It is a distinct honor, both professionally and personally, to be here today as a speaker in the University of New Hampshire’s Yale-Maria lecture on the Middle East. I am grateful for the opportunity to participate in the New Hampshire International Seminar Series and to address a topic of significance to the seminar’s focus on the “International Dimensions of the American Presidency.”

I would like to extend my appreciation to Professor Howard, the Director of the Center for International Education, for his kind invitation.

I am elated to be back in Durham after a hiatus of almost thirty years.

I love the people of the granite state. They have been good to me. I have fond memories of the snows of New Hampshire and its mesmerizing fall. I still cheer for the Wildcats. But I must confess that as an undergraduate at UNH in the mid 70’s, it was impossible for me to imagine that I would return as Cyprus’ Ambassador to the US and as a speaker in such an impressive setting.

Coming to UNH is like a homecoming.

My years here were very formative. They have shaped my future and my world view. It was a trip to the United Nations in 1976 organized by Professor David L. Larson, whom I still consider my political mentor, which opened the door for me to join the diplomatic service of my country. This led me to postings in New York, in Germany, in the USSR / Russia, in Libya, in Israel, in the Netherlands and finally in Washington working toward closer relations with the US.

Having studied, lived and worked in this country, I have developed a great fondness for the American people; their warmth, hospitality, generosity, openness to diversity, the exuberant quality of their popular culture and the incomparable natural splendor of their homeland from sea to shining sea.

* The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official position of the government of Cyprus.
As UNH leads the nation in terms of students participating in programs to study abroad, my topic is perhaps most fitting. I will be presenting a brief overview of the Middle East, truly a region at risk, because the unresolved conflict situations have world-wide implications that can only promise more trouble if they are not addressed resolutely.

The Middle East is a region of major importance to my country. Obviously, it is of cardinal importance to the United States, as demonstrated by years of American diplomatic initiatives, and most vividly evidenced by the ongoing US military commitment in Iraq. Indeed, however much the military intervention in Iraq may have caused divisions within the western alliance, the community of nations is united in recognizing that failure in Iraq is not an option, even if disagreements persist on how to achieve, or even define, success.

For me the Middle East is a region of more than strategic importance. My interest in the region is both personal and professional, having the honor of formerly serving as Cyprus’ Ambassador to Israel (1997-2000).

My experience in Tel Aviv has given me a deeper appreciation for the complexity of the Middle East. I found Israel to be an intense, complex, challenging and ultimately fascinating country. It was extremely rewarding to serve and promote the interests of my country in a nation whose modern history is in the making but whose people go back to the genesis of humankind and to whom the western civilization, especially the humanities and the arts, owes so much. The diplomatic action in Israel is analogous to the kind one encounters only in a few other countries and capitals.

My time in Israel has brought me a greater understanding of the nature of the conflict there, but it has also given me a painful look at the human cost of the situation. And as an envoy of a small, vulnerable state with its own recent history of tragedy, I can very much appreciate the security predicaments of a small country like Israel but, at the same time, identify too well with the human tragedy of the protracted Middle East conflict.

Although the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the Palestinian question, are central to world stability and security, there is a broader undercurrent of issues that continue to plague the Middle East region, such as illiteracy, demographics, democratic deficit, poverty and fundamentalism to mention but a few. All these issues require more than slogans and declarations.

In reality, if there is to be any hope for true progress in this region, there must be first an initiative worthy of breaking the current impasse in the peace process by ending the vicious cycle of violence that has only recently demonstrated its chilling efficacy.
Specifically we and I say “we” because we all share the pain and suffer the consequences from this violence, must dare to break the impasse of the Middle Eastern violence by daring to break with the confines of decades of failed policies and faded politics.

From one perspective, the tragedy of September 11th marked the beginning of a global war on terrorism, along a firm black and white dividing line of good versus evil. Seen from another perspective, such a view is too narrow, as the world today is profoundly more complex, without such clear divides and in shades of far more gray than black and white.

It is the tendency towards oversimplification that suggests that there is a “clash of civilizations” underway. If anything, I believe there is a clash of ignorance. The challenges which we face today have much deeper roots. They demand a much more comprehensive approach. Some still tend to see the current threat to global security through an outdated lens, through a cold war prism that is no longer applicable.

As a representative of a small but front line state in the fight against terrorism, I want to reiterate that we must not make the mistake of following such a rigid, narrow approach to today’s problems. That approach only blurs the important distinctions and obscures the essential directions needed to tackle the challenge of all regions at risk, not just the Middle East.

