

**iai** istituto affari internazionali  
88, viale mazzini • 00195 roma  
tel. 315892-354456 • cable: Intaffari-roma

International Institute of Strategic Studies  
London

and

Istituto Affari Internazionali  
Rome

"Local Perception of Security"

by

Roberto Aliboni

presented at the conference on  
"Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East"

10-12 April, 1981  
Castelgandolfo, Italy

IAI/14/81

## The Persian Gulf

In the Persian Gulf, Iraq has played a crucial role from the point of view of regional security. Iraq's drive for leadership in the region began with a shift in its international alignment. In 1977, the Baath party no longer collaborated with the ICP within the Progressive Front. In May 1978, a number of Communists were sentenced to death, and repression of opponents continued until spring 1979. The Baghdad government publicly expressed its opposition to the presence of a Communist government in Kabul. In a Newsweek<sup>(1)</sup> interview, Saddam Hussein declared that Iraq firmly intended to remain independent of the USSR no less than of the USA.

Iraq's 'positive neutralism' put it in a position to bid for regional leadership. But in order to achieve this aspiration, Iraq also had to prove itself as a power capable of providing security. It attempted to do so by applying its military strength first to the traditional threat represented by Israel and the Arab-Israeli conflict, and later to the new threat represented by Iran.

In the bewilderment that followed the Camp David accords, Iraq was the first to react, proposing a union with Syria. The move was designed to strengthen Syria's security which, as a result of Egypt's 'defection', was seen as increasingly endangered by the Israeli threat and the burden of acting as a peacekeeping force in Lebanon. It was, however, above all addressed to the Arab world and the more conservative states in particular, who feared that without alternatives Syria would end up moving closer to Moscow. The reconciliation process, stipulated in Baghdad at the end of October 1978, proceeded rapidly. The new design for regional equilibrium and security, based on the newly forged union between Syria and Iraq, was sanctioned during the course of the Arab summit meeting in Baghdad at the beginning of November.

In July 1979, however, Syria appeared to be implicated in the coup attempt organized by a faction led by al-Samarrai, Saddam Hussein's personal enemy, who had previously spearheaded the 1973 Kzar conspiracy. The alliance with Syria collapsed, consequently weakening the hypothesis of security through a united front of the conservative and radical countries opposed to Sadat's policy. While the Arabs were concentrating on how to confront the traditional Israeli threat, it was, however, Iranian instability and the opportunities for Soviet intervention that were becoming increasingly dramatic. This reality was perceived as a threat, by Saudi Arabia and the other conservative Gulf states in particular, not only in terms of greater Soviet influence in the region, but also in terms of strictly regional political and religious subversion. The hostages taken at the American Embassy in Teheran and the invasion of Afghanistan clearly demonstrated that the new threat was a very real one, deserving more immediate and urgent attention than the threats represented by Israel and the unresolved Palestinian question. Iraq, not as vulnerable as the Gulf monarchies, but nevertheless threatened, presented itself as the country in a position to provide security to the Arab world. Intense diplomatic activity to forge closer ties with Jordan and the other moderate countries of the Gulf developed into the war against Iran.

How should this development be interpreted? As a substantial change in the focus of regional instability, or rather as a multiplication of the focuses of instability? The most suitable method of examining the question seems to be a look at the way in which the perception of security of Saudi Arabia and the other moderate Arab countries of the Gulf region has evolved.

Saudi Arabia reacted to the sudden and unexpected threat in the Gulf with the necessary immediacy and urgency. In the Saudis' view, however, the Palestinian question never lost its pre-eminent importance. Declarations on Palestine and Jerusalem have not been lacking, and neither their substance nor their urgency has been modified. If anything, a radicalization can be noted. At the November 1980 Amman Arab summit meeting, Saudi Arabia voted with the other attending countries to reject UN Resolution 242 as the basis for settling the Middle East conflict. A similar resolution was voted at the Third Islamic summit conference in Taif in January 1981, known as the 'Palestine and Jerusalem session'. The emphasis laid on the Palestinian question during the summit was decidedly extraordinary. In the Mecca Declaration the Islamic leaders resolved to undertake a 'jihad' in order to liberate Jerusalem and all occupied Arab territories. In the resolution dedicated specifically to Jerusalem the participants committed themselves to making East Jerusalem the capital of an independent Palestinian state, and vowed to mobilize all means at their disposal, including oil, to assert the Palestinians' right to an independent state. Another resolution provides for greater cooperation with the Arab front-line parties: Syria, Jordan and the PLO.

