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Internal Political Changes and the Atlantic Alliance

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The Southern European members of the Atlantic Alliance each have their own past. Portugal (which belongs only marginally to the Mediterranean area) had difficulty in overcoming NATO fears deriving from Communist participation in the Portuguese government. Thanks to the solidarity of her European allies, however, the Portuguese domestic political balance has been modified and today is better adapted to allied requirements. France does not belong to NATO. Italy is being submitted to pressure aimed at avoiding Communist participation in government, although, sooner or later, it seems as though this participation will be necessary in order to maintain domestic stability. She is thus in the difficult position of having to reconcile the stability of her domestic situation with that of her international position. Greece has withdrawn from all those Eastern Mediterranean commands in which the Turks participate and is negotiating her membership of and role in NATO directly with the United States. Turkey is showing strong pro-Arab leanings, is gradually undertaking an economic and political rapprochement with the USSR and fears that Greek membership of the EEC could eventually lead to her own isolation in Western Europe. She feels that she is being submitted to dangerous American pressures over the Cyprus question and reacts nationalistically. As far as those non-member states with direct ties to NATO are concerned, the situation is no clearer. Spain has an agreement with the USA which provides for the withdrawal of all American nuclear warheads from Spanish territory by the end of 1979; at the same time, the country is bitterly divided over whether or not to join the Alliance. Malta is renegotiating the agreement over NATO use of the port and arsenal at La Valletta, but has also requested a kind of "international

neutrality guarantee" from a strange mix of countries: France, Italy, Libya and Algeria.

It is thus clear that at least in the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Alliance is an extremely fluid grouping.

It seems evident that perceptions of the Atlantic Alliance and NATO vary with the nationality of the observer. First, throughout the Mediterranean, there is ever broader acceptance of the distinction drawn by De Gaulle between the Atlantic Alliance (which is seen as an essentially political grouping, as representing a "choice of international camp") and NATO (which is identified with the American military presence in the zone). A further distinction is then drawn between the "Atlantic sphere" (that is primarily relations with the USA) and the "European sphere" (that is relations with the EEC or with individual West European powers).

These distinctions should be emphasized as they play a crucial role in the foreign and domestic policies of the Southern European countries. Certainly, it is not always easy to distinguish between the positions assumed by the USA and those assumed by the EEC, Germany, France, etc. on Mediterranean problems. On some occasions, however, this distinction is possible (and, at times, it affects vital issues such as solidarity with the Portuguese Socialists or the attitude to be adopted towards the Greek Colonels). Even when European and American positions are similar, they are never seen as being identical, as it is argued that European methods and interests must necessarily differ.

Simplifying, to a maximum, current convictions in the Southern European countries, we may say that:

- a) the US role is commonly identified with the military element in international politics;
- b) this role is considered to be essential as a "guarantee" of the balance with the USSR;
- c) the European role is identified with the economic and commercial side of foreign affairs;
- d) the European countries are seen as essential partners in economic development policy.

Naturally, this is not always the case. It is clear, for example, that the USA is considered as an important economic and financial power, especially if a Southern European country is engaged in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund. Equally clear, is the growing importance assumed by the Arab oil-exporting countries, for economies as weak as those of Southern Europe. Nevertheless, despite the considerations, the basic equation which sees the primary US role as tied to the military balance, remains valid.

What is more, this equation does not seem to contradict the positions the USA has gradually assumed towards the Southern European countries. Here too, the main priority seems to have been the maintenance of the military balance. Other considerations seem to have received far less attention. Thus, the whole problem of political change in Southern Europe (from right wing coups d'état to Communist participation in government) seems to be seen exclusively from the point of view of maintaining American bases, freedom of action for American forces, security for NATO secrets, etc. This has three

consequences:

