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The UfM and the Middle East ‘Peace Process’: An Unhappy Symbiosis

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ABSTRACT *This contribution explores differing theories on how the failure of the ‘peace process’ featured in the design and goals of the UfM, drawing on lessons from the period when the EMP was pursued in parallel with the peace process. In each case, institutional overlaps are identified, as well as commonalities in the approaches of the actors to both pursuits. Crucially, however, the persistence and intensification of the Arab–Israeli conflict, in combination with the shift from multilateralism to bilateralism embodied in the UfM, has politicized the latter at the expense of the functionalist aspirations of its architects.*

The objective here is to define the relationship between the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the unsuccessful Middle East Peace Process (MEPP). The operating assumption is that the Arab–Israeli conflict represents a key feature of the context within which the UfM was launched and one of the main questions explored is whether the UfM was created as a way to downscale European ambitions in the face of a deteriorating situation in the Middle East. Then, in keeping with the line adopted in the framework paper for this collection, the argument developed is that the UfM could not avoid entanglement with the conflict.

Contrasting views on the impetus behind the UfM are examined in the first section below and, as will be seen, the verdict on how it relates to the MEPP depends in part on how one understands the relationship between the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the MEPP. As discussed in the second section, the vision embodied in the EMP could not be realized without a resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict and the architects of the EMP tended to assume that the MEPP would take care of that.

On this they were disappointed, but the failure was due more to flaws in the design of the peace process in the 1990s than to the weaknesses of the EMP. Also, while the failure of the MEPP was a blow to the EMP, this was only one of the factors that led to disillusion and frustration with the EMP and thence the creation of the UfM.

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As argued in the third section, however, in so far as the UfM did represent an attempt to refocus European ambitions in the face of reversals in the peace process, its fate will rest on whether it can be ring-fenced or insulated from the Arab–Israeli conflict. The likelihood of achieving such a separation is deemed remote, principally because of changes in the regional and international context stemming from ‘the war on terror’ declared after 11 September 2001 (9/11) and the fallout from the invasion of Iraq. As a result of these developments, the salience of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has increased, rendering it less plausible that the UfM can attain its modest objectives in isolation.

There are other reasons why the fate of the UfM is inseparable from that of the dysfunctional MEPP. The UfM has been built on the edifice of the EMP and this was informed by assumptions about the normative mission of the European Union. Thus too much hope has been invested in the capacity of so-called ‘soft power’¹ to effect change in the Mediterranean Partner Countries (MPCs), notwithstanding persistent failures by the Europeans to act on or abide by their professed norms. As argued in the fourth section, European declaratory policy represents a retreat from reality into the safety of simple pronouncements and self-serving projects.

In the fifth section attention turns to some of the individual European and Arab actors and their stance on the MEPP. As demonstrated, even if the Europeans put risk avoidance above conflict resolution, for the Arab states the need to keep conflict resolution on the international agenda, including through the UfM, is a matter of survival.

Another reason for scepticism that the UfM can succeed in attaining its limited goals has to do with the institutional framework within which the EMP and now the UfM, as well as the MEPP operate. The MEPP is an international endeavour, led by the United States, and the UfM is a regional initiative, presided over by a joint presidency (starting with France and Egypt). Yet the two are institutionally linked through a plethora of mechanisms, including the Middle East Quartet (that groups the EU, UN, US and Russia), the Arab Peace Initiative (devised and agreed by the Arab League, which now participates in the UfM) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The implications for the UfM of these overlapping institutional arrangements are explored in the sixth and final section of this contribution.

The UfM and the Conflict: Adapting to Realities?

As Bechev and Nicolaidis (2008) and Kausch and Youngs (2009) have suggested, the UfM was conceived partly as a way to forge closer economic ties and security co-operation between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean *notwithstanding* the conflict. Although these commentators are sceptical about the prospects, they detect a perception, among some of the original architects of the scheme, that the conflict could be sidelined or ‘parked’ as a separate concern, to be dealt with primarily within the framework of the MEPP. On the latter, in contrast to the UfM, the United States has been expected to take the lead.

As explored in other contributions to this collection, the motives of the individual European players who signed up to the UfM were varied. For France the initiative

represented an opportunity for President Nicolas Sarkozy to take a lead on matters Mediterranean (see Delgado and Gillespie, this collection). The French also identified a need to make up for the flagging fortunes of the EMP. Spain scrambled to respond to the challenge the French lead posed to its role in the Mediterranean (see Gillespie, this collection). Germany was initially critical of the initiative because Sarkozy appeared set on pursuing his scheme at the expense of the EMP (see Schumacher, this collection). Turkey, in turn, reacted negatively at first for fear that the proposal would affect its bid to join the EU (Balfour and Schmid, 2008; Emerson, 2008).

In all these cases, the capacity of the UfM to affect or be affected by the quest for Arab–Israeli peace seems not to have featured centrally in the actors' calculations. By contrast, Israel's initial response to the UfM was influenced by concerns that the Arab League would be accorded a bigger role in the plan than it had been given in the EMP (see Bicchi, this collection; Del Sarto, this collection). In other words, the Israelis feared spillover from the conflict into the proceedings of the UfM. For some Arab states, meanwhile, there could be no question of forgoing any new opportunity to air their frustrations with Israel's continued occupation of Arab lands captured in 1967. Arab resistance to 'normalizing' their relations with Israel, following the Israeli assault on Gaza in 2008–09 and the advent of a more hardline Israeli government since then, have already undermined the progress of the UfM (see in particular Schlumberge, this collection; Barber, 2010; Vogel, 2010).