Saudi Arabia's radicalization may in part be interpreted as a tactical move in the context of increasingly tense relations with the USA. However, this is not the most important aspect. What emerges from this position and should be emphasized is that Saudi Arabia's and the other minor Gulf states' perception of the conflict with Iran and increased Soviet presence in the region in no way implies that the Palestinian issue has become a peripheral cause of instability in the Middle East.<sup>(2)</sup> These new developments are perceived as a multiplication of, not a change in, the sources of instability in the region.

The Saudis view the Palestinian crisis and the Iranian-Afghan crises as different manifestations of an identical threat. The crises in the region provoke the polarization of radical and conservative forces. These polarizations open the way to interference on the part of external powers. The resulting situation is hardly tolerable for a country like Saudi Arabia whose foreign policy instruments are inferior to the prestige and religious authority on which its legitimacy and stability are founded. From the point of view of security, the principal objective of Saudi foreign policy is to avoid and/or moderate the polarization processes. To this end the importance of Islamic leverage is evident. Saudi Arabia draws legitimacy from the Islamic community in order to use its influence in the Arab world and at the international level, thus ensuring its leadership and security, though on a strictly political and ideological ground. When regional crises flare up and it is not in a position to intervene due to the lack of the most traditional attributes of force or because of the objective ingovernability of interarab diplomacy, Saudi Arabia reconducts the crisis to the Islamic level. Though intervention at this level will equally not help to definitively resolve the crisis, it serves to reassert Saudi Arabia's legitimacy and consolidate its security.

This being the foundation on which Saudi Arabia's foreign policy is built, its adherence to the principle of avoiding the direct presence of external powers in the Gulf appears more evident and resolute. Support of direct superpower presence is incompatible with the religious character of Saudi leadership and the attributes of neutrality and sacredness expected from it by the Muslim masses; it would tarnish the Saudi leadership's religious image and would undermine the basis of Saudi security. This point was emphatically stressed by King Khalid at the Taif summit : "Our allegiance should not be to an Eastern

bloc or a Western bloc, but only to God and his Messenger, and after that, to the Muslim masses everywhere on earth. The security of the Islamic nation will not be achieved by joining a military alliance or sheltering under the wing of a big power. It springs from faith in God and in oneself, and from solidarity born of a profound Islamic brotherhood which outlives transitory temporal interests."<sup>(3)</sup>

There was an exception to this policy at the beginning of the Iranian-Iraqi war, when Iran represented an exceptional threat, and the Saudis asked the Americans to send them AWACS. The exceptional nature of the case makes it insignificant. It is instead significant that the Saudis felt obliged to react by breaking off diplomatic relations when Col. Qadhafi insinuated, with reference to the presence of AWACS: "Let every Muslim know that Mecca, the Holy Ka'ba, Medina, the Prophet's tomb and Mount Arafat are effectively occupied by America."<sup>(4)</sup> The insinuation was not the fruit of the eccentricity attributed to the man but a well-aimed blow to Saudi legitimacy.

Apart from this episode, the Saudis have resolutely followed their policy of self-reliance in security matters and exclusion of external military forces. This policy has been pursued in a constructive way. For a number of years now the Gulf ministers have been meeting regularly. At the end of June 1979 in Khamis Moushat, Saudi Arabia, a meeting was held to discuss security problems. In the meantime initiatives aimed at increasing economic cooperation have multiplied. Pressure from the Reagan administration has perhaps accelerated this process. On 4 February 1981 a Council for Gulf Cooperation, endowed with institutional structures, was set up. It has already started to elaborate a vast program

for defending key oil installations, based on the protection of the most vulnerable points, such as the pumping stations, the coordination of the various countries' armed forces for the defense of the oilfields and terminals, and the construction of strategic pipelines to bypass the Strait of Hormuz.<sup>(5)</sup>

The new American administration stresses that the local forces are not capable of defending the oil routes and, above all, containing Soviet expansion. It therefore intends to build up its own military presence in the Gulf. The new administration thinks that Saudi opposition to its presence does not stem from regional 'realities', but rather from the decline of American power. The key to a favorable attitude in the Gulf states is therefore "a restoration of American credibility".<sup>(6)</sup> Our analysis of the factors legitimating Saudi power instead leads to the conviction that Saudi opposition is indeed rooted in regional 'realities'. It is quite true that the Gulf states are not in a position to defend the region; however, it is also true that the current purposes of American policy might contribute to the political destabilization of the area, and that this is the light in which they are perceived by the Gulf states.

