

Regional problems – regional solutions? Taking stock of the recent mediation efforts in the Middle East

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Michael Bauer and Julia-Kristina Ismar

Regional problems – regional solutions?

Taking stock of the recent mediation
efforts in the Middle East

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Introduction

For decades the Middle East has been one of the most unstable and unsafe regions in the world. Trying to resolve the regional conflicts is a prime goal on the agenda of many governments and international institutions. Nevertheless, most of the peace initiatives proposed by outside actors so far have failed, as their proposed solutions to the conflicts often did not really take into account the political realities in the region, but instead were more oriented towards the interests of the external actors. This instance is particularly apparent in the case of the current US administration. After having already failed at attempting to reorganize the political landscape of the Middle East through power politics, the administration of President George W. Bush turned to diplomacy in order to achieve its goals in the region. However, when that change of attitude gradually evolved the credibility of his administration was already weakened to such an extent that none of the regional players appeared to accept them as a serious partner in the handling and, ultimately, resolving of the various conflicts. What is more, its rhetoric notwithstanding, the US also failed to offer a promising solution to the conflicts. At the same time, neither the so-called Middle-East Quartet (consisting of the US, the European Union, Russia, and the United Nations), nor the Europeans themselves have been able to step in and fill the growing diplomatic vacuum. Instead regional actors have taken on the task of settling the regional disputes. Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and Qatar, to only name a few. Their approach: refraining from proposing ready-made solutions, and instead focusing on the negotiation process, including the stake-holders and taking into account their specific interests, dealing with a single issue at a time, and not putting pressure on anyone by officially proclaiming a great breakthrough before anything has been officially agreed upon. What are the prospects of these regional initiatives? Has US engagement in the region become obsolete? And what implications does this have for the European Union? What should its role be? These questions shall be addressed in the following paragraphs.

In order to sort out options for a resolution, an understanding of the conflict's distinct layers is indispensable. Therefore we start our analysis with an overview of the different conflicts. In this context we will put a particular focus on the Arab-Israeli confrontation and related conflicts. In a second step we will outline the main characteristics of the different types of mediation and introduce current mediation efforts by regional actors. Based on this analysis we will discuss the strengths and shortcomings of the various diplomatic initiatives and negotiation efforts that are currently taking place in the region. In a concluding part we will develop recommendations for European policy on how to support conflict resolution in the Middle East.

1. Conflicts in the Middle East

When dealing with the conflicts in the Middle East, one has to bear in mind that all the key issues are closely linked to each other: Israel has to find a modus vivendi with its Palestinian population, which is at odds with itself. Hamas and Fatah are fighting over the control of the Palestinian territories, leaving little hope for a peace-agreement with Israel. The conflict between Israel and Syria over the Golan Heights is fueled by Syria's support for Palestinian Hamas and Hezbollah in Lebanon. Lebanon's instability and the increasing strength of Hezbollah constitute a further threat to Israel's security. Above all, political instability in Iraq as well as Iran's hegemonic ambitions, which it puts on display not least by the support of Hamas and Hezbollah and its alliance with Syria, add a broader dimension to the conflict as both factors increase tensions between Sunnis and Shiites within the Muslim community. As Ghassan Khatib observes, "this interrelation is growing to an extent that it is becoming nearly impossible to understand one conflict in isolation."¹

Developing a
differentiated picture

Nonetheless, each conflict displays its own characteristics, and hence a differentiated picture needs to be drawn. The following paragraphs are to provide an introduction to the inner-Palestinian altercation, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the inner-Lebanese power struggle, and the regional role of Syria. This focus of interest is by no means meant to negate the importance of the confrontation over Iran's nuclear program or the unstable situation in Iraq. Instead, we focus on the Levant for two reasons: First, these conflicts impact each other very immediately, not least through the geographic proximity. This is not to say that the situation in Iraq has no effect on the Arab-Israeli conflict, however these repercussions are not as direct as in the case of the conflicts we chose. Moreover, even though the conflict over the Iranian nuclear program is certainly a central aspect of Middle Eastern politics we do not include it in our analysis here.² Instead we conceptualize Iran as an external actor in the conflicts we analyze. Second, as we scrutinize the role of regional mediation efforts we see that regional actors play a particularly prominent role in the conflicts of the Levant, even though regional mediation is desirable and on the rise with regards to Iraq and Iran as well.

Focus on the Levant

1.1. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict

The core problem of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, namely the fact that two people claim control over the same piece of land, is yet to be resolved. Indeed the Palestinian problem has an impact on the Middle East as a whole. The key issues which impede a resolution of the conflict are the disputed territories and a lacking agreement on the borders of a future Palestinian state, the unresolved problem of the Palestinian refugees' right to return, the status of Jerusalem, the ever expanding Israeli settlements in the West Bank, and the problem of Palestinian terrorism. These issues have been addressed in several initiatives and peace agreements, but both parties still hesitate to comply with their obligations due to a mutual lack of trust.

Refugees, settlements,
and Jerusalem

When dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian relations one has to differentiate between the two parties of Hamas and Fatah (See also: 1.2. The conflict between Hamas and Fatah). Since the landslide victory of Hamas in the 2006 national elections, long-established conflicts between the two major actors in Palestinian politics escalated over the struggle for political control over the Palestinian territory. Rivalries between the two parties have existed ever since the foundation of the Islamic Resistance Movement (Hamas) during the first Intifada due to the rivaling claims for Palestinian

Palestinian disunity

leadership and the differing ideological backgrounds of the two parties: whereas Fatah, the political branch of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) with a rather nationalist agenda, is considered to be the more “moderate” of the two, Hamas, which shares its roots with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, is a radical Islamic movement that refuses to play a cooperative role in the peace process.

Hamas’ rule in Gaza

Israel considers Hamas a terrorist organization, with many of their leading politicians being regarded as public enemies of the state of Israel. Although Hamas has ultimately adjusted its program and respects the ceasefire that has been agreed upon in June of 2008, it still refuses to officially recognize Israel, to disarm, and to abdicate terrorism. On the other hand, the disastrous living conditions in Gaza, originating from the international isolation of Hamas, and the vast preconditions Israel demands before starting to hold negotiations, leave the Hamas-led government little room for action. A lack of trust on both sides and the serious asymmetry of power complicate a rapprochement between Israel and Hamas which has brought the political process to a deadlock.

The weakness of President Abbas

On behalf of the Fatah, Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas is ready to negotiate with Israel and is ready to make important concessions. President Abbas’ role in the so-called Annapolis process, which was initiated under US guidance in November of 2007 at the Annapolis peace conference, provides the most recent example for that. Moreover, Fatah can be considered the more cooperative and more reliable partner for sorting out Israeli-Palestinian problems. President Abbas so far has supported all international initiatives and has met with Israeli President Shimon Peres and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert several times. Admittedly, President Abbas has lost power in the inner-Palestinian struggle, not only because of the increasing competition from Hamas but also due to Fatah’s severe corruption and poor governance performance, and will hardly be capable to implement any peace accord against the will of Hamas. In other words, Israel never faced a partner more willing and at the same time less capable to negotiate.

