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Colloquium on  
"NATO AND SECURITY IN THE SEVENTIES"

"NATO and the Mediterranean Situation"

paper presented by

Stefano Silvestri  
Istituto Affari Internazionali  
Rome

ERRATA CORRIGE:

pag. 9 - heading: Italy - line 5: Bréguet instead of  
Bristol

pag. 10 - heading: USSR - line 4: 4 submarines instead  
of 12

Our analysis will be more of a political than a military one. Many of the papers dealing with the Mediterranean which have appeared during the last two years have been based on military or strategic premises. They have examined the balance of forces in this zone and have tried to define the intentions and the effective role of the Russians. On the basis of this type of analysis, they have tried to determine the best riposte, the one which would compensate for the change in the military equilibrium. By undertaking a political approach to the problem, we should be able to study different aspects of the situation.

Concluding an analysis of the situation in the Middle East, Mr. Griffith, the rapporteur of the General Affairs Committee of the Western European Union, recently stated that "today it seems evident that an external intervention is needed in order to re-establish peace in the Middle East"<sup>(1)</sup>. A working group of the Istituto Affari Internazionali arrived at a similar conclusion<sup>(2)</sup>: "In order to initiate this de-escalation and to prevent its going on the rocks at the first difficulties, there must be an external authority present between the contending parties; an authority that is first a mediator, to assist in the formulation of proposals acceptable to both sides, and second, an arbitrator that is recognized by both sides as a juridical authority after they have at least accepted the definition of terms of this or that aspect of the conflict. Such a mediating or arbitrating authority must be able as well to guarantee effectively that the partial agreements reached from time to time will be respected; it must be able, that is, to deploy its own armed forces which act as an international police force, guaranteeing order when it is threatened and not obliged to leave when one of the two sides demands it."

However a similar mediating authority cannot be composed of the combined so-called great powers, whether four or two. The right of intervention of a group of powerful nations is logically irrational because it sharpens the differences between the powers themselves, and is morally to be condemned because ownership of the world cannot be conceded to any nation or group of nations. The sole acceptable arbitrating authority with powers of intervention is an authority which derives its rights from a higher source than the nations; that is, today, from the United Nations.

But today this authority is extremely weak. The two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, are the real international police authority in the Mediterranean. A decidedly illegitimate situation.

The southern and eastern portions of the Mediterranean which formerly were dominated by the Europeans are now independent. Their military bases were the tangible sign of the alliance between some European countries and these Mediterranean ones and the Europeans used them to exercise their influence in this zone and its trade lanes. The newly won independence (which was often obtained at the price of blood shed in battle with the Europeans) made it difficult to maintain the old order; the new order that is developing has been marked by the entrance of the two world powers, the USA and the USSR, on the scene. The first thing that comes to mind is that in this region, just like in many other regions of the world, local contrasts and sectorial crises risk being turned into global ones by the presence of the superpowers.

But in the Mediterranean the two superpowers are not directly antagonistic; the most direct and immediate confrontation has been the one between the ex-colonial powers and the ex-colonies. Even the Arabs tend to treat the Arab-Israeli conflict as a new type of neo-colonialism. In this situation, the American intervention (which followed the British and French one) looked like an attempt to continue the colonial policy.

A similar line of reasoning led people to believe that it was in Russia's interest to support any destructive or anti-Israeli movement in order to oblige the USA to intervene in areas where Russia's prestige was not directly involved and therefore where there was no danger of a serious world crisis. However, the experience of the Arab-Israeli and the Cyprus crises showed that this analysis was both hasty and superficial. Instead of keeping out of these conflicts, Russia became so involved in them that it explicitly supported peace proposals coming from the West. These two crises demonstrated that the crises in this area cannot be allowed to pass a certain point and that to a certain extent the freedom of action of the bigger nations is becoming more and more limited.

The presence of the Russian fleet in the Mediterranean and Russia's direct commitment to the policy of some Arab states are not completely negative factors. The logic of the spheres of influence is a logic of stabilization. This means that the Soviet Union will have to try to resolve crises which heretofore were the burden of the western world alone. It is impossible to think that the USSR is willing to let itself be dragged into risky nationalistic adventures like the ones which

are sometimes characteristic of the policy of many Arab countries. Russia's fleet and experts may exert some form of control and psychological and political pressure on the more turbulent countries in this region (for example, many experts agree that Russia is stingy with the spare parts for the more sophisticated weapons which it so generously furnished). Today, this role may be secondary to the role of offering a visible riposte to the United States and a a posteriori guarantee of support to the Arab countries against Israel. But this role could become the predominant one: Russia's desire to combat China's limited infiltration in the Arab countries and the Mediterranean and its desire to isolate China from the rest of Asia are important factors in this sense.