Finally, Saudi security perceptions are complex. The threats represented by Iran and Afghanistan today, by Pakistan and Baluchistan tomorrow,<sup>(7)</sup> do not cancel the threat stemming from the unresolved Palestinian issue. The threat from the east is obviously perceived as more immediate. However, in confronting this threat, they do not intend to risk their own stability and legitimacy by allowing foreign powers to install themselves in loco. An alliance with Iraq, a regional Arab force, would be acceptable, but only to a limited extent since one of Saudi Arabia's aims is to avoid excessive interarab polarizations. The Saudis therefore emphasize their Islamic role, from which they draw authority, legitimacy and security. Military strength does not necessarily form part of a security strategy. The Saudis, though contemplating

an accelerated improvement of their military capacity, base their security on ideology and diplomacy. This determines their security perceptions. The West should be more aware of this fact.

### The Palestinian issue

Prior to the 1973 War the Palestinian movement was more revolutionary than nationalist. Many militants maintained that a solution to the Palestinian problem depended on the installment of revolutionary Arab governments in the place of the reactionary and petty bourgeois ones then in power. The victory of the latter governments in 1973 forced the PLO to relentlessly evolve into a nationalist force, though some factions continue to be inspired by revolutionary ideals. The Arab states' perception of the Palestinians has therefore changed. Before 1973 the Palestinian movement was viewed above all as a threat of internal subversion; today it is instead perceived as a source of regional and international instability.

The Palestinian cause, like all national liberation questions, involves and concerns the neighboring states. This was the case in the last century with the Italian question and today with Zimbabwe. The neighboring states are not indifferent to whether the new state emerges or not. The absence or presence of such a state will necessarily affect their own interests and security. They are naturally even less indifferent to the social composition of the embryonic state, so much so that the emergence of a certain social structure rather than another may completely alter their opinion on the opportunity of supporting the birth of the new nation. In relation to the desired regional and international equilibriums, what type of Palestinian state would today be most suitable?



It is not easy to answer this question. Unresolved, the Palestinian issue represents a threat of varying intensity for the single countries, but is perceived as such by all. The desire to eliminate this unsettling factor is common to all. However, none of the eventual solutions can simultaneously satisfy the security needs of all the interested states. Moreover, each of the different solutions implies the emergence of the leadership of a certain country or group of countries. The Palestinian question, in much the same way as intervention of external powers, is thus contemporaneously a threatening factor and an opportunity to assert leadership. Let us now examine the present stance of those countries most immediately affected by developments in the Palestinian issue.

With the passing of time the conflict with Israel had become an increasingly heavy burden which Egypt wanted to get rid of. But it could not free itself of this burden without first resolving the Palestinian issue; otherwise it risked losing its leadership role in the Arab world. Egypt attempted to reassert its leadership through the Camp David accords, which it had hoped would offer a solution to the Palestinian problem. Begin's intransigence and Carter's weakness prevented this outcome. While the Egyptian-Israeli peace process is not yet complete, it is already clear that negotiations for West Bank and Gaza Strip autonomy have failed. Though the Reagan administration has assured US adherence to the Camp David accords, the meaning of this assurance is not clear. If it is associated with the very low priority given to the Palestinian issue, adherence to the Camp David process would mean nothing more than a bilateral peace between Egypt and Israel. This would sanction the idea, already deeply rooted in the Middle East mind, that this peace is a 'separate' peace between the two coun-

tries and would consolidate Egypt's regional isolation.

The failure of negotiations for West Bank autonomy and Reagan's attitude generate a sense of insecurity in Egypt. The Egyptians risk losing their leadership in the Arab world, and at the same time their privileged relationship with the USA. They have reacted energetically to speculation on the Reagan administration's presumed preference for the 'Jordanian option' proposed by the Israeli Labor party as a solution to the Palestinian problem. This does not mean that the Egyptians are opposed to a Jordanian solution. On the contrary, though they have never explicitly said so, this is exactly what they themselves are aiming at and for the sake of which they are willing to sacrifice Gaza, as a gift to the new Arab entity. The point is that they feel that the situation is out of their <sup>control and that</sup> the Jordanian solution would be managed by others and this would confirm the decline of Egyptian leadership. In a more general context, the risk they perceive is that the US, while undermining their regional leadership and contributing to their isolation, would nevertheless demand bases and close military cooperation from the exclusively East-West point of view adopted by the new administration. A decline in Egyptian leadership and an accentuation of its regional isolation might eventually affect the internal political and social stability, which is still rather fragile. Sadat, unlike the Shah, still enjoys a great deal of consensus. However, this consensus depends on Egypt's maintaining an adequate regional and international role, for it is organized by rather tenuous and inconsistent institutional structures.