Turning to the official pronouncements of the UfM, in these the desirability of conflict resolution is acknowledged but not emphasized. At the launch in Paris in 2008 the heads of state and government reaffirmed their 'support for the Israeli–Palestinian Peace Process'; recalled that peace in the Middle East 'requires a comprehensive solution'; and welcomed 'the announcement that Syria and Israel have initiated indirect peace talks under the auspices of Turkey' (Joint Declaration, 2008: Article 7). Yet, as the EMP before it, the UfM espouses the objective of turning the Mediterranean basin into an area of peace, stability and prosperity through dialogue and co-operation (Barcelona Declaration, 1995; Joint Declaration, 2008). Arab–Israeli peace is thus *ipso facto* incorporated into the vision of the UfM.

The linkage between the UfM and the MEPP is also evident in the orientations, calculations and policies of European and Arab actors and Israel in their dealings with each other.² In institutional terms there are also overlaps and interconnections, as discussed below. The thrust of this inquiry, therefore, is to determine how closely the fate of the UfM is tied to that of the dysfunctional MEPP.

This question is clearly not quite the same as asking what effect the continuance of the Arab–Israeli conflict will have on the prospects for the UfM. If the conflict continues, by definition the goal of developing an area of peace in the Mediterranean will not be met. Yet that does not eliminate the possibility that the UfM could pave the way for conflict resolution by generating more co-operation in other spheres, such as economic development, job creation, intelligence sharing and cross-cultural understanding (Aliboni and Ammor, 2009).

What matters, therefore, is the underlying logic with which the various stakeholders approach both the UfM and the MEPP. Belief in the power of economic

development and institutional reform to counter instability and conflict informed the EU approach to *both* the EMP and the MEPP, but in neither case did the Europeans live up to the principles they espoused (Tocci, 2005; Pace, 2009; Al-Fattal, 2010). On the Arab side, at least at the government level, a determination to retain power has infused their approaches to both the EMP and the MEPP (Fernández and Youngs, 2005; Pace, 2010). For Israel, the UfM represented a potential opportunity to subsume the conflict.³

The UfM largely dispenses with the normative agenda that characterized EU aspirations for the EMP in its early years (Aliboni and Ammor, 2009; Kausch and Youngs, 2009). However, that agenda was abandoned or reneged upon long before the launch of the UfM, notwithstanding persistent references to European ‘values’ in EU rhetoric.⁴ The way political reform featured in the EU approach to the MEPP also represented a betrayal of the ideals purportedly espoused by the EU. This became apparent after the outbreak of the second Intifada in 2000 and more markedly following the election victory of Hamas in 2006, as discussed below.

Thus, even though the UfM has been greeted by some as a sign that realism has replaced wishful thinking, there is still room to question that conclusion. If the EU had truly woken up to reality, then its approaches to both the UfM and the MEPP should embody greater recognition of the growing dangers posed by the conflict.

Latterly, not only has the problem of extremist movements and transnational terrorism become a shared concern for European and Arab governments, but it has become conflated with the Arab–Israeli conflict. In addition, that conflict has worsened, compounded by the failures of the MEPP. The UfM does not offer a resolution and the elevation of North–South dialogue to state level increases the likelihood that the initiative will become hostage to the conflict.

The EMP and the MEPP: Pointers for the UfM

The existence of a seemingly promising MEPP at the time the EMP was launched in 1995 enabled the latter to go ahead on the assumption that its vision for an area of peace, stability and prosperity could be realized (Dosenrode and Stubkjaer, 2002). It also made it possible to argue that the EMP would serve to ‘underpin’ the MEPP and anticipated peace deals (Marks, 1996: 2). However, the EMP was not specifically envisaged as an alternative or rival to the MEPP.

On the contrary, in the mid-1990s the preoccupation in Europe was not with the Arab–Israeli conflict but with the security problems posed by Islamist extremism emanating from North Africa and manifest in the bomb attacks in France in 1995.

The security agenda that the EMP was supposed to address had to do, first and foremost, with migration, arms proliferation, Islamist terrorism, instability and economic malaise in the south (Bicchi, 2007; Hollis, 2000: 125). As argued in a report issued by the EU Institute for Security Studies, one of the faults of the EMP was that it failed to face up to realities, such as the Arab–Israeli conflict (Aliboni *et al.*, 2008).

Over time a number of scholars and commentators have examined the achievements and failings of the EMP and by all accounts it has fallen short of meeting its declared

goals. These included: a political and security partnership, establishing 'a common area of peace and stability'; economic and financial partnership, 'creating an area of shared prosperity'; and partnership in social, cultural and human affairs (Barcelona Declaration, 1995). It is on the second of these objectives that most attention has focused and the verdict commonly reached is that prosperity has eluded the majority of people in the MPCs and the gap between standards of living in the north and south has widened (Joffé, 1999; Radwan and Reiffers, 2005). Economic growth and development in Israel, by contrast, has overtaken that of some EU countries (Nathanson and Stetter, 2005).

