

9th Annual
Worldwide Security
Conference

Reshaping Economic Security
in Southwest Asia and
the Middle East

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KEYNOTE SPEECH
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Transforming Southwest Asia and the Middle East to an Area of Peaceful Cooperation and Economic Growth: What Do We Need to Do?

Remarks by Martti Ahtisaari

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Thank you, Francis for the warm welcome and kind words.
Good morning, Your Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Let me at the outset acknowledge the importance of the partnership we at the EastWest Institute enjoy with the World Customs Organization in co-sponsoring this important annual event. Thank you, Secretary General Mikuriya for your personal continued strong support.

The EastWest Institute's Worldwide Security Conference, now in its ninth year, is a laboratory to test new ideas for preventing new conflicts and facilitating the ending of existing conflicts. It starts with those who need to speak and listen to one another coming together in the first place. Building trust depends upon creating relationships among people who can make a difference. Over the years, we have seen the outlines of a number of important new initiatives crafted in the public sessions or the sidelines of these meetings.

This year the conference is concentrating on issues of economic security in Southwest Asia and the Middle East. We are taking a wide geographical sweep, from Afghanistan and Pakistan in the East to Egypt and the Horn of Africa in the West. In my remarks, I would like to concentrate on the question of political will and how we might help to build that. I want to make a couple of general observations about this conference and then my remarks will look at three themes

1. Regional responsibility for preventive action
2. The lens of economic security; and
3. The way to build political will.

I will conclude with several recommendations that may seem provocative in nature. The EastWest Institute prides itself on moving the ball down the field, not just redescribing the ball. How do we take key ideas, stimulate sincere discussion and encourage new commitments for action? That indeed constitutes our challenge here at WSC9.

Some observations about the conference

We are not here just for academic analysis. That is important. We are here to help build trusted relationships and to identify approaches for action -- including building the political will to transform conflicts in these regions from their deeply entrenched paths of violence into manageable and peaceful forms of cooperation and competition. We have an excellent program loaded with people from the regions we are focusing on. The policy ideas from this conference, and indeed its very convening, are intended to support those people from the region itself who are working for peace. It is they who have the primary responsibility.

The purpose of this conference and the process it creates is to have an immediate impact on thinking and political will. Yet it is not in the nature of a gathering such as this that we can find some formula that can be carried to Syria to convince the parties to agree this month or next to a ceasefire. We can discuss that, but the main value of this meeting will be in how people will recall it in the future. Did we act as a catalyst for some new ideas about changes in politics that can help reduce and then end some of the political violence and armed confrontation in this region?

The challenges include terrorism, invasion, military occupation, arms build-up, nuclear missile development, sectarian violence, and even the prospect of chemical weapons use. They also include youth unemployment, poverty, rural underdevelopment, water security, and food security. Many in the region have identified the social treatment of women and children as a major security issue. I personally agree with those people. I would like to congratulate EWI for its ground-breaking initiative in facilitating women parliamentarians from Pakistan and Afghanistan working together to build trust between their two countries. On June 3 and 4, 2011, EWI organized for the first-ever delegation of Afghan women parliamentarians to make a working visit to Islamabad.. We have continued to foster the contacts.

Let me explain the three principal themes I want to share with you this morning.

First, Regional responsibility for moving from war to peace

The broad area of Southwest Asia and the Middle East has too often been host to regional tension and conflict, and a battle ground for competing outside interests. In the 21st century, this vast area has become the core of global politics. I am convinced that it is a region whose further development and direction will determine what kind of 21st century we all will be facing. It is also a region where the very credibility of the international community is at stake. Regional security organizations have taken on a new life and offer considerable promise. We should note the positive contributions of the Economic Cooperation organization (ECO), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the League of Arab States. We should also note the contribution of civil society organizations.

We should note, however, that this is the only region of the world without an effective collective security organization that bridges major divides (Israel/Palestine, GCC/Iran, Syria/Israel, Israel/Iran, Lebanon/Syria, and Pakistan-Afghanistan). It does not seem that there would be one in the making in the near future either. The CICA (the Conference on Confidence Building Measures in Asia) does that to a degree, but is arguably too broad in its membership, extending as it does to China. It has its place but it also happens to be at an early stage of its development. Interestingly it is the only regional organization that brings together Israel, the Palestinian Authority and Iran.

The history of the EU experience, in something as simple as the Coal and Steel Community shows on the one hand a pathway for such organizations, but on the other hand it shows the time frame needed – decades—for such organizations to be effective in peace building within their own region. But we should take heart from the impressive transformation in the past five years of the regional organizations in Africa, including the African Union at the continental level and ECOWAS at the sub-regional level.