Apart from the problems it may create for Egyptian leadership, is the 'Jordanian option' a realistic solution? In other words, what is Jordan's role in the context of the Palestinian issue? Jordan is surrounded by Egypt, Iraq, and Syria. Because of historic rivalries, these three countries by no means remain indifferent to Jordanian policy choices. A Jordanian alliance with Iraq or

Egypt would represent a threat to Syria, just as a Jordanian-Syrian alliance would be viewed with concern by Iraq. On the other hand, Jordan oscillates on the basis of the security which this or that alliance with one or the other of the three countries can offer it in any particular moment. Being a conservative country, Jordan closes ranks with the country which can best guarantee the preservation of its moderate policies and which can best defend it against the threat of Palestinian extremists. From this point of view, the present alliance with Iraq is quite natural, considering the Iraqi transformation described above. This transformation also included a shift toward the more moderate elements of the PLO. Moreover, Iraq's 'positive neutralism' with respect to the superpowers is perfectly congenial to Jordan, who in some way had to defend itself against American pressure to become involved in the Camp David peace process. In this framework, the current tension with Syria is also quite natural. This tension stems not so much from the aid Jordan may supply to the Muslim Brotherhood, but rather from Jordan's alliance with Iraq.

This cat-in-the-corner game is complicated by the security perceptions which the countries in question draw from the alternative solutions to the Palestinian issue. In terms of security, the type of solution adopted is of particular importance to Jordan. This new state, economically and militarily weak, would have to be in some way integrated into a wider whole. It would in any case be subject to some kind of control in order to guard against extremist initiatives which might spark renewed conflict with Israel. A first hypothesis is that some sort of union with Jordan be formed. In this case, not the present Jordan, but a new Jordanian-Palestinian entity would be involved in the regional-rivalry mechanism mentioned above. A second hypothesis is that

a union including the Palestinian entity, Jordan and either Iraq or Syria be created. This hypothesis belongs to the same family as the first one: such a union would probably be the more or less transitory outcome of the rivalry process sparked off by the first hypothesis. A third hypothesis is that the new Palestinian entity form an alliance with Syria or Iraq, leaving out Jordan. This last hypothesis is the one the Hashimite dynasty fears the most because it is the one most likely to open the risk of an uprising of the East and West Bank Palestinians, supported by external forces and aimed at creating an independent Palestinian state in the place of a Jordanian-Palestinian entity. This might be provoked either by Palestinian initiative or by Iraqi or Syrian initiative in the context of the usual game of regional rivalry. On the other hand, the risk that the dynasty be overthrown is also inherent in the first hypothesis. This explains Jordan's great caution, if not aversion, with respect to the hypotheses of setting up a Palestinian state. As Ascov underlined: "The transformation of the Palestinian entity into a territorial unit may undermine Jordan's very legitimacy. If the new state speaks for all Palestinians (regardless of their place of living and citizenship), this could mean that Jordan would cease to represent even those Palestinians remaining in the East Bank."<sup>(8)</sup> If the Palestinians developed a sense of superiority from this circumstance, conflict would inevitably result.

The strategy which seems to prevail in Jordan in order to anticipate the risks and complications of an eventual Palestinian state includes careful preservation of Jordan's ethnic and national character, readiness to expel to the West Bank the Palestinians who immigrated to Jordan in 1967 and possibly even those who immigrated in 1948, and readiness to take the initiative of a unification process if the conditions guaranteed total Jordanian hegemony. It is evident that this strategy, which envisages a

federal structure similar to the one Ethiopia has been trying to impose on Eritrea, will require patient and continuous efforts to ensure Hashimite presence and influence in the West Bank. This is being achieved to a certain extent, despite the radicalization provoked by the failure of autonomy negotiations, within the framework of the Jordanian-Palestinian Commission which administers the funds made available by the Baghdad summit. These funds, as far as possible, have been administered in such a way as to reinforce Jordanian influence; however, this is but a feeble <sup>requisite</sup> pre- for Jordan's strategy of West Bank integration.