Assessments of the progress of the EMP in achieving its other objectives have been largely scathing. Pace (2007), among others, deconstructs the normative approach of the EU and documents the pernicious consequences for democracy promotion in the MPCs. Al-Fattal (2010), focusing on EU aid and policies to build a functioning democracy in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPT), charges the EU with reneging on its own principles and promises, to the detriment of the Palestinian people and their prospects of statehood. Pace (2007), Al-Fattal (2010) and Le More (2005) highlight the failure of the EU to tackle the core problem facing the Palestinians, namely: the Israeli occupation.

With respect to the security agenda, in an early assessment Spencer (1997) contends that the EU proved unable to develop a partnership with MPCs distinctive from or co-ordinated with other initiatives such as those of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Western European Union (WEU). She also points to the contradictions inherent in the EU approach to Mediterranean security, in so far as it hoped to protect Europe from migration and instability in the South, while speaking the language of partnership. Aliboni and Ammor (2009), among others, highlight the betrayal of the EMP vision implicit in the increasing emphasis placed on intelligence sharing and security co-operation between governments, at the expense of political reform.

A common feature of many assessments of the EMP, shared by this author, is that it failed to meet expectations largely because the Europeans hoped to use it as a vehicle for the export of values and practices that could not and would not meet with acceptance in the MPCs. Conceivably, therefore, the Europeans were either unrealistic or naïve, or a combination of both. A close reading of EU pronouncements and stated expectations gives credence to the latter.⁵ The alternative explanation, namely that the Europeans were disingenuous, would mean that while they claimed to want to promote democracy, free trade and co-operation, they actually intended to use such claims as a cloak for furthering their own interests, including stemming the flow of migration from South to North. To hold up, this explanation would imply an absence of the kind of assumptions about the benefits of adopting EU values that informed the whole EU enterprise (Le More, 2005; Hollis, 2009).

Irrespective of whether the Europeans were naïve or disingenuous, it may be that the EU, weakened by the competing interests of member states, was outmanoeuvred by Arab governments and Arab elites intent upon protecting their interests (Hamzawy, 2005; Hollis, 2009; Khouri, 2010). Equally important, as argued here,

is that intervening events, in particular 9/11 and the issue of terrorism linked to Islamist groups, transformed priorities in Europe and in the MPCs, overriding the reform agenda (Fernández and Youngs, 2005).

Turning to the MEPP, it could conceivably be argued that its failure was either a symptom or a consequence of the flaws in the EMP. However, neither the EMP nor the MEPP can be reduced to a dependent variable of the other. The two endeavours coexisted and the verdict here is that the MEPP pursued in the 1990s, under US leadership, *was itself flawed* (Keating *et al.*, 2005; Miller, 2008) and only one of its shortcomings could be laid at the door of the EU for focusing on state-building in the OPT to the neglect of policies designed to bring an end to the occupation. After the outbreak of the second Intifada the EU made more mistakes, as discussed below. The key point here, however, is that, in the 1990s at least, the failings of the EMP cannot be attributed solely or even mostly to the dysfunctional MEPP *per se*.

The context changed after 2000 and the collapse of the MEPP, partly as a result of the second Intifada and changes in government in the United States and Israel, but also because of 9/11 and all that flowed from that. How these developments affected European and Arab attitudes towards the MEPP and the EMP is the subject of the next section.

The UfM in Context: No Escape from the Conflict

At various stages in the past 40 years the Europeans, the Maghreb and the Arab Gulf states have proceeded on the assumption that progress could and should be made toward closer economic ties and security co-operation irrespective of the continuance of the Arab–Israeli conflict. During the 1970s and 1980s, for example, the Europeans developed their relations with the Arab world and Israel on a bilateral basis (Ismael, 1986) in a manner deliberately intended to ensure that the continuance of the conflict would not be allowed to interfere with their pursuit of closer commercial links and energy security.

In the 1990s by contrast, complementarity and convergence were assumed and welcomed between the EMP and the MEPP. When the latter collapsed there was a reversion to bilateralism, including at the level of EU–Arab and EU–Israeli relations, through the ENP (see Bicchi, this collection). However, de-linkage between the conflict and schemes for Mediterranean integration was no longer an option. The US declaration of ‘the war on terror’ following 9/11 and the disruption of the regional balance of power resulting from the invasion of Iraq in 2003 saw to that.

The ‘war on terror’ meant that all US allies were expected to demonstrate their loyalty: ‘You are either with us or you are with the terrorists!’ The reaction in Europe was initially strongly supportive of the United States in its hour of need. French President Jacques Chirac and British prime minister Tony Blair went to Washington to signal solidarity. Blair declared that Britain stood ‘shoulder to shoulder’ with America.⁶ NATO invoked the Treaty to support military action against al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. However, in a portent of what was to come, Washington declined to make use of NATO in the initial stages of the subsequent

invasion. Having learned from experience in the Balkans, the Americans were in no mood for the frustrations of coalition warfare.