- 1 - It means that the permanence and effectiveness of the American presence in the Mediterranean depends almost exclusively on American military forces. On the one hand, this may be positive; it gives a more concrete character to discussions and clarifies the interests of the parties. At the same time, however, it reduces American flexibility when faced with political change and conflicts in the Mediterranean, and forces the USA to continually establish linkages between internal political developments in the Southern Mediterranean countries and relations with the USSR. In this way, relations between allies are inevitably affected by any, even temporary, crisis in détente;
- 2 - It means that the American presence suffers from the fact that American forces present in the Mediterranean, and especially the VI fleet, are not only NATO forces committed to the East-West conflict, but also have other roles, for example in the Middle East, which lie outside NATO interests and where US allies may have positions differing from those of the USA;
- 3 - It establishes an excessively tight tie between the American political role and the ups and downs of military strategy. In this way, a relatively minor "technical" problem, such as the neutron warhead, can become a problem for the American political role in Europe.

Recently, the use of American military strength in the Mediterranean for political ends, has become increasingly difficult. On the one hand, the Soviet military presence prevents the Americans from using their forces for peacekeeping or enforcing and implies a continual risk of escalation; on the other, the proliferation of ever more sophisticated conventional weapons in large numbers to many different actors (including the Palestinians), forces the Americans to use more than the minimum level of force previously required and thus creates increased difficulties in decision-making. Finally, the crisis situations in which American forces might have to operate, are becoming ever more difficult and ambiguous:

- it is no longer possible to resolve these crises by the straightforward use of military pressure (consider, for example, domestic political change or the Yugoslav problem);
- even when the use of American military strength could have a positive effect, decision-making must be extremely rapid and decisive (as shown in the last Cyprus crisis).

The political use of American military strength in the Mediterranean is further complicated by the differences between the strategic situations in the Eastern and Western sectors and on the North, South-Eastern and South-Western shores. In the Western sector on the Northern shore, there are fewer problems, there is a higher degree of military security and military reactions are less necessary (the main requirement is to maintain a credible balance with the Soviets). On the Southern shore, on the other hand, there is a stronger Soviet presence and a conflict between the Maghreb states. Any kind of military intervention could lead to escalation

or could have ambiguous results (excessive support for Morocco could, for example, lead to the loss of Algeria.....there is the problem of the Canary Islands and the complicated political dispute between Tunisia and Libya.....one needs to take account of the possible impact of military intervention in the region on Malta's international position, etc.).

In the Eastern sector, there is a lower degree of military security and the Alliance is infinitely less compact than in the West. This increases the significance of domestic political developments in each individual country within the area and of these countries' relations with the USA. In the South-Eastern sector, there is a major risk of escalation and a highly significant military commitment. What is more, President Sadat's peace initiative has, at least, to some extent, changed the terms of the Middle Eastern problem, forcing the USA to abandon its strategy of seeking a US-Soviet agreement as a means towards a solution. In this way, the local confrontation between the USA and the USSR has become more acute.

The differences existing between different situations within the Mediterranean have worsened the problems facing a key country within the Alliance, namely Italy. Italy lies in the boundary zone where the various Mediterranean sectors meet and is thus affected by the policies adopted for each sector. Slowly, she is thus being transformed from being a country with an isolated role in the Mediterranean, when only ties were with Western Europe, into a "frontier country" faced with all the risks and pressures implied by this position.

The main problem facing the Southern European countries is internal political stability (and economic development: it is impossible to separate the two questions). There can be no doubt that over the years, the Atlantic Alliance and the continuing American military presence have favoured this stability. In the immediate post-war period, memberships of the Atlantic Alliance provided an answer to the problem of how to consolidate the Southern European states as well as guaranteeing internal order, international security and a clarification of the Southern European countries' domestic political situations. The choice between a pro-Western and a pro-Eastern position was the central issue around which stable government majorities were formed. Nevertheless, this emergency situation was in flux right from the beginning and has now changed completely.

The first sign of evolution was in Yugoslavia: the maintenance of a Communist régime in no way prevented a free choice of foreign policy. The theory of non-alignment helped the Yugoslav government to persist in its option in favour of independence from the Soviet bloc. Nevertheless, it was this basic decision which came first, rather than the theory.

