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"ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICO-MILITARY EVOLUTION IN
THE MEDITERRANEAN"

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THE MEDITERRANEAN CRISIS: EVOLUTION IN THE BALANCE OF POWER AND
PROBLEMS OF MANAGEMENT

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Although the Mediterranean is not in the immediate geographical vicinity of either the Soviet Union or the United States, in contemporary geopolitics it has been a most sensitive area to changes occurring in the balance of power on the global level. What can now be termed the "Mediterranean crisis" is particularly indicative of the DISTURBANCES produced by shifts in politico-military set-ups since the advent of what has come to be identified as a growing tendency towards DETENTE.

Within a limited period, practically every country bordering the Mediterranean has witnessed or is expected to witness marked changes. No one can fail to notice the irreversible processes taking place in the Middle East crisis since the October war. Abrupt institutional changes have occurred since in Portugal, Greece and Cyprus. Momentous changes are likely to occur in Spain, Yugoslavia and Tunisia soon after their aging, life-appointed heads of state disappear. Oil and gas have promoted the regional import of Libya and Algeria. No remedy has been found for Italy's chronic political instability. What future does Albania have, since China is no longer an outcast? NATO's cohesion has suffered rifts and setbacks, not only in the case of France a few years ago, but now also with Greece, Turkey and Portugal and possibly with Italy in the future. Inside the Mediterranean, the American/Soviet naval balance of power is bound to acquire a new dimension if and when the Suez Canal is reopened.

Forms and reasons for these changes seem heterogeneous, but can be traced to a coherent explanation. To simplify analysis we shall follow a logical rather than a chronological sequence, irrespective of incidental interactions and the relative import of the various phenomena under study.

Detente does not imply a cancelling of contradictions. Rather, it can be defined as a PURPOSEFUL REARRANGEMENT of contradictions, dictated by a growing need to FREEZE a specific set of contradictions, namely those accepted by all concerned as being more detrimental to them all than beneficial to any: nuclear war, pollution, possible future famines...

Now, with the freezing of mutually constraining, admittedly self-destructive modes of conflict, less "intolerable", more variegated forms of conflict come to the fore. Many of these new forms were screened, repressed or "absorbed" in the previous bipolar, pre-detente world pattern. Hence we witness a DISPLACE-

MENT OF ACTIVE CONTRADICTIONS, operating less at the "summit", more at "intermediary" levels and specifically in regions where a complex entanglement of hot issues remains unsolved, with a corresponding proliferation of distinct and relatively independent actors in cybernetical feedback interplay. The current crisis in the Mediterranean is a demonstration of the unfolding of this process.

The Mediterranean separates Europe from its previous colonies in Africa and Asia. World War II, which was, at least in the Mediterranean theatre, a war involving contending colonial powers, deeply undermined the colonial system in the region. Though this gave national liberation movements a powerful impetus, up till the end of the war only a few of the countries along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean had achieved formal independence.

In the post-war years, the Cold War did not halt the decolonizing process. What it subjected to uncompromising polarisation was the area encompassing the developed capitalist states on the one hand and the socialist states on the other. This polarisation was delineated, grosso modo, according to the points reached by Soviet and western troops respectively at the end of the war and extended to all European Mediterranean countries, the non-communist among which were included in NATO. But outside this area of direct confrontation, the cold war relationship induced rather than discouraged the drive towards a new equilibrium.

National liberation movements were bound to look upon the Socialist Camp as an objective ally in their "struggle against Imperialism". Likewise, in their assistance to national liberation movements Socialist countries saw an effective deterrent to "capitalist encirclement" and a means "to undermine Imperialism and Capitalism in their weaker links" outside the zone of "saturated polarisation". In such a context, adherence to a policy of traditional colonial rule was more likely to precipitate than to prevent "defections" from the western orbit. Out of this rationale emerged a new situation: throughout the fifties and sixties, most ex-colonies developed into sovereign states.

To assert their non-commitment towards either bloc, these newly sovereign states rallied round a philosophy which was first defined as Positive Neutrality, later as Non-Alignment. Of the three states which promoted this stand, each with its own specific motivations, two were Mediterranean: Yugoslavia and Egypt.

Later, Non-Alignment was gradually embraced by all pact-free countries in the Third World, including all non-European Mediterranean states with the exception of Israel. It extended to become the yardstick of sovereignty for islands which acquired statehood inside the Mediterranean itself: Cyprus and Malta.

This change in the status of the Third World countries throughout the pre-detente period was neither LINEAR nor EXHAUSTIVE.

It was not linear. Spearheads of the western world coagulated inside Africa or on the Mediterranean in the form of settler-states: Algeria, Rhodesia, South Africa. In the western Mediterranean, the status of Algeria as a French settler-state collapsed in 1962; in counterpart, the end of the British Mandate over Palestine in 1948 brought into being a Jewish state in which the Arabs are not alone in discerning the features of the settler-state. The refusal of the Arabs to accept Israel, which the latter answered with a policy of systematic expansionism, created a hotbed of growing instability in the eastern Mediterranean, especially since the 1967 war. Up till October 1973, a couple of years after the onset of detente, the Arab-Israeli conflict was the last crisis to retain the acuteness and polarisation characteristic of crises situations in the Cold War climate.