Serious divisions emerged in the transatlantic alliance over how to combat al-Qaeda-inspired terrorism (Gordon and Shapiro, 2004). By its very nature, the EU is committed to internationalism and international law. The Bush administration, by contrast, positively relished the prospect of acting alone, informing the Europeans that their job was to do 'the nation-building' in the wake of US war-fighting (Kagan, 2002; Gordon and Shapiro, 2004).

In the background, under the leadership of Ariel Sharon, the Israelis depicted themselves as steadfast allies fighting 'in the same trench' as the Americans against the menace of Islamist-inspired terrorism. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat was denigrated as a sponsor of terrorism and blockaded in his compound in Ramallah. European governments refused to go along with the delegitimization of Arafat and their officials continued to pay him visits, but they failed to convince the Americans or the Israelis to take him seriously any more as a 'partner for peace'. EU policy became focused on the limited objective of keeping the Palestinian Authority (PA) afloat in the face of a crushing Israeli assault on its operations and infrastructure (Hollis, 2004).

After the fall of the Taliban regime in Kabul in late 2001 it soon became apparent that the United States planned to take the war against terror into the Middle East. In his State of the Union address in January 2002 Bush designated Iran and Iraq along with North Korea as part of 'an axis of evil'. For the remainder of the year the prospect of a US invasion of Iraq gathered pace and the EU divided.

A semblance of unity was restored when the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1441, initiating a new round of weapons inspections in Iraq. However, when the inspectors failed to find conclusive evidence of an active Iraqi weapons programme, the Security Council split. France called for more time for the inspectors. The British joined the Americans in frantic lobbying at the UN, but failed to gain a green light for an invasion. Blair nonetheless convinced the British Parliament to agree to military action, and in March 2003 British troops accompanied the Americans into Iraq. Because the Turkish Parliament refused to facilitate entry from the north, Kuwait provided the sole point of access for the ground assault.

Once Saddam Hussein's regime was toppled and the UN formally recognized the occupation of Iraq, Washington called on its allies to help quell the resistance. The East Europeans offered the most enthusiastic support. Spanish troops were also deployed, but withdrawn again, in the wake of the Madrid bombings. As these demonstrated, far from reducing the threat of Islamist-inspired terrorism, the invasion of Iraq exacerbated it. Meanwhile, both Arab and European allies of America tried to persuade Washington that the plight of the Palestinians was part of the problem. The United States was not convinced.

Offering a ray of hope, in 2002 Bush did issue the first formal US endorsement of a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Seizing on this opportunity, the EU set about drafting the roadmap that they hoped would turn Bush's 'vision' into reality. Yet Sharon outmanoeuvred them, conditioning Israeli co-operation on

the marginalization of Arafat and securing US recognition that Israel could not be expected to return to the 1967 borders in the event of a peace deal.

The lesson here is that the Europeans, with or without Arab concurrence, were powerless to push the MEPP in the absence of US and Israeli commitment to a solution. Added to which, because of differences among the Europeans over the Iraq crisis, the ambition of the EU to achieve a unified and effective foreign policy stance suffered a severe setback. On the need for resolution of the Arab–Israeli conflict they could still agree, but divisions over Iraq reduced European leverage and credibility in Washington. As US forces faced a full-scale insurgency and sectarian conflict in Iraq, European opponents of the invasion forbore to say ‘I told you so!’ Instead, all made efforts to repair their relations with Washington and in the process re-invigorated their commitments to combating terrorism through intelligence co-operation and new strictures on their own migrant populations and asylum seekers.

Among these measures, in 2003 the EU decided to add Hamas to its list of terrorist organizations (Hroub, 2006: 113–16). This move may have helped marginally to appease Washington and the Israelis, but also paved the way for EU paralysis after Hamas won the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006. EU commitment to pursuing the MEPP through the Middle East Quartet also served to dilute the role of the EU and signalled a new preoccupation with policy co-ordination across the international community as opposed to effective action, as discussed below.

The fallout from the invasion of Iraq meanwhile transformed the context of the MEPP. Two consequences deserve mention. First, having found none of the weapons programmes cited to justify the invasion, the Bush administration espoused a new rationale, namely regime change and democratization across the region. As the United States launched its reform initiative for the Broader Middle East and North Africa in June 2004, the EU responded with its own strategy, namely the ENP, also launched in 2004. Having invested so much through the EMP in promoting economic and political reform in the MPCs, the EU hoped to demonstrate more substantive results through differentiation and Action Plans tailored to the specific needs and capacities of the partner countries. In the process, an opportunity to build in conditionality related to conflict resolution was overlooked.

Secondly, the invasion of Iraq produced a surge in anti-Americanism (Center for Strategic Studies, 2005), not only in the region but among Muslim populations everywhere, including Europe. Resentment of US high-handedness proved more widespread, in conjunction with a rise in Islamophobia. The principal beneficiary in the region was Iran and its allies Hizballah in Lebanon and Hamas in the OPT. Hizballah soon became embroiled in war with Israel in July 2006. The psychological victory was claimed by Hizballah, since its forces managed to keep up a hail of rockets into Israel until the day a ceasefire was finally agreed.

