

International (Not So) Greatness

The U.S. wants Europe to clean up our Mideast mess.

By Leon Hadar

THERE IS NOTHING LIKE a new addition to Washington's alphabet soup—one of those mysterious acronyms that only a true insider can unlock. These provide the community of government officials, Congressional staff members, think-tankers, and editorial writers with the sense that We, the Chosen Few, are Present at the Creation of yet another government entity that will “do something” or will launch a new crusade, preferably “war,” to make the world safe from or for something—or just to have some good time. Have Acronym, Will Travel to NATO conferences or NAFTA meetings or G-7/8 Summits.

In the early 1990s, Bush I and then Clinton were promoting the idea of the United States playing a leading role in the new organization called the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum—no, that's not APECF (too difficult to pronounce) but APEC—as part of an effort to “engage” the PRC (People's Republic of China) and the ASEAN (Association of South-East Asian Nations) and press the EU (European Union) to make concessions at the GATT (General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade) negotiations. So we had this APEC with which we could impress our moms (“Hey, I'm flying to the APEC thing in Shanghai next week.”) or annoy our colleagues (“You mean you weren't asked to Seattle to cover the APEC?”). The problem was that APEC sounded too much like AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee), the pro-Israel lobby in Washington. So I suppose it could get confusing when you

announced to reporters that POTUS was going to APEC to do a “bilateral” with the PM. Was he going to meet with the PM of Israel or of China?

Never mind. We Beltway types have a new abbreviation to show off. G-M-E, the Greater Middle East initiative (or plan, or proposal, or whatever) coming soon to your favorite world capital. Officially, it will be unveiled by P-43 himself at the coming G-8 Summit scheduled for June 8 in Sea Island, Georgia.

Now, if you are a bona-fide Davos Man, you may have already seen a preview of the GME in the WEO (World Economic Organization) this January, where the CEO-U.S., Vice President Dick Cheney, introduced a “forward strategy for freedom that commits us to support those who work and sacrifice for reform across the Greater Middle East.” After all, the great experiment in democracy-manufacturing has proven to be a resounding success in Iraq, where Ahmad Chalabi and the other Founding Fathers of that nation have just completed writing a constitution that would have made Madison green with envy, and Shi'ites, Sunnis, and Kurds are singing “Kumbaya Allah” around the campfire in Karbala (or is that a suicide bombing?). So America's imperialists want to replicate that triumphal democratic revolution in other Arab and Moslem countries. Why should the Iraqis be the only ones to get the rewards of neoconservative experiments and enjoy the services of a Paul Bremer? The Bush administration is intent, therefore, on “promoting

democracy throughout the entire Middle East and beyond,” Cheney revealed in Davos.

Cheney was speaking to a largely non-American gathering, suggesting that it has become sort of *passé* to start the promotion of grand U.S. policies at home. Remember the good old days when those Marshall Plans and Middle Eastern “doctrines” were first proposed to Congress and the American people? Now it's the global elites who get the first look at what American taxpayers are going to spend their money on in the coming years. “We call upon our friends, and allies everywhere, and in Europe in particular, to join us in this effort,” Cheney pleaded with the French and German officials and business executives meeting in the Swiss mountain resort. You know, all those “Old” Europeans—the decadent, the impotent, the effeminate wimps and anti-American “men” from Venus, not to mention anti-Semites—who just as Baghdad started to look like the Gaza Strip were suddenly becoming so “New,” friendly, and amiable. Hey, we will even call those damn fries French again! Just help us get out of the mess in Iraq—and preferably before November.

In the audience in Davos were also all those guys from the “entire Middle East and beyond” who were expected to join the VP in his great campaign to transform the GME into Jefferson-Land, free of “rogue states” and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), and very woman-friendly. There, listening to the VP, was our ally, Pakistani dictator Gen.

Musharraf, who between cellphone calls to his pardoned pal Dr. A.Q. (“Would you like to buy a nuke?”) Kahn, was discussing women’s rights with Saudi sheiks, election systems with Egyptian military officers, and press freedom with all those tin-can despots from the “Stans” of Central Asia, who look and sound like they are auditioning for roles in the “Great Dictator: The Third Generation.”