The above considerations lead to the conclusion that Jordan's role in the Camp David process had more or less been taken for granted. If Begin's concept of autonomy had prevailed, annexation of the West Bank to Israel would have provoked the expected protests, but a difficult problem would have been eliminated. If Sadat's concept of autonomy had prevailed, based on the reinforcement of the conservative and pro-Jordanian elements in the West Bank, Jordan would have stepped in at the right moment when the groundwork for applying its strategy had already been laid. Jordan naturally wanted to keep out of the negotiations until it was clear what type of autonomy would result, its meaning and extent. Jordan wisely resisted American pressure to enter into the negotiations at an earlier stage. If it had, it too would have been overwhelmed by their failure, risking much more serious consequences than Egypt.

In the short run, however, Jordan may find itself subject to increasingly strong pressures from the Americans and Israelis if it is true that the Labor Party, if it wins the elections, intends to propose what it calls the 'Jordanian option' and that this proposal would be backed by the Americans. According to

this solution, Hussein should take over control of the West Bank, allowing Israeli security settlements along the Jordan river. This proposal made sense immediately after the 1973 War; but today, considering the developments which have taken place in the meantime, this solution does not offer Jordan the slightest guarantee. Moreover, it in no way provides for the only real problem which exists with respect to the West Bank: how to create internal political processes which reinforce the moderates. The Israeli settlements, especially in the version perfected by Sharon, are an insurmountable obstacle. A Labor government would probably not even be able to dismantle the Gush Emunim settlements, populated by armed and fanatical militants, without running the risk of a civil war.<sup>(9)</sup> Hussein would never even consider accepting such a proposal, which would only serve to run the Palestinian question up another blind alley.

Jordan's present position is less dynamic than is generally perceived at the international level. As long as the alliance led by Iraq guarantees Jordan a margin of maneuver with the Palestinians, thanks to the Jordanian-Palestinian Commission, and a front for resisting regional and international pressure to directly involve it in the Palestinian issue, Jordan will continue to perceive this alliance and its 'positive neutralism' as the best guarantee for its own security. If for any reason this alliance should also try to pressure Jordan into a premature commitment with respect to the West Bank, it will move toward Syria, even if this might cause some embarrassment with respect to the Palestinian extremists.

Like Egypt, though for different reasons, Syria has found itself isolated in the region. The abortive attempt at union with Iraq after the Egyptian 'defection' posed a real security problem for Syria with respect to Israel. Through its presence in Lebanon, Syria is the only country which continues

to be militarily involved in the conflict with Israel. The friendship treaty signed with the USSR was the only security alternative open to Syria in the regional and domestic situation in which it found itself. How does Syria view the option of a Palestinian state in the West Bank? It might be imagined that Syria would see this eventuality as a way of freeing itself of the heavy burden of controlling the mini-Palestinian state in Lebanon. However, not even Syria is overly anxious to see the emergence of any type of Palestinian state. If the prospect were a Palestinian state serving a Jordanian-Iraqi power play, Syria would certainly try to oppose it by supporting the actions of the Palestinian extremists. Syria's strategy is to offer peace in Lebanon in exchange for a Palestinian state under Syrian control. With the weakening of Lebanon's exchange value, this design is sincerely backed only by Syria. The USSR and Libya support it only for tactical reasons. The bickering between Qadhafi and Arafat in November and December 1979 and the short-lived union between Syria and Libya confirm Syria's uneasiness, weakness, and isolation.

These developments have instead led to a greater feeling of security in Israel. The most difficult military confrontation, that with Egypt, has been eliminated. The peacekeeping force that will surveil the Sinai after the definitive withdrawal of the Israeli Defense Forces from the occupied territory will not be sponsored by the UN because of the Soviet veto. Instead, the USA has committed itself to organizing such a force with the aid of its allies. Within the context of a bilateralization process which, as was mentioned earlier, the Reagan administration is trying to impress on the Camp David accords, what The Economist has to say on the matter is quite correct: "Some American military planners see in a Sinai peacekeeping force the germ of an American military ground presence in the Middle East."<sup>(10)</sup> This, together with other regional factors, such as the Iran-Iraq conflict, the

hostilities between Jordan and Syria, Syria's weakness, and international factors such as the priority Reagan has attributed to the East-West aspect of all conflicts, especially those in south east Asia, have all contributed to reinforcing Israel's sense of security.

