

Colloquy

George
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The short-term risks of energy Security in the Age of Middle Eastern Revolutions include the physical security of wells, facilities and pipelines; the evacuation of foreign operators from dangerous areas; and strikes and embargoes. What are the long-term risks?

The Middle Eastern unrest must be divided into two regions, North African and the Arabian Peninsula. In North Africa, energy is only effected by the unrest in Libya, where the amount of oil involved doesn't pose a global threat. It is the Arabian Peninsula where the unrest is significant as the region is a major producer and exporter of oil. Here the unrest must be understood in two contexts, the withdrawal of the United States from Iraq and the emergence of Iran as a major regional challenger to Saudi Arabia. The first leaves a power vacuum, and the second the possibility of the reordering of the power balance in the region. Iran is interested in restructuring oil revenue in the region, not in stopping the flow of oil. Similarly the Saudis have no interest in interrupting oil flow. The danger is that in the competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran, and the possible reengagement of the United States in the competition, there might be miscalculations that lead to conflict and that might significantly disrupt the

flow of oil in the world. In the long run this is the greatest risk to energy security.

Do you think the United States' reaction and policy towards the changes in the Middle East is adequate for the protection of U.S. national interests in the region?

The United States' position in the region is currently in flux. It is ending the war in Iraq and seeking the means for ending the war in Afghanistan. This both absorbs U.S. attention and reduces resources for other activities. This has created a window of oppor-

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tunity for other nations, particularly Iran, to attempt to create new realities. With the withdrawal from Iraq almost completed, Iran has the opportunity to redefine the politics not only of Iraq but also of the Arabian Peninsula. We have seen part of this emerging struggle in Bahrain. In the short run, the United States is not well positioned to deal with Iran. However, the United States is enor-

mously powerful and it is not a question of generating power, but of deploying it more efficiently against emerging threats. Therefore I would answer that the United States is currently poorly positioned to deal with threats in the region, but that this is a temporary situation that will cause great distress in the region, but not pose an unmanageable problem for the United States.

Following the next Turkish election, will there be enough political capital in Ankara to push for a positive solution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict? Could any warming in the dynamics between Turkey and Armenia help bring a real discussion of conflict resolution to the negotiating table?

The question of Nagorno-Karabakh rests less with Turkey than with Turkish-Russian relations. Armenia is a client state of Russia and the Russians use Armenia to pursue their interests in the Caucasus as well as with Turkey. Turkey has a dependence on Russian energy that limits Turkey's ability to challenge Russia and is in the process of redefining its foreign strategy in general. Therefore, I find it difficult to envision engaging in aggressive moves toward Armenia on this question. The fact is that Russia has more levers to use against

Turkey than the other way around. The key to Nagorno-Karabakh is in a split between Russia and Armenia, which I do not see as likely.

In recent years, the pragmatic foreign policy of Turkey affords grounds to ascribe it as a rising power in the Middle East region. Why do you think Ankara's official policy is accepted as a "role model" to regional states? Foremost, do you think that there are discrepancies between the Islamic radical movement's rise in the region and the generally accepted Turkey model?

In my view there has been some confusion on Turkey's status. It is indeed a rising power, but that does not mean it has already risen. It is in transition from a secondary power to a significant one but this transition will not be executed in under a decade. Therefore, it is as important to understand the limits of Turkish power as the power it will one day have. In this context, Turkey is not so much defining its relationship to the Islamic world, as trying to find its balance in that world. There is always a tension between the Turkish view of the world, the Arab view and the Persian view, both religiously and politically. But at the moment, Turkey has little appetite for assertiveness in the region and the Turkish model of Islam

is a work in progress as is Turkish foreign policy.

Turkish-Iranian relations are sometimes characterized as an apparent friendship, but concealed rivalry. Which steps by the U.S. and the West will maintain open competitiveness of the official policies of Tehran and Ankara?

The competitiveness between Turkey and Iran predates the United States and even the British. It is inherent in

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their geopolitics. In the current situation, we are looking toward a period in which Iranian influence spreads into Iraq. This means that Turkey’s southern frontier will face an old power with increased power. Turkey will not be comfortable with this regardless of the rhetoric, and will seek to limit the Iranians. Therefore, there

is a natural balance of power in the region that will emerge and assert itself. Given the current configuration of relationships in the region, it follows that Turkey will either accept the Iranian presences and its potential threat, or draw closer to the United States. I think it will be the latter because it is the less risky course for Turkey. But before this happens we will have to see the evolution of Iraq.

Given Turkey is increasingly diverging from the Transatlantic bloc in its endeavors in its neighborhood, do you think that there might arise an effort in the West to contain Turkey? Do you predict the rise of a Turkish regional powerhouse?

There is unease in the West about Turkey but this is not turning into any attempt at containment. For one thing there is little to contain. At this point, whatever ideological shifts have taken place, there has been little substantial change in Turkey’s behavior. It talks to Iran and Syria, but this is far from action. The actions of Turkey, beyond public image, have been cautious. What is most interesting about Turkey is what it has refused to do, not what it has done. And in that sense its actions have been irritating to the West, but not threatening.

