

Global Foreign Policy Today, an unconventional approach

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A few weeks before Christmas, a German magazine published its front page under the heading “The lost decade”. This look back in anguish inspired many television shows of the final days of December. Indeed, blazes of wars, not lightnings of hope, characterized the first ten years of the New Millennium. Irrational decisions, self inflicted mistakes and lies left their imprint on the past ten years, most probably the worst period of mankind since World War II.

My humble purpose of today is to analyze the reasons why foreign policy jumped out of the rails, and to attempt drawing lessons for the future.

Let me stress right from inception, that the election of Barak Obama, the first black President of the United States, would never have been possible, in the absence of the fundamental rejection of past errors by the American voters and the deep frustration visible across the world. The Nobel Prize to the American President was not a surprise. It came as a reward and as an encouragement to change. Globalization had just made its way through mountains of war wreckages.

As tools of my critical flash back to the disasters of the recent past, please allow me to use two opposite notions: conventional and unconventional wisdom, notions which I borrow from the American Economist John Kenneth Galbraight. Prof. Galbraight defines conventional wisdom as general knowledge and general interpretation of facts spread by a big majority of news-media. Source of the “knowledge” might be governmental services or news-agencies relying on official sources. The repetition of the same “information” day after day by various media, newspapers, radios, television channels and through speeches of government officials, up to the Heads of State or Government, creates among the public a feeling of certitude. Truth becomes unquestionable. After a not too long period of time, almost everybody believes in “conventional wisdom” and starts to spread it personally during family-breakfast small talk, or in offices and cafés.

“Unconventional wisdom”, the opposite arguments of the general theory, is pushed to the side-lines. Having generally little impact on the press, the believers in unconventional wisdom have difficulties to voice their concerns. Sometimes they are disqualified as bad patriots, or even as traitors.

To what extend could conventional wisdom be at the very origin of the most recent conflicts?

Even if we lack of a sufficient historical delay (recul historique) , it might be possible today to disclose what went wrong, and what is needed to redress the mistakes of the past and to embark on a more promising paths for humanity.

After the fateful errors to invade Afghanistan and Iraq and to consider with a benign neglect the ongoing conflict between Israel, the Palestinians, Lebanon and Syria, time is ripe for change.

Global foreign policy today is a policy of mutual respect. Nations and people around the world should govern themselves according to their own rules. As long as they do not threaten the sovereignty of neighbors and respect their borders, they must be protected against military interventions.

Not every member country of the United Nations will be ruled by democratic standards, but reforms and regime change can only come from within...People, especially young people, have the capacity to react against a stolen election, and bloody crackdowns will shatter the establishment.

Should an intervention from outside try to intervene in that process, people would soon rally behind the leaders and the reform movement would be halted. Far from being a new strategy, what I just described, is no more and no less than an appeal in favor of the strict application of a Document, banning unilateral military actions: the Charter of the United Nations.

Thinking forward:

What is likely to happen after the full redeployment of the foreign occupation troops?

In Afghanistan an Islamic regime will take over. The Pashtoun-regime will not lean back on a strong central power. The regional, as well as the local, satraps, drugs- or warlords, will carve out their territory, exactly as they did for hundreds of years.

In Iraq, the Shiite majority will stick to the political power, despite of ongoing, possibly violent, disputes with the Sunnite and Kurdish minorities. A delicate balance of power could finally emerge, as the dust of war settles.

In Iran, then, intellectual circles, students, merchants... will try to reform the system from within, always subject to setbacks and to severe repressions from the clerical establishment.

Democratic structures, human rights, freedom of press, gender equality, a.s.o., will exist nowhere in the region, most probably for more than a generation. Also bombings by illuminated fanatics will not cease the day after the last foreign soldier has been flown out.

The picture after the wars will resemble the picture before the wars, hundreds of thousands of deaths making the difference, not mentioning the costs: 160 bn \$ just for the running year.

The unwanted western “presence” did not change the realities, neither in the Hindukush, nor in Mesopotamia, nor around the Shatt-El-Arab.

Looking backward:

The administration of former U.S. President George W. Bush is a striking example of the misfits of conventional wisdom, almost a school-case.

The terrorist attack of 10.11.2001 sent a shock-wave across America and the world. Obviously this strike could not remain unanswered. But the conventional answer, a “crusade” or “war” against terrorism or against “the axes of evil” was the wrong decision. The spectacular, live-consuming coup, landed by a handful of extremists, was indeed an utterly planned terrorist action. It was not a declaration of war, as propagated without delay by the official propaganda.

