

**Arab Republic of Egypt**

***Conflict Prevention and confidence-building  
in the Mediterranean***

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## **Conflict prevention and confidence- building In the Mediterranean**

### **The Mediterranean in a changing environment.**

The geopolitical and geostrategic concept of the Mediterranean is now widely accepted on both shores of the basin and world wide. This led to the initiation of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the requirement of a new vision that goes hand-in-hand with the growing importance of this region and its new security dimension. Indeed, not only must this vision reflect the actual security and stability concerns of the Euro-Mediterranean partners, but it must also take account of the linkage that exists between the future of this security and stability and the political settlement of the chronic conflict in the Middle East. Therefore, conflict prevention and confidence building in the Middle East have a major impact on conflict prevention and confidence-building in the Mediterranean region as a whole.

### **Egypt and the Mediterranean.**

Egypt does not view the Mediterranean as an isolated circle but, rather, as an integral one that occupies a natural place in national political and strategic thinking and understanding of its vital Arab, African and Middle Eastern strategic circles of importance. In general, and from Egypt's perspective, the Mediterranean and its surrounding land, waters and related seas form one geopolitical /geostrategic whole with its own particular characteristics. While it has not evolved into an independent political economic system, it does, nevertheless, impose on current events due to its continuing importance and impact within the international arena. Consequently, the geostrategic issues pertaining to the Mediterranean, and the Middle East, are intricate and complex.

## **The current situation in the Middle East : a Summary**

The unhappy events that occurred in the region since September 2000, refer to a massive mismanagement of the peace process by the internal and external parties concerned. Nevertheless, we believe that Israel, who has the upper hand on key issues, holds the key to ending the conflict by adhering to and implementing international legal norms such as United Nations' resolutions calling for Israeli withdrawal from occupied territories, and its binding agreements with the Palestinians.

One major entanglement concerning this matter is that there is no consensus on a clear definition of peace that is agreed upon by all parties and the confidence - building measures that should be taken. As a result, each side's actions are interpreted by the other side as proof that they do not want peace. Although each side claims that the primary goal for the moment is the cessation of hostilities and violence to be followed by a return to negotiations, there still are disagreement about the sequence of doing so: should violence ends before negotiations are resumed or would the start of negotiations leads to the end of violence?. Unfortunately, each party interprets violence differently, therefore there is no clear framework, as yet, for a return to negotiations.

Consequently, this meeting comes at an especially tense and difficult time for both the Middle East and the Mediterranean regions. Nonetheless, this opportunity to share perspectives and ideas should be helpful and constructive. We hope that we reach common insights, then build on the shared ideas and begin finding ways to move beyond this crisis in regional security relations.

***Some possible confidence-building measures concerning the current situation in the Middle East could be:***

- 1- There is a need to end violence, to implement existing agreements and to start negotiations. A special group should immediately be formed to address these issues.
- 2- War would not benefit anyone. Therefore, threats that are coming from different parties should stop at once, and parties should seek other means for solving their differences. Simultaneously, mismanagement of negotiations should be rectified.
- 3- There is a need to re-activate third party roles, in particular the United States, Europe and the United Nations Organization. This would enable the resumption of negotiations on all tracks, improve the management of dealing with each other and end all violence and incitement.
- 4- There is a need to clarify concepts, such as war, peace and violence. Also, there is a need to close the gap between different perceptions of the situation and of the core issues. In doing so, parties should know that the security landscape in the region has changed and new elements have emerged as significant factors. They should adapt to this kind of change.
- 5- The situation is critical and urgent and steps should be taken to defuse it. This situation has an impact throughout the Middle East. Therefore, lessons should be drawn from the past experience, and all sides should reach out to explain perceptions and aspirations.

- 6- All parties should believe that there is a need for economic cooperation in the long term, and this would be the real guarantor of peace and stability in the Middle East of the future. Economic cooperation should be based upon a just and lasting peace settlement among parties concerned.
  
- 7- Turkey and Iran should be given a new role to play in the Middle East. Nations of the Mediterranean should assume their role in stabilizing both the Middle East and the Mediterranean. This would ensure a more stable region.

**Some possible conflict prevention a confidence building measures.**

The Middle East and the Mediterranean basin can be looked upon as an integral and unified unit, with common interests for all the countries in both regions. According to the most recent strategic thinking of all parties concerned, including Egypt, a broad and long-term vision of cooperation, security and stability within the states of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is called for, based on the following:

- 1- All Countries of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership should review their previous positions and proposals in respect of hard and soft security measures, which were made in a different historical or political context or whose aims are no longer valid or appropriate. Cooperation, instead of confrontation, should be the key concept among all partners and more understanding concerning hard and soft security measures should prevail.
  
- 2- In the Middle East, there is a need to achieve a reasonable and acceptable balance of power that takes account of each state's threat perception but, at the same time, does not create a situation in which one country's perceived security

needs heighten threat perception among other states. On the other hand, any peace agreement reached in the Middle East that is not accompanied by a solution to the nuclear issue cannot be considered durable and comprehensive. Without this solution it is highly probable that, in the long term, the non-nuclear parties will endeavor to secure such an option in order to minimize any future threat emanated against them by the nuclear party, thus endangering the non-proliferation regime worldwide.

- 3- The concept of “maximum transparency” provides the basis for security and stability through hard security measures in both the Middle East and the Mediterranean, as well as for all confidence-building measures and arms control processes. In other words, during the period of confidence-building, concrete reduction should be implemented in the arms agreed upon among the parties concerned, coupled with a verification and inspection regime to guarantee the parties’ commitment to the agreement reached among them.
- 4- The concept of “negotiation” is not confined to the negotiation process but also involves a long series of moves and contacts, aimed at creating a favorable climate and the necessary confidence-building measure for elaborating proposals and reaching a reasonable degree of consensus among the parties concerned.

## **Epilogue**

We should all believe that we are living in a changing world with new Middle East and Mediterranean regions, and what we have today is a new opportunity that deserves to be given the utmost attention. This opportunity should be aimed at attaining a security founded on a common shared vision based on political, economic, cultural and security interests. It not only carried further emphasis on the reality of

interdependence of all aspects of relationships among the parties, but also have enhanced the concept of “indivisibility of security”.

Egypt as the country that initiated peace in the region and shouldered its risks, has and continues to exert all efforts to secure that a permanent peace will eventually prevail. However, peace without balanced security arrangements will always be at risk as a true peace cannot, and should not, be protected by military supremacy.

***Our meeting may explore the following issues, in addition to the required confidence-building measures:***

***1- The ongoing crisis in the Arab-Israeli Peace process.***

This should include a detailed exploration of what happened and why, the implications for the countries of the region and neighboring states and the impact of the crisis on the tense and volatile Syria, Lebanon and Israel triangle.

***2- The impact of the crisis on the wider region.***

This should include the determination in some detail the spillover effects of the events of Iraq on the Middle Eastern states and neighboring countries. What new roles can these states play in the new security environment of both the Middle East and the Mediterranean regions and how can they share in the future economic cooperation in these regions.

***3- Answering some vital questions, such as:***

- (1) Is the region sliding towards war? What can be done to halt the deterioration in relations?
- (2) How can we end violence, implement existing agreements and restart negotiations on solid basis?

- (3) How can we resume negotiations within the Syrian, Lebanese and Israeli triangle?
- (4) How can we reintegrate Iraq into inter-regional relations?
- (5) How can we reactivate third party's role, in particular the United States, Europe and the United Nations Organizations?

We are looking for a fruitful meeting, new ideas and some positive results that would help the parties to overcome their differences, and eventually re-orient the peace process toward its final goal.