

The United States and the EU's Broader Neighbourhood

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Following a brief presentation of the German Marshall Fund, Ian Lesser introduced his lecture by emphasising that the United States (US), contrary to the European Union (EU), has a global power perspective on the Middle-Eastern and North African (MENA) regions. His remarks were subsequently structured around three main points.

First, the US, as a global power, is expected to have a clear strategy regarding the MENA regions. However, this is not the case and the US approach is best characterized as optional engagement. In this regard, a parallel could be drawn between the United Kingdom at the end the 19th century and the US today: both world powers would go with the flow of international events, fending off obstacles as they appeared, while lacking a clear strategy for each and every region of the world.



Second, Ian Lesser mentioned the well-known drivers of US engagement in the European broader neighbourhood: the commitment to Israel's security and to the Middle East Peace Process, energy security, counter-terrorism policy and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, the commitment to democratisation and to European security interests. The originality of his remarks lay in the emphasis put on the need not to take these drivers for granted: the US position towards Israel is evolving slowly whereas its energy strategy is being redefined thanks to the domestic production of shale gas.

However, what has remained has been an American sensitivity towards European security interests, as well as the perception of its own normative role in the region. The Iranian nuclear issues remain also high on the US agenda. In terms of international deployment, Ian Lesser underlined that Mali is next on the agenda and that despite Western commitment to the responsibility to protect, Syria is unlikely to be militarily addressed. He also pointed to the crucial role of Turkey in dealing with Syria and stressed its likelihood to remain an important topic of transatlantic discussions in the coming years.



Finally, Ian Lesser touched upon the US presidential elections and insisted that the divergences between the two candidates with regards to the EU's broader neighbourhood were rather a question of style than of substance. President Obama is likely to promote a more multilateral-minded American foreign policy but challenges such as the Iranian nuclear issue or the rise of Asia will be given priority by both candidates.

The lecture was followed by a highly interactive question and answer session with the audience and a reception.

Dr Ian LESSER is Director of the German Marshall Fund's Transatlantic Center in Brussels, where he leads GMF's work on the Mediterranean, Turkish, and wider-Atlantic security issues. Prior to joining GMF, Dr LESSER was a public policy scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and Vice President and Director of Studies at the Pacific Council on International Policy. He came to the Pacific Council from RAND, where he spent over a decade as a senior analyst and research manager specializing in strategic studies. From 1994-1995, he was a member of the Secretary's Policy Planning Staff at the U.S. Department of State, responsible for Turkey, Southern Europe, North Africa, and the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process. Dr LESSER was educated at the University of Pennsylvania, the London School of Economics, and the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, and received his D.Phil. from Oxford University.



From left to right: Prof. Erwan Lannon (College of Europe), Dr. Ian Lesser, Prof. Paul Demaret (Rector of the College of Europe), and Prof. Sieglinde Gstöhl (College of Europe)