The overall situation is therefore anything but clear and simple. Let's take a look at some of the more important elements:

a) the Mediterranean area is marked by many crises and local conflicts;

b) important Western, Russian and Arab-Israeli military forces are concentrated in this area;

c) the West's forces in this area are the strongest; they also have nuclear weapons;

d) the Russian forces are the second power pole in the Mediterranean; they too, have nuclear weapons;

e) some believe that Israel's forces may have nuclear weapons <sup>(3)</sup> but their interests are strictly regional and are

not in opposition with the two principal poles;

f) the American and Russian fleets are the principal intervention forces in the Mediterranean; their actions are dictated by the global strategy of the two superpowers;

g) so far, the presence of these two forces has frozen the conflicts in this area, but if they continue to remain in opposition they may delay the solution of the local conflicts;

h) the degree of agreement between the two superpowers is not high enough to permit them to agree on the solution of the Mediterranean crises or furnish the UN with sufficient strength to guarantee peace in this area;

i) both the United States and Russia are interested in resolving the conflicts in this area.

The various West European countries have different roles in this situation.

Even though they follow different policies, both France and Britain have begun a progressive withdrawal from the Mediterranean. France abandoned her bases (Mers el Kébir, Bizerte) and Britain abandoned or reduced some bases (in Lybia and at Malta, etc) and initiated a progressive withdrawal from East of Suez and announced that in 1971 it would give up some weapons (aircraft carriers, for example). These two European countries have given up their former policy of hegemony in the Mediterranean. Their last attempt, at Suez in 1956, marked the beginning of their decline as great Mediterranean powers.

In spite of this, these countries maintain sectorial ambitions and policies. Under De Gaulle, France tried to increase its influence in the Arab world (in the Maghreb above all, and in the Middle Eastern countries: Lebanon, Iraq...) by condemning Israel, imposing the weapons embargo, and by furnishing some of the Arab countries with weapons and instructors (asking Iraq, for example, for favours in the oil fields in exchange). Even though Britain's position was closer to Israel's, it tried to maintain its traditional good relations with some of the Arab countries (Jordan, Libya, etc) by furnishing them with heavy weapons.

France suggested the four-power meetings on the Middle-East. The members of the WEU invited Britain to be the spokesman for the interests of the whole of Western Europe and not just its own national interests. (France received the same invitation but it was even more theoretical because in order to accept it, France would have had to give up its "empty seat" policy.)

France proposed a policy for making the Mediterranean neutral (Mr. Debré's trips to Spain and Italy). But at the same time, its Mediterranean fleet (even though it has been reduced in size during the last ten years) participated in the Nato exercises (Eden Apple) and its aerial observation service in the Western Mediterranean will keep close contact with Marairmed, the new Nato command in Naples. Britain participates in Marairmed and decided to strengthen its naval intervention force in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, part of Parliament believes that Nato should create a permanent Mediterranean fleet (like



the one in the Atlantic) to work together with the American VI fleet. Under Pompidou, France has not yet changed its Mediterranean policy, but the so-called well informed sources say it may take a more lenient attitude towards Israel.

Of the three Mediterranean countries in Nato, only Italy is of international importance. On the Mediterranean political scene, Italy tends to don the garb of a kind mediator, sufficiently disinterested even though obviously part of the Western world. But within Nato, Italy has always worked to strengthen Nato's military commitments in the Mediterranean.

Greece and Turkey have been fighting each other over Cyprus (a particularly embarrassing conflict for the Atlantic Alliance) but they agree that strong American forces in the Eastern Mediterranean are necessary. On the other hand, the Mediterranean only became explicitly part of Nato's field of interest in 1951 when Greece and Turkey joined the Alliance. <sup>(4)</sup>

Spain followed France's initiative by proposing that the Mediterranean should be made neutral. But in the meantime it renewed the agreement for the American bases. Spain's conflict with Britain over Gibraltar looks more like a typical instrument of domestic policy than a real international conflict.

In this situation, where the Western countries have different attitudes and interests, it is difficult to discover Nato's role in the Mediterranean.

Today, the West's forces in the Mediterranean are still the strongest:

USA: VI Fleet - 50-60 warships, with 2-3 aircraft carriers (attack aircraft carriers, with between 150 and 235 combat aircraft). The United States Air Force in Europe (USAFE) the VI Air Force in Spain and a detachment in Turkey. Submarine with Polaris missiles.