Reflecting the same spirit of let’s all kiss and make up, Nicholas Burns, the U.S. Representative to NATO, took part in another preview of the GME in Prague late last year, during which he called on “Old” and “New” Europeans to let bygones be bygones and focus their efforts on bringing peace and security to the GME. And, by the way, please send a few troops to help us in Iraq and Afghanistan. Again, if you don’t mind, could you do that before November? Thanks in advance!

If VP Cheney accentuated the “democracy” part of the American plans for the GME in Davos, Ambassador Burns, while never using the “E” word—you know, empire—was proposing in Prague that American-controlled NATO establish dominance in the GME. And voila, it’s Good Morning Baghdad, and Cairo, and Ankara, and Islamabad, and Kabul, and ...

So what exactly is the “Greater” Middle East, and what are we supposed to be doing there? We don’t have a lot of details. A report about the U.S. Working Paper called “The G-8 GME Partnership” was leaked to *Al Hayat*, a London-based Arabic newspaper in February (some suspect that this was done by Saudi officials interested in sabotaging the plan). There is a lot of discussion about promoting democracy and good governance, parliamentary exchange and training, literacy corps, digital knowledge initiative, with all the familiar globalization mumbo-jumbo.

While a few human-rights activists in Cairo and Amman might take all this stuff seriously, or at least they are saying so in the hope of receiving a fat grant, most of the of the Arab governments dismiss it as American rhetoric and their message to the Bushies is quite clear: hold a one-man, one-vote election in Saudi Arabia (or Egypt or Algeria or Jordan or any other Arab country) and you’ll ensure that an anti-American Islamist party will come to power.

And where is this GME, where is the “entire Middle East and beyond” located? That’s not spelled out anywhere. So we have to guess. Traditionally, Americans associated the Middle East with the Arab states in North Africa, the Levant (Near

IF WE FOLLOW THIS AMERICAN “ROAD MAP,” WE’LL PROBABLY HAVE A GREATER ISRAEL BEFORE WE GET A GREATER MIDDLE EAST.

East/Eastern Mediterranean), the Persian Gulf members of the Arab League, and Israel, plus Iran and perhaps Turkey (which actually wants to become part of Europe). But for the Bushies, size seems to matter and that Smaller Middle East (SME) has been expanded and extends now from Morocco, North Africa, and the Horn of Africa through the Balkans, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and the former Soviet republics in the Caucasus and Central Asia, and including Pakistan, Bangladesh, and everything up to the borders of China.

The administration seems to like this redefinition of the Middle East from an SME to a GME, “because it identifies American action with a positive approach—a vision of unification and reform to Islamic civilization as a whole,” suggested columnist William Pfaff. The neocons certainly like this new designation—and the Europeans and the Arabs don’t—because in this GME or

“Islamistan,” the Palestinian-Israeli conflict becomes a sideshow, one of the many other conflicts that beset this region (Kashmir, Southern Sudan, Kurdistan). From that perspective, there isn’t really any urgency in trying to resolve it. We have to look at the Big Picture of the lack of democracy, free markets, and secularism in the GME before we deal with minor issues like Arabs and Jews killing each other in Jerusalem. On the eve of the war in Iraq, the administration promised the Europeans and Arabs that “the road to Jerusalem leads through Baghdad” and that a resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would follow the ousting of Saddam Hussein. Now the road to Jerusalem leads through Kabul,

Islamabad, Tunis, and the other capitals of the Greater Middle East. The problem, as the French and the Germans suspect, is that if we follow this American “road map,” we’ll probably have a Greater Israel before we get a GME.

But the neoconservatives who have been promoting this GME plan assume that the Europeans and the Arabs won’t read between the lines and figure out that it is, indeed, just another part of a strategy to impose diplomatic-military U.S. hegemony and the interests of Greater Israel, while marginalizing European and Arab concerns in the Smaller and Greater Middle East, and disguising this imperialistic project as an idealistic campaign to bring about freedom, peace, and prosperity. The Europeans have already seen that movie in Iraq, and it’s not surprising that they are a bit skeptical.