1.2. The conflict between Hamas and Fatah: The struggle for Palestine

Hamas vs. Fatah

As displayed above, the relations between the two major Palestinian parties have deteriorated since 2006: That year’s elections, intended to officially strengthen President Abbas, put the public support for the resistance of Hamas as well as the accumulated discontent with Fatah’s political performance and its tendency to corruption on display. Hamas called for the formation of a national unity government, including all parties in the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), but all of its offers for cooperation have been turned down – demonstrably also due to negative reactions from abroad. Fatah never recognized the legitimacy of the Hamas-led government and opposed the idea of political collaboration, while President Abbas maintained control of the whole security apparatus. Notwithstanding Saudi mediation in Mecca in 2007, which resulted in a fragile ceasefire and the formation of a unity government, violent fighting between Hamas and Fatah increased, resulting in a civil war-like situation and in the separation of Palestinian territory: Hamas seized control of Gaza, whereas the West Bank remains a Fatah stronghold.

The role of external actors

However, inner-Palestinian conflict has also been fueled by outside actors as the internal struggle limits Palestinian power in negotiations: During the first Intifada (1987-1993), Israel has deliberately closed their eyes to the activities of Hamas while prosecuting members of Fatah. The inner-Palestinian divide was serving Israel’s stra-

tegy to weaken the PLO, which they considered to be the greater threat at that time.³ After Hamas presented itself as a radical movement and opposed the peace-process “sympathies” have shifted: Fatah received extensive support from the US before the elections and still does today, including monetary funding, arms, and military training.⁴ Iran on the other hand provides Hamas with material and ideological support. This increasing role of Shiite Iran causes additional concern among the Arab countries ruled by Sunni Muslims.

What further complicates the situation is the heterogeneity within both parties. Both comprise a political and a military wing which both follow different strategies. In the case of Hamas this discrepancy is most obvious as its politic bureau is currently located in Sudan, outside Palestinian territory.⁵ Also, both parties have to deal with the struggle between moderate and more radical forces within, which further complicates decision-making processes.

Heterogeneous movements

Needless to say, inner-Palestinian reconciliation is the key to a successful peace process, as negotiations with Israel can only lead to a sustainable pacification of the region when they are accepted in both Gaza and the West Bank.

Palestinian unity is needed

1.3. The conflict over Lebanon

Even before Hezbollah’s war against Israel in the summer of 2006 Lebanon was a fragile state. Since then, political developments have heightened the traditional ethnic and religious tensions. Moreover, external actors have pursued their specific agendas, by which they contributed to the country’s political disarray.⁶ In May 2008, inner-Lebanese power struggle between the Sunni government and Hezbollah opposition escalated into an armed conflict that pushed the country on the verge of a civil war.

A state at risk

For various reasons Lebanon represents one of the key locations where Iran has an interest to interfere: the fragile political system which traditionally perpetuated Christian and Sunni supremacy over the Shiites provides a fertile soil for Iranian engagement and the evolution of a radical Shiite movement, such as Hezbollah. Moreover, the ideological influence on Hezbollah provides Iran with a direct access to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Iranian influence

Although Syria does not share Iran’s ideological motives it has strong historic ties to the Shiite republic. Via Syria, Iran can provide Hezbollah with material support. However, supporting Hezbollah is also a tactical move for Syria itself: first, by means of Hezbollah, which has evolved from being a militant resistance movement to being a political factor in Lebanon, Syria can once again access the political agenda of its neighbor and regains its influence over Lebanon’s security policy agenda where Syria had lost leverage after the forced withdrawal of their military troops in 2005. In addition to that, the Syrian political establishment has massive economic interests in Lebanon. Further, Syria is trying to resume its position as a key political actor in the region to overcome political isolation: its influence on Lebanon and Hezbollah might be seen as a bargaining chip for President Bashar al-Assad to help him achieve that goal.

Syria’s interferences
in Lebanon

The presence of Hezbollah on Israel’s northbound frontier in southern Lebanon represents a constant threat to the security of the state of Israel; the outcome of the war of 2006 has broken the nimbus of the invincibility of the Israel Defense Forces

Israel's worries (IDF). Even more problematic for Jerusalem, this has strengthened Hezbollah's position within Lebanon and made Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah one of the most popular figures for the so-called Arab Street. Israel thus tries to strengthen moderate forces in Lebanon in order to weaken the Shiite movement and thus pacify and secure its northern border.

Inner-Lebanese power struggles The tensions between Sunnis and Shiites, which gravely affect national decision-making processes, further complicate the situation: The competing interests of both external and internal players have led the country to a political deadlock, leaving it on the brink of civil war and without an effective government for more than six months. Only with the help of external actors, namely Qatar and Turkey, resulting in the Doha agreement of 2008, could the situation be de-escalated and the political stalemate be overcome. However, political tensions remain, leaving Lebanon's future in the air.

How to achieve stability? Stabilizing Lebanon is key, as it can be regarded as an epicenter of the Middle-East Conflict in which all the important actors try to claim their interests. Such endeavor would require an effective tactic of dealing with Hezbollah. Moreover, since Syria facilitates Hezbollah's access to arms and money, a sustainable solution in southern Lebanon would need Damascus' support.⁷

1.4. The conflict between Israel and Syria

No peace without Syria Syria's role in the region is as crucial as it is ambiguous. The meaning behind Henry Kissinger's famous quote that without Syria there would be no peace in the Middle East becomes obvious when looking at Damascus' potential to act as spoiler. Without Syrian consent the political arrangements in Lebanon will not be sustainable: Damascus can obstruct the stabilization of Iraq, it is a strategic ally of Iran, and it has the means to support Hezbollah, Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and radicals in Hamas. It thus possesses the ability to strengthen the radical forces in the region.⁸ Syria does not recognize the state of Israel and since the Six-Day War of 1967 there has only been a ceasefire agreement between the two states. Against this background it should be obvious that a rapprochement of Israel and Syria would not only end a longstanding conflict that has repeatedly erupted in violence, but also substantially alter the political landscape of the region.⁹

Syrian and Israeli interests For both partners, there is much to gain from an agreement. It is not hard to guess what Syria demands from Israel: Damascus wants to regain the Golan Heights, which have been conquered and later annexed by Israel in 1967. Further, peace with Israel would possibly end the economic and political isolation of the regime, especially on behalf of the US, which is of great importance to Assad, promising economic growth, increasing diplomatic freedom, and regime stability. These are strong points of interest for Syria in terms of *realpolitik*, and it might well be possible that Damascus would be willing to give up its support of Hamas and Hezbollah, and even loosen its ties with Tehran in exchange, as engagement in Lebanon and the alliance with Iran are arguably not driven by ideological or sectarian interests but rather serve as a means to strengthen Syrian bargaining power.¹⁰

Weakening Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran An agreement with Syria would mean strong strategic gains for Israel vis-à-vis its three strongest antagonists. If Syria ceases to function as a channel for foreign aid to Hamas and Hezbollah and stops its own support for these groups, a pacification of the border in Israel's northern region as well as Gaza could be possible. In addition,

Iran, seen by many in Israel as an existential threat, would lose its most important strategic ally in the region.