The nations of Southwest Asia need to work to build a security organization that bridges major divides. The EWI policy paper from January this year that was prepared by a group of eminent political figures and specialists, under the title “Bridging the Fault Lines”, charts both the difficulties and the potential. We know that the issue of Palestine and other big issues, such as Iran’s nuclear program, have prevented even the idea of such an organization. But history shows – as the UN Charter foreshadowed – that regional organizations and regional states are a powerful tool in successful conflict resolution and peace building. Peaceful borders are a sine qua non of peace and prosperity. In this region, the Manama dialogue has brought together political leaders from across the divides. This is a foundation. Civil society organizations must play their role too, as they did in Europe in the Cold War.

The catastrophe of Syria demonstrates this need in two ways. First, the escalation to full scale civil war may have been inevitable, but it was aggravated by the absence of any countervailing “preventive” actors or forces. Second, the Syrian conflict has been a draw-card for personal and political agendas of regional states. These are states that are in conflict with each other, in a situation of domestic political instability across the region. It goes to show that the possibilities of individual states to contain a civil war remain limited, as opposed to their power to further aggravate the conflict within a country. The failure to bridge the Palestine/Israel divide has had the hidden cost of perpetuating a backward and divided regional order. It is clear to me that peace will never come to the Middle East as long as the Israel-Palestine conflict remains unresolved.

Secondly, on economic security

We need to stop asking whether new collaboration in economic security can bring peace. We know it helps. It is time to begin devising specific, concrete, practicable and funded initiatives. We don’t need more debate about how it helps. We don’t need more demonstration projects. We need initiatives that can have strategic impact on the prospects of conflict reduction in a relatively short time period. Areas of attention include those on the agenda of this conference.

For example:

- The building of new cross-border infrastructure. One highly developed proposal on the table is for a border development zone between Pakistan and Afghanistan. But this would only be the tip of the iceberg of what is needed. We need to promote open borders and efficient road or rail transport links that can provide for shipment of goods by land from Istanbul to Islamabad and Kabul. We need new port facilities and road transport that can link agricultural producers across the region to their neighbors.
- the water-energy-food nexus: we want to build new bridges between the policy communities of richer and poorer regional states, and the private sector, in ways that lead to concrete new projects that address not just water needs or energy needs or agriculture needs. We are encouraging investors and governments to devise and invest in joint strategies for a bigger, integrated vision of

prosperity and sustainability of the worst conflicted regions and communities. We need to build new value chains for commerce and local production. The GCC states have enormous wealth that can be put into play between new diplomatic and developmental agendas developed by the people of the region themselves.

- new policy instruments to address youth unemployment and social marginalization, including of women: the challenges in this area and the potential threats laid out by the Arab Development Reports of a decade ago in respect of social marginalization in critical countries and communities were not addressed effectively. Some non-Arab countries of Southwest Asia also faced identical problems at the time and these have not been addressed effectively in the decade since either. The results of failure to act have been as violent as was foreshadowed a decade ago. Only states of the region can fix this but they cannot do it alone. New community-based and cross-border stimulus packages are essential but the policy environment in many countries of the region is not conducive to new policies in such areas. We need to see private sector leaders from the region paying for new policy development by community based actors and their supporters in government.

EWI is actively canvassing options now on practical ways to create partnerships in this space. Our emerging work has been influenced by consultations over the past 18 months, especially including representatives of regional organizations. We had started somewhat earlier however. In 2009, we began a process of regional consultations on mutual exploitation of shared water resources in Afghanistan's river basins. This was an effort to address the specific technical questions which were rather underdeveloped at regional level but we were also trying to improve strategic trust among the regional states to help overcome quire deep suspicions. This work led to the creation in the case of the Amu Darya basin of a new international consultation network.

The EastWest Institute has also started to see whether its unique modus operandi can be usefully applied to address questions of water and food scarcity in the Horn of Africa and the Arabian peninsula. Many specialists predict increasing shortfalls relative to the human needs without significant new policies. This widening shortfall will increase the potential for new political conflicts in the region, and therefore increase the potential for violent conflict. At the same time, the potential for new remedial action is high, and lies in three main places: the policies of the national governments themselves, the policies of the G20 countries, and in the investment choices of the international and national private sectors. This is the conclusion of a series of consultations led by the EastWest Institute in late 2011 and other consultations in the preceding two years as part of a wider review of impact of climate threats and resource scarcity. The geopolitical and business linkages between the wealthy countries of the Arabian peninsula and their poorer neighbors, particularly in the Horn of Africa, will be increasingly decisive in how well and how peaceably the water and food security needs of all communities and countries in this critical region can be met.

