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Security and Other International Developments in the Mediterranean.

The aim of this paper is simply to provide a number of points for discussion. It is therefore both short and somewhat over-simplified. I have no intention here of entering into a detailed discussion of strategic and political problems of the Mediterranean area.

The main problem of the Mediterranean is the lack of a stable security system. From a military point of view the sea is dominated by the forces of the Atlantic Alliance. Allied naval forces outnumber and are capable of controlling the soviet "Ez hadra". The VI fleet nuclear and land operations support capabilities are vastly superior to those of the Soviets. Western forces are the only forces in the area capable of using and controlling Mediterranean air space and having access to adequately defended bases. The few air bases open to the Soviets are not credibly defended. At best Warsaw Pact aircraft could cover a section of the Eastern Mediterranean, and only then having first crossed air-space controlled by the Alliance. The Soviets cannot match the Allied forces' nuclear capability. No significant change in the regional balance of power is likely in the forseeable future, unless, that is the western powers opt for a massive withdrawl.

The Soviet presence depends on the fragile Soviet relationship and a small number of coastal states: Algeria (which has allowed however neither indiscriminate access to nor the reinforcing of ex-French bases), Libya (which is poorly defended) and Syria (which is presently changing policy). The Soviets may be able to exert a degree of pressure in the South from their bases in Somalia and Aden. The military efficacy of such operation has however yet to be demonstrated. The other countries of the area are either United States allies, countries seeking close relations with the West, or countries strongly attached to the idea of neutrality.

Despite all this the Alliance's position in the Mediterranean is uncertain and unsure. In my opinion there are four reasons for this situation :

1. Before the 1960s the Mediterranean was a western lake. Since 1964 however there has been a significant soviet presence in the area. This makes the repetition of the "peace-keeping operations"

such as those in Lebanon and Jordan in 1958 rather difficult and on occasions has obliged the U.S. to run unusual risks, as in 1973 when the American government responded to the threat of Soviet unilateral action in favour of Egyptian forces with a "nuclear alert".

Western and Soviet forces cruise freely in the Mediterranean. There are no frontiers such as those existing in Central Europe to define respective spheres of influence. Politically this situation is equivalent to a continual challenge from one side to the other's position. Militarily it forces Nato to maintain continual vigilance in order not to lose the initiative.

2. The political and economic characteristics of the area have changed. The Mediterranean is no longer Europe"s "soft-under belly" - it is one of the main channels of communication with the Middle East. During the Second World War oil was a strategic product to be defended. Today it is an important tool of international politics, manipulated by a number of Arab countries. This situation has changed both perceptions of interest by, and the balance of power between those countries with interests in the Mediterranean. This has encouraged a fresh American approach to the Arab-Israel conflict. At the same time it has created problems within the Atlantic Alliance for both Americans and Europeans. At the same time it has led to the convergence of new actors in the area whose political priorities differ from those of the Western powers.

3. There has been an important series of changes in the internal political balance of many Southern European countries. It is hardly necessary here to refer to the changes of régime in Portugal, Spain and Greece, to the phenomenon of "Euro-communism" and its influence in Italy, to the growth of the left-wing parties in France, to the problems of the "post-Tito" era, to the difficult internal problems facing Turkey, to Cyprus and to the fact that in 1979 the Western powers will lose access to the base they rent on Malta. These changes could affect the relationship between these countries and the USA and thus the coherency of the Atlantic Alliance They pose a difficult management problem which has yet to be resolved.

4. Military expenditure by Mediterranean area countries is rising continually. Turkey for instance, in just two years (between 1974 and 1976) increased her expenditure by 195.8%. Similarly Algeria, whose defence budget had been steady for a decade, has over the last two years doubled her military expenditure. In Israel in this same period the defence budget increase was by 256%, in Syria by 212.5%, in Iraq by 131.4%, in Saudi Arabia by 456.4%, in Iran by 408.3%. These increases are measured in local currencies at current prices; even when inflation and loss-replacement after the Yom Kippur war are taken into account, the upward trend is even faster than that between 1967 and 1973. To give an example of the latter (in constant 1970 prices and exchange rates) between 1967 and 1973, Italy has increased her defence budget by 31.3%, Greece by 61%, Spain by 31.3% etc.