These unilateral interpretations of the facts lead to a series of errors. What was needed was not a preventive war, but a preventive policy, meaning contra-terrorist measures by the secret services and an effective protection of airports, transportation means and communications. Strengthening the security, for instance, improving the international anti-terrorist action by existing bodies, like INTERPOL, could have been accomplished at a considerably lower human and financial cost and with greater operational success. For example, the Nigerian terrorist, who attempted to blow up the Amsterdam-Detroit flight on last Christmas day, revealed another systemic failure of the secret services. Not the fact that he spent some time in a Yemen-camp is relevant. This man was on the list of suspects, his own father had expressed concern about his dangerous behavior, and yet he detained a multiple- entrance visa of the United States. Strengthening security, not attacking another Arab country, such as Yemen or Pakistan, with drones and cruise missiles, will tame Islamic terrorism. Constantly moving the military target all around the Muslim world can only scatter nests of anti-western uproar and create new ones elsewhere.

Instead of a logical reaction, an irrational behavior of George W. Bush and his European followers, some of them I would not hesitate to qualify as poodles, lead to military adventures and to a “state of emergency” (Ausnahmezustand) lasting until now.

Since the 11th September 2001 we were drawn by the Bush-Administration into a worldwide state of emergency. On the 26th October 2001 the American President released his” Patriot Act” which eclipses the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the international laws against torture and the Conventions of Geneva. In September 2002 the Pentagon, under the leadership of Mr. Rumsfeld, without consulting with NATO -allies, published its new national security strategy, which proclaimed the right of the United States “to act alone, if necessary to exert the right of auto defense, in preventive action.” The 7th March M. Bush declared, that in the need to act, we do not need the permission of anybody...

So, by a unilateral presidential decree of September, year 2002, both the Charter of the United Nations and the NATO-Treaty- a, purely defensive alliance-, were thrown into the waste-bin.

Whereas most of the world leaders remained silent, America celebrated arrogantly the comeback of the Clausewitz principle which suggests that war is only the continuation of politics by other means. Lessons drawn by the winners of World War II, after 4000 years of bloody confrontations, were simply wiped out.

Of course, the E.U. is co-responsible for this historic blindness. Conventional thinking and the ever paralyzing rule of unanimity voting in foreign policy matters prevented an outcry against this most regrettable U-turn. Only a few responsible voices, such as Chris Patten, Commissioner for foreign affairs, stood up in a speech to the European Parliament (12.3.2003) and said that democracy cannot be exported at the gun points and that, up to now, intergovernmentalism had only produced mediocrity and weakness.

A striking example of mediocrity and weakness was the invasion of Iraq. The attack occurred in March 2003, after months of drum-beats and war mongering.

Conventional wisdom, sent out by leading media, forcefully spread two certainties – which, as we know today, happened to be lies:

- first, that Iraq's dictator Saddam Hussein detained weapons of mass destruction, threatening the western civilization,
- second, that the same "enemy" was linked to "Al Qaeda", the evil network, which planned the terrorist attack of September 11th.

After Afghanistan, suddenly Iraq was projected into the frontline, as the biggest factory of terrorism of the world... Let me bet, that tomorrow it will be Iran!

The summit of conventional misleading, or political manipulation, was British PM Blair's astonishing announcement, that Saddam had the capacity to launch an attack (allegedly with WMD) on Britain, within 45 minutes. A simple phone call to the "International Institute for Strategic Studies"(IISS), located in London could have taught Mr. Blair that not a single country in the Middle East had any vehicle or missile with the capacity to deliver a WMD, or any other weapon, to British territory.

Fair enough: an inquiry is in process in the U.K. about Mr. Blair's role during this crucial period.

At the moment this declaration was made, it was already too late to stop the war-machine build up in the Persian Gulf. The military logic had swallowed political thinking.

After weeks of heavy bombing and shelling, ground forces invaded Iraqi territory, heading to Bagdad. The declared official aim of the war-looking after WMD and toppling Saddam Hussein-changed as the offensive proceeded. Bringing about a regime change and installing a democratic system, were added to the official list. Unofficial war aims, such as acquiring control over the oil-fields, and, last but not least, eliminating a potential enemy of Israel, were pushed aside. They never had the chance to reach the headlines. Conventional wisdom does barely allow dissenting views.