Moreover, that the Americans are spinning their GME project, coupled

with plans to establish democracy and form free-trade agreements between the countries of the region with the United States, as a turning point in the history of the Middle East and “beyond” certainly sounds amusing to the Europeans. They have been advancing for years similar initiatives aimed at reforming the political and economic systems of the states in the Eastern Mediterranean area and linking them to European markets. If in Iraq we already had the UN weapons inspectors, and we

on the relationship with Central and Eastern Europe and should not ignore developments taking place in the “southern frontier” in North Africa and the eastern Mediterranean. As the wall had fallen between the eastern and western halves of Europe, “a bridge must be built across the Mediterranean,” stressed French President Chirac. First proposed by the Italians in 1989, the CSCM was formally introduced in the beginning of 1991 by France, Italy, Spain, and Portugal and was received

its signatories—Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Turkey, Cyprus, Malta, and the Palestinian autonomous region (later to become the Palestinian Authority)—to “develop the rule of law and democracy” and guarantee human and minority rights as well as “the freedoms of expression, association, thought and belief.”

Hence, the EU has already formed its own version of what can be described as the NAFTA of the Middle East, in the form of the EMP. Interestingly enough, two of the 12 governments that signed the Barcelona Declaration, Cyprus and Malta, are due to become EU members in 2004, which sends a positive message to the other members of the group, suggesting that association with the EU could lead eventually to membership. At the same time, the EU established cooperative economic arrangements with the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1989 and concluded a common external tariff arrangement in 2003.

More impressive, the EMP has become the only forum of its kind to have Israel and the Arab countries sitting around the same table, and the EU has become the major source of financial aid for the Palestinian Authority. But the inclusion of Israel and the Arab states in the EMP also explains why the plan for Euro-Mediterranean integration hasn't gathered more momentum. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has made it impossible for the Europeans to get the Arabs and Israelis to agree to establish the kind of political and economic ties that are necessary for the creation of a free-trade area. Which is why, stress the Europeans today, the GME initiative would never get off the ground without a resolution of the conflict in the Holy Land. And if we were able to resolve that conflict, who would need the GME anyway?

PROFESSOR RICE PROBABLY SHOULD HAVE READ AT LEAST A SHORT HISTORY BOOK ON THE BRITISH IMPERIAL EXPERIENCE IN IRAQ BEFORE INVADING MESOPOTAMIA.

now know we didn't have to invade that country, in the Middle East we already have quite a few European initiatives, and we don't need the GME. Professor Rice, who probably should have read at least a short history book on the British imperial experience in Iraq before invading Mesopotamia, should have also tried to familiarize herself with something called the Barcelona Declaration before launching the GME initiative.

Indeed, following the signing of the Helsinki Agreement in the mid-1970's, the southern European states, concerned about the potential for growing economic and demographic disparities between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, began to discuss the need to create a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM). The idea gained momentum after the end of the Cold War and reflected the interests of the southern European countries, led by France, to assert more diplomatic influence over the Middle East and North Africa by utilizing the economic might of Europe. They argued that the Europeans were putting too much emphasis

with enthusiasm by the North African countries, Turkey, Jordan, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), and Israel.

The pressure by the southern European countries led to the convening of the Euro-Mediterranean conference in Barcelona, Spain in November 1995, marking the EU's biggest effort to refocus its attention towards the Middle East. The conference, launching a partnership between the EU and 12 Middle Eastern and North African nations, pointed to the role that Europe could play in the Middle East and the potential for the formation of a Euro-Mediterranean bloc. The Barcelona Declaration launched the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), which regionalized and tied together bilateral association agreements between the EU and individual states reached earlier with Tunisia, Israel, and Morocco; provided for a “Euro-Med” free-trade area by the year 2010; increased U.S. aid and loans, worth \$13 billion; and offered incentives for the largely closed economies of North Africa and the Levant to integrate. The Barcelona Declaration committed

What the Bush administration has done is not only plagiarize the EU Barcelona initiatives for the Middle East but also stripped the European plan of its two important political elements that could have made it doable and added a military component that would make it unworkable.