During the 2006 Lebanon war the Europeans and Arabs were again divided (Hollis, 2010). The French were among those calling for an immediate ceasefire. Britain held off doing so immediately in the hopes that Hizballah could be quelled first. Saudi Arabia and Egypt also hoped that Hizballah would be chastened, but

ended up having to join the general Arab outcry against the Israeli bombardment of Lebanon.

Within two years Israel went to war again, this time against Hamas in Gaza. The Palestinians lost over 1,000 lives, many of them women and children, while Israeli dead numbered only 13. In Europe, the fate of the Palestinians in the Gaza war of 2008–09 gained them increased popular support. Yet when Israel comes in for criticism for its treatment of the Palestinians, there is always the danger that this could conflate with anti-Semitism. Certainly the Israelis are attentive to this possibility and have used the spectre as leverage on European governments.

As the foregoing demonstrates, thanks to the fallout from the invasion of Iraq, the Middle East has become more unstable. The old order, dominated by the Arab states, has been weakened and the new beneficiaries are the non-state actors Hizballah and Hamas, together with Iran.

In this situation all the stakeholders in the Arab–Israeli conflict cannot consider it a localized problem, capable of marginalization. Since 2009 the Syrians have gained new prominence as the potential weak link in the Iran–Syria–Hizballah axis. President Assad was feted by President Sarkozy as the star at the launch of the UfM, simply for turning up, and France has since proceeded with upgrading relations with Damascus without the latter having to change any aspect of its regional posture or domestic politics (ICG, 2009). Damascus has also been the object of US diplomatic approaches since Obama came to power. Yet without Israeli co-operation the Americans cannot wean the Syrians away from their alliance with Iran or their support for Hizballah and Hamas.

France may have wanted the dual presidency of the UfM, and selected Egypt to serve alongside France in the first instance, for reasons unrelated to the Arab–Israeli conflict. Egypt, by contrast, could not miss an opportunity to raise the issue. As the leading state representative of the Arabs in the UfM, in which the Arab League is also represented and could upstage Cairo, Egypt's regional standing and prestige are at stake. Turkey's new profile in the region, its defence of the Palestinians at the time of the Gaza war and its reaction to Israel's commando raid on the flotilla that sought to break the Gaza blockade in 2010 represent a challenge to Egypt. In short, if ever the possibility of sidelining the Arab–Israeli conflict existed, it is no longer feasible.

Europe's Misleading Normative Narrative

Attention now turns to the evolution of European thinking on the Arab–Israeli conflict. European perspectives have progressed through several phases since the British and French finally exited their last imperial domains. In the 1970s the first oil price shock and fear of Arab reprisals for support for Israel persuaded most Europeans to embrace a more pro-Arab stance on the conflict (Ismail, 1986). By the time the Europeans chose the Arab–Israeli conflict as the test case for the development of a common European foreign policy, culminating in the Venice Declaration (1980), the United States had taken the lead in conflict mediation.

Israel rejected the Venice Declaration and Washington proceeded with its own diplomacy. After Israel invaded Lebanon in 1982, France attempted its own

mediation policy, alongside the United States, including deploying troops. Yet both their efforts foundered. After the leadership of the PLO was evacuated to Tunis, the Europeans proved unable to adopt a unified approach to dealing with the organization. However, the scene changed in 1990–91 as the Cold War ended and the United States marshalled an international and Arab coalition to reverse the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait. When the United States and post-Soviet Russia convened the Arab–Israeli peace conference in Madrid, the Europeans were accorded observer status only.

Since then and substantively in the 1990s the EU has played junior partner to the United States in the pursuit of conflict resolution (Dosenrode and Stubkjaer, 2002). After Norway brokered the so-called Oslo Accords, Washington took charge of driving what became the MEPP. The EU participated in the multilateral process that accompanied bilateral negotiations until the mid-1990s (Peters, 1996) and presided over the Regional Economic and Development Working Group (REDWG). The EU became the single largest donor to the Palestinian Authority, elected and constituted under the MEPP (Al-Fattal, 2010: 51–3).

In the 1990s EU policy on the Mediterranean and the MEPP could be characterized as a ‘soft-power’ approach to addressing European security needs (from migration to terrorism) through the disbursement of economic development aid, institution building and the promotion of good governance. Thus, when the PA was established in the OPT the Europeans, individually and collectively through the EU, concentrated on giving development aid and helping the PA govern the Palestinians. This suited the Americans, who reserved management of the political negotiations between the Palestinian leadership and Israel to themselves. In both respects there was palpable progress initially, but after the election of a Likud government led by Netanyahu, he proved resistant to implementing the provisions of Oslo.

Meanwhile, the expansion of Jewish settlements in the OPT continued. Periodic terrorist attacks on Israelis by Palestinians, some under the Hamas banner, also undermined confidence. However, given the devotion of the Clinton administration to pursuing peace and renewed hope following Labour’s return to power in Israel in 1999, the Europeans apparently saw little purpose in breaking ranks with the Americans. However, retrospective analysis on the MEPP during the 1990s, has deemed it flawed (Keating *et al.*, 2005). Not only did it require the Palestinians to build a state-in-waiting while still under occupation and with no guarantee from Israel or even Washington at that stage that statehood would be the reward, but US diplomacy proved partial to the Israelis (Miller, 2008).