Nor was this change exhaustive. Not all African countries within the Cold War rationale acquired sovereign status. But in the Detente rationale, it is more likely that decolonisation will come to completion. It is no accident that a component factor in the Mediterranean crisis today is the collapse of Portuguese colonialism, and that the question of the Spanish Sahara has come to a critical point. A non-colonial regime in Portugal cannot afford to alienate the support of the Left and can hardly sustain its previous relationship with NATO.

The collapse of traditional colonialism did not imply that the western world was prepared to relinquish its control over the basic raw materials furnished by the Third World. In fact, the change was tolerated insofar as it affected form rather than content. It was not to imperil a structure of the world based on a central core of developed industrialised countries around which the rest of the world was to revolve. This structure was perpetuated, among other means, by the increasing disparity in prices of finished products with respect to raw materials. When

the October war triggered the quadrupling of oil prices in the span of one year, it was the first significant signal that the era of cheap raw materials was coming to an end.

Indeed, demand on raw materials has been steadily growing and, for the first time since many years, primary prices are tending to grow faster than the prices of finished products. Synthetic materials are no substitute for raw materials: their production is based on a reshuffling of a wider variety of raw materials. More and more the seller, i.e. the developing countries, is acquiring a decisive say. This tendency is further stimulated by an unprecedented consumption in consumer societies with the psychological atmosphere of detente.

But with the rectification of prices of raw materials, decentralisation of the world risks to no longer remain a formal phenomenon. The issue is nevertheless ambiguous insofar as it can in the long run either be more favourable to DEVELOPED industrial countries, which might find it more economical to export industrial plants rather than import expensive raw materials (at least in the field of polluting industries or those in need of cheap labour), or to the DEVELOPING countries interested in promoting industrialisation. This is a typical example of the rearrangement of contradictions in the detente rules of the game.

Nevertheless, in the short run, this strive to bridge the price gap has deepened economic unrest in developed western countries. With no willingness to curtail industrial profits, consumer prices have skyrocketed with inevitable consequences: galloping inflation, slackening of industrial production, unemployment and creeping recession. Economic instability is bound to aggravate political instability and to threaten the cohesion and the military setup of the western world. This is bound to affect the Mediterranean scene, as witnessed by Italy.

A striking example of this threat to the cohesion of the West: the rise in the pre-October price of oil (\$1.99 at the time, per bbl) was obviously a heavy burden for the European consumers of Arab oil, but was not necessarily a disadvantage for the USA. It increased the profits of the majors. Even more important, higher prices created a better competitive situation in world markets for American commodities vis-a-vis Europe and Japan, who are substantially more dependent on Arab oil. Also, making oil prices commensurate with prices of alternate sources of energy is considered an incentive to develop

these alternate sources before available oil reservoirs are exhausted.

In 1950, western agencies forecast that nuclear energy would become competitive round about 1975. However, this did not transpire because, with the low price of oil, there was no pressing stimulant to invest in alternate sources of energy. The energy crisis is not evidence of the fact that there is a growing inability to meet the growing needs because of scarcity in raw materials, but rather of a bottleneck created by the discrepancy in prices between raw materials and finished products.

For the Americans, the optimum price for a barrel of oil has been calculated at around \$7. This was the price fixed by the OPEC countries in their Tehran meeting in December 1973. When prices through 1974 climbed beyond this threshold, threats of American military intervention in the oil-producing countries were voiced. This increased still more strains and stresses in the western military alliance.

There is no doubt that there is a definite correlation between the deepening energy crisis involving relations across the Mediterranean between oil producing and consuming countries, and the strive for a settlement of the Middle East crisis. It is to meet this new situation that the European community is so keen on promoting the Euro-Arab dialogue and, more important, that Dr. Kissinger has deployed such an active diplomacy since the October war. The stalemate before the war threatened the ability of the USA to go on reconciling their special relationship with Israel with maintaining a decisive word in regulating the price and flow of oil from Arab countries. When Egypt and Syria waged the war, American diplomacy was interested in rearranging the contradictions, in undoing the previous Cold War pattern of the Arab-Israeli conflict rather than to have this conflict become, in the new context, a liability to its own regional and global economic and strategic interests.

In fact, the new political climate, identified as detente, has raised a number of dilemmas for the West in the Mediterranean:

- If Israel is to withdraw from occupied Arab territories, its survival is to be guaranteed.
- If the October war further deepened reasons of strain between Europe and the USA, both parts agree that the western cohesion must be consolidated.

--If the economic stability of Europe makes it increasingly wary of confrontations with the oil producing countries, Europe also believes that the Atlantic military alliance must be preserved.
--If the reopening of the Suez Canal is an asset for the deployment of Soviet naval strategy, the West is as interested in avoiding any shift to the former's advantage in the balance of power.

The rearrangement of contradictions has had its military implications insofar as the previous set-up of NATO all over the Mediterranean theatre has been deeply affected. This incited an attempt to strike at the non-aligned status of Cyprus. Instead of consolidating NATO's position, this brought about the downfall of the military junta in Greece, severed Greece's relations with NATO, promoted inter-communal tensions in Cyprus and brought about problems between NATO and Turkey following the latter's military intervention in the island.

The outcome of the Cyprus crisis is significant: it is not in opposing, but in meeting the requirements of a more diversified, more decentralised world after Detente that crises situations can be avoided. This is particularly true for the Mediterranean, at crossroads of a network of hot issues of world bearing.

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