First, unlike the GME plan, which attempts to put all the Muslim nations of North Africa, the Near East, North, South, and Central Asia into one basket and create the illusion that it would be possible to link them politically and economically to the liberal institutions of the West, the Barcelona initiative is much more modest in its scope. It proposes an ambitious but not unrealistic goal of associating its 12 signatories—the Arab states of North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean, and Israel—to the EU. After all, despite their differences, North Africa, Egypt, Syria/Lebanon, and Israel/Palestine share a common history, geography, and cultural and demographic ties, and they have a closer economic relationship with the EU than with the United States. The SME is for the EU what Mexico and most of Latin America is for the United States, a strategic and economic backyard. Indeed, take a look at the map, and the idea that the 12 Barcelona signatories, all of which border the Mediterranean, would be linked to the EU certainly makes some geo-strategic and geo-economic sense. Why should Egypt, which regards itself primarily as an Arab, African, and Mideast nation, belong to the same club as Pakistan, which is actually part of South Asia? They and the rest of the GME are Muslim, respond the Bushies. So what? Just consider the conflict between Shi'ites and Sunnis in Iraq and the entire Middle East, reflecting deep historical, cultural, and socio-political tensions, and you would conclude that they are not in a mood to cooperate in this fantastic American program.

The Department of Homeland Security's proposal to fingerprint and photograph foreign visitors from 27 of the United States' closest allies is irritating potential visitors without enhancing anyone's security.

Ironically, Mexico, the major source of both legal and illegal entry into the U.S., will be exempt from the new controls due to the hypocrisy of the Bush administration, which is courting Hispanic votes for the November elections. The new policy will begin September 30th at the 50 busiest ports of entry. The 27 countries are referred to as "visa waiver" states, whose citizens do not normally need visas for short visits. Most of the countries are European, but Japan, Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand are also included. Homeland Security is arguing that the new biometric controls will be non-intrusive and will take only a second or two to implement, with the traveler placing an index finger on a small screen while a photo is being taken. The government claims it will be able to check the criminal and terrorist watch-lists using the biometric information, but the assertion is absurd as the software, computer capacity, and system interconnectivity do not exist to permit anything of the sort. The information will presumably be stored for later use, whatever that will mean.



Drug use among American soldiers has reached levels not seen since the Vietnam War.

The Pentagon is quietly moving the soldiers from the affected units back to the United States and Germany for medical treatment. Though drug use is a court-martial offense, the soldiers are generally receiving only administrative sanctions in order to avoid making the issue public. Afghan heroin is available cheaply and uncut, sometimes resulting in lethal overdoses. Recently, an entire company of Marines guarding the United States Embassy in Kabul was reassigned short of tour because so many soldiers were failing drug tests. In another instance, an airmobile regiment's helicopters were temporarily grounded because many of the mechanics were found to be using drugs. Drug use is reported to be much more prevalent among support troops than among those in combat. Sources in Kabul indicate that the narcotic abuse is a symptom of the boredom of the assignment to Afghanistan, which offers little in the way of acceptable recreation. Only small groups of special forces are involved in active operations, and the vast majority of the soldiers in Afghanistan see little or no action. Intelligence sources indicate that an investigation is going on to determine whether the drug use is simply a matter of supply meeting demand or something more sinister. One senior Drug Enforcement Administration officer has been relieved of his duties because of suspicion that he has been involved in the trafficking. A highly placed Afghan source believes that the drugs, which are produced in parts of the country where the Taliban is active, are being deliberately diverted to the Kabul market and sold to American soldiers. Normally, Afghan-produced drugs would be exported to Russia and Western Europe, which is where the most profitable mass markets are located. ■

Philip Giraldi, a former CIA Officer, is a partner in Cannistraro Associates, an international security consultancy.