Please allow me now to go back in history almost 19 years: It is the 27. February 1991. The first Gulf war, led by George Bush sr., has come to an end and Kuwait is free.

Decisive arguments, not to go to Bagdad, "finish the job" and topple Saddam Hussein, were put to paper by the main actors of Kuwait's liberation, President George Bush sr. and his Security Adviser Brent Scowcroft, on one side, and Secretary of State James Baker III, on the other side. Their respective books, or "Memoirs": "A World Transformed" (1998) and "The Politics of Diplomacy" (1997), drew the lessons of the Gulf war and articulated in a quite comprehensive manner the conventional wisdom of the last decade of the 20th century: The theory of non intervention in foreign countries internal affairs.

"Trying to eliminate Saddam," writes George Bush, the father," extending the ground war into an occupation of Iraq would have violated our guideline...and would have incurred incalculable human and political costs...We would have been forced to occupy Bagdad, and in effect, rule Iraq ", and finally "had we gone to the invasion route, The United States could conceivably still be an occupying power in a bitterly hostile land. It would have been a dramatically different - and perhaps barren- outcome."

In even clearer terms, Secretary of State James Baker confesses, that ending the war just after the liberation of Kuwait was a quite controversial issue in the United States. He qualifies as nonsense the insistence of the hardliners to continue the offensive all the way to Bagdad. It would have been ridiculous from a practical standpoint. "More to the point, Iraqi soldiers and civilians could be expected to resist an enemy seizure of their country with a ferocity not previously demonstrated on the battlefields of Kuwait. Even if Saddam were captured and his regime toppled, American forces would still be confronted with the specter of a military occupation with indefinite duration to pacify the country and sustain a new government in power. The ensuing urban warfare would merely result in more casualties of American GI's than the war itself, thus creating a political firestorm at home, criticism from many of our allies, and the dissolution of the coalition."

A masterpiece of political diplomacy!

Apparently George W. Bush did not read his father's book. Right in 1991, wrong in 2002 and in 2003 ? The lessons why the invasions of Afghanistan and of Iraq never should have happened were swept under the carpet. No wonder, that today the specter of occupation is haunting the American people, as well as the people of those who followed suit.

An unpopular war cannot be won. On the contrary it will be lost, not necessarily on the battlefields, but - like in Vietnam - in front of the television screens of ordinary people.

Significantly - contrarily to some of its political leaders - European public opinion was, and still is opposed to the military adventure launched by the former American President. This is confirmed by older and more recent polls. One remarkable example: A survey conducted by the

non suspect German Marshall Fund in September 2007 found out that 77% of European citizens disapproved the American President. Same in the USA: A poll realized in November 2009 by the CNN-Research Corporation, soon after the “surge” decided by President Obama, showed that the Afghan war remains unpopular. A majority of 55% of the Americans oppose the war. One fourth of the samples favored the war as it began, but oppose it now.

A very significant poll was initiated in November 2003 by “Eurobarometer”, a polling institute financed by the European Commission. A representative number of citizens of the EU-Member Countries were asked to pick, out of a dozen of countries, those they consider to be the most dangerous for world peace. Emerging at the first ranks of this poll were Israel and the United States! The uproar was great among the “winners” and the Commission’s President Romano Prodi felt compelled to apologize. The apologies may have been politically correct, but not indispensable. After all this was Bush’s America and Sharon’s Israel. One might be curious how the result would be today? But let us guess that this disturbing question will never be repeated again in the EU. It was, in fact, repeated in Turkey, an American ally for 60 years, three years later (2006), where in a poll, 74% of the respondents said they saw America as the biggest threat to world peace.

Back to basics!

The conflict between Israel and its Arab neighbors is the catalyst of all the wars in the greater Middle East. It has to be solved- I would say trenced as the Gordian Knot- in order to bring peace to the region and start the process of reconciliation between the West and the Muslim World. All the conflicts, from Pakistan to Israel, from Iran to Yemen are inextricably and globally linked. They cry for a global solution.

Decades of double standards, the ever increasing repression of the Palestinian people, massacres of civilians during the ongoing military offensives, Sabra, Chatila, Canaa, Jenin, Gaza...have swollen the tide of humiliation in the whole Arab world. The degree of hatred against the West and all its symbols probably never has been greater since the crusades of the 11th Century.