In effect, the Europeans became complicit in a US-led strategy that required the Palestinians to control their own militants and forgo resistance in the name of convincing the Israelis to end the occupation. Yet, in so far as the PA did so, the Israelis could sustain the occupation. In terms of the dichotomy between functionalism and politicization depicted by Bicchi in the framework for this collection, with respect to the MEPP the EU has opted for a functionalist approach to Palestinian state-building which has turned out to have highly political consequences.

Rather than draw attention to the occupation and focus on bringing it to an end, the EU may have actually helped to perpetuate it, on which, see more below. In any case, when the second Palestinian Intifada erupted in 2000, the peace process collapsed and the Israelis responded by reasserting control by force. The PA only survived thereafter thanks to EU support.

The EU was by this time a member of the Quartet and through this mechanism worked to develop the roadmap that was supposed to turn into reality what Bush announced as his 'vision' for a two-state solution in 2002. Thereafter, policy co-ordination, within Europe and across the Quartet, substituted for action. Inability to force through implementation of the roadmap symbolized the ineffectiveness of the MEPP in the first years of this century. This failure turned to counterproductive meddling after the Hamas victory in the Palestinian legislative elections of January 2006.

During and following those elections the United States briefed members of the Palestinian Fatah movement to resist any form of compromise or co-operation with their Hamas rivals for power in the PA. The Quartet formulated three principles that Hamas was expected to embrace to gain acceptance: renunciation of violence; recognition of Israel's right to exist; and acceptance of all agreements previously signed between the Palestinian leadership and Israel. This was a recipe for stalemate. When Saudi Arabia brokered a power-sharing agreement between Fatah and Hamas in 2007, Washington scuppered the deal.

Realism or Retreat?

From the Venice Declaration of 1980 to the Conclusions of the Council of Ministers in December 2009, the EU has led the way on declaratory policy. In their conclusions, the ministers called for 'a two-state solution' to the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, with 'the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine, living side by side in peace and security' (Council of the EU, 2009).

The Council also stated that the EU 'will not recognize any changes to the pre-1967 borders including with regard to Jerusalem, other than those agreed by the parties' and that, in the interests of 'genuine peace, a way must be found through negotiations to resolve the status of Jerusalem as the future capital of two states'. Beyond this, the Council noted that: 'A comprehensive peace must include a settlement between Israel and Syria and Lebanon.'

A declaration of what should happen is not, however, a plan of action. Successive EU statements have not spelled out what the Europeans would do to make the parties to the conflict conform to their wishes. Also, while pronouncing on what is required for an end to the conflict, EU dealings with the protagonists have not made progress on bilateral relations conditional upon the implementation of steps to reach a two-state solution. Israel has not been punished for continuing the occupation, house demolitions, the confiscation of Palestinian homes and land, or construction of the security barrier that was deemed in contravention of international law by the International Court of Justice in 2004.

The Palestinians in the Gaza Strip have languished under a blockade that the EU has branded unacceptable and counterproductive. What finally prompted Israel to ease the blockade – but not end it – in June 2010, was not EU action but the fallout from the deadly Israeli commando raid on the flotilla of ships mounted by civilian volunteers that challenged the blockade. Turkey, not the EU, applied most pressure and Washington called for a re-think (BBC, 2010; Khalaf, 2009).

Meanwhile, the EU has been active in supporting Palestinian institution-building under the emergency administration of prime minister Salam Fayyad in the West Bank. Europeans are working with the Americans and Canadians to train Palestinian police and security forces to keep law and order in Palestinian towns (Asseburg, 2009b). The logic of these endeavours rests on the assumption that the PA must be prepared to take on the responsibilities and tasks of government when statehood is realized. The EU pays the salaries of PA police, civil servants, teachers and medical workers, including those of Fatah members in the Gaza Strip who are instructed to stay at home rather than work for Hamas-run organizations. According to European Commission figures, between 2000 and 2009 the EU disbursed over €3.3bn in aid to the Palestinians.⁷ Al-Fattal (2010), Brown (2010) and Pace (2010) argue that this approach has been counterproductive and a disservice to the Palestinians.

The net result of EU endeavours is conflict management, not resolution. In contrast to the situation in the 1990s, when European aid was channelled into development projects in the West Bank and Gaza, today the EU only finances the running costs of a PA which is not subject to legislative oversight and whose remit only runs in so-called Areas A and B, while the remainder of the West Bank (60 per cent) is still under Israeli control and in which settlements have not been removed or curtailed.

The unelected PA owes its survival to the EU, but it only serves to keep the peace, improve internal governance and regulate business within Palestinian towns and villages which remain separated by Israeli checkpoints, interspersed with Israeli settlements and by-pass roads, sealed off from Israel by the security barrier and separated from Gaza.

Thus, the EU is not totally inactive. On the contrary, its members are busy and engaged, but only on the Palestinian side and this in ways that have undermined Palestinian unity and prospects. European support for the PA in the West Bank and complaints about the blockade of Gaza add up to no more than a holding strategy as opposed to a transformative one. EU tax payers' money is being used to relieve the Israelis of the costs of occupation and EU policy is not directed at rolling back that occupation.