In the recent years, there is a feeling that the U.S. has withdrawn its interests from the Caucasus, not engaging on the field, not even interested in energy security any more, but caring for the Caucasus just because of the Azerbaijani airspace and refueling infrastructure for the troops to Afghanistan. Active engagement of Russian President in Nagorno-Karabakh negotiations and of the EU in Georgia conflicts is an example. What shall be done to bring the Caucasus back on the US agenda?

As I have said, the United States is currently pre-occupied elsewhere. Every nation has its priorities and this region is not the American prior-

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ity for the moment. The United States views the Caucasus through the prism of the great regional powers—Russia, Turkey and Iran. It will act there to the extent it must deal with these countries. The United States has hostile relations with Iran, uneasy relations with Russia and strained but

still solid relations with Turkey. Being preoccupied elsewhere, the U.S. has chosen to reduce tensions with Iran and Russia for the moment. But in the long run, U.S. interests run counter to both of these countries. As the U.S. settles its wars and reengages Russia and Iran, its interest in the Caucasus will return.

It is clear that the orbit of Armenian policy in the Caucasus region is forming under the direction of Russian foreign politics. According to Western analysts, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Armenian attempts of integrating with the West through Turkey were unsuccessful because of objective reasons. Do you think that the settlement of the Armenia - Azerbaijan conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh could become a prerequisite for Yerevan to integrate to the West?

I agree with the premise of your question, which is that Armenia is in the orbit of Russia. Therefore it is not clear to me that Yerevan has the freedom of action to shift its policies. Integration with the West has become less meaningful. The EU is deeply divided and its future is uncertain. Germany in particular has no desire to challenge Russia. NATO is similarly divided as we see in Libya. Therefore, I don't see the “pull” from

the west, or the release of the Russian grip that is not quite firm. Russia gains nothing by letting Armenia go its own way, and the Western alliance, aside from the individual states is not clearly drawing anyone toward it.

What comprises the United States' best options to counterbalance Russia's sustained influence of power in Armenia, (if not most of Eurasia as well)? In light of this, why is a renewed entente between Russia and Germany a threat [if] the EU would balance out such relations? Wouldn't an alliance between Iran and Russia be much more of a likely threat?

The foundation of a U.S. containment of Russia depends on freeing American forces from battling Islamic extremism. So long as that is the primary focus of American foreign policy, counter-balancing is difficult, which the Russians are aware of. This means that the Russians need to act decisively and quickly to create a reality in the former Soviet Union, as they are doing. The single most important thing the United States must do throughout the region is to reduce the dependence on Russian energy supplies by creating alternatives. This will be the first step the U.S. will need to take.

As you know, it is almost three years since NATO member states in Bucharest declared that Georgia become a NATO member one day. How do you see this process today? How close is Georgia to the NATO membership?

I see all Euro-American structures in disarray, along with European structures. I also see NATO as a military alliance that must be measured in military terms. Given the political disarray and the military weakness of

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many NATO countries, I neither see Georgian membership as likely nor do I see it as meaningful. The Russians are aware of the political divisions in NATO as well as its military capabilities. I doubt that membership will be granted and if it is granted, I doubt that it will change strategic realities. In fact, it might trigger Russian action in order to demonstrate this point. We live in a very different

world since 2008 and the Russian invasion of Georgia and the global financial crisis. This is the post-post-Cold War world and many of the assumptions the older world rested on, like NATO's power, are no longer meaningful.

As the spread of uprisings across the Middle East produces the rise of a “new Arab world order,” whose hands benefit more: Iran or the United States?

I do not see a massive democratic movement in the Arab world. We see in North Africa how little things have changed and when they have changed, how the situation has deteriorated. Clearly we see powerful cross currents in the Arabian Peninsula that clearly threaten American interests and potentially benefit Iranian. But the situation is complex and while Iran seems to have the advantage, this is a long and complex situation we are facing.

A recent deal was brokered by Iranian, Turkish, Azerbaijani foreign ministers in April 2011. A new border crossing opened, which is projected to increase trade between Iran and Turkey from \$10 billion to \$30 billion. How should the U.S. react to Ankara without jeopardizing its amicable relations? If such

actions continue, the efficacy of UN sanctions will be further damaged.

It does not appear to me—not having been at the meetings of course—that the sorts of agreements that have been reached are strategically significant. The decision to increase trade needs to be implemented and that is not going to be easy. But more important, it does not create new and unprecedented realities. I see these as relatively minor agreements that do not shift the reality of the region. The UN sanctions are obviously not effective in changing Iran's foreign policy and I doubt that the United States really expected them to make much difference. Therefore Turkey's action is of marginal importance to the United States and I doubt the United States will make it a major issue, beyond some diplomatic gestures perhaps.

*Conducted by Gunel Ismayilzade,
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