

**LE MONDE**  
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### **The Middle East: Before it will be too late...**

In the Tikva, or hope, of the 1994 Peace Treaty aftermath, an estimated \$35 billion for a decade of infrastructure development from Morocco to Turkey inclusive was the recommendation of the Middle East North Africa Summit in Casablanca, only 7 years ago. Yet, with \$300 billion spent on weapons since the Gulf War, it appears that armament and 'ad hoc' are more important than a medium range comprehensive stability plan. The 'arc of crisis' from Morocco, south east to the Congo and the Sudan, the Arabian Sea and then north to the top of the energy ellipse (70% and 40% of the world's oil and gas), has no in-built conflict avoidance capability.

No sooner do we witness the Peres-Arafat handshake, than we hear of the renewal of hostilities in Southern Lebanon, possibly escalating to involve Syria and Lebanon. In the last decade numerous peace-building opportunities have arisen, (Egypt and Jordan are signatories, and the Palestinian Authority a 'peace partner' as described in Portugal by Mr. Peres) only to disappear in dust and ashes. The centrality of the Palestinian tragedy has to be internalised by the Jewish people, and Arabs have to correspondingly internalise the historic suffering of the Jewish people.

Surely when a situation becomes impassable, you do not judge the legitimacy of people's fears, but you think again. I have, alongside my late brother King Hussein, worked for peace for three decades. Today, on the one hand, I see no alternative to mediation and containment in the short term, or the prevention of low-intensity conflict expanding into all-out war. On the other hand, I do want to emphasise that we are a region only in name, isolated from the world in the absence of an O.S.C.E., an arrangement that has filled a vacuum of over 40 states from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Our relevance in the eyes of O.E.C.D. thinking is linked to the security of Israel and the security of oil. Shortly after the election of Mr. Bush, a Gulf

personality said to me: "We are now more important to the United States than even Israel is". I asked, if Israel is 'important' and Gulf oil is important, then what are we in the Middle East and Central Asian hinterland – hell's firewood?" The U.S. strategy for Asia apparently stops at the borders of India with Pakistan. The Shanghai 5's influence ends with the borders of the Caucasus and Turkey, although oil pipelines are projected through the Black Sea to Europe. The revisiting of the 'Great Game' of the 19th Century is not along the railway lines of old, but by way of energy pipelines and 'soft security' or people's needs are secondary.

The tensions livid in the Sub Continent between nuclear India and Pakistan, the alleged or proven missile capabilities of Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Egypt, not to mention the nuclear biological and chemical capacity of Israel, could ignite Armageddon at any moment. I understand the significance of N.M.D., yet do the 'pariahs' have to retain their status, until the gestation of the N.M.D. project is completed?

In the event of hostilities, you cannot put a lid on their not engulfing the whole of the arc of crisis, the Atlantic to the Sub Continent. I think it is time everyone in the region was brought to the table, with a cheap inclusive and compulsory admission ticket to a regional strategic security conversation. We feel that politicians prefer tactics to statesmanship. Maybe we need a parallelism and complementarity of both.

As for soft security, or human dignity, let us develop a proposal for a regional energy and water community to offset the coal and steel, Monnet-Schuman inspiration, of extra national strategic post-war planning in Europe. Let us stop hot housing the extremism we claim to fear. We live in a region where up to 40% of the population lives under the poverty line and where 45% are under the age of 15. Security and economy with a human face would undercut the politics and economics of despair and pave the way for a code of conduct. We could develop a culture of compliance living up to and developing international norms to apply to both state and non-state actors in what would no longer be a

'non-region'. We should build a *cordon sanitaire* before it is too late for the region and its partners.

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