Albania is a similar case. Given that she needed to affirm her independence, not only from the USA and the USSR, but also from Yugoslavia, she opted not for non-alignment but for China. The tactical nature of this option was clearly shown after the death of Mao when Albania continued to insist on her independence, while abandoning the Chinese label.

In the West, there is the classic case of Gaullist France

(the Socialists proposed an up-dated version to be applied if they won the Elections). Internal stability was maintained, but there was a change in foreign policy. Thus, rather than France's international position determining her internal stability, the need to consolidate French internal stability, shaken by the trauma of the colonial wars, was allowed to determine France's international position; the government used its dispute with the USA as a means of recovering internal consensus.

There is a similar situation in Greece and Turkey: on several occasions, both countries have felt in some way betrayed by American decisions (as early as the 1964 Cyprus crisis for Turkey and even since American acceptance of the Colonels coup d'état for Greece). Both countries have used their disputes with the USA as a means of generating domestic consensus.

All this tends to lead us to the conclusion that the mechanical linkage of a pro-Western (or pro-Eastern) international option and internal stability, which grew up in the post-war period, is today no longer valid

Unfortunately, however, this analysis could bring me to two different conclusions. One of these is the normal American argument. In short, certain kinds of domestic change are destabilizing, in that they can lead to a modification of an allied country's international position and loyalties. It is thus necessary to hinder this kind of change. Where this proves to be impossible, the American government seems convinced of the need to "rethink" its own political position towards these countries and maybe go so far as to consider them "marginal" members of the Atlantic Alliance. This raises doubts as to

the American guarantee against the USSR and to the automatic nature of the Alliance's guarantee to these countries. What is more, it could create serious political cooperation problems.

The Southern European countries seem to look at these questions in a different light. They do not believe that international stability necessarily depends on their domestic political options; on the contrary, they believe that these same domestic political options depend on a stable international framework. They, therefore, rely on the working of American and NATO guarantees of stability and security, at the same time as NATO and the USA are beginning to place these in doubt.

This leads to serious misunderstandings, and probably to threats to both internal and international security and stability.

In these conditions, it is not easy to rethink NATO's role in the Mediterranean.

The USA believe in the need for a change in NATO, at the very time that NATO is most necessary to the Southern European countries as a general guarantee of stability and security. Meanwhile, the Southern European countries seek to use NATO for their own domestic political ends, although

- a) various countries objectives may be incompatible (e.g. Greece and Turkey;
- b) these same domestic political ends may appear to the Americans as a threat to the political balance between the two blocs.

It is extremely difficult for NATO to escape this maze of

contradictions. If NATO has survived, this is because very few questions are being asked; everything is entrusted to old cooperation routines. At least in the Mediterranean, "rethinking" NATO means liquidating NATO, unless that is, the Alliance moves into a new political dynamic.

In my opinion, it is unlikely that this dynamic can be centred around the USA

- a) because the USA is already at the centre of the present system and cannot risk adventurous or over-radical moves, without risking a crisis in the system as a whole;
- b) because the USA is too closely identified with military forces and military problems;
- c) because US global interests lead the USA to an operational analysis and operational conclusions which differ from those of their allies in the area;
- d) because the US image has already been over-exploited for domestic ends (often with merely tactical ends in view) by political leaders in the various Southern European countries.

There is, however, room for Western European initiatives (by the EEC, other international groupings, or by individual Western countries).

The Portuguese, Greek, Maltese and Spanish cases have given a certain vague credibility to European foreign policy. What is more, on many crucial problems such as economic development, energy problem, the labour market, and certain foreign policy questions of immediate significance for the Mediterranean (the attitude to be taken over the Palestinian problem, for example), the Europeans are closer to the

Southern-European domestic political "problématique" than the Americans. This makes it easier to discuss problems, which are not immediately military in nature, with a higher degree of mutual understanding.

None of this leads to concrete proposals. The aim of this paper has been to indicate certain aspects of the problem and thus, to open a discussion and give some ideas as to how this might proceed.

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