

Conference for Security and Co-operation in the Middle and Near East (CSCME)

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The Middle and Near East is, in more than one respect, the most conflict-ridden region of the world. The Israel-Palestine Conflict has extended to the entire region. Given the gigantic oil and gas reserves, the region also achieved a strategic key role in the hegemonial system of the USA. The industrial catching-up and political transformation in the states of this region – as incidentally also in Europe in the last 250 years – set in motion culturally biased conflict potential. The geo-strategic interests of the west, as well as the Israel-Palestine conflict contributed to the radicalisation of the political currents and to the emergence of nationalism and religious fundamentalism. The open border conflict and ethnic extremes, which came about through the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire and the colonial establishment of borders at the beginning of the 20th century, are added to this.

The involvement of varied territorial, ethnic, religious and political conflict formations with the external economic and geo-strategic interests of the USA and the west, transformed the Middle and Near east literally into an explosive cocktail. This is the result of a chain of linked conflicts, which have taken place over the last half century, namely the Iran conflict after the nationalisation of the oil industry (1951 – 1953), the Suez conflict after the nationalisation of the Suez Canal by Egypt, the continuing conflict between Israel and Palestine, with numerous Arab-Israeli wars, the Iran-Iraq war (1. Gulf War 1980 – 1988); Iraqi invasion of Kuwait 1990, and the 2nd Gulf War of the US and allies against Iraq; the US war against Iraq (2003); the Iran –Nuclear conflict since 2003 and finally the Israel war against Lebanon (2006).

Experience shows that unilateral initiatives deepen the conflict, because they ignore the legitimate goals and security interests of the other party in the conflict.

The Basic Conflict Structures

There are basically five large regional conflict levels, which in addition are geo-strategically linked to the global interests of the USA, but also the EU and to some degree also Russia (former Soviet Union),

- (1) **Territorial conflicts** through Israel's occupation of Palestine and the Syrian Golan Heights; Iraq's border conflict about the border in Shatt-al-Arab (an important reason for the first Gulf War); Iraq's tenure of Kuwait and of the islands Bubiya and Warba: The Iranian-Arab conflict about three strategic islands (Abu Mussa, Great Tonb and Small Tonb) in the Persian Gulf and the tension between Iran and the Arab states about the appellation, the Persian, or the Arab Gulf.
- (2) **Conflicts about sources of energy and water**, especially between Iraq and Kuwait, about the oil field Rumaila, cross-border oil and gas reserves in the Persian Gulf between most of the Gulf States. In addition the fight between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan about the oil field, Elbur in the Caspian Sea and the use of the energy sources of the Caspian Sea and the oil and pipeline routes between the abutting states. In the conflicts of interests about the use of the cross-border water bodies the primary ones are

about the Jordan (between Israel, Palestine and Jordan) as well as the Tigris and Euphrates (between Turkey, Syria and Iraq).

- (3) **Cross-border ethno-cultural conflicts**, particularly also those externally fuelled between Sunnis and Shiites, the danger of a country-wide war between Iran, with the Iraqi Shiites and Hezbollah in the Lebanon on the one side and Saudi-Arabia, Jordan, Egypt and the Sunni in Iraq and Lebanon on the other; apart from that there is, at the moment, the basic cultural conflict taking place in all the states of the region between modernism and fundamentalism in an historic transformation process and which is being partly fought by violent means. In addition separatism and the fuelling of ethnic conflicts, especially in the multi-ethnic states like Iran (Aseris, Bellutshi, Kurds, Turkmen and Arabs) and Iraq, but also, since the foundation of the post-colonial national states in the region, the latent Kurdistan crisis.
- (4) **The Israel Palestine Conflict**, has, since the establishment of Israel, lead to continued development of antagonistic images, growing Islamic-Jewish fundamentalism and Arab nationalism, the amplification of a propensity to violence and terrorism, as well as decisively hindered democratisation in all Arab-Islamic states.
- (5) **The Israel-Lebanon Conflict** (since 1982) that came into being originally through Israel's occupation of Palestine, in the mean time threatens to engulf the whole region.