Much is to gain, but peace won't come easy. Mistrust between Israel and Syria runs deep: there is a suspicion in Israel that Syria does not want peace; all it wants is to end its isolation, and peace is merely a strategy to reach that goal.¹¹ Many Israelis don't trust the Baath-regime and fear that President Assad might not comply with his obligations deriving from an agreement. Moreover, the majority of Israelis is very skeptical about giving up the Golan Heights, even though public opposition is decreasing rapidly in view of the recent negotiations.¹² This public sentiment meets with the strategic concerns that already exist: giving up the Golan Heights would mean that a former enemy would gain control of the majority of Israel's water resources and overlook northern Israel from the hilltops.

Mistrust and suspicion
on both sides

Consequently, any initiative involving a withdrawal from the Golan Heights would be hard to communicate to the Israeli public, and that raises Syrian concerns about the enforcement and popular support in a referendum on a possible peace agreement between the two states.

2. Regional mediation efforts

Traditionally, the Levant has always been an area that aroused the interest of external players, during the age of colonialism as well as during the Cold War, and the conflicts that have to be dealt with today partly derive from foreign interference. For the last decades the Middle East has again been an arena for international intervention. The world witnessed a wide range of approaches brought forward by different players trying to resolve the conglomerate of conflicts, unfortunately most of them with only limited success. The Middle-East Conflict traditionally holds a high place on the foreign policy agenda in the US particularly. Past US administrations had launched several initiatives aiming for the "grand bargain", such as the Madrid Conference in 1991 and Camp David II in 2000. However, under the Bush-administration the focus of the US engagement in the region has shifted to Iraq and Afghanistan, which are of higher importance especially in domestic politics. When it came to Israel and Palestine, mediation efforts of the current US administration failed, largely due to its unconditional support for Israel that brought about a severe loss of credibility and fueled an increasing tendency of anti-Americanism. Thus, the most recent attempt to reach a "grand bargain" at least for the Palestine conflict, which was initiated in Annapolis in November of 2007 and is intended to result in an independent Palestinian state before George W. Bush leaves office in January 2009, is considered very unlikely to succeed.¹³ Moreover, given Mr. Bush's status as a lame duck president, the current US administration's influence in the region is further decreasing.

America's role in the Levant

The European Union (EU) in turn seems like a promising actor on the scene and would have the resources, credibility, and ambition to fill the United States' shoes.¹⁴ However, the EU has not yet decided on which role to play, falling short of its possibilities. The revival of the Middle East Quartet under the German presidency of the European Council seemed like a promising sign, but admittedly not much has happened since. The Quartet could be a forum in which the EU could propose politics without running the danger of challenging the US administration¹⁵, but has not yet made use of this opportunity.

Europe's limitations

Regional actors
exercise leadership

Against this background, one might have expected diplomacy in the Middle East to come to a standstill altogether. However, the contrary was the case: over the course of the last year, the Middle East has seen a remarkable amount of diplomatic initiatives that were developed within the region itself. Regional actors make use of their increased maneuvering space brought about by the decreased influence of external actors. In turn, this development has further sidelined America's role in Middle East diplomacy. As Rami Khouri rightly notes, "important regional issues seem to be moving into the hands of local players and mediators. [...] This is good news because it signals both willingness and a capacity by regional actors to act as diplomatic mediators, rather than constantly looking to foreign powers to nudge the warring parties towards negotiated accords."¹⁶ Egypt is trying to arrange a ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, Turkey is the channel for talks between Syria and Israel; Saudi Arabia plays an ever-increasing role in regional diplomacy. Not to forget the emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa Al Thani, under whose auspices the Doha Agreement for Lebanon took shape, and Yemen, which negotiated the Sanaa-Declaration constituting another attempt to reconcile Hamas and Fatah.

2.1. Mediation in international conflicts

Conceptualising mediation

"International mediation has become almost as common as conflict itself."¹⁷ Throughout history, conflicts in international relations have repeatedly been the subject of mediation, for it represents an important alternative to resolving differences violently. Mediation in international relations is to be understood as a specific form of conflict management in which the affected parties seek the assistance of, or embrace an offer for help from a third party, which tries to facilitate a settlement of the dispute.¹⁸ Thus, mediation turns an originally bilateral dispute into "triadic interaction"¹⁹, and by that changes the structural character of the conflict.

Mediation can be carried out either through private individuals, government officials, non-governmental organizations (NGO), regional and international organizations, or by states. Each player possesses a specific set of interests and resources, applicable to variable forms of conflict. The mediator can modify the conflict by influencing the conflicting parties, the nature of how the conflict is fought, or the context in which the conflict takes place.

The mediator's resources

Even though mediation is ideally intended to be a process in which the participants take part voluntarily, mediators naturally also possess power resources, which they employ in the mediation efforts. "Mediators' resources constitute the basis required for exercising leverage, or better still, any form of influence."²⁰ Consequently, "power", in this context, shall be understood as all characteristics of a mediator that can be employed to exert influence on the conflict, the conflicting parties, or the environment in which they are operating. In this sense, it is possible to differentiate between various sources of power:²¹

Different kinds of power

– *Reward Power* means that the mediator possesses resources which are valued by the parties and can be offered as an incentive to come to a negotiated solution. On the other hand, the mediator possesses *Coercive Power* if he or she is in the position to threaten withdrawal of material or political support, or even apply sanctions in case the conflict parties reject negotiations. These instruments are the well known "sticks and carrots" that are employed by great powers or strong international organizations in their mediation efforts.

- The mediator might exercise *Expert Power* if he or she actually possesses or can create the impression of being in the possession of knowledge relevant for the resolution of the conflict. This kind of resource is usually the strength of individuals, such as professional mediators, diplomats, or former politicians.
- Also dependent on the perception of the conflict parties is the legitimacy on which the mediator bases his or her involvement in the conflict. Almost any mediator will possess some kind of *Legitimate Power*, if only by the fact of trying to resolve a conflict. However, the higher the degree of legitimacy the conflict parties ascribe to the mediator the more difficult it will be for them to reject the suggestions made by the third party. Usually international or regional organizations, NGOs, or public figures like former politicians possess a high degree of *Legitimate Power*, but also small states with few or no geostrategic interests might be able to exercise what Randa Slim calls “the legitimate power of powerlessness”.²²
- If there is a special relationship between the mediator and the conflict parties that is valued by the disputants, the mediator can exercise *Referent Power*. This relationship might derive from religion, ethnicity or history, and it implies that there is already some trust between the mediator and the parties of the conflict. Moreover, the conflict parties believe that the mediator understands their motives and truly attempts to reconcile their divergent interests. Obviously, this kind of power is a characteristic of mediators coming from the same region as the antagonists, hence it is a particularly important feature for the analysis at hand.
- Additional characteristics any mediator has to possess are relentlessness and patience.²³ Mediation processes are seldom finished within a time of weeks or a few months only but might last years. In particular for great powers this can present a problem as they might fear to lose reputation if they are engaged in prolonged negotiation efforts without being able to bring about a positive conclusion.