In his Cairo-speech to the Arab countries (June 2009), President Obama clearly recognized the reality that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in the center of all the conflicts in the Middle East. He stressed that the basis of a solution is the recognition of the borders of 1967. Obama addressed an appeal to all, including Hamas, to negotiate a lasting peace.

Almost seven month has passed and not the slightest movement can be perceived. The road to peace is blocked by 40 years of bloodshed and of occupation, mountains of paper scraps, violations of signed commitments:” During the history of the Israeli-Arab conflict,” writes the publisher of the newspaper “Yediot Aharanot”,” not a single agreement has ever been implemented. The publication killed the implementation.”

Time has come to scrutinize the profound reasons of these repetitive failures, pointed by the Oslo-agreements, the Madrid-conference (imposed 1992 by George Bush sr. as a direct consequence of the Gulf war), the Taba peace talks, the Camp- David Accord (July 2000), the roadmap of the Quartet (2003)... I forget roads and maps. As soon as issued the good intentions were torpedoed by spirals of violence, triggered, either by suicide attacks of Palestinian extremists, or by Israeli military raids against Palestinian towns, two intifadas, and four calamitous wars launched by Israel into Lebanon and into Gaza.

To understand the reason of the present deadlock and the very end of bilateral contacts I need not mention the closure of territories, the extra-judicial killings, the road blocks, the construction of the "apartheid wall" biting deep into the West Bank, and, last but not least, the never ending building of settlements and the cancerous land grasp. The underlying strategy behind all this is to kill the egg-cell of a viable Palestinian State.

In the meantime, the spiral of death turned at an increasing speed. A masterpiece of contra productive (re)actionism was the murder of Sheik Yassine, an old paraplegic man nailed on his wheel-chair. He was the spiritual guide of the Hamas. The death sentence, ordered by Sharon, was carried out the 22.3.2004 by an Israeli attack-helicopter, regardless to "collateral damages". Hamas' influence among the Palestinian population grew ever since, and consequently, it won the elections in January 2006.

Trying to interpret these stubborn facts and to find Arianna's garn out of the labyrinth, I must, again, revert to conventional and unconventional thinking.

According to conventional thinking, the State of Israel is the "only democracy" in the Middle East. This tiny country, a western outpost, almost our cousin (Alain Gresh), in a hostile environment, is surrounded by enemies, superior in number, some of them being ready to wipe it out from the map. This myth, solid as a rock, is firmly anchored in the minds of a majority of Americans and Europeans.

It is fitting to such a self-portrait that Security (with capital "S") is the essential, if not the unique, point of policy. The "right to defend itself" enjoys the absolute top of priorities. It can never be questioned, neither at home, or abroad.

All other principles, such as the respect of international and humanitarian law, the respect of the resolutions of the UN-Security Council, the respect of the decisions of the International Court of Justice, are ruled out as irrelevant.

Priority to security includes the right of first strike (banned by the UN-Charta), the use of disproportional force and of forbidden weapons, collective punishments, the recourse to human shields, the destruction of civil infrastructure such as schools, hospitals, roads, water and sewage facilities, chicken-farms (as done in Lebanon), greenhouses, UN-offices (as done in Gaza), olive trees, and, of course private houses, inhabited or not. Whatever the military define as target is a military target. Every person killed is an enemy combatant. Body counts may be

allowed, or not, at a later stage. Civilians, women, children killed, injured or deeply traumatized by the death of a loved one, or the destruction of their habitations, are, in military terms, collateral damages.

The victims have no right to appeal and no right of compensation. The occupation forces enjoy total impunity.

Critical statements against this kind of warfare – like the Goldstone Report on the latest aggression against Gaza – are dismissed as biased before publication in the press and wiped off the table: How can anyone dare to charge with “war-crimes” and “crimes against humanity” the “most moral army of the world”? *Causa finita!* The Report of the Judge Goldstone, committed to by the UN-Secretary General himself, was approved by a significant majority of the General Assembly of the United-Nations. But the Israeli Government knows how to prevent its implementation. In bypassing UN-Resolutions it can lean back on a long experience.