Great Britain : The British Navy still controls some of the best naval and air bases in the Mediterranean, like Gibraltar and Malta, and exercise some rights on Cyprus. Until 1968 only a few frigates and minesweepers were permanently in the Mediterranean and one batallion at Gibraltar, two at Malta, two at Cyprus and even smaller units in Libya. In January 1969, Britain offered to add two more frigates and one guided-missile destroyer. Also the assault ship "Fearless" and the cruiser "Blake" have been assigned to the Mediterranean (task force "on call"). The Royal Air Force maintains a nuclear bomber striking force and a fighter squadron on Cyprus, and reconnaissance aircraft are operating from Malta and Gibraltar.

Britain could and should send at least one attack aircraft carrier and a light aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean, together with some additional surface warships and submarines.

- France : The French naval forces in the Mediterranean, now mainly frigates, escorts, some submarines and training vessels, should be brought up to about two thirds of all available French warships, including the two attack aircraft carriers.
- Italy : The Italian Navy has pursued a considerable program and built some very efficient warships, several of which are quipped with missile-launchers. Recently, the Italian Navy bought some new naval patrol aircraft (Bristol Atlantic).
- Greece : The Greek Navy is mainly an escort force.
- Turkey : The bulk of the Turkish Navy, ten older destroyers and ten obsolete submarines with conventional armament, are of course hopelessly outgunned by the more modern, powerful and sophisticated Soviet warships. Its role will therefore mainly consist in supporting the defense of the Turkish Straits.
- Spain : The Spanish Navy is above all an escort force, the bulk of which should be concentrated in the Mediterranean.

Altogether the Nato powers and Spain have as much as 1500 land-based combat aircraft available in the Mediterranean area, plus maybe 200 shore based naval aircraft, to which must be added

about 200 US Navy combat planes aboard the aircraft carriers of the VI Fleet. Another 200 combat planes could be added by ordering two French and at least one British attack aircraft carrier to the Mediterranean.

USSR :                   Except perhaps for a few intelligence trawlers there was however no permanent Soviet naval force present in the area until about 1958, when 12 submarines and some auxiliaries arrived in Albania and remained there.

The Russian fleet now consists of about 60-65 surface vessels, including two helicopter carriers, Moskva and Leningrad, one of which is always in the Mediterranean. The fleet also includes about 8-12 submarines. This fleet is armed with nuclear weapons and missiles are its principal weapons. It does not have any permanent bases in the Mediterranean but it can use the ports in Syria, Egypt and Algeria for repairs and brief visits. The Soviet Union does not have any air force in the Mediterranean. It trains Egyptian, Syrian and Algerian pilots in the use of Russian planes, but it does not have its own air force. An attack against Italy, for example, would probably have to be launched from bases in Eastern Europe (Rumania, Hungary and maybe even Czechoslovakia). In this case, it would be very useful for the Warsaw Pact countries to have bases in North Africa (near Mers el Kébir, for example) that could be used for refueling, for example. But at present the USSR does not seem to have these facilities.

The recent events in Libya and Sudan and the worsening of the Arab-Israeli conflict show that the problem is not just a military one.

The presence of the two superpowers may be studied from two points of view. On one hand, it is part of the global strategy of reciprocal dissuasion. This role is filled by the nuclear forces (Polaris submarines, American missile bases in Europe, Russian MRBM's, etc). The VI Fleet and Britain's bombers based in Cyprus are part of this global strategy. But the presence of the superpowers also has a regional significance. This presence wants to make the interests of the world equilibrium prevail over the regional conflicts and divisions. But today it does not seem to have had too much success. Perhaps because they have not yet clearly decided for a two-way division of their spheres of influence, the superpowers seem to get pushed around by local events, without being able to prevent them or solve the problems they create. Look at the difference between 1958 and 1969: then a Panarab crisis in Lebanon was solved by landing American troops; today, the superpowers are absent from the Panarab crisis in Libya.

This is not a moralistic judgement: it is important to note that while formerly the USA and its allies could play the role of the world's policemen in the Mediterranean, today it has become almost impossible, unless they want to risk a world crisis.

What is Nato's role in this situation? Its first task is obviously to counterbalance any real or potential offensive which threatens the allied countries. This role integrates Nato's strategy with America's global strategy. Marairmed, designed to control the movements of potential enemies, is a perfect example. The difficulties arise when we look at the other role, which is much less clearly defined: coordinating the initiatives of the allied countries (especially the European ones) in the Mediterranean area.