From Reagan's point of view, Israel has once again become a Western pillar against radical subversion in the region. For Israel, from a regional point of view, this is a guarantee of the utmost significance. It should however be added that the new administration may consider a more articulated organization of containment of the Soviet threat to the Gulf which would include assigning security roles to other countries such as Egypt and Saudi Arabia. An improvement in the military capabilities of its Arab allies in the Middle East would be carried out mainly in the view of East-West conflicts, but could have side effects at the regional level. The supplementary equipment supplied for Saudi F-15s is a case in point. Israel may not feel excessively threatened for the moment, but an improvement in the military capability of America's Arab allies, if carried through seriously, would be perceived as a threat. In prospect, the anti-Soviet alignment Reagan is calling for may also entail political solutions aimed at preserving cohesion among the allies in order to guarantee the operative effectiveness of the alignment.

Apart from this hypothetical development, today Israeli security is once again based on the political incoherence and weakness of the Arabs as well as the American support of the Israeli security concept at the regional level in exchange for for absolute fidelity and effectiveness at the global level. The Europeans and Saudis instead view Middle East fragility and instability from a wider perspective, perceiving it as a particularly intense factor of insecurity. They are not willing to



tolerate the permanence of this factor of global insecurity just because it is instead a factor of security for Israel at the regional level. The Europeans and the majority of the moderate Arabs are convinced that a solution to the Palestinian problem is the key to security at both the regional and global level. Israel ought to modify its siege concept of security and accept the fact that security also depends on a much wider political context.

Many of the factors considered, including Israel's perception of how to guarantee its security, have remained unchanged for decades. Others, such as European perceptions of security, have developed more recently and could prove to be dynamic factors in a situation which, lacking substantial changes, tends to be blocked in a vicious circle. The East-West perspective from which the Reagan administration views the Middle East situation prevents it from seeing that the Palestinian problem is perceived by the Arabs as an increasingly intense threat to security and stability in the region. From this perspective the only thing that counts is anti-Soviet effectiveness and the related military capability of its allies. The Palestinian issue is carelessly brushed aside stating that: "Those urging this view (the importance of resolving the issue) seem oblivious to the notorious fact that there is no consensus among Arab states on what a 'satisfactory' solution would consist of and that such a consensus is not likely to emerge"(11). Malcolm Kerr correctly points out that this American stance corresponds to <sup>the</sup> ~~concept~~ 'equilibrium' applied by the US in the Middle East in 1967-73, until war broke out again. This concept "... assumes that the governments of Egypt, Israel, Syria and Jordan, as well as the PLO leadership and the main parties in Lebanon, have each adjusted in their own ways to the status quo and are prepared to live with it, much as some of them may protest verbally against it. It also assumes that continued American efforts to strengthen

the hands of friendly parties - Israel, Egypt and Saudi Arabia - will reinforce the readiness of the less friendly to accept their fate."<sup>(12)</sup> This ignorance or 'nonchalance' with respect to Middle Eastern security perceptions could very well compromise Western security, certainly Western European security, in the not too distant future.

### The African 'Frontier'

To complete our examination of Middle Eastern security perceptions we must also consider that myriad of international, inter-ethnic and intercultural relations which constitute what could be defined as the Arab-African crisis. An historic example of this sort of crisis is the long civil war in southern Sudan. More recently, post-1973 Arab attempts to politically involve the Africans by means of petroleum and development aid have deluded the Africans and aroused diffidence, mainly because of the Islamic discriminant which prevails in Arab cooperation policies. Conflict in Chad has grown in intensity since 1965 leading recently to direct intervention on the part of the Libyan army, whose pan-Islamic characteristics imply involvement of such distant countries as Senegal, Nigeria, and Cameroon.

Brzesinski's crisis arc may have a much wider span than he imagined. The various interconnections may produce repercussions from these Middle East crises which reach as far as central Asia and India at one end, and as far as central and western Africa at the other. We shall here limit ourselves to considering the Middle Eastern repercussions of the Arab-African crisis, without going into the African side of the question, just as Pakistan and India were left aside when examining the Gulf situation.