The crux of Israel is that it is the only country in the world which does not recognize its own borders, those which are internationally agreed. Its school-children are given national maps showing the country within biblical borders, which existed 2000 years ago, before the invasion of the Romans: the Promised Land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Included inside this map are the illegally annexed territories, East Jerusalem, and the Syrian Golan. Today more than 500.000 Jewish settlers occupy roughly one third of the West Bank, the rest of this territory being cut into pieces: military territory on one side, Palestinian Bantustans at the other. To make the two-State-solution merely impossible, Israel’s Constitution leaves to a national referendum any retrocession of illegally annexed territories.

This raises a question of logic: Can we urge Hamas to recognize Israel, as long as Israel does not recognize itself?

Hard to imagine, how negotiations with the entrenched, handcuffed and partly imprisoned Arab enemy could lead out of this deep, self-built, bunker? Anyway, the method of “negotiations” followed up to now has completely failed.”Direct negotiations between parties is a worn out paradigm”, writes the former Israeli FM Shlomo Ben Ami (1.2.10), “when left to their own devices, they are bound to come to a deadlock.”

In order to complete the picture, the unconventional positions inside Israel and inside the USA should not be ignored. The peace camp has a weak voice. But it is not entirely silent. The minority views expressed time and again in the newspaper “Haaretz” and in the “International Herald Tribune” are courageous deviations from the official line. For instance Avraham Burg, former President of the Knesset (“The Zionist Revolution is dead”), Uri Avnery critical journalist, Jonathan Peled, survivor of the Holocaust and Ilan Pappé, historian, who wrote a book about “The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine” and many others... throw their counterweight into the uneven balance.

A very important document for a just peace, which could serve as reference during the final Peace negotiations, is the Geneva-initiative. It was signed the 1.12.2003 in Geneva by the Israeli Jossi Beilin, former Minister of Justice, and the Palestinian MP Abdel Rabbo, Member of the Fatah. This shining piece of forward thinking in an environment of death tackles and settles not only the problem of the borders, but also the problem of Jerusalem and the right to return of the Palestinian refugees, recognized by the UN.

As a significant curiosity, I would like to mention the hardliner Ehud Olmert's political testament, immediately (dis)qualified as a poisonous gift by an Israeli all party consensus: "We have to pull out," writes Olmert, "of almost all the territories, including the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, including the Golan Heights."

Certainly, this amazing confession of a PM on leave was in the news. But not a single leader of a Western country paid him attention or gave him applause. The day after, the Israeli press was covered again by headlines on terrorism, Hamas, Hezbollah and Amadinedjad.

As suggested by Michel Rocard, former French PM, "Israel had a surplus of sympathy due to the Shoa. It could do what nobody else could do. This is over now. Israel has to admit that it belongs to the international community and that it must abide by its rules".

It would bring European foreign policy a great step forward, I must stress this here in Berlin, if Chancellor Merkel came to the same conclusion.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have been involved in the Middle East conflict in my capacity as FM and as President of the Council in 1985, 1991 and 1997. Today I remain an independent critical observer of the facts on the ground and of the news they generate on either side. Please allow me therefore to declare, and I weigh my words, that all the leaders succeeding the Government of Itchak Rabin, the PM assassinated by the Israeli hawk Ygal Amir in 1995, just try to stick to the status quo. Sticking to the status quo means, consolidating the territorial conquest and annexations and expanding the colonization. They pay peace a lip service, but remain fundamentally unwilling to make the slightest territorial concession, unwilling to dismantle a single settlement in the West Bank, unwilling to return to the borders of 1967.

Every observer of average intelligence, except those who adhere to extremist views, should have understood, at least by 2010: Peace in the Middle East means, no less, no more, than the end of the occupation. And, opposite: Continuing the occupation means endless war!

Time for action is now. Time also to get tough!

President Obama, having successfully accomplished his domestic job – the health care reform – hopefully, I must add, after the Massachusetts election, has his hands free to dismantle the mountain of mistrust in the Middle East, guided, as he is, by a global, long term approach."With

no breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict”, insists Minister Ben Ami, “Obama is left with the epicenter of the Middle East maladies seriously undermining his entire strategy in the region”.

The Cairo-speech draws the outlines of a global solution. President Obama, and his advisers, must be conscious by now that the acting right- wing Netanyahu-Lieberman Government will not move an inch towards a just and lasting peace.

Without giving lessons, let me just try to imagine, how he could proceed.