The Role of Individual Actors

Here attention turns to the positions of three European states (Britain, France and Germany) and two Arab states (Egypt and Jordan) on the MEPP. Whereas in the past each believed in their individual capacity to make a contribution to that process and invested resources accordingly, latterly they have retreated to risk avoidance in the case of the Europeans and survival mode in the case of Egypt and Jordan.

Britain, France and Germany

The positions of all the European actors on the Middle East 'peace process' can be identified across a spectrum of positions on: (a) their relative sympathy or antipathy to the positions of the core protagonists in the conflict; (b) the importance they attach to their bilateral relations with Washington; and (c) the costs and benefits of raising their profile in the MEPP.

Taking as a benchmark the categorizations of different actors in the UfM introduced by Bicchi and discussed in other contributions here, over the past 20 years Britain, France and Germany have sampled the roles of 'entrepreneur', 'leader', 'veto-player', and 'low-profile supporter'. The descriptions 'favour exchangers' and 'unhappy laggards' do not fit. In all their roles, however, the three states have assumed that they are not acting in a vacuum and that the involvement of other Europeans and the United States is a pre-requisite for a successful peace process.

Whereas between 1948 and 1967 France was the leading supplier of arms to Israel, as of the 1967 war it decided against this role and turned its attention to developing better relations with the Arab world. Thereafter, until Sarkozy arrived on the scene, France could be identified as more sympathetic to Arab than Israeli concerns. Demonstrating independence from Washington also featured in French motivations (Hoffman, 1971), along with seizing opportunities to provide leadership in Europe.

In the 1980s France adopted the role of 'entrepreneur' in several contexts, notably in Lebanon following the Israeli invasion of 1982. France was also an open supporter of the Iraqi regime in the Iran–Iraq war, when Britain and the United States preferred to give limited support to Baghdad in secret and through Arab surrogates.

In the 1990s France championed the cause of expanding EU relations with the Maghreb, and through the EMP sought to match German initiatives for Eastern Europe. Itself the target of terrorist action linked to Algeria, Paris led on development of security co-operation between Arab governments within the context of the EMP. France was also far less enthusiastic about the political reform agenda than the northern Europeans (Youngs, 2006). With respect to the MEPP, France was in the forefront of European calls for attention to international law in the formulation of peace proposals, at the same time as developing projects in the OPT designed to garner publicity for France.

In contrast to France, since the Suez debacle the British have accorded high importance to maintaining close relations with Washington. Until the 1980s the British were also more sympathetic to the Arabs than Israel, but during the 1980s Margaret Thatcher took a tough line on terrorism, including refusing to meet members of the PLO. The arrival of Tony Blair at 10 Downing Street marked a new period of British activism. Blair played the role of would-be entrepreneur on several occasions, but always in a manner intended to help the US leadership in the MEPP (Hollis, 2010: 70–85, 135–57).

The Germans, by contrast to both the British and the French, have adopted the role of 'low-profile supporter' of the MEPP and occasionally 'veto player' within the

EU. Developing a close and supportive relationship with Israel was vital to ridding the Germans of the stigma of the Nazi era and making recompense to the Jews, through compensation payments to Israel (Lavy, 1996). Consequently, Germany could be counted on to veto any European initiative which could be depicted as biased against Israel. However, with the advent of the Oslo process, the Germans did begin to build a profile in the OPT with a diplomatic presence and assistance, including through the party *Schiftungen*, to Palestinian projects and NGOs (see Schumacher, this collection).

Latterly, changes of government in Germany, France and Britain have led to shifts in their positions (see Schumacher, this collection; Asseburg, 2009a). Angela Merkel has gone out of her way to demonstrate German support for Israel, including speaking before the Israeli Knesset. Reportedly, one of her motives is to demonstrate that she, an East German, is prepared to own and atone for the Nazi past (Dempsey, 2010). Sarkozy has deliberately sought closer relations with Washington and shown greater warmth towards Israel than was typical of France in the past. Since the departure of Tony Blair from government in Britain, the British have declined to take a strong lead or even act as entrepreneurs in the context of the MEPP. Overall, given their preoccupations with adjusting to the new economic constraints affecting all three countries, it seems unlikely that the governments of Britain, France or Germany will be in the mood to launch any new initiatives on the Middle East for the foreseeable future.

Egypt and Jordan

Across the Arab world public support for the Palestinian cause and antipathy toward Israel is intense and volatile. As a result autocratic Arab regimes tend to use every opportunity to align themselves with such sentiments at the same time as trying to avoid having to take any actions that might turn animosity into war. Israel is not an opponent that any Arab state can contemplate engaging in battle without heavy penalty – as experienced by Lebanon in 2006 when Hizballah initiated a conflict that led to major destruction and over 1,000 Lebanese deaths, many of them civilians.

It is not surprising therefore that Egypt and Jordan, the only two Arab countries that have peace treaties with Israel, are constantly urging both the Americans and the Europeans to do more to end the Israeli occupation. In both cases the governments are frequently pressed by their publics to sever relations with Israel in protest at Israeli actions, but neither have done so, for fear of the consequences.