Quite apart from this quantitative growth, the most startling development is qualitative. Many countries have now equipped their forces with F-14 fighters, C-5A long range transport planes, heavy tanks, missiles of the Phoenix, Harpoon and Maverick types, Scud surface to surface missiles and Mig-23 fighters. Other important new weapons systems have been developed in loco. This tendency is in no way limited to conventional armaments. There is a definite tendency towards nuclear proliferation, affecting not only Israel but also other countries in the area. This trend has been facilitated by the proliferation of "peaceful" nuclear technology (note, for example, the sale of American nuclear reactor to Spain, Turkish ambitions, certain declarations in the Yugoslav press at the end of 1975 etc.).

These four factors interact with older problems which have already, in the past, troubled the Mediterranean. This interaction makes the area into a zone of growing insecurity.

In the Mediterranean a precess of integration and institutionalization of international relations has not taken place as it did in Europe, both in the West and in the East, in different ways and to a different degree of efficiency.

In Europe, the East-West confrontation was based on two opposite integration processes. Especially at the end of the 1940's and the early 1950's the two camps were easliy distinguishable : the Atlantic

Alliance and the European integration in the West, the USSR and the new international Socialist society in the East. Later, this changed, and today we can find different interests, between Europeans and superpowers inside the same camp. Nevertheless, the process of integration and institution building in Europe has in the meantime been solidified. It has no longer been seriously challenged in the West, and has been strengthened with military interventions in the East.

Such a process of integration has been absent from the Mediterranean. On the contrary, a series of old institutional ties were destroyed : the colonial dominions, the protectorates, etc. This destruction was not followed by construction of new systems.

The international organization formed in the Mediterranean are intergovernmental institutions, without either the legitimacy or enough force for institution building or for organizing the relations between nations in a stable way.

In the absence of a process of integration and stabilization of the area, it has proved impossible to find a common denominator to tie U.S. military dominance, Western European trading dominance, and Arab energy dominance. On the contrary, the area's atomization has worsened and led to problems within the Atlantic Alliance.

Future Political Options

The greatest risk at the present time is a worsening of this atomization. The long-term objective should be the building of a stable multilateral security system.

The American role is a difficult one. Every change in the balance within and between the Mediterranean states automatically involves the United States. There is already a trend towards a growing U.S. involvment in conflict situations e.g., the presence of American technicians in Sinai, the pressures for a formal American guarantee for Israel etc. In every Mediterranean crisis the U.S.A. appears either as a hidden conspirator or alternatively as a deus ex machina.

Whether or not this is an accurate representation of the American role, perceptions such as these have remained a fundemental characteristic of the political behaviour of Mediterranean governments. During the Italian elections in 1975 and 1976, much of the debate was centred around the American attitude towards the P.C.I. In Greece and Turkey the Ford-Carter electoral contest was seen as a fight between pro-Greeks and pro-Turks. Presidents Sadat and Assad expect to consolidate their regimes as a result of American political decisions. The list is endless. There are however drawbacks to this situation namely a) that given her role as a universal crisis manager, the U.S.A. becomes, in the case of policy failure, a universal scapegoat, and b) that the United States lack the necessary strategic flexibility and resources to intervene effectively in every Mediterranean crisis.

Through her attempts to satisfy all demands made on her and through her maintenance of bilateral relations with all parties, the U. U.S.A. ends up by worsening the long-term situation. The United States for example, grants aid to both Greeks and Turks but has nonetheless failed to win sufficient leverage to force the two sides to reach agreement. On the contrary the Americans expose themselves to blackmail (via the threat to close American military bases) and have been forced to meet ever more pressing requests from their allies (and especially Spain). While seeking a non-partisan position they often find, as has happened in the Middle East, that their commitment to the statusquo implies a commitment with both sides, this despite the extreme fragility of the status quo and despite the risk that its defence could lead to a serious world crisis.

The main American interest in the area is the balance with the Soviet Union. American policies have become incredibly entangled in local crises. When as occured in Angola, they seek to approach a local crisis within an East-West context, they risk a useless dramatization of the situation and a possible loss of face. When on the other hand, as in the case of the Middle East, they become so involved in a local crisis as to forget the USSR, this may force them in the long to resort to extreme measures of policy.

All this does not of course mean that American policy has not won notable if isolated success. These have not however led to the creation of the kind of stable security system which the Mediterranean requires.