There are two aspects of the Arab-African crisis which must be kept distinct. There is the properly Arab-African aspect, which involves mainly the relations which revolve around the

large international organizations for economic and political cooperation. The second aspect involves interarab and Islamic relations. From this second point of view the Arabs' relations with the African countries are largely instrumental. They are used mainly in the context of struggles for influence and the rivalries that exist among the Arab states. It is this second aspect which is most specifically relevant to our analysis.

Libya is certainly the Arab country which has most constantly and consistently tried to use relations with African countries for interarab political ends. The Islamic aspect recently impressed on Libya's African policy certainly has an autonomous dimension; however, it is mainly connected with Colonel Qadhafi's pre-eminent pan-Arab ambitions. Libya's African presence may occasionally <sup>be</sup> directed against Iraq or Syria. However, the prevailing motive for Qadhafi's African interventions remains his ever more resolute hostility toward Sadat's Egypt. Emphasis on the Islamic aspect of his interventions is also, however, directed against Saudi Arabia. On the whole his target is to preclude Western influence on the Arab world, a target which took on top priority after the Camp David accords. At the ideological level Libya's <sup>policy</sup> emphasizes anti-imperialism and pan-islamism. In practical terms it has led to increasingly strong ties with the Soviets, <sup>(12)</sup> a more effective African presence, an upgrading of this presence at the Islamic level, and an increased threat against Sudan and Egypt.

How does Egypt perceive this threat? Now that the hostilities with Israel have been settled, an eventual conflict with Libya does not appear to be a cause for concern at the regional level. The countries which presently back Libya would not be in a position to intervene in a conflict. Iraq and the other Arab countries would not support a country so closely tied to the USSR as Libya is today. The threat is perceived mainly in terms of Libya's growing ties with the USSR and its increased military effective-

ness as demonstrated in Chad after such grotesque rehearsals as intervention in Uganda. There is no doubt that presently Egypt sees its security, though strongly conditioned by the negative evolution of the Palestinian issue, mainly threatened by Libya, its alliance with the USSR, and its new capacity for military projection.

Sudan is the country which appears most fragile and vulnerable with respect to the Libyan-Soviet threat. This, however, only increases Egypt's concern. Sudan's stability, if not control over its territory, is historically a very important part of Egypt's perception of its own security. For this reason Egypt has never failed to intervene to protect Sudan's security and the stability of the Numeiry regime. In 1971, Egypt intervened militarily to restore power to Numeiry, who had been overthrown by a communist-oriented conspiracy. More recently, in the context of the bilateral pact for mutual defense, Egypt intervened at the end of 1978 to oppose important Ethiopian incursions.<sup>(13)</sup> In January 1979 Sadat declared that "the borders of Sudan are those of Egypt and that any aggression against this country will be considered an aggression against Egypt."

This Egyptian military guarantee is not without contradictions in terms of Sudanese security. It in fact leads to certain difficulties in Sudan's internal politics which restore the insecurity which the guarantee would like to remove. The alliance with Egypt has become one of the major obstacles in the path to 'national reconciliation', a policy launched by Numeiry in 1977 to reintegrate the various political forces of the country which he himself had repressed, exiled and excluded from any sort of power, in order to give to Sudan a wider and more solid base of consensus. This 'national reconciliation' is viewed as a necessity not only to increase internal consensus but also because

the prevailing divisions in Sudanese political life intertwine with the numerous areas of instability along the borders of the country - the conflicts in Eritrea, Uganda, and Chad - and lead to interarab and international interferences which are highly destabilizing. Libya is the country which has most actively interfered in Sudanese political life trying to undermine the country's stability and in this way strike a blow at Egyptian security as well. 'National reconciliation', no less than the Egyptian guarantee, thus appears essential for Sudan's stability and security. However, as a condition for adhering to the reconciliation process, the opposition forces from the Umma to the Sudanese Communist party demand that Sudan break away from Egypt and unite with the other Arab countries opposed to President Sadat's peace policy. The reasons they have to oppose Egypt's alliance are actually much more varied : they go from the historical aversion of certain parties and regions to Egyptian hegemony, to the fear of the cultural and religious implications of too close a tie with Cairo (a fear felt above all in the southern provinces), to the Communists' hostility toward Sadat's blatantly pro-American and anti-Communist regime.