In accordance with their resources, the parties’ needs, interests and capabilities, and the nature of the conflict, the mediator might choose between three categories of mediation strategies, which differ in terms of the intensity with which the mediator infers in the conflict:²⁴

The right degree of interference

- In the case of *Communication-facilitating Strategies*, the main aim is to re-establish communication between the parties. The mediator confines himself to the role of communication channel. On this basis one hopes that the disputants can exchange views on the nature of their conflict, develop an understanding of motives of the respective opponent, and identify possible points of departure for negotiations. Specific for this kind of strategy is that the mediator refrains from formulating alternatives on how to settle the dispute.
- By employing strategies that focus on shaping the negotiation process (*Formulation Strategies*), the mediator attempts to control the nature, the environment, the timing and the political contents of the communication between the parties. This might include informal meetings between the parties, individual meetings of the mediator with the parties, joint sessions, shuttle-diplomacy, workshops (often in combination), setting up an agenda, addressing simple issues first, arranging package deals, etc. Thus, the mediator organizes the format as well as the contents of the communication.

- *Manipulative Strategies* are the most intense kind of interference: Here the mediator exercises direct influence over the conflict and the opponents. The mediator can introduce proposals for the resolution of the conflict that constitutes a compromise of the opponents' positions (*arbitration*). Also, the mediator might exercise pressure or provide incentives in order for the parties to come to an agreement (*power mediation*). In addition to that, the mediator might be able to militarily guarantee the agreement reached by the antagonists and economically and politically support its implementation (*peace-keeping/peace-building*). Especially when there is a great imbalance of power, the conflicting parties are likely to be unable to agree on viable negotiated arrangements, and thus a powerful mediator can make a great difference as to bringing about a just and mutually accepted agreement.²⁵

The ripeness of a conflict

The mediator's resources and the mediation strategies have been discussed as variables determining the chances to succeed with mediation efforts. Another central aspect is the question whether the conflict is "ripe for resolution".²⁶ That means that the conflicting parties must perceive themselves as locked in a hurting stalemate and come to realize that their current strategy of confrontation has failed. Under this condition there is a chance that the opponents take on a conciliatory mentality with a will to compromise. However, even if this is the case there still needs to be a viable alternative available that allows the parties to reach a negotiated compromise. It is the task of the mediator to help the parties find this alternative. In particular mediators endowed with substantial economic or military capabilities might try to use this leverage to engage in power mediation in order to change the variables of the conflict and thus proactively make the conflict ripe for negotiations. However, it is questionable how sustainable such conflict resolution efforts are, as they would require a long-term engagement on behalf of the mediator in order to keep the conflict parties at the negotiating table and enforce the agreements that are reached.

2.2. Mediators in the Middle East

Regional mediation efforts

As highlighted above, the Middle East has experienced and is experiencing a wide range of mediation efforts in the past as well as in the present day, which all had their strengths and shortcomings, leading to different results. In the following paragraphs, the characteristics of the current initiatives shall be analyzed and assessed.

2.2.1. Egypt

Concerned about Gaza

The breach of the Egyptian-Gaza border in January of 2008 has vividly demonstrated that developments in Gaza will eventually also affect Egyptian politics. The situation in Gaza impacts Egyptian security in two ways: There is a fear in Cairo that a consolidated Islamist Hamas regime in Gaza could resemble the political system the Muslim brotherhood intends for Egypt and might create spillover effects into Egypt.²⁷ Moreover, Egypt feels very uncomfortable with the influence Iran has gained in Gaza through its support for Hamas.

Hamas, Fatah, and Israel

Egypt wants to exercise a moderating influence on Hamas directly, and at the same time tries to secure the cooperation between the relevant actors, namely Hamas, Israel, and the PA. Throughout the year 2008 Egypt has been trying to engage Hamas in the peace process, facilitating meetings with both Fatah and Israel. In June of 2008, thanks to Egyptian mediation Israel and Hamas managed to agree on a ceasefire that has turned out to be more stable than expected.

Egyptian mediation is strongly facilitated by the country's cultural and political standing and its historical role as a leader of the Arab world. Using the terminology introduced above, it possesses referent and legitimate power. Egypt unquestionably has a strong interest in improving the humanitarian situation in the Palestinian territory not only because of the geographic proximity. Moreover, it can count on good relations with the different Palestinian groups because of historical ties and a shared cultural background, and can thus act as a mediator between them. Due to the traditional importance of Egypt in Arab politics, Egypt always used to be an important facilitator for peace in the Arab world. Furthermore, as Egypt is one of the few Arab states that have officially recognized Israel, it does enjoy Israeli confidence and is considered a reliable and trusted partner.

Sources of power

A central point in Egyptian efforts was to re-establish and facilitate communication between the conflict parties. In order to do so it used its good relations to the disputants and convinced them to overcome their reservations about each other. This could be observed during Egyptian efforts to reconcile Israel and Fatah with Hamas: both Israel and Fatah were persuaded that it be in their own interest to talk to Hamas, which was the precondition to make negotiations possible. Given its well-established political relations in the region, Egypt could provide informal communication links between the conflicting parties. Especially in the case of Israel and Hamas Egypt had to proceed with a high degree of diplomatic sensitivity. Moreover, Cairo did not offer a complete solution to the conflicts but was solely trying to lower tensions between the antagonists and to encourage them to move towards direct interaction. Hence, its main goal was to overcome the obstacles that impede the diplomatic process. Egypt indeed was successful in bringing the parties together, which was a great achievement. In the case of Israel and Hamas it even succeeded in brokering a ceasefire. However, talks between Hamas and Fatah have shown no significant results, because both parties still seem to consider their position strong enough to achieve their goals unilaterally and Egypt was not in the position or was unwilling to change that calculation.

Egypt's mediation efforts

2.2.2. Saudi Arabia

Although Saudi Arabia has always been an important player in shaping regional politics, the country has turned into one of the most active and powerful players in the Arab world and beyond since King Abdullah ascended to the throne in 2005. "Since then, Saudi Arabia has been more forthcoming and forceful in its views on Gulf and Middle East crises than before. Riyadh realized that the fault lines in the region – Palestinian, Iraqi, Iranian, and Lebanese, carry with them the potential to destabilize the kingdom and the entire Arab world."²⁸ Thus, the Sunni kingdom is trying to broker peace in the region, which promises improved Arab cooperation as well as economic benefits. Saudi Arabia sees itself threatened by Iranian hegemonic ambitions and the political empowerment of long-oppressed Shiite communities across the region, which could agitate religious distribution of power within the country and tip the balance of power in the region in Iran's direction. Engaging Hamas in the peace process would limit Tehran's influence on the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Saudi Arabia's regional role

In 2002, the Saudi kingdom had proposed the Arab Peace Initiative which offered Israel an exchange of land for peace, meaning that the Arab League would fully recognize the state of Israel if Israel in turn would withdraw from all the occupied territories and grant the Palestinian refugees the right to return. Riyadh successfully encouraged the Arab League to join this effort which still represents an important framework for negotiations.²⁹

The Arab Peace Initiative

Hamis and Fatah In 2007, King Abdullah hosted negotiations between Hamas and Fatah in Mecca, which resulted in the formation of the National Unity Government. Although this breakthrough was short-lived and violence between the two parties recrudesced 90 days later, it did show that King Abdullah is ready to take on regional leadership.