Varied similarities

In the Middle and Near East there are not only contrasts, but also, in at least four areas, many similarities, which make one aware that they are substantial for economic, social and cultural cooperation in the region and also form a good basis for a security-political cooperation. These four areas are:

- (1) **Economic Cooperation** through the export of oil and gas, as well as petrochemical products from the Gulf States in exchange for agricultural products, food products, textiles, long-lasting consumer articles, industrial facilities and high-tech commodities from Iran Turkey and Israel; Potential for regional tourism in all the abutting states of the Gulf, the Caspian Sea and the Mediterranean, as well as the states with ancient cultures and antique sites (Egypt, Israel/Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, Turkey), which could be made available though common projects; substantial possibilities for the broadening and deepening of common cross-border investment and financing projects, starting with the infrastructure (railways, regional water-ways, public power-supply; the founding of a regional development bank, as well as a common economic commission, modelled on the European Economic Community (EEC)
- (2) **Resources and environmental protection**, as well as the **extension of renewable energy sources** with mutual strategies for the efficient use of oil and gas sources; mutual investment projects for the use of the Caspian Sea and the Gulf; projects for the mutual use of regenerative energy potential and for the creation of a regional power grid; mutual use of scant water sources and the regulation of fair distribution of cross-border water bodies, as well as commissions for the coordination of environmental protection and the use of resources as the institutional bases for regional integration in this area.
- (3) **Social cooperation**: Via the activation of the financial and human resources available, it would be possible to initiate cross-border social projects, which would be capable of creating jobs in particularly disadvantaged regions – but also in conflict areas like Palestine and Kurdistan, which because of their permanent involvement in wars are dependent on the import of resources. Only in this way, can the advantages of a peaceful perspective through cooperation, rather than the way of separatism, with all its violent results, be felt by the peoples of the area, and the carpet pulled out from under the conflicts. Mutual

strategies for the fight against unemployment, poverty, drug addiction and illiteracy also work towards establishing identity and help further cooperation in all the other areas.

- (4) **Culture and Education:** It would, for example, be possible, to create sub-regional cultural centres and found joint universities and research institutes in Kurdistan, in the states on the Gulf and Caspian Sea and in the long term, certainly, also in Jerusalem. This applies too to the linking of civil society's initiatives and projects, particularly, youth exchange.

Perspectives for mutual security

The traditional idea of security, through the increase of power, which rests on Hobbes image of humanity („man is a wolf to his fellow man“) and assumptions of the „realist school“, which show mistrust and preparedness for aggression of states, as a natural constants in international relations, has a crucial structural error. Regardless of the question, whether the assumptions of this school of thought are well-founded or not, it runs parallel to the mercantile teaching of economics of a zero-sum game as the result of inter-state relationships: More security and more prosperity for A is based on less security and less prosperity for B. This thinking legitimised, colonialism and imperialism in the last centuries and advanced both world wars, as well as the nuclear arms race in the era of the cold war.

Counter to this thinking, is Kant's idea of peace through cooperation, analogue to the classic idea of free-trade for all concerned, creating the possibility of more prosperity and more security and in fact through the creation of a lasting peace. The results of the actions, which come from the philosophy of peace through cooperation, follow the logic of the win-win game: More security and prosperity for A means more security and prosperity for B. The integration of the formerly antagonistic European states in the European Union rests on this philosophy. In spite of still existent deficits in the area of social equity, participation and social security, the EU integration created a sustainable basis for economic and political cooperation, which is to the advantage of all the states concerned, and – what is of more importance – also for the banishment of war. Those who are pessimistic about such a conference for the Middle and Near East should note that in spite of deep enmities and two world wars within only a few decades, Europe managed, through cooperation to leave the non-culture of devastation and darkness far behind it.

The Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) came into being however at the height of the East-West confrontation, and indeed out of the normative interests of all parties, in order to break down the antagonisms between the western and eastern states through the idea of establishing *mutual security*. Mutual security is a security system for states with varying cultural and living standards, which allows a maximum of security for minimum effort. It depends on *the exclusion of confrontational behaviour, through the willingness to dialogue for the over-coming of conflicts, on the formal and also factual equality of all member states and on the possibility for economic, ecological, social and cultural cooperation*. The CSCE was founded in Helsinki in 1976 and in 1995, was transferred to the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Today 55 states belong to it. These are all the European states as well as the USA and Canada. Though disarmament has only made limited progress, at least the arms race has been stopped and the dangerous middle-distance rockets, which were set up in Eastern and Western Europe in the 1980's, were being dismantled.

The states of the Middle and Near East can't follow the European model and start directly with economic integration. Their economic systems, their standard of living and their cultural experience are far too different for that. They can though follow the path of *mutual security*, which Europe took. This path is urgently indicated, as all the states in the region, which are concerned would stand to gain in the mid- and long-term and on top of that they could establish conditions for a lasting peace. This is true not least also for Israel.

CSCME now and without preconditions ...