A global approach to the problem of Mediterranean stability and security would probably require different policy tools than those presently available and a higher level of political tension than that which exists at present. The military tools of policy available to the U.S.A. are limited by their very nature? The U.S.A. can dominate the area, but not without allies. She has the capability to defeat the Soviets but must not allow herself to be caught out of step. She has a political role in the area but more often acts as a political obstacle to area stability. She has little flexibility in her policy options. One example is enough. The VI Fleet is today more vulnerable today than in the past. Its main weakpoint is in the Eastern Mediterranean. It has enormous power in extreme circumstances. From a global point of view the most rational way of deploying American forces would be to maintain a large Atlantic fleet, capable of crossing the whole area from the Norwegian Sea to the Mediterranean and of moving into the Mediterranean when necessary, not two aircraft-carriers (which are in any case difficult to defend) as is at present the case, but rather four or five and all necessary support ships. Today the appearance of a force of this size would have the same effect as that achieved in the years after 19466by the permanent presence of American air and sea forces. This possible solution would however create more problems than it would be likely to resolve. An American withdrawl would seem, to American allies, to represent the sacrifice of their own interests. Difficult problems would arise concerning the priority to be given to the defence of the Norwegian Sea and the Mediterranean. Every time American ships returne it would create new domestic and international political problems. A rational military decision could thus become an excuse for political chaos.

In a confused and unstable situation any move risks provoking the opposite effect to that intended. The most secure option might thus be that of "non-decision". This would mean freezing the status quo and the worst conflicts even if this meant accepting a number of faits accomplis. (This the Turks and Israelis fully realize.) Inevitabl change would have to be accepted with a degree of resignation.

The failing of this line is however that it leaves the initiative to others and that it provides insuffieient guarantees to the countries of the area. At the same time however the Mediterranean balance

cannot realistically be based on the local states. The idea of a neutral Mediterranean whoses crises are to be managed exclusively by the local states ignores the enormous importanee of international alliances and ties for the survival of the governments of these same states and for their economies, their defence, etc. It also underestimates the domestic fragility of many mediterranean countries, and the existance of strong nationalistic feelings, normally oriented against the bordering "cousins" (in many Mediterranean countries there is a proverb equating : cousins and assasins).

It is also true however, that the foreign powers alone are unable to establish a long lasting security framework. In my opinion the solution to the problem can only be a long-term one. It cannot any more be based on an American than on a Soviet direct commitment. Both super-powers have short-term interests which tend to take precedence over longer-term concerns. Both have a strategic vision which makes it difficult for them to treat local problems. They tend to assume all responsibilities at all levels and end up by weakening their over all effectiveness.

Other actors also exist in the Mediterranean (notably, the Arab countries and the E.E.C.). These are clearly weaker than the superpowers and are incapable of confronting the latter. On the contrary, their very existance depends on the maintenance of a certain kind of world balance of power which cab be guaranteed only through alliance with a super-power. Within this framework, however, they are capable of acting more effectively than those tried out by the U.S.A. and the U.S.S.R.

After many failed attempts it seems today that the Arab world is discovering a political dimension for itself, centred on a number of dominant poles of interest : the alliance between Saudi Arabia and Egypt, the "imperial" role granted by the Arab League to Syria in the interests of domestic and international order, the drive to put oil revenues to political as well as to economic use. All of these represent new developments which could lead at long last to the consolidation of governing elites, the setting in motion of a credible process of inter-Arab integration and last, but not least, the resolution of the Palestinian problem.

The common denominator linking the political upheavals in Southern Europe, and changed attitudes in this area towards the U.S.A. is a coherent line favouring growing integration with the E.E.C. If the Community can meet this challenge (which will undoubtedly cause it economic, institutional, political and security problems) it could become the main force acting towards the integration of these countries and of their new governing elites within the western system.

Policies in this field are however both difficult to formulate and fragile in practice. They have to confront at least three problems:

a. how to conciliate the relatively slow pace of integration process and the urgency and rapidity of many Mediterranean crises. It is obvious that this requires American cooperation. At this point however there emerges a second problem ;

b. how to reconcile local interests (and perceptions) with those of the U.S. Already we have an example of this. The new Carter administration has declared its interest in a more autonomous and more highly integrated Europe. When, however, the E.E.C. governments attempted to formulate a joint declaration on the Middle Eastern problem (which in practice did nothing more than make explicit many aspects of recent American thought regarding this question and could thus have been put to use by Vance during his Middle Eastern tour as a trial balloon) the State Department's automatic reaction was to exert (successful) pressure for the declaration not to be published. This represents perhaps only one aspect of a third problem, namely

c. how to utilize homeopathic long-term economic and political instruments when short-term military instruments are already in use by other powers. This is not possible in practice unless a certain degree of short-term incoherency is accepted between American and European policy.