Political and economic power Being the home of the Two Holy Mosques, Mecca and Medina, the kingdom enjoys a prominent position in the Islamic world. Moreover, being an important member of both the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council it can count on the backing of its Arab neighbors – and also not insignificantly on its vast oil reserves. In addition to that, Saudi Arabia traditionally enjoys good relations with the US and also high credibility in Israel. Further, all three states have a common foe in Tehran, which augments confidence in each other. These features equip the kingdom with extensive leverage in terms of “sticks and carrots” (reward and coercive power), but also legitimate and referent power.

Exercising influence Given Saudi Arabia’s economic power and strategic ties, King Abdullah can offer the conflicting parties strong economic and diplomatic incentives to back the negotiation process. On the other hand, Saudi Arabia is also in a position in which it can castigate non-cooperation from its partners by threatening to withdraw its support. The fact that the Saudi kingdom can also draw on its good relations with the US further enhances this capability. Hence Saudi Arabia is in a position to employ more proactive mediation strategies that not only shape the negotiation process but also, and more important, the expectations of the parties of the conflict.

Leadership beyond the Arab world Yet Saudi Arabia is also exercising diplomatic leadership in addressing several of the regional hotspots beyond the Arab-Israeli conflict.³⁰ The invitation of Taliban representatives to Mecca to negotiate with Afghan government officials in October of 2008 was especially noteworthy.³¹ Moreover, King Abdullah has invited Iranian president Ahmadinejad to the pilgrimage to Mecca in 2007.³² This publicly disputed act has underlined Saudi ambitions to deal with political issues not in an aggressive, but in a cooperative way.

Overcoming religious divides In addition to these *realpolitik* issues, King Abdullah has made religious dialogue one of his political priorities. This includes inner-Islamic relations, in particular between Shia and Sunni branches of Islam, as well as the inter-religious dialogue. The kingdom organized high-profile conferences on both aspects. Given his status as Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques, Mecca and Medina, King Abdullah possesses the necessary authority to further such attempts for religious reconciliation. These efforts to foster inner-religious and intra-religious understanding create a more favorable atmosphere to addressing the political conflicts in the region as well.

2.2.3. Turkey

The return of Turkey For the first time since the breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, Turkey is once again playing a key role in shaping the political order of the Mashreq region. Under the current government of Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan Turkey has reoriented its foreign policy to play an increasingly important role in Middle Eastern politics in general and conflict resolution in particular.³³ Engagement with its eastern and southern neighbors is to be seen as a product of Turkey’s multi-dimensional foreign policy and emancipation from the US, which still opposes any contact with the regime in Damascus. Moreover, it is a demonstration of increasing international influence. From the perspective of its Muslim neighbors, the fact that an openly Islamic

party as the Justice and Development Party (Adalet ve Kalkinma Partisi, AKP) could gain governmental responsibility without being removed from power increased the credibility of Turkey. The success of the AKP helped to eliminate the perception of Turkey as being a country where a “small secular elite [ruled over the] populous but powerless Islamic mass”³⁴ and made it a role model for other Muslim countries.

For the time being the most important results of this new orientation of Turkish foreign policy are the talks between Syria and Israel mediated by Ankara. Reconciliation between these two antagonists would fundamentally alter the political landscape of the Middle East, and the importance of the Turkish initiative cannot be overestimated. Admittedly, the negotiations have not moved to the next stage, meaning from “Shuttle-diplomacy” to direct talks between the two delegations. Moreover, Israel has postponed the fifth round of talks due to “technical and legal constraints”³⁵. The resignation of Prime Minister Ehud Olmert in September of 2008 and the resulting uncertainty regarding Israeli politics has not made things easier. It remains to be seen whether it will be possible to continue the negotiations despite the beginning of the election campaign in Israel.³⁶ But in spite of the challenges that negotiations between Israel and Syria will bear, the Turkish initiative constitutes a significant step that provides new perspectives in the peace process.

Hope for an Israeli-Syrian peace deal

Turkey entered new diplomatic territory with this initiative and was given credit not only by the two conflicting parties, but also by the international community, especially the EU. The fact that Turkish diplomacy addresses its eastern and southern neighbors is not to be mistaken as a turning away from Europe, quite the contrary.³⁷ The Turks feel predestined to act as a link between Europe and the Middle East, not only because of geographic reasons: as a secular Muslim state it represents a cultural link between the two regions.

Bridging Orient and Occident

Moreover, after Barack Obama had won the US Presidential election, Ankara publicly offered to mediate between the next US administration and Iran.³⁸ This underscores that Turkey has evolved into a crucial political actor in the region and is willing to develop this role further.

As a secular, western oriented state it is a trusted partner for Israel – as a Muslim state it enjoys the trust of its Arab neighbors. Consequently, Turkey holds a high potential of referent power, which increases the acceptance of its political role on both sides. The fact that Turkey has strong ties to the affected parties but has nevertheless never interfered in the conflict and is not directly affected by it grants Turkey’s action strong legitimacy, which adds to its authority. Moreover, because of its political flexibility Turkish foreign policy succeeded in keeping or establishing communication channels to all the important actors in the region. This is another important asset for its potential as mediator.

Referent and legitimate power

The fact that Turkey will serve as a non-permanent member of the UN-Security Council for a two-year term, starting on January 1, 2008 will certainly contribute to Ankara’s political assertiveness and increase its regional influence. In addition to that, Turkey is also a military power in the region and hence in a position to contribute to peacekeeping efforts as in the case of the UN-Force (Unifil) that is securing the border between Israel and Lebanon and monitoring the ceasefire that ended the war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006.