The Nato commands are responsible for the strongest military force in the Mediterranean. The "on call" task force is a good example of the difficulties they have to face. For the time being, this force only exists on paper and it is composed of Italian, Greek, Turkish, American and British ships. This force should be formed during maneuvers and in times of crisis. But the responsibilities of Nato's various political and military commands have not yet been defined. The biggest obstacle is that all the allied countries want to have a hand in the control and command of this force, which would be under a unified command. But there is no common strategy or policy for intervention in the Mediterranean, and thus the principal military force in the Mediterranean has no political line.

Therefore the Nato countries have a wide range of choices, going from a "minimal" to a "maximal" position.

The minimal position consists in treating Nato as a limited and strictly defensive organization, capable of controlling the movements of the presumed adversary and blocking it if it

attacks one of the allied countries. Each country would be free to follow its own national policy in the Mediterranean.

This choice is a risky one. First, there is the risk of unexpected conflicts which the majority of the countries would have preferred to avoid and which might rapidly involve the whole Alliance before anything could be done to stop them. Furthermore, it would be very hard for the single national policies to solve the open or latent conflicts in this area. Finally, the development of independent national policies would probably undermine the internal coherence of the Alliance.

The maximal position consists in treating Nato as the unified military instrument of allied policy in the Mediterranean. Nato's active commitment in the crises in this area could be manifested by the formation of a permanent unified (European?) task force, together with a more unified command in Southern Europe and closer ties between the American and European forces in the area. This military force should be able to accomplish all the tasks of a modern naval power. It should be able to move rapidly and decisively throughout the whole area. It should be able to land large numbers of troops in a reasonable length of time. It should be able to aid friendly nations in the case of external attack or internal subversion. It should be capable at all times of winning the "Battle of the Mediterranean" if it should ever take place. The role of a unified task force is not just destroying the enemy fleet of forces at a certain time: its true mission, the one which the political and strategic needs of this area call for, is to project allied

power on the Mediterranean regions. If it were not capable of doing this, the allied force would not be prepared to answer the modern strategic needs and in the end it would be little more than a propaganda piece.

But everybody can see the difficulties in this position. The principal one is the absence of political premises. What could Nato do in the various Mediterranean "hot points"? How should it maneuver its fleet when it has one?

Sir Alec Douglas Home recently listed <sup>(5)</sup> the advantages of a European task force for Nato. First of all, Nato should take care of the Cyprus and Malta questions. In both cases, mediation or a stronger participation could help solve the political crises in these two islands. According to Sir Alec, a European fleet, together with the American one, could be an extension of the European Identity in the Mediterranean. It would offer the following advantages:

militarily, it would strengthen Nato counter-measures against the Soviet naval threat;

politically, it would bring the West European nations together, in an area-defense policy outside the Rome Treaty. As such it would offer proof that Britain is ready to join forces with member countries of the European Community in activities not subject to the French veto;

diplomatically, the European force could and should undertake visits to neutral nations, whether in the Adriatic or the Arab countries. Such visits, outside the context of a direct US-



Soviet confrontation, with its nuclear implications, in our view could do nothing but good. Another advantage would be that the smaller WEU powers would be able through such a task force to obtain practical experience of naval operations in the Mediterranean, in conjunction with maritime air forces which, in the case of the Belgian and German navies, they themselves do not possess.

Even though these things are important and have some interesting implications, we feel that we must take a closer look at them.

The advantages listed above can be achieved by other means: better unification and coordination of the existing commands, improvement of Nato's existing material and efficiency, closer European coordination (within the WEU or Nato), intensifying relations between the EEC and the associated countries in the Mediterranean, etc. The formation of an allied task force implies something more. It implies the ability and the will to intervene directly in the principal crises in the Mediterranean. But in order to do this we must have a clear doctrine for crisis management. And in this case we will have to use military, political and economic instruments.

(6)

In some of his recent works, General Beaufre divided possible interventions in the crises into two categories: homoeopathic and curative. The interventions which fall in the first category try to fight the crisis before it becomes very acute and try to eliminate its basic causes. Curative interventions

are launched at the height of the crisis and try to solve it in a short time by means of a few decisive actions. Both systems call for a clear politico-strategic doctrine. But in the case of "curative" interventions there is the risk of launching them at the wrong time, of worsening the crisis, or of freezing the crisis without being able to eliminate it (the Security Council's intervention in the Arab-Israeli conflict, for example). But this type of intervention is the one that could be most easily launched by an international organization (like Nato), where different points of view are often the rule.