We have all seen the impressive expansion of globalized trade in recent years, with goods and services flowing through and between countries at a very rapid rate. And although this globalized network of ties and relationships is rooted in economics, there is also a powerful influence on politics. What this trend in globalization means is that the days of “far away” conflicts are over. Conflicts in today’s globalized world means that no one and no where is immune from the potential spillover of unresolved or unattended disputes. This is the dark side of globalization – the global network of terrorism, moving across borders virtually unseen and largely unchecked.

The Need for Engagement

The challenge today is to engage. But there must be a lot more than a military focus. The present situation in the Middle East is, at any rate, unsustainable. But the longer it lasts, the more its corrosive and poisonous effect will impact the entire region and beyond. The existing violent environment kills innocent lives, whether Palestinian or Israeli, breeds hatred and destroys hopes, expectations and visions.
There has to be a comprehensive and sustained engagement of diplomacy to address the roots of the conflict and try to redress them. As the case of my own country clearly demonstrates, there is no success in avoiding a proper understanding of the roots of conflict.

As an island state, Cyprus has been living at the center of its own globalized world for centuries. And throughout our history, Cyprus has both thrived and suffered from being a maritime crossroads. Cyprus has flourished from a pivotal role in world trade. But it has also suffered from invasions and domination by several of history’s powerful nations and empires by virtue of being at the center of this geographic crossroads. The Middle East has also long been at the center of a geographic crossroads. In both cases, this has been both a burden and a blessing and has often led to turbulent periods and bitter experiences.

This offers an important lesson for us today as it shows that no side of the conflict, whether Israeli or Palestinian, is without a direct stake in the fate of the other. Too often, this lesson of intertwined fate is lost by the interlocutors. It must be accepted that a suicide terrorist bombing from one side and collective punishment or targeted extra-judicial killings on the other, are both integral elements of the very same cycle of violence. I believe that this lesson has been lost in the despair of the violence and even those who have the best intentions to address the situation often fail to recognize it.

Cyprus has historically maintained friendly relations with Israel, the Arab states and with the Palestinian people. I can attest that despite our own problems, we have on numerous occasions provided assistance to the parties in the Middle East conflict. We have a rather quiet but well regarded record of mediation on several issues in the troubled Middle East. By seeking headway over headlines, and by pursuing, not publicizing, our diplomatic efforts, Cyprus has been able to bolster its role as a useful bridge to the Middle East. The clearest example came with our successful contribution during the crisis at Bethlehem’s Church of the Nativity (May 2002) that was defused at the 11th hour through the vital role of my country.

On account of Cyprus’ EU accession on the 1st of May, hopefully as a reunited country, the zone of peace security, stability and prosperity, which is the main political feature of the EU, will extend into the strategic corner of the eastern Mediterranean and inevitably project itself toward the tumultuous Middle East region. Cyprus’ unique vantage point at the crossroads of three continents allows our country to play a more significant role in the wider region as a result of its membership in the EU: as a business, communications, educational and medical center.

The geographic element in the EU’s expansion to the Eastern Mediterranean cannot be underestimated. In a post-cold war era and post-9/11 world, foreign policy has, in many respects, become geography again. I am not a determinist.
But I do believe that there can be positive effects to countries that are geographically closer to zones of stability, peace and economic prosperity.

Cyprus also utilizes its own experience as a victim of international aggression and forcible division to help the Middle East process where we can. Through our own history, we understand only too well that the deliberate construction of artificial barriers tends to only harden intransigence. True, all countries have the international right and obligation to protect their citizens against terrorist attacks. But as we have all witnessed by the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Soviet Union, today’s global agenda demands an end to any such walls and divisions. The states and peoples from the Mediterranean to the Middle East are all stakeholders in the peace process.

Regrettably, we have also seen the spillover of Middle East extremism all over the world. As the dastardly and callous terrorist attacks against the United States and most recently in Spain have so painfully demonstrated, no place and no one is safe or immune from the threat of extremism. Therefore, we must tackle this problem at its core and pursue policies and strategies of engagement and multilateral management, rather than relying so heavily on military force. Unilateralism is too superficial in scope and too limited in reach, to have any lasting effect on the real causes of the scourge of the global phenomenon of terrorism.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (the “Barcelona Process”)

Cyprus is committed in word and deed to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, also known as the “Barcelona Process”, which is a multilateral initiative between the European Union (EU) and a dozen key Mediterranean states. Together with Cyprus, this Partnership comprises a truly diverse set of states, including Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Malta, Morocco, the Palestinian Authority, Syria, Tunisia and Turkey. Indeed, this diverse group demonstrates the central role that geography plays in the European Union’s foreign and security policy.