Political and military Power

2.2.4. Yemen

Negotiations in Sana'a

As the Mecca Agreement has demonstrated, Hamas and Fatah are well aware of the fact that they ultimately have to find a *modus vivendi*. After hostilities between the Palestinian factions increased following the collapse of the National Unity Government, Yemen has yet again advocated a peaceful solution to the conflict in 2008 and thus invited both Hamas and Fatah to Sana'a.³⁹ The joint declaration, which originated from the negotiations, states the will of both parties to return to the status quo ante before the outbreak of fighting. Both parties agreed in principal but in fact give very little importance to it, since heavy fighting between Hamas forces and a Palestinian clan that supported Fatah broke out in Gaza only a few weeks after the Yemenit negotiation effort.⁴⁰

Power of the powerless

Yemen has a strong interest in ending the Arab-Israeli conflict in order to stabilize the region. However, it has no strategic interests in Palestine. The country is struggling with internal Islamist tendencies and structural instability. Furthermore, it is located at a pivotal point between Pakistan, Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iraq – an ideal “breeding ground” for terrorists.⁴¹ As the attack on the US embassy in September of 2008 has demonstrated, Yemen, as a supporter of Bush's War on Terror, is also gravely affected by the conflict in the region and tries to work towards stability for its own sake as well. The fact that Yemen itself is affected by the hostilities in the region increases its credibility as a mediator who has genuine interest in a sustainable resolution of the conflict. Moreover, the Yemenites have a profound knowledge of the conflict and are expected to take into account its political, cultural, and historical dimensions. In addition, Yemen's status as a small and powerless state increases its legitimacy, as there is no reason to suspect that the country could pursue any hidden agenda with its efforts.

2.2.5. Qatar

The Doha agreement

Stability is also in the interest of the Emir of Qatar, who has lately proven to be an active supporter of the peace process in the Middle East. The royal leadership has learned to “balance contradictory political interests as a means of national preservation”⁴². Rich in resources⁴³ but poor in military capacity, the emirate is successfully using diplomacy to pursue its regional agenda. The Doha-Agreement of May 2008 has been an important step to stabilize Lebanon and to stop further escalation of the violence between the Sunni government and the Hezbollah opposition. What is more, the agreement that was reached with the support of Turkey and Saudi Arabia has also ended the political stalemate that had paralyzed Lebanon for the last six months. A new distribution of power has been agreed upon, and with Michel Suleiman a new President was elected.⁴⁴ Controversial issues, such as strengthening Hezbollah's role in the political system and repeated fighting in Tripoli even after the ceasefire, remain but Doha, as an interim agreement, still facilitates the re-establishment of a political process within Lebanon and thus represents an important benchmark in the consolidation process of Lebanese statehood.

The emirate has initiated an extensive mediation and consultation process in order to achieve a long awaited stabilization of the Lebanese statehood. Qatar can draw on both US support (as Qatar is home to the biggest US military base in the region) and its good relations with Tehran, with whom it shares a natural gas field. In addition to that, the diplomatic experience the emirate gained during its membership in the UN Security Council in 2006 and 2007 facilitated its political efforts. As a sponsor of the

al-Jazeera Network based in Doha, it has gained unprecedented prestige in the Arab world and can thus legitimize its involvement in the peace process. Moreover, the emirate enjoys economic ties with Israel. Natural riches, such as oil and gas, give the emirate the resources needed to follow through with its diplomatic activity, which aims at patronizing both the peace process and the economic boom the country is experiencing. Hence, Qatar's diplomatic activity may be seen as successful attempts to pacify the region, but also as a "survival mechanism in an unforgiving corner of the world."⁴⁵ In addition to its role as political mediator, Qatar has also invested large sums in the reconstruction of Lebanese towns, providing additional incentives for the conflicting parties to come to an agreement. Moreover, the good relations between Syria and Qatar, which also include financial attention on behalf of the emirate⁴⁶, and the latter's will to stabilize Lebanon might also have facilitated the amelioration of Syrian-Lebanese relations. "Qatar, on the Lebanon issue, is the only country with good relations on both sides and has the money to back it up."⁴⁷ Qatar's diplomatic ambition is also displayed by its political initiative with regards to the conflict in the Sudanese province of Darfur.⁴⁸

Diplomatic guidance
from Qatar

2.3. Assessing the regional mediation efforts

Since the actors introduced above all have their individual approaches to set about a resolution to the different fields of conflict, an ultimate classification of the different approaches is hardly possible. Moreover, some of the initiatives, such as the shuttle diplomacy between Syria and Israel, are still in the making and have not yet led to clear results.

Assessing mediation

Still, we can observe an important change in diplomatic activity in the region: Whereas attempts by players like the US, the Middle-East Quartet, and the EU have so far failed to reach an inclusive agreement, Arab and Turkish diplomats have taken on the task of pacifying their own neighborhood and re-shaping the political landscape of the region. As the US has renounced its role of key "mediator" in the region, and the EU as well as the Middle-East Quartet seemed unlikely to fill its shoes, the stage was open for regional players. According to the Spanish foreign minister, Miguel Moratinos, "One of the most important changes [...] in the Middle East is that the countries in the region itself are taking their own responsibilities".⁴⁹ And they are successful at doing so: The unparalleled success of recent Arab and Turkish mediation, especially vis-à-vis Lebanon, raises the question whether regional mediation is a possible alternate route to take for other conflicts.⁵⁰ After all, a peace deal brokered by a nation from the region is more likely to be accepted throughout the Arab world than any "western" project. Because, "contrary to conventional wisdom, outsiders have only very limited capacity to bring contending sides in the Middle East to meaningful negotiations"⁵¹, especially if the local players lack political will themselves. The so-called "Quartet of moderates"⁵² (Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey), as well as the other actors such as Turkey or Yemen possess the diplomatic relations, the cultural insights, and the different forms of power that are necessary to advocate peace talks.

Turkish and Arab leadership

Regional mediators are seriously interested in a just and lasting peace, as they would often be directly affected by failure. This leads to a stronger commitment on behalf of the mediators, which manifests itself in the willingness to provide their diplomatic efforts with financial backing (as seen in the case of Qatar) and to search for means to overcome traditional obstacles (like the shuttle-diplomacy exercised by Turkey due to the refusal of Israel and Syria to speak to each other directly).

Commitment, credibility,
and flexibility

Moreover, although tensions between the actors remain, the region's states have displayed a more inclusive and thus more pragmatic approach than previous international initiatives: peace without the inclusion of Hamas, Hezbollah and Syria is not likely to last. Hence regional diplomacy concentrates on these "troublespots", including the former "obstructors", to end the stalemate in the peace process without imposing vast preconditions. For the EU, and even more the US, such a direct diplomatic engagement is hard to implement, especially in the case of Hamas and Hezbollah given the Western stance towards these entities in the past.

Regional expertise

All the players introduced above can draw on regional expertise, which distinguishes them from external actors, namely the US, Europe, and the Quartet. Given their proximity to the affected region, a common religious ground, and a cultural analogy, they are in a better position to understand the motives of the parties and the complexities of the conflicts.

Although the commitment highlighted above is of immeasurable importance to the peace process, there are also potential shortcomings and limits of the regional mediation efforts.

No unified Arab world

Firstly, the "Arab world" as such does not exist when it comes to the resolution of the Middle East Conflict. The states are competing for their national interests, catering to the needs of their allies, and are, most importantly, divided along confessional lines. Division and contrasting interests of the Arab countries are themselves part of the conflict; the Palestinian divide is probably the most overt proof to that point.