Thirdly, on building political will

I often say that peace is a question of political will. You all know that. I will share with you four ideas that will help you in advancing this cause. This framing is based on some ideas from Gareth Evans, with whom I was fortunate to work closely in the International Crisis Group. He has identified four key requirements for building political will:

1. knowledge - ensuring that all the relevant players know the contours of a conflict – in granular detail

2. A process – one that is capable of translating knowledge and concern into actual action: process in the sense both of a clearly identified strategic solution and the institutional and organizational means to advance it. This includes targeted advocacy.

3. The right arguments to help decision-makers move -- a framing of the overall issue in a way that it cannot be readily dismissed. Another option is to articulate specific arguments for action in a way that cannot be readily ignored, especially including budget considerations while never abandoning the moral imperatives either.

4. Good leaders. --We have to know for each conflict situation who can make a difference and we have to be ready to work with those people. This will usually not be a large number, but getting access to the critical decision makers involved in violent conflict is not always easy either. One of the motivations for establishing the Elders group in which I am a member, was the conviction that personal relationships at the highest political levels were essential foundations for brokering an end to conflict. The record shows that it is not easy at this level either, but we must continue our efforts and never give in.

As this conference devises new approaches to economic security in Southwest Asia and the Middle East, it will be important for you to address the different categories of action. The quality of this conference can be measured by the extent to which it addresses these challenges in respect of specific initiatives. We are looking for action plans not for more talk about the need for them.

Three recommendations

1. Syria domestic situation-- this is a tough one. I did say that the purpose of this conference was not to focus too much on the immediate demands of politics, but we can hardly ignore the moral imperative to understand a workable way forward other than continued war until one side is defeated. Perhaps one can recommend a holding action: find a way to get humanitarian access, and to stop the fighting unconditionally, but premised on a commitment to new and fair elections, organized for example by the UN and supported by a substantive UN peacekeeping operation. I do hope there would still be a possibility for peaceful and democratic way to start building a new future for Syria. This sadly does not appear on the immediate horizon. A tangible democratic alternative for ending the conflict should have been presented long ago for the Syrians and the world alike.

2. Regional: states of the region need to build on the last decade of intensifying but minimalist regional collaboration (Manama Dialogue) to begin to construct a stable regional order around new patterns of consultation across the big divides. We can understand the causes of the big divides but the people of the region can't afford to live with continuing divisions and lack of security. Peaceful and open borders, the economic and social interchange provided, are essential for preventing large scale violence. Sectarianism is the big threat now facing this region. We need open borders between communities within countries as well as between them.

3. Global: the international community and individual states from outside this region have responsibilities, commitments and interest in the Middle East and Southwest Asia. These have been

in conflict more than they need to be. The historic divisions in the UN Security Council over the Israel/Palestine question for decades until the end of the Cold War may have been understandable at the time, but this region has changed fundamentally since then. The new divisions in the Security Council caused by the unfolding events in Egypt, Libya and Syria through 2011 and 2012 might have been avoided with more intense quiet diplomacy and less political grandstanding. In particular, the permanent five of the Council should not have been so hopelessly divided on political questions in Syria to the extent that these differences undermined all efforts at containing and terminating the large scale violence. We should look at what caused that and be prepared to change the underlying dynamics. In the Security Council, the protection of the policy of non-interference in internal matters is as important a cause for a deadlock and delay as those relating to regional interests. For example, China and the United States commenced their first consultations on the region at Vice minister level just in August this year. The state of US-Russia official dialogue on regional conflicts is far from ideal.

The wealth of Southwest Asia and the Middle East regions and of the international community should arguably have spared us the violence of the recent past. We have to turn states and other parties in these two regions to effective peace-making and reconciliation by recommitting our political will to that cause. This will involve new costs, and new political relationships. We will look to states of the region to bear those costs and to build those relationships. We look to all of you present to play your part.

Wrapping Up

For the past 3 decades, the EastWest Institute has been known for its foresight and skill to identify emerging issues, bring together key stakeholders, brainstorm and design practical solutions, while remaining sensitive to specific needs of diverse regions and being able to find a balance between often contradictory interests of different actors. Some of its initiatives so far in this region have been influential, others more useful for developing ideas and promoting the goals we can all support. I encourage you to familiarize yourself with them.

I would like to congratulate John Mroz and his team at EWI for being once again on the cutting edge of global developments and trends and for aiming to address in a practical way critical issues of today within such a pivotal geographic area.

I look forward to the outcome of today's and tomorrow's discussions. I hope that WSC9, with such broad and high-level participation, will provide a timely opportunity and a useful and inclusive platform for exchanging views, identifying issues at stake and crafting innovative solutions. Personally, I feel privileged to be part of this exercise, and I wish you a very stimulating and productive debate.

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