The middle and long-term central aim of a CSCME must be, the creation of a nuclear-free, and respectively, a weapons-of-mass-destruction free zone in the Middle and Near East. This idea however is not new. Since 1957 Israel, Egypt and Iran, took the initiative and in 1974 the UN adopted the resolution for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East, which has ritually been adopted every year, and since 1980, unanimously, that is also with Israeli assent. This idea, but also the idea of a weapons-of-mass destruction free zone (Mubarak-Initiative of 1990), was at the core of numerous negotiations between Israel and the Arab states, but which always ended in a cul-de-sac. Why was this so?

The main reason why these initiatives have failed is the maximal demand of the conflicting parties. Whereas Israel always made comprehensive peace regulations with the Palestinians a precondition for talks about nuclear disarmament, the Arab states required exactly the reverse order. Both sides have obviously made a result, which would only be achieved after many years, into the precondition for the start of talks, thus blocking each other.

If one is not prepared to wait for a miracle to prevent the region, together with Israel falling into the abyss, then there is no other choice, but to dare to tackle the conflict formation in its entirety and, in the framework of a conference for Security and Cooperation. To this end it should be called into being unconditionally and without delay. The CSCME dare not be the last step, not even the second step, but must be seen as the very first step. It is essential to achieve a turnaround – away from the spirit of selection, division and the creation of conflict alliances and towards a new spirit of mutual security and cooperation. The definite target of this conference is to create a new framework, which makes it possible for all states in the Middle and Near East, to start on a path of dialogue for mutual security and cooperation.

The only precondition for the start of the conference is immediate preparedness to dialogue: All conflicting parties that don't make preconditions will be able to take part. Even if there were only a few willing parties, the conference would be justified. Its start, could create a dynamic effect, which hardly any of the parties would be able to resist.

Start of the conference process and potential circle of participants

Basically it should be left to the conference process, when which state in the region enters the process. Given the relevance of the subject matter of the conference, it would make sense to differentiate between core and peripheral states of the greater Middle and Near East. The core states are, Egypt, Israel, the future Palestinian state, Lebanon, Jordan, Syria, Cyprus, Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, The United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen. The Kurdish side, as an essential part of the problem, but also as a political and cultural factor in the heart of the region, should not be left out. The peripheral states are in the north and the east, the entire central Asian states, which want to be part of the conference, as well as Afghanistan. In addition, in the west there are the Mediterranean Arab States Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco,. Consequently the CSCME could, in the long-term include the entire area between North Africa and Pakistan from the West to the East and between the Black Sea and the Caucasus to the Indian Ocean from north to south.

A question of just as great importance is which states will in principle be interested in CSCME and which state or groups of states would take the initiative for a CSCME. That the initiative would first start and gain momentum in the region itself, is to be expected. The interest in this process however, varies greatly. The states, which lose power in the framework of the CSCME, would no doubt not present themselves as pioneers. On the other hand, one can assume that most of the small states in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and in addition to this those states can be seen as supporters of the CSCME, which could well see more security for themselves in this perspective, than they have at present.

Mutual security, democratisation and disarmament

The perspectives of mutual security are the most effective guarantee for democratisation as well as for the prevention of proliferation of nuclear weapons and for disarmament.

The Iran nuclear conflict can only be resolved on a continuing basis in this context. This however takes as read, Israel's willingness to accept that the disarmament of their nuclear weapons and conventional weapons arsenals will lead to more prosperity and security. Under the present conditions of war Israel's population would continue to live in permanent anxiety about it's own safety.

To this end however, Israel must find the strength to see itself as a willingly integrative part of the Islamic-Arabic world. This mental reorientation is probably a great challenge for Israel's population. Accepting the neighbouring states as such and being prepared to enter into partnership with them on the same level, are however the most important conditions for a lasting peace.

International support for the CSCMN

According to a realistic assessment of the powers that are to be considered, the EU has the greatest chance of supporting a long-term CSCME in many ways. However, one can not ignore the fact that in the EU, there is the position that Europe's *short-term* energy and renewable resources interests must be enforced either by the EU subordinating itself to US hegemony and the existing unilateralism and therefore of necessity sharing the burden of the hegemonial order with the USA, or building its own hegemonial system, including a military base in competition with the US hegemony.

The obverse of this is that the EU would have a realistic chance, to develop Europe as a regional civil power worth imitating, to build up multi-lateral and peace furthering structures in the world. Its own long-term interest, the historic integration experience after 1945 and the political results of the CSCE process are of incalculable value for this.

Initiated by IPPNW e.V. (Registered Association) Germany and IALANA Germany