America's power is ultimately needed

Secondly, the United States will ultimately remain "indispensable" for conflict resolution in the Middle East for two reasons: In the case of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the power differences between the actors is far too big to be overcome by Arab-mediation only. Ultimately, only the US will be in the position to convince Israel to make the necessary concessions to the Palestinians, as only the US can act as guarantor for Israeli security. Similarly, it is very unlikely that Syria or Israel would be willing to sign up to any peace deal that is not backed by the US, as recognition by America is a major motive for Syria's rapprochement with Israel, and for Israel its strategic alliance with the United States constitutes a guarantee for national security.

Ripe for resolution?

Egypt, Turkey, and Yemen have merely focused on bringing the two parties together and lessening tensions between them, which can be seen as an important step that can also be historic in some cases, like the conciliation between Syria and Israel. The countries have acted as a bridge to overcome obstacles that impede negotiations. However, this approach is highly dependent on the conflicting parties' will, need, and ability to compromise. The Sana'a Declaration is a good example of this shortcoming: both parties have accepted the invitation and have issued a joint declaration – but none of the parties give it much significance and also cannot be forced to do so. Instead, it seems that both Hamas and Fatah still expect to be able to improve their respective positions so that they can achieve better results. Hence, the conflict between them seems not yet ripe for a resolution. The same goes for Egypt, which is trying to broker peace between Israel and Hamas: as the political costs of reaching an agreement beyond a temporary ceasefire momentarily exceed the expected benefits, both factions remain irreconcilable in their fundamental stance to each other.

Enhancing communication

What becomes apparent when comparing the current initiatives is that regional actors are extremely successful in bringing the conflicting parties together and to agree on much-needed compromise, but very often they lack the capability to underwrite, secure, or even enforce their agreements. This is where the need for external actors in general

and the US in particular becomes apparent: in the end, any peace accord needs to be accepted by the American administration – if it does not, it is not likely to last very long.

3. Options for European engagement

Against this background, the fact that regional actors are performing quite well in their negotiation and mediation efforts does not mean that there is no role for Europe to play in the Middle East. On the contrary, there is still plenty to do for external actors. Traditionally it was always the US that played the most important part, but given Washington's poor reputation in the Middle East the importance of the EU has increased. The EU should acknowledge this and endorse the regional approaches and try to support them, making use of the resources and assets that distinguish it from other actors in order to facilitate their implementation and to enhance their status within the international community in general and vis-à-vis the US in particular.

External actors have a role

The EU constitutes to be the most important donor to the peace process. However, the EU should not be satisfied with being only the *payer* of the process, as Ariel Sharon famously said, but should also aim at establishing itself as a key *player*. Europe possesses the diplomatic resources and the political credibility to support the regional initiatives and help overcome stalemates in the negotiations. Europeans could use their bilateral political relations with the actors, or act within the EU framework. Additional opportunities to underscore Europe's commitment and support regional initiatives are high-profile events like the founding summit of the Union for the Mediterranean in Paris on July 13, 2008. Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert and Palestinian President Mahmud Abbas used the event to demonstrate their commitment to the peace-process and went on record with the statement that they were as close to an agreement as never before.⁵³ Even more remarkable was the announcement of Syria and Lebanon that the two countries would exchange ambassadors and open respective embassies. Contrary to the statement of President Abbas and Prime Minister Olmert, Syrian-Lebanese diplomatic relations have been established in the meantime.⁵⁴ Although the Union for the Mediterranean was initially a French project and caused some irritation among the EU Member States, the EU should adopt and make use of the concept, as it represents an important forum to enhance the foreign policy impact of the EU and reorder Europe's relations with the Mediterranean.⁵⁵

Active diplomatic support

Moreover, the Europeans should support initiatives that include groups like Hamas or Hezbollah in the negotiation process. One might like it or not, against the will of these groups it will be very difficult to achieve a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian as well as the Israeli-Arab conflict. Regional mediators have already taken this fact into account. For the EU, however, it seems advisable to use contacts behind the scenes when approaching these groups – as was the case with France and Hamas and with Germany and Hezbollah, respectively.

Inclusive approach

Yet, regional diplomacy sometimes will not suffice. Most of the negotiations will only be finalized with the approval of the US, as it will be Washington who has the hard security capabilities that are needed to ensure any peace-deal. This is especially important in the case of Israel and Syria. Given that the EU is still a defence policy actor in the making, its role on that matter will be limited. Even though the development of the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) holds a high place on the political agenda of the EU in general, it will take some time until the EU is really in a position to flex its military muscle. Nonetheless, it has to be noted that European soldiers provide the largest share of the Unifil force in Southern Lebanon.

A lack of hard security

Europe's strength:
Institution-building

Moreover, to provide for sustainable solutions, not only hard security is needed: underdevelopment and weak institutions amplify many of the ongoing crises and conflicts. Given its economic might and its know-how on issues like state-building, the EU is an important partner when it comes to peace-building efforts, the establishment or reform of state institutions, humanitarian aid, and related issues. Especially in the Palestinian territories the EU is playing an important role in this regard. There is an ongoing ESDP mission in the West Bank to train Palestinian police officers. Moreover, until Hamas' coup in 2007 there was also an ESDP mission at the border between the Gaza strip and Egypt, at Rafah. In addition to that, Germany organized an international conference on how to strengthen international support for the Palestinian institution-building efforts in June of 2008. The EU should continue and increase its efforts to support the process of institution building in Palestine.

4. Conclusion

Regional responsibility

Ultimately, regional actors have displayed a strong commitment to contribute to the resolution of the conflicts in the Middle East. Saudi Arabia has brokered a peace deal between Hamas and Fatah, Turkey has arranged talks between Israel and Syria, Egypt is working towards a rapprochement between Hamas and Israel. The Emir of Qatar succeeded in ending the political stalemate in Lebanon, and Yemen has brought the conflicting Palestinian parties together for the Sana'a-declaration.

Cultural and political skills

These initiatives show that regional actors themselves have taken on the responsibility of stabilizing the region, and their current success boosts cautious hopes for peace. While these actors lack the capabilities to engage in pure power mediation, they possess cultural and political know-how, and their intentions and thus the initiatives they brought forward are held highly credible. These skills and soft powers are needed to get engaged in the protracted conflicts of the Middle East, encourage negotiations, conflict transformation, and ultimately conflict resolution. Hence, most of the mediation initiatives have a strong focus on the facilitation of communication between the conflict parties, even though there are also efforts that include the exercise of direct influence on the parties or the conflict itself (e.g. through economic incentives).

Expectations vis-à-vis the EU

However, in some cases it is very likely that regional actors cannot go all the way alone. Especially US consent is needed to underwrite any political deal and provide for a sustainable solution. This does not mean that the EU can abdicate from its own responsibility. Europe has the political strength as well as the resources to provide valuable assistance to the reconciliation endeavors, not only as an actor in international politics, but also as an important member of the Middle East Quartet. It should thus build on its existing missions and engage in peacekeeping, institution building, and, most importantly, diplomacy. Europe has the credibility as well as the strategic ties in the region of which it should make use. Doing this, Europe should endorse a more inclusive approach and talk to all the affected parties. This refers predominately to Hamas and Syria, as peace will not be possible without them.