As Cyprus is poised to enter the European Union on the 1st of May, our role in this Partnership, as alluded to earlier, is to serve as a bridge by bringing Europe closer to the region and by fostering a new atmosphere of cooperation over conflict and security over instability.

Through the “Barcelona Process”, we are seeking to establish a common Euro-Mediterranean area of peace based on fundamental shared principles. These unifying principles, a common dictionary if you like, include respect for human rights and democracy, as well as the overall creation of an area of shared prosperity through a free-trade area between the EU and its Mediterranean partners by 2010. The Partnership also includes a political and security dimension.
Moreover, we are forging a new effort at integration stressing economics.

We recognize that the economics of conflict are the most daunting long-term component of instability. We see the social and economic consequences of this reform process as the best hope for the rebirth of the Middle East. And we clearly see the imperatives of developing the region’s human resources, bolstering civil society and democracy, and promoting an understanding between cultures and peoples of the Euro-Mediterranean region as the keys to transforming the region.

Another integral component in this Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is dialogue.

Cyprus has already established the Foundation for the Dialogue between Cultures and Civilizations, an institutionalized forum designed to foster a healthy exchange and interaction. Such a dialogue has been absent in the Middle East for far too long. We see this forum as an essential step toward greater understanding and cooperation.

It is also relevant to note of a recently released report of the London-based Foreign Policy Centre. This report calls on the European Union to adopt a much tougher policy towards the Middle East, by withdrawing aid and trade from regimes that continue to violate and abuse basic human rights or fail to implement or introduce democracy for their citizens. While such a recommendation may appear basic, or even somewhat naïve, it reflects a significant principle of the “Barcelona Process”, namely that true reform can not be imposed from the outside but it can only emerge from within through encouraging and rewarding liberalization and fostering civil society. It is, in fact, this element that seems to be absent from the recent US “Greater Middle East Initiative”, a plan that otherwise has many worthy elements.

The Important Role of Turkey

Just as it is fairly unpopular to question decades-old policies and politics that, despite their marked failure, have continued to serve as unworthy and unproductive pillars for Western policy, I too dare to question Turkey’s role in the security of the region.

By failing to address the new realities of this post-9/11 strategic landscape, it merely fosters diplomacy of atrophy. If I may, I would like to state, forcefully and sincerely, that Turkey holds the potential for playing a pivotal role as a contributor to regional peace and stability. But it also holds the inherent responsibility to uphold the minimum expectations of a partner for peace. This obligation is neither automatic nor autocratic, as Turkey’s future in the EU depends on its upholding of the obligations, as well as of sharing the rights and rewards of security and stability in the Mediterranean.
Specifically, the seeming change in the approach of the new Turkish government to end the forceful division of Cyprus was primarily due to the impetus of the accession process of Cyprus into the European Union and Turkey's own aspirations for membership in the Union which we support. This impetus holds a much more dynamic impact on Turkey than modifying somewhat its traditionally hard-line and intransigent stance on Cyprus.

It seems clear now that Turkey, including its powerful military, recognize that the future of Turkey lies to, and with, the West. This recognition offers the hope that Turkey's drive toward the West generally, and its performance on resolving the Cyprus conflict specifically, can help anchor Turkey firmly in the democratic and progressive community of Europe. This is the most effective means toward promoting democracy and human rights in Turkey which would clearly impact positively the Middle East. In the end, all Cypriots and all Turks want this and, over the longer term, all of Turkey's neighbors will see the benefit of a Turkey advancing within the parameters of accepted norms and international law.

If Turkey is today closer than ever to joining the EU, it is largely so on account of Cyprus. This is a fact that is not often publicly said or admitted, but the long and arduous record of Cyprus' and Turkey's negotiations with Brussels bears witness to this.

**The Imperatives for Broadening Diplomacy**

Cyprus is also active in broadening all areas of diplomacy beyond the confines of governments and cabinets. The need for a multidimensional diplomacy is also essential. To pledge oneself to democracy and civil society is not enough. We must recognize that the imperative for engagement in the Middle East necessitates a “second-track” of diplomacy. In all conflict-torn regions, there is a glaring need for such diplomacy that involves non-governmental actors. And with a dangerous tendency of strongmen over statesmen, the Middle East is in dire need of such broadened diplomacy.

