



**DRAFT**

International Conference

*Middle East, fragmented societies, What future?*

Since the fall of the Berlin Wall a weakening in nation-states has been observed, together with an exacerbation of community identities of an ethnic, linguistic or religious nature. These identities may be represented by movements in civil society or even by political parties. These parties are on occasions supported by paramilitary groups with revolutionary ideologies. Some of these have been included on lists of terrorist groups compiled by international bodies and States. As a consequence of all of this, current coexistence models have become increasingly weakened, and there are no new visible forms of coexistence to give a satisfactory answer to this social phenomenon.

In the last few years we have witnessed a remodelling of the world map. New nations have been formed in the last 20 years based on the religious, ethnic or linguistic identity of their peoples. This phenomenon has extended from the ex-Soviet republics to the rest of Europe and it has on occasions involved bloody clashes. 60 cases of *failed States* have been recorded in the last decade alone, a figure that is unparalleled in history<sup>1</sup>.

The dismemberment and restructuring of some countries in the name of a supposed revision of their history, and their subsequent international acknowledgement, has also opened up the way for minority organisations or political parties to try and impose their point of view on the majority of the population. One example, perhaps the most dramatic one, is the unstoppable fragmentation of the Balkans into ever smaller parts.

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<sup>1</sup> FP Foreign Policy, Spanish edition, August/September 2008

In the Middle East countries, the failure of the socialist and Arab nationalist model and its policy has been due to the low level of institutionalisation and the dubious legitimacy of its political class, characterised by ineffective, if not corrupt, state administrations. These dysfunctions are reflected in social tension, high levels of poverty, low educational and academic levels and very high unemployment rates amongst young people.

Middle East development policies aimed at seeking alternatives have looked to two fronts: implementation of the democratization process of societies and economic restructuring. The successful model of European construction has been followed to do this. Yet they have not taken into account the fact that the European democratic process is based on the construction of a common space, and has been founded upon the same historical legacy, shared ideals and multi-secular values. All of this has in addition taken place in stable societies, and through very strong institutions.

One of the results of this Mediterranean cooperation policy, entirely based on economic development and re-adjustment policies in its first few years, has been the weakening of unsuccessful administrations. But the consequence has been the absence of any suitable replacement solution.

Another result has been the appearance of groups emerging from civil society, supported by different cooperation policies, which have gradually taken over key state functions: health, education, welfare and even security. What led in some countries of Western Europe to strong administrations, even if only on an autonomous or regional basis, capable of providing basic social services, led to an absolute weakening of the State in the Middle East. Under different circumstances, the various development policies in the Middle East tried to separate States from providing basic needs to their population.

Unfortunately, this cooperation policy, when applied to these multicultural societies organised according to a clan type system, has degenerated into greater social fragmentation and the absorption of part of the State by civil society groups,

each one with a different ideology and diverse, contradictory objectives. This vacuum produced by the incapacity of the state to ensure the coverage of basic needs has been exploited by some organisations that, appearing to be social movements of charitable nature, have turned into armed terrorist groups with the capacity to lead whole countries into war.

Lebanon, a country already fragmented and divided by a long civil war, is a special case in this phenomenon. The country has seen in the last few years how a part of its society, headed by Hizbollah, has collaborated in the outbreak and development of the war in the summer of 2006, with the opposition of its Government and of the other half of the population. Half of the population is currently demanding democratic Western values, while the other half wants to destroy these values. Its political class, discredited for years, is now unable to take any decision without the support of foreign, Western or Arab States. This deteriorating situation in the Lebanon could be the new prelude to further de-structuring.

In Palestine, Hamas has come to power following democratic elections, the most transparent of those held in the Middle East, and has created a mini Palestinian State in Gaza with autonomous government. The opposition has withdrawn and partly governs in the West Bank. The Hamas government has questioned all the peace settlements and agreements reached by the Government of the Palestine National Authority and the State of Israel.

Israel is a Jewish State, but with a multi-ethnic and multi-religious population. The Israeli Jewish civil society is composed by groups from different origins, making its integration into an uniform society complicated. The situation of permanent conflict in which the State of Israel is living since its creation, makes difficult its relations with its minorities. Arabs are considered the most important minority - almost 20% of the country's population, 90% of them is Muslim and the other 10% Christian-. Arabs, also known as Arab-Palestinians, citizens of the State of Israel, have on theory the same rights, but on practice they are far from reaching equal opportunities in political, financial and social spheres as compared with the Jewish majority. This situation arises originally from the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and is quiet complex to resolve without a Palestinian- Israeli peace agreement.

The deep economical disparities, the suffering as a consequence of the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the blocus imposed by Israel over the Gaza Strip, as well as terrorist attacks launched by radical fundamentalists Palestinian organizations, on one hand, and extremists Israelis, on the other hand, is putting further away the possibility of any solution to the conflict. The inflexible hostility of extremists from both sides is continuously obstructing the negotiations process between Palestinians and Israelis.

After the failure of the Barcelona process and the *Greater Middle East* policy that led to the Iraq war and its dramatic consequences, the prospects of democracy in this part of the World seems less and less likely.

This seminar aims to analyze this new situation in more depth. Many questions arise:

In the first place the aim of this fragmentation process. Many researchers consider it to be a premeditated process, for some it consists of a form of Balkanization in the area. For others it is the first step towards the dismantlement of nation-states in the Arab world, as the first step in the creation of the Muslim Umma.

In the second place the possible alternatives to this process. These alternatives will have to ensure respect for human rights, equal rights for all groups, and the participation of everyone in public life.

Finally, it will be necessary to reflect on suitable management of cooperation policies in strengthening institutions so that the State can once again assume its powers, whilst also allowing civil society to occupy its corresponding place.

**Structure and disposition during the conference:**

The conference will be divided into four sessions. Each session will tackle the questions described above, each one of the session will count with speakers presenting their works and will be followed by a debate.

Each session will have a moderator. He/she will be an expert responsible for the content of the presentations and the final conclusions.

**Duration, date and place:**

The Conference will be held in Madrid at the *Instituto de Empresa* (27, María de Molina St.) on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of June 2009.

**Participants in the conference:**

It has been considered that the most appropriate number of participants would be 50 representatives from: the political world, the mass media, the academic world, the business world, the development agents and civil society agents.

The countries and organizations that will take part in the Conference will be from Spain, United Kingdom, Italy, France, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, Israel, United States and the European Union.

**Visibility:**

Brochures, posters and publication of minutes will clearly show the identity of the conference's fund-raisers.

**Technical structure of the seminar:**

**Language:**

The conference's organizers will provide a simultaneous-interpreting service for English and Spanish.

**Organization of the panels:**

Presentations will be thirty minutes in duration. Please send your paper before the 1<sup>st</sup> of June to the conference's technical office for subsequent publication.

Please attach a half-page CV.

**Travel, accommodation and board expenses in Spain:**

The conference's technical office will take care of flight and rail bookings and payments from point of origin to Madrid, plus accommodation in Madrid throughout the duration of the seminar.

**Contact person:**

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