Herein lies one of the problems that befell both the US and the EU reform programmes. Real democracy in Egypt or Jordan could lead to the election of groups and parties that would scrap what they regard as their current governments' appeasement of Israel (see Schlumberger, this collection). It was for fear of this spectre and the rise of Islamist movements generally that the EU and the United States have ceased to press the reform agenda.

In addition, both Egypt and Jordan are in an especially difficult position because of their proximity to the Gaza Strip and the West Bank respectively. If Egypt opens

its borders to Gaza and Jordan eases access for West Bank Palestinians, in both cases they would relieve Israel of some of the pressure to end the occupation.

As a consequence, both Egypt and Jordan lack the leverage to pressure Israel and must rely on others to do so. It is thus to be expected that both states will regard the UfM as an opportunity to make themselves heard. As mentioned above, as co-president of the UfM, Egypt in particular must regard it as a positive responsibility to keep the conflict on the agenda.⁸

Institutional Overlaps and Conclusions

As discussed in other contributions here, it is possible to assess the institutional architecture of the UfM in terms of two dichotomies: regionalism versus bilateralism; and functionalism versus politicization. As the foregoing discussion indicates, in all respects the UfM is entangled with the institutional arrangements that frame the MEPP.

Unlike the UfM, the MEPP is an international endeavour and, as of 2002 and the formation of the Middle East Quartet, the United States, the UN, the EU and Russia have combined forces in pursuit of a common stance on Middle East peace. In 2002 the Arab League launched the Arab Peace Initiative (API), re-launched in 2007, as a collective Arab contribution to resolving the conflict. Within this context the EU and the Arab League, as well as some of the signatories to the API, are parties to the ENP and have signed up to the UfM.

To make clear distinctions between these structures, their functions and their goals is therefore unrealistic. To cite one example of functional overlap, EU engagement in the MEPP has been pursued through some of the same instruments and structures developed under the EMP and the ENP (Al-Fattal, 2010) which, in the latter case at least, continue to function. Thus the ENP Action Plan for the PA is actually more about fulfilling the expectations for Palestinian state-building envisaged as part of the MEPP than preparing the Palestinian economy for harmonization with the EU. In addition, successive EU collective and unilateral practical initiatives to aid Palestinian 'state-building' have embedded the European bureaucratic and security endeavours and personnel in the infrastructure of the occupation.

The linkages have become compounded over time. The Madrid process sought a comprehensive approach, but devolved onto bilateral tracks. Oslo was the central feature of this narrow approach, but when it failed, the effort to revive it became multilateral, through the Quartet. The API is a quest to shift from a bilateral approach to making peace deals (as was the case with Egypt and Jordan) to a regional or 'comprehensive' approach. Both the EU and the United States have sought, belatedly, to capitalize on this, but only in so far as the Arabs might be persuaded to 'deliver' the Palestinians to the table. The Arabs have refused to take any steps towards 'normalization' with Israel unless and until it withdraws from the Occupied Territories. This resistance to normalization is now being played out in the UfM.

Within this context, neither the UfM nor the unproductive MEPP is reducible to the status of a dependent variable in the relationship between the two. However, both

are the product of the mindsets or worldviews of the actors involved, as repeatedly indicated above. In the case of the Europeans, they have operated on the assumption that the values embraced by all EU members and embodied in the *acquis* are not only positive for them but also for any other country (Hollis, 2009). Among the MPCs, meanwhile, a worldview prevails that is positively suspicious of EU intentions and values. These mindsets also informed the EMP and the MEPP in the 1990s, but have evolved in response to failures on both counts, as well as exogenous factors, including 9/11, the Iraq crisis, fallout from the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the resulting intensification of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

The EU's declaratory policy on the MEPP, together with its narrow focus on Palestinian 'state-building' in the West Bank and the adoption of the limited objectives of the UfM indicate a retreat in the face of a gathering storm. For the Arabs, particularly Egypt and Jordan, that storm could spell destabilization. Hence the scene seems set for turbulence from which the UfM cannot be immune.

Notes

- ¹ The term coined by Joseph Nye and adopted by others, both academics and politicians, to contrast the EU approach to power projection with the military or 'hard power' available to the United States.
- ² As attested by officials participating in the seminar at which this and other papers were discussed in May 2010. As one said, official deliberations on the UfM and the MEPP are so interwoven as to be inseparable. If one tried to treat them as two separate clients for the purposes of billing for official time spent on each, the distinction drawn would be arbitrary or even false.
- ³ An opportunity Israel apparently considered jeopardized by inclusion of the Arab League as a participant.
- ⁴ For example, ahead of the Luxembourg summit in May 2005, Luxembourg's foreign minister Jean Asselborn declared that the EU was not just a source of funds but ought also to 'transfer European values to Arab society to encourage democracy' (Islam, 2005).
- ⁵ Substantiated in interviews conducted by the author with EU officials in 2005–06.
- ⁶ The role of Britain, and Blair in particular, is the subject of Hollis (2010).
- ⁷ http://eeas.europa.eu/occupied_palestinian_territory/ec_assistance/eu_support_pa_2000_2009_en.pdf (accessed 22 November 2010).
- ⁸ The problems connected with co-ownership are discussed by Johansson-Nogués (this collection).

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