An International Peace Conference should be convened at short notice in a symbolic Mediterranean town, why not in Istanbul, cultural capital 2010? Invited should be all the parties involved into the conflict - without exception... explicitly: including Fatah and Hamas - Israel and its neighbors, the UN, the EU and Russia. (Bracket: How to justify the ban on Hamas, while in Afghanistan, a dialogue with the Taliban is part of the new exit-strategy?). Every party invited to the Peace Conference will immediately accept. Israel will loudly object, but, most probably, will finally be present, exactly as this was the case at the Madrid Conference, conveyed by President Bush, sr., after the first Gulf war. Israel will weigh the consequences of an agreement “in absentia”.

Can President Obama do that? Yes he can.

The timing for a peace conference is most urgent, because a “de facto” cease-fire is in place between Israel, the Fatah and the Hamas, precondition which is lacking in Afghanistan between the allied forces and the Taliban.

The agenda of this International Peace Conference, the Conference of last Chance, is to be set up by the Host. Drawing lessons from the past, it should by no mean embark on another interim-solution or transitory agreement. It should, on the contrary, draw straight away the outline of the final stage and set a strict and binding time-table for the redeployment of the Israeli occupation forces and of the settlers, as well for the dismantling of the apartheid wall, as ordered by the International Court of Justice.

The new map of the Middle East will have - must have - two focal points:

- on one side Israel, within its secured borders of 1967; corrections of the border remaining possible through mutually agreed land- swaps, according to the international rule of 1 to 1, or 10 to 10;

- on the other side the Palestinian State, with sovereignty over the entire West Bank and Gaza, and its air space, the problem of Jerusalem and the problem of the refugees being resolved according to the Geneva-initiative.

The Palestinian State would be recognized without delay by The United Nations and would of course enjoy the protection of every sovereign nation. The return to legality and to normality,

could, if necessary, be accompanied by financial and military aid from the participants to the Conference. As a parallel move, the Arab Countries should officially recognize Israel, as they pledged to do, during their Beirut Summit in March 2002.

Not to be naïve, I must confess, that this big "land for peace" deal will not be easy. It will be obstructed by the infuriated radicalized settlers, by the way heavily armed, on one side, and the military establishment, on the other side. In peace time the political-military complex will lose its pivotal dominant position it holds on the society, since the creation of Israel. But I believe that the Americans have ways and means to remove the stumbling blocks these two interest groups will throw on the road to peace.

Mutual recognition and reconciliation will have unexpected economic benefits. Goods and services, and gradually people, all but weapons, could circulate freely in the entire region, region which, since ancient times, is known for the intellectual skill, the commercial spirit and the compelling initiative of all its inhabitants. Especially Israel would not be harmed by the transition from an economy of war to an economy of peace, and most important, it would be fully integrated into the Euro-Mediterranean economic space.

Finally, the problem of Iran should be addressed separately but in parallel to the International Peace Conference, also on the basis of the stretched hand of President Obama.

Be it right or wrong, the political power in Iran rests with the Ayatollah-regime, whose political arm (or puppet) today is Amadinedjad. Waiting for a regime change is not an option. The necessary political contacts have to be initiated now. A hardening of the western positions would dry out the green shoots of political evolution in Iran, whereas a normalization of our relations would favor them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

After Iran had kept a neutral stand during the first Gulf war, the European Troika of Foreign Ministers (Luxembourg, Italy, and Netherlands) paid a visit to Teheran, in spring 1991. Acting President was Ayatollah Rafsanjani and Foreign Minister Ali Akbar Velayati.

After a few hours of critical dialogue, it became obvious to the European Ministers, that this important country, in terms of population and in terms of land mass, was impatient to recover its position as regional power, it always held in the Persian Gulf and in the Middle East. It complained severely about the sanctions imposed on it by the late Carter-administration and it affirmed again and again its peaceful intentions: "At the difference of Israel and the United States", stressed the Foreign Minister, "Iran, never in its history, invaded any neighbor".

It was perfectly clear to me: Persians, like Greeks, like Turks -to remain on the same regional parallel- are proud nations, conscious of their historical background and of their rich cultural heritage. Neither of these countries would kneel down under threat.

19 years later, apart the name of the President, the same parameters stay in place around the Persian Gulf: The only parameter-change, not to be neglected, is the nuclear dispute.