The real solution of a crisis obviously calls for a number of "homoeopathic" interventions in the medium and long-term period. But these are economic, social and political interventions rather than military operations. And it is impossible to decide on economic, social and political interventions without running into medium and long-term considerations. In order to achieve this, we need a unified European political will of the type that grows out of integrated institutions.

This is the real challenge the Mediterranean crisis offers to the Nato countries (especially the European ones). It is not a question of counterbalancing the increases in the enemy's military capacity or of improving our instruments of military intervention. We already have reached a sufficiently good level of security: bigger decisions and more expenditures than have heretofore been proposed would be needed to raise this level. The real problem is a more general one: in the absence of a world authority capable of acting as a mediator between the

contenders in this area, the superpowers have taken over this role. But since the superpowers do not seem to be capable of overcoming their differences and are letting themselves get pushed around by the existing crises, adding their weight and the danger of atomic escalation to them, and since Europe's interests are directly involved, we must think of something more effective. Some people believe that Nato could play this role. Speaking in Rome at the Nato College, Mr. Brosio recently spoke of a new economic and social dimension for the Atlantic Alliance. But these are just words. Nato's new dimension must be political, and that means changing its institutions.

Even if it were possible to develop a "European Identity", this would not be sufficient. The problem of world (and regional) order must be guaranteed by forces on a world level. The superpowers are the only ones who have these forces. A more united and decided Europe could not enter into a direct confrontation with the superpowers: it should not become a "re-gional police force" in the Mediterranean, substituting the Russians and the Americans. This solution (or dream) is marked by the same lack of political imagination which is at the base of the paralysis in the Mediterranean. When the crises (even the regional ones) involve the interests of the wealthy and developed world (whether it be East or West), they must be solved by global agreements. The UN is the best place for doing this, and in theory this Organization offers the best way of carrying out the decisions that have been made. But the UN cannot operate without Russian-American agreement. Their impotence means that the crisis in the Mediterranean cannot be solved. Russia's

and America's presence in the Mediterranean will only bring about reciprocal paralysis unless this is clearly understood.

Western Europe does not have the political capacity or the strength to change this situation. Nato has even less of a chance of changing it. The possible policies must be more complex and they call for a higher degree of European political awareness. In order to defend their own interests, the European countries must try to achieve this. Therefore they must concentrate their attention on the political, social and economic aspects of the existing crises and not the military ones. They have to accept the fact that their military policy should limit itself to not making the situation any worse and that it must follow the lead of the superpowers.

Through medium-term "homoeopathic" interventions, the European nations can contribute to the solution of the crises. In the long run, a new network of economic, cultural and political relations can form the basis for changing the Mediterranean situation.

It is obvious that in order to be valid, the moves of the European nations:

- must be planned and carried out by integrated European organizations,
- must follow a few common and general lines for medium and long-term intervention.

The military organizations, like Nato, are only relatively important in this situation. Organizations like the EEC, WEU, OECD, etc, become more important.

On the other hand, Nato reform or the necessary creation of a European Identity will not result from a series of isolated measures dictated by what seem to be the needs of the moment. The institutional and military decisions must be made on the basis of clear political decisions. This means that we must take another look at the whole problem, not just of the Mediterranean, but of European security in general and the role that the European states can play (individually or united in a common identity) on the world scene.

N O T E S:

- (1) Doc. WEU 480, 9 June 1969.
- (2) Lo Spettatore Internazionale, English edition, 1/2 1969.
- (3) See L. Beaton: La position nucléaire de l'Inde et d'Israël, Politique Etrangère 1, 1969.
- (4) The North Atlantic Treaty, Washington D.C., 1949, article VI: "For the purpose of art. V an armed attack on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France, on the occupation forces of any Party in Europe, on the islands under the jurisdiction of any Party in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer or on the vessels or aircraft in this area of any of the Parties". The definition of the territories has been revised by:
  - Article II of the Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the accession of Greece and Turkey, London 1951: "...For the purpose of art. V, an armed attack on one or more of the Parties is deemed to include an armed attack:
    - i) on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France, on the territory of Turkey or on the islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer;

ii) on the force, vessels or aircraft of any of the Parties, when in or over these territories or any other area in Europe in which occupation forces of any of the Parties were stationed on the date when the Treaty entered into force or the Mediterranean Sea or the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer."

- a declaration by the French Representative, on 16th January 1963, who recalled the independence of Algeria. The result was that the "Algerian Departments of France" no longer existed as such, and that at the same time the fact that they were mentioned in the North Atlantic Treaty had no longer any bearing.

(5) The Atlantic Community, Spring 1969.

(6) Gen. A. Beaufre, Bâtir l'avenir, Calmann-Lévy 1967.

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