Joint efforts for a
sustainable peace

In summation, new mediators have entered the political stage in the Middle East and started to play a central role. These diplomatic initiatives offer plenty of possibilities for European engagement: diplomatic, humanitarian, and civilian. Since the EU has a serious interest in stabilizing the Middle East it should not sit on the fence and watch how regional actors try to find a way out of the abyss, but should rather give full support to the regional initiatives and pull its weight and work towards a lasting peace.

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Appendix: Mediators in the Middle East

	Date/ Mediation effort	Content	Assessment	Resources and Strategies
Egypt	2008 Indirect talks between Israel and Hamas	In June a six-month ceasefire was agreed upon.	Until early November, the ceasefire had proven considerably stable, but new outbreaks of violence and increased tension between both factions since then. The ceasefire will expire in December.	Egypt historically is a key player in Arab politics, but also one of the few trusted Arab partners in Israel. Referent and legitimate power.
	2008 Invitation to Hamas and Fatah for peace talks	Return to the status quo ante before the mass arrests in July 2008; re-conciliation of Hamas and Fatah.	Both parties want a national unity government but have incompatible ideas concerning the implementation. The meeting of both parties in Cairo scheduled for November has been cancelled by Hamas.	Focus on communication-facilitating and formulation strategies.
Saudi Arabia	2008 Involvement in the preparations for the Doha-Agreement	→ Qatar		
	2002 Arab Peace Initiative	“Land for peace”: Recognition of Israel and normalization of relations with all Arab States, if Israel in turn agrees to pull out of the occupied territories from 1967 and grants Palestinian refugees a right to return. Proposes the creation of a Palestinian state with East Jerusalem as the capital.	Could not be implemented but still remains an important and mutually accepted framework for a possible accommodation.	Strong influence on the Arab League, vast oil reserves, and the confidence of the United States. As home of the Two Holy Mosques, Mecca and Medina, exceptional position in Muslim world.
	2007 Mecca, mediation between Hamas and Fatah	Creation of a National Unity Government.	Very short-lived, fighting started a few months later and the joint government collapsed.	Reward and coercive power, as well as legitimate and referent power.
	2007 Invitation of Ahmadinejad to the pilgrimage to Mecca	Attempt to settle the conflict in Lebanon and improve political climate in the Gulf region.	Could not prevent escalation in Lebanon and strengthening of Hezbollah, but important political gesture vis-à-vis Iran.	Communication-facilitation and formulation strategies, but also arbitration.

	2008 Mecca, mediation between Taliban leaders and Afghan government	Attempt to stabilize the political situation in Afghanistan.	Symbolic event, the practical outcomes have yet to be seen.	
Turkey	2008 Hosting of indirect peace talks between Syria and Israel	Shuttle-diplomacy, but direct talks seem possible Highest priority is the status of the Golan Heights and the final line of the border.	Israel has postponed the fifth round of negotiations, but declares its willingness for a dialogue. Both sides do not trust each other. Uncertainty about who will succeed Olmert. Assad is said to have handed in a proposal for peace with Israel.	Good relations to Syria and Iran, Turkey functions as a link between the east and the west. Non-permanent member of UN-Security Council (2009-2010). Referent, legitimate, political and military power.
	2008 Support of the Doha Agreement	→ Qatar		Focus on communication-facilitation.
Yemen	2008 Sana'a Declaration	Joint declaration of Hamas and Fatah, brokered by Yemen to end the conflict that recrudesced after the breakdown of the national unity government.	Both parties give little importance to the declaration, Hamas and Fatah seem non-conciliatory.	Neutrality, "legitimate power of the powerless", expert power.
Qatar	2008 Doha Agreement	Formation of a national unity government in Lebanon, reshaping of the distribution of power.	Doha is an interim agreement, legislative elections are to be held in 2009. Michel Suleiman is elected president after six months of political stalemate. Hezbollah is strengthened, but the movement's participation in the new government is still disputed, Hezbollah has not disarmed yet.	Good relations with both the US and Israel and Iran, huge financial resources to back mediation efforts. Legitimate power Focus on consultation and formulation strategies.

USA	<p>2007 Annapolis</p> <p>Attempt to reach an all-embracing resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by the end of 2008, including a two-state-solution. Political, humanitarian and financial support by the EU.</p>	<p>No clear agenda, no consideration of regional issues, no considerable progress.</p> <p>November 2008: official declaration that a final resolution will not be reached by 2008, instead establishment of the “groundwork” for further negotiations.</p>	<p>Strong interest in stability in the region.</p> <p>Financial, diplomatic and military capacity to secure an agreement.</p> <p>Focus on power mediation, arbitration and formulation strategies.</p>
<p>2003 Roadmap</p> <p>→ Middle East Quartet</p>	<p>2007 Action Plan for the Middle East</p> <p>Institution building, education, security, strengthening the private sector.</p>	<p>No concrete action taken.</p>	<p>No strong military, but a civilian power, good relations to the countries involved.</p> <p>An accepted partner for state-building and humanitarian affairs.</p>
<p>2008 Founding of a Union for the Mediterranean</p>	<p>2008 Founding summit of the Union for the Mediterranean</p> <p>Organization of meetings between Assad and Suleiman – engagement of Syria, establishment of diplomatic relations between Syria and Lebanon announced.</p>	<p>An ambitious framework that would provide a useful platform for engagement in the Middle East in the future but is not yet fully developed.</p>	<p>High credibility in peace-building efforts.</p> <p>The main sponsor of the peace process.</p>
<p>European Union</p>	<p>2008 Founding summit of the Union for the Mediterranean</p> <p>Abbas and Olmert – support for Annapolis process, negotiations about Palestinian prisoners.</p>	<p>Diplomatic relations have been established. However, a normalization of the Syrian-Lebanese relations has yet to be achieved.</p> <p>Both parties have displayed their good will, but were unable to make substantial progress in the peace process.</p> <p>On both sides uncertainty about the future leadership; Palestinian side divided in Hamas and Fatah.</p>	<p>Member States can provide military resources.</p> <p>Some Member States possess historical ties to the region (e.g. France and United Kingdom).</p> <p>Focus on communication-facilitating and formulation strategies, but also on arbitration.</p>
<p>Middle East Quartet</p> <p>2003 Roadmap</p>	<p>2003 Roadmap</p> <p>Plan for a gradual peace agreement, endorsing a two-state-solution based on mutual recognition and an accord on the final status of Jerusalem. Inclusion of Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan.</p>	<p>Could not be realized, but remains the most important framework for a permanent, all-embracing agreement. Division of Palestinians complicates a two-state-solution.</p>	<p>High potential of reward and coercive power, expert power.</p> <p>Formulation strategies and power mediation.</p>

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