

# **DOCUMENTI IAI**

## **WORKSHOP REPORT**

*by Francesca Nardi*

Report of conference on  
"Trans-Atlantic and Trans-Mediterranean Relations: Perceptions in the Aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>",  
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The workshop “Trans Atlantic and Trans Mediterranean relations: perceptions in the aftermath of September 11<sup>th</sup>” took place in Rome on October 1<sup>st</sup> 2002 and is part of a wider IAI project on “Transatlantic Relations”. This part is devoted more specifically to the Mediterranean and the Middle East in a transatlantic perspective. The overall project is financed by the German Marshall fund of the United States while some initiatives in the Mediterranean framework are supported by the NATO Office of information and Press.

The attacks of September 11<sup>th</sup> have sparked changes in the world system and are still unfolding on the global stage. The participants overviewed the impact of September 11<sup>th</sup> on the following:

- The US foreign policy
- The response to and the perception on Terrorism
- Transatlantic relations
- NATO’s role and future

### **1. US foreign policy**

The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have had a major impact on US foreign policy: first, the **war on terrorism** has become the central focus and guiding organising principle of U.S foreign policy; second, the “**anticipatory self-defence**” has now been raised as a cardinal point principle in the U.S foreign policy and national security strategy. Moreover, September 11<sup>th</sup> and the suicide bombing against Israel in the spring 2002 forced US administration to give greater attention to Middle East region. In particular four issues have assumed greater importance: (a) The Arab Israeli conflict, (b) the Iraqi Issue, (c) the relation with Saudi Arabia, (d) and the role of Turkey.

#### **a) The centrality of the Arab Israeli conflict**

As far as the Israeli Palestinian conflict is concerned, the **US** does not see it as a threat to its national security, which is posed by global terrorism on which allies should have to concentrate. At that purpose the Palestinian issue is seen as a secondary issue whose resolution will be facilitated by Saddam’s overthrow. By contrast, the **European** governments and EU tend to give high priority to an Arab-Israeli settlement, and especially to the Palestinian issue.

Moreover, EU and US differ over their approach on Arafat’s role: if on the one hand many European governments do not entirely trust him, they regard him as the elected representative of the Palestinian people, on the other hand US administration considers necessary to outsting Arafat and reforming the Palestinian National Authority.

### **b) The Iraqi Problem**

The US administration considers the Iraqi question *the* central issue and *the* key to transforming the Middle East. In US view Saddam's overthrow will have a positive impact on stability in the Middle East and will give new impulse to a process of democratisation in the region.

However, if on the one hand, many democrats and some republicans are worried that a war in Iraq will divert the attention from the real issues i.e. the war against global terrorism, on the other hand the division runs across the political spectrum. The republicans are split between the "Old Bushies" supporting a broad international coalition against Iraq and the "New Bushies" supporting an international support to overthrow Saddam but who are prepared to act alone if necessary (unilateralism vs. multilateralism).

By contrast, **European** countries are much more focused on the Palestinian issue and they are worried that a war with Iraq will destabilise the Middle East. Moreover, most of them (except Great Britain) want any military action to be approved by the UN. They do believe that the West should provide a well articulated response rather than only a military one. Finally, they are afraid that the aftermath of a war in Iraq would prove politically unsustainable and that the war would weaken pro-western forces in the region. So, depending on how it is handled, Iraq could lead to a major disagreement in transatlantic relations.

### **c) The relation with Saudi Arabia**

One of the most important and relevant repercussions of September 11<sup>th</sup> has been a visible deterioration of Saudi Arabia relations and US and consequently Saudi Arabia is viewed as part of the problem rather than part of the solution. According to the Bush administration, supporting the Israeli perspective, the Saudi peace plan regarding the Arab Israeli conflict has also contributed to the deterioration of ties.

### **d) Turkey**

Since September 11<sup>th</sup> Turkey has seen a reinforcement of its strategic importance in the eyes of the US administration. Even if Ankara is unenthusiastic about the idea of a war on Iraq (economic interests, possible independent states Kurdish state in Northern Iraq rekindling separatism in Turkey and threatening the unity of the Turkish state), they are aware that they have no choice since an American attack on Iraq is inevitable.