In 1979 and 1980 Numeiry took a number of steps aimed at relaunching the 'national reconciliation' policy and at improving relations with the neighboring countries. In 1979, without being anti-Egyptian, he publicly expressed criticism and scepticism over the Camp David peace process.<sup>(14)</sup> This permitted reconciliation with Saudi Arabia which substituted the oil supplies which Iraq had cut off. Successively, friendlier relations with Libya were also established by allowing Libyan troops to cross the southern provinces bordering on Uganda. In 1980 Sudan was reconciled with Iraq and Ethiopia in an as yet illdefined prospect of mediation in the Eritrean conflict. The alliance with Egypt has been played down but not broken. Sudan's overall policy is essentially low-profile.

Despite everything, the national reconciliation policy continues to mark time and its progress is aptly commented by the title of a recent article in Sudanow: "And the beat goes on".<sup>(15)</sup>

The overall result is that Sudan, unable to resolve these contradictions, is further weakened. Libya's Soviet-backed intervention in Chad is not only a serious international threat for Sudan, but also an internal threat, because of the interference it may permit Libya in its domestic political life. Moreover, Sudanese insecurity reflects negatively on Egyptian security. Thus, while circumstances dictate a reinforcement of the alliance between the two countries, this reinforcement destabilizes Sudan's internal political framework, weakening the country and ultimately diminishing rather than increasing both Egypt's and Sudan's security. Both countries, paying the price of a deterioration in the internal political situation, seem oriented toward strengthening their security ties in an essentially anti-Soviet key in an attempt to gain greater Western protection.

In this context, Africa might represent for Egypt not only an immediate threat, but also an opportunity to regain <sup>that</sup> regional leadership and <sup>that</sup> preferential relationship with the US, which <sup>it</sup> fears losing in the contest of the Palestinian question. Egypt, which has projected its power as far as Zaire, has for some time assigned itself an African mission aimed at contributing to the containment of Soviet expansion. The implementation of this design would be tantamount to a psychological removal of its own regional reality. On the other hand, an African mission would not exclude Egypt from any system designed to guarantee security in the Gulf. As a result, Egypt's leadership role would be similar to that played by imperial Iran: leadership without regional consensus, based exclusively on a preferential relationship with the US, involving formidable military strength but lacking in political ca-

capacity. This role might have a destabilizing effect on Egypt. It would also constitute a formidable obstacle to the overall solution of Middle East problems. Europe should be actively concerned about preventing this outcome. Sadat's recent trip to Paris and Strasbourg may be a hint. A European military guarantee with respect to Mediterranean and African security would be pertinent and would strengthen the working of its Middle East initiative.

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) July 17, 1978
- (2) Robert W. Tucker, "The Purposes of American Power", Foreign Affairs, vol. 59, n. 2, Winter 1980-81, p. 252.
- (3) Quoted in Jim Muir, "Third Islamic Summit Consolidates Emergence of Islamic Bloc", Middle East Economic Survey (MEES), vol. XXIV, n. 16, 2 February 1981, p. 2.
- (4) MEES, vol. XXIV, n. 3, 3 November 1980, p. 1.
- (5) MEES, vol. XXIV, n. 19, 23 February 1981, p. 6.
- (6) Robert W. Tucker, op. cit., p. 252 and 254
- (7) This threat has been highlighted among others by Ahmed Zaki Yamani, "The Impact of Oil on International Politics", MEES, vol. XXXIII, suppl. to n. 29, 5 May 1980.
- (8) Avi Plascov, A Palestinian State? Examining the Alternatives, IISS, Adelphi Papers, n. 163, London, Spring 1981, p. 40.
- (9) Hirsh Goodman, "Choice of dilemmas", The Jerusalem Post (Int. Ed.), 1043, October 26 - November 1, 1980, p. 12.
- (10) 7-3 March 1981, p. 33
- (11) Malcolm H. Kerr, "Reagan's Priorities", Middle East International, n. 144, 27 February 1981, p. 5-6
- (12) See recently John K. Cooley, "Evidence of Soviet Build up in Libya Points to Grave Military Threat to West", International Herald Tribune, March 13, 1981.
- (13) M. Wassef, "Vers l'intégration de l'Egypte et du Soudan?", Maghreb Machrek, n. 14, 1979, p. 12-13.
- (14) See interview to Mr. Numeiry in Newsweek, June 11, 1979.
- (15) February 1981, pp. 15-16.



iai	ISTITUTO AFFARI INTERNAZIONALI - ROMA
n° Inv. 5443	
BIBLIOTECA	