One noteworthy initiative came in late 2003, with the unofficial "peace plan" presented in Geneva by former Israeli Justice Minister Yossi Beilin and former Palestinian Information Minister Yasser Abed Rabbo. This unofficial plan, known as the Geneva Accord, attempted to jumpstart the stalled negotiations with a new approach: focusing on the hardest issues in detail, including such serious obstacles as the status of Jewish settlements, the status of Jerusalem and the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their ancestral homes. In contrast, the Quartet Roadmap defers such issues until its third phase, after the establishment of an interim Palestinian state. Irrespective of this, the Geneva Accord complements the Quartet Roadmap which should faithfully be implemented by both sides.
The Geneva Accord initiative has been praised by a number of world leaders. The plan’s authors met with US Secretary of State Powell in Washington. In addition, a bipartisan group of seven former US national security advisers, defense secretaries and a secretary of state issued a statement saying the Geneva Accord deserves "strong support" because it is necessary to "address at the outset, not at the end of an incremental process, all the basic principles of a fair and lasting solution."

The Bush Administration’s “Greater Middle East Initiative”

To its credit, the Bush Administration has recently announced a new initiative aimed at promoting democracy in the “Greater Middle East.” This ambitious program will be presented at the June summit meeting of the G-8 group of leading industrialized countries. The European Union, and of course Cyprus, support any initiative that will address the overall deficit of democracy in the region and welcomes this plan as an essential element for development and security.

This new initiative sets to promote democracy from the “Helsinki model” that was so effective in combating the repression of the Cold War period. And by leveraging a new emphasis on bolstering civil society, expanding democratic elections and elevating politics to full representation, the citizens of the Middle East can finally be given their rightful place at the center of decision making and governance in their countries.

The broadening of democracy has long been heralded by Cyprus as one of the most important avenues toward greater empowerment of people of the Middle East. As stakeholders in their region’s future, it is the people of the Middle East who have the most to gain from such an initiative. We can only hope that this effort is met with the commitment and concern worthy of its noble goals of democracy and economic development.

Moreover, this initiative must replace policies seeking regime change with policies securing institutionalized change. This must be home grown. The change has to come from within. It cannot appear as if it is imposed from the outside because it will never acquire legitimacy and it will be doomed to failure from the outset.

As I have tried to make clear, the path toward a stable and secure Middle East is by no means easy.

The challenges for the United States and Europe in jumpstarting the peace process are daunting indeed. At minimum, nuanced diplomacy and expert management are called for. The agreed upon policies, I repeat, must be implemented in cooperation with and not in opposition to the existing governments. NGOs and nascent civil groups must also be an integral part in
the process. Short-term economic and other goals of high visibility must be implemented in order to slow down and, hopefully reverse the spiral of violence, alienation and the frustration of the young and especially their orientation towards various forms of extremism.

With genuine commitment and sincere concern, there is an opportunity in this new post-9/11 world for achieving lasting change and reform in this region at risk.

The test for any initiative rests with its implementation.

Experience so far has shown that the American input is crucial to any progress towards peace and reconciliation in the Middle East. Looking at the US initiative, we seem to see a fundamental obstacle from the start. The US initiative does not appear to recognize the fact that the necessary reforms envisaged for the broader Middle East must start with or at least go hand in hand with a sustained effort to tackle the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The EU and Cyprus both understand the fact that progress in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is key to forging progress in the region for the “Greater Middle East Initiative”. This is also reflected in the EU’s “Wider Europe/New Neighborhood Initiative” program, which envisions a broad but deep engagement to tackle the fundamental challenges of political conflict and economics.

The United States and the European Union must work in sustained partnership in solving the Middle East conflict and in helping reform the region. However, the resolution of the Israeli Palestinian conflict must be a strategic priority.

**Iraq**

Before closing, let me say a few more words about Iraq, which is on everybody’s mind and which is an essential element to any discussion addressing the risks in the Middle East.

Regardless of one’s particular feeling on the war in Iraq, it is now imperative that the stabilization, democratization and economic development of the country, succeed. The reasons are obvious and there is world-wide recognition of this necessity even by people who opposed the war itself. The region cannot afford to have two major open wounds at the same time, the Israeli Palestinian conflict on the one hand and an unstable Iraq on the other. Without significant progress on both fronts, the extensive reforms of the broader region that are under consideration cannot be adequately discussed and promoted with the interested parties in the region.

Thank you for your time and attention. I am eager to hear your comments and I welcome any questions.

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