## **2. Terrorism**

The participants stated that since September 11<sup>th</sup> events **terrorism has shift from being a risk to a threat**. If from European perception it is necessary to distinguish between Global and Regional terrorism, Bush Administration argues that United States cannot afford to wait to be attacked but must strike first in order to assure its national interests and protect its citizens.

The **national terrorism** stems from the political background of terrorist attacks whereas the **global terrorism** lacks a precise and unequivocal political background (Al Qaeda case). Therefore, while the global terrorism requires a military response, the regional

terrorism, nationally motivated terrorism in the Mediterranean Area, requires a more specific political response. Management of regional dimension could be instrumental in helping undermine or strengthened global terrorism.

From **Arab perspective** (Abdel Momen Aly), the function of combating terrorism has become highly strategic and the relations between global and national terrorism are complex. The September 11<sup>th</sup> events have no political or social objectives, but rather aim at inflicting mass fear on the widest possible scale. Moreover, the Arab representatives highlight the ambiguity regarding the kind of justice required: while the US is justified to fight to bring the perpetrators of terror to justice, the rest of the world will face the moral problem of extending the same right to other nation faced with massive terror.

Terrorism has been linked to the issue of the so called Rogue States (Iraq, Iran), i.e. states that use terrorism to achieve their interest either directly or indirectly. Most Europeans and Americans alike believe that the West should provide a well articulate response rather than only a military response: in fact they should be coercive as well as co-operative, military as well as political, but should remain distinct from response to global terrorism.

### **3. Trans Atlantic perspective**

If at the beginning of the new millennium, transatlantic perspectives look weak, common concerns related to Trans Mediterranean regions are emerging but what is lacking, though, is a strategic understanding i.e. a common strategic perspective. In fact, if the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> provoked a remarkable degree of sympathy for and solidarity with the United States, a year after, new tension and strains raised due to a difference approach to **global and regional issues**.

As stated above, the difference in Euro-American points of view stems most of all from the Palestinian and Iraqi issues, but it was argued that there are common interests on which US and EU can co-operate.

Trans Atlantic and Mediterranean relation face a paradox: Europe and Us believe that the political dialogue discussions and information exchanges come first to build confidence and to stimulate and develop constructive co-operation. By contrast, the Arab countries prefer to start with hard issue, particularly when matters are related to the Arab Israeli conflict.

The participants argued that it is important not to forget that global and regional challenges relating to the Middle East and the Mediterranean must be mainstreamed in the existing co-operative NATO Mediterranean dialogue .

### **4. The role of NATO and the Mediterranean Dialogue**

The events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have intensified the debate about NATO's mission and strategic purposes and have outlined the necessity for NATO to adapt to a fundamentally new strategic environment. Nevertheless, the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> have made clear that the US and its European allies are faced with new threats and

terrorism and therefore in the focus of these dangers new questions about Nato's role and strategic purposes have been raised: What is Nato for? Should it be focused on enhancing stability in Europe or should it broaden its role beyond Europe?

In the evolving debate on NATO's future, it has been stated that NATO will need to develop closer and more comprehensive security co-operation with Mediterranean and North African countries. At that purpose a better understanding and updating of security perceptions in light of the changed security environment will be necessary on both side of the Mediterranean. In particular, the idea of "Pfp for the Mediterranean" should be explored.

However, major obstacles are present for a closer co-operation between NATO and the MENA countries, the most important continuing to be the Arab-Israeli conflict. Moreover, it was underlined that many Europeans see that the U.S is losing interest in NATO as an instrument of policy and that in the future the U.S will prefer to deal with crisis outside of Europe, unilaterally or with a few keys allies, eroding the sense of common purpose of the Alliance.

With regard to the Arab perspective on the role of NATO, it was argued that NATO Mediterranean goal is to build a strategic understanding on security issues in the Mediterranean and to overcome the unequal balance of power within it. NATO and Mediterranean dialogue should therefore contribute to the building of the coalition of moderates in the region and this could be reached only through changing the current approach on the Middle East on the basis of a firm strategic understanding between Europe and the US. Coalition and concert of moderates through NATO Mediterranean Dialogue is the only way to make a strategic breakthrough in order to prevent radicalism, fundamentalism and instability. So, it is NATO interest to intensify dialogue with the Middle East in order to expand Mediterranean initiatives.