According to the conventional wisdom spread on the media front-pages today, Iran is secretly building a nuclear military capacity, threatening the whole region, if not the whole world. Panic-like reactions regularly appear in the Israeli press, where Amadinedjad is portrayed as a new Hitler, or as Israel's Ben Laden. Appeals advocating a preventive strike are frequent. "It is 1938 and Iran is Germany", Mr. Netanyahu stressed, already in 2006. A threefold mystification: We are not in 1938, Iran is not Germany and we are not in Munich! The explosive capacity of this verbal escalation should not be ignored by any world leader.

On the other hand, the IAEA, based in Vienna, has so far not confirmed that Iran is likely to proceed with the fabrication of nuclear fuel able to be used as a weapon, also it complains about restricted access to the uranium enrichment facilities. As underlined in a special report on Iran dated 6th May 2006, (published by "The Economist"), "it will be several years before the country has enough of the stuff to power a reactor, and between five and ten, in the opinion of America's director of national intelligence, before it could make a bomb. Clearly Iran is some way from being a nuclear country".

Sufficient time is left for diplomacy.

Personally, I consider - even if I am conscious that this view might not be shared by everybody - that floating incertitude about Iran's nuclear intentions is a deliberate strategy of the Ayatollah-regime. Its intention is to focus on Iran the attention of the rest of the World. Who would even take notice of the sanctions imposed to Iran during the 1980ies, and strengthened since, if it did not play with nuclear fears? Similarly, who would care about poverty-stricken North Korea, also hit by long lasting sanctions, if it did not wave the nuclear flag? We are here at the interconnection of three disciplines: economy (= the sanctions), politics (= the increasing pressure) and psychology ("I behave abnormally until somebody cares about me"). In such a situation, it seems obvious that adding more sanctions will be useless. On the contrary, this strategy could trigger an escalation leading straightly to a military intervention.

Fortunately an alternative exists. I will call it to mind in a moment.

Anyhow, Iranians, like anyone else, do not ignore that there "is no successful use of nuclear capacities", (Robert McNamara) and that "collective suicide is not a rational option" (François Mitterrand).

A military attack, or preventive strike, using conventional weapons, launched by Israel against Iran, would not immediately initiate a collective suicide, but, most certainly, would trigger a massive retaliation and an economic disaster. The closure of the Strait of Ormuz for oil-shipping would send the oil-price through the roof of Dubai's highest tower, the tallest in the world. A severe world-wide recession in an already fragile economy would be the inevitable consequence. Exactly for this reason, the Chief Editor of "Die Wirtschaftswoche" opines that

reasonable forces will prevent this lethal attack from happening. He, quite rightly, stresses the invisible interdisciplinary link between policy and economy.

But how to prevent an ignition by unreasonable forces, in the name of the all embracing “Security”?

At this point of the story, appears in the limelight Barak Obama’s pledge for a nuclear-free world.

While it is understood that the five permanent members of the UN-Security Council, which detain thousands of nuclear warheads, have to do their home job, why not start by putting an end to any nuclear temptation in the most explosive region of the World? Why not start right now a serious round for a nuke-free Middle- East? Let me recall that Iran has signed the NPT, whereas Israel has not. Concerning sanctions, the double standard glares in fluorescent red color!

Supposing that Israel possesses 200 nuclear warheads, Obama’s insisting demand appears as obvious: Iran should accept a strict control of the AIEA of its civil enrichment facilities and Israel should dismantle its existing military nuclear capacities, also under AIEA control. As an alternative, one could imagine that Israel’s capacities are locked- in with an American key.

In a peaceful environment of a State of Israel, recognized by its Arab neighbors, an Iran reintegrated into the regional economy, and the world-wide nuclear disarmament making progress, the ambition to possess the nuclear bomb will recede. Mutual interdependence would make nuclear armament an unaffordable temptation.

To sum up: Concerning Iran, President Obama holds two powerful tokens in his hands, the process of normalization and the process of denuclearization. No Iranian leader, or cleric, would resist to such an offer for too long!

As I am approaching the end of my lecture on “Global Foreign Policy today, an unconventional approach”, and though I have not consciously crossed the white line of international law,

I do have to apologize:

- first, to those among the audience who found my approach subjective, because too much colored by personal souvenirs,
- second, to those who noticed, quite rightly, that my reflections constitute a non-conservative, non-American and, off course, non- authorized, interpretation of President Obama’s promise of change,
- finally, to the entire audience, for having delivered, with a few weeks of delay, a kind of Christmas-dream.

Thank you.

