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MILITARY OPTIONS FOR THE SECURITY
OF THE SOUTHERN FLANK

by

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THE MEDITERRANEAN THEATER

The naval threat

Nato continues to call the Mediterranean area its "Southern Flank", just as it did in the 1950s when it could be quite rightly considered simply as the natural extension of the ground line of defense of the central European front, a line which extended along the northeastern border of Italy and the Greek-Turkish Thrace up to the eastern Turkish-Soviet border. At that time, the Mediterranean was an American lake and the predominance over the sea exercised by the Sixth Fleet was unchallenged. At that time, Algeria was still a French colony and France was still a member of the Atlantic Alliance's military organization. At that time, the pilots of the US Air Force squadrons stationed in Europe landed at the US base at Wheelus in Libya for their periodical gunnery training on Libyan ranges. Today, this definition of the Mediterranean area appears wholly inadequate. Over the past fifteen years the area has been transformed from a "flank" into a veritable theater of operations: the threat to the area has intensified quantitatively and qualitatively; its nature has become more diversified; and it might now come not only from the East, but also from the South.

Today, a strong Soviet fleet -- increased from 1,500 ship-days with an average of 5 units in 1964 to 17,000 ship-days with an average of 46 units in 1980 -- is stationed in the Mediterranean. Today, the Soviet Naval Aviation has deployed in its Crimean bases not only the old Tu-16 "Badger" bombers, but also the modern Tu-22M "Backfire" bombers equipped with

long-range AS-4 and AS-6 air-to-surface missiles. Today, Libya has a huge arsenal of sophisticated Soviet weaponry, whose quantity exceeds the country's defence requirements and whose quality exceeds its own armed forces' ability to use them. Today, Libya's Su-22 aircraft engage the Sixth Fleet's F-14 fighters in the skies over the Gulf of Sidra in an attempt to impose Tripoli's claim to sovereignty over those international waters. Today, Soviet military advisers, technicians and instructors are present in Algeria, Syria and Libya. Today, following signature of a friendship and collaboration treaty with the Soviet Union, Syrian and Soviet amphibious forces are conducting joint landing exercises on the Syrian coast.

The Soviet Fifth Escadra in the Mediterranean, supported by the Naval Aviation's bombers from the Crimea, is capable of contrasting the American Sixth Fleet militarily and of limiting it politically. In other words, it is capable of performing what I define as a "mission-denial mission", that is, a mission intended to make more difficult, if not impossible, the accomplishment of the typical missions of the Sixth Fleet. And in this context its political "value" is quite high, superior to its purely military worth.

The Soviet Union's capacity was very evident in October 1973, at the time of the Arab-Israeli conflict, when the Soviet Fleet reached a maximum of 96 ships with a "first-launch" potential (according to figures given by Adm. Elmo Zumwalt in his book On watch: a memoir) of 88 surface-to-surface missiles, 46 surface-to-air missiles and 348 torpedoes.

In the event of a conflict between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the Sixth Fleet would no longer be in a position to support,

right from the outbreak of hostilities, the defensive battles of NATO's ground forces, which would presumably be engaged along NATO-Warsaw Pact borders. The Alliance's naval forces will first have to neutralize the Soviet's aero-naval forces, win the battle at sea, and only then will the Sixth Fleet's carrier-based air force be able to intervene in support of the ground forces. In other words, as Adm. Crowe has pointed out: "no longer can NATO navies plan to devote their full effort to support of the land battle; sea control must be an initial priority for at least a major portion of their resources. Moreover, in collaboration with land-based aircraft, Alliance ships must combat long-range Soviet bombers, which are growing steadily in numbers, proficiency and range."

Indeed, the mission of power projection ashore, which no longer seems feasible in the initial stages of a conflict (when it is most necessary, especially if we consider NATO's weak geostrategic situation in the Greek-Turkish Thrace), may not even be feasible later if the sea battle seriously cripples the combat capacity of the Sixth Fleet's carriers.

I do not intend to speculate on the vulnerability of the aircraft carriers and on the survivability of the allied naval forces in the event of a surprise anti-ship missile attack by the Soviets, an attack based on an organic plan coordinating the missiles of the ships, those of the submarines and those of the Crimean-based bombers. I am aware of how difficult it would be to organize and carry out an attack involving such a high degree of coordination. I am also aware of the defensive capabilities of an alerted, combat-ready carrier task force; in other words, of the Sixth Fleet's capacity, in a situation

of rising tension, to control the activities and presumed intentions of the Soviet forces, frustrating the surprise factor of an eventual attack.

The traditional definition of the Soviet Mediterranean Fleet as a "one-shot Navy" is basically correct. However, even just that one shot could seriously cripple the NATO naval forces.

But even in time of peace or in the event of crises which are not a part of the confrontation between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean limits and conditions the range of political and military options open to the Americans and the possibility of using their naval forces to support foreign policy objectives.

It is obviously a reciprocal limitation in that the Soviet Union is in its turn conditioned by the presence of American military forces. Indeed, the Soviet Union is even more conditioned because of its limited capacity to operate effectively in the Mediterranean, both in political and military terms. For the Soviet Union the problems of evaluating and balancing its interests and the risks involved in pursuing them are more complex and difficult than for the United States.

I do not mean to say that the use of American force in the Mediterranean is no longer "technically" feasible. The United States have shown that they are not about to accept overly rigid conditions. In 1973, for instance, Nixon declared "Defense Condition 3", which put the entire American military apparatus on alert, as soon as the

prospect of Soviet airborne troops intervening in the Middle East loomed up. Actually, both the United States and the Soviet Union enjoy some latitude for use of military forces in peacetime in direct support of their respective foreign policies. It even seems that the two superpowers have reached a certain understanding as to the rules of the game, though it could not be defined as an agreed-upon and accepted code of conduct. In general, in situations in which their direct and vital interests are not at stake, the two superpowers tend to conserve the status-quo, for example, by preserving the political independence of a "client" state. The problem arises from the fact that the status-quo is defined in deeply contrasting terms. The West sees it in basically static terms. The Soviet Union sees it in dynamic terms, as change, as an advance toward a marxist structure in the societies of the Third World countries, which would allow it to widen its sphere of influence and control. This was particularly evident in the 1970s when Moscow adopted a more markedly interventionist foreign policy. Moreover, the Soviet Union interprets western attempts to oppose and curb such changes as attacks on the status-quo, as attempts on the part of the capitalist countries to change the status-quo to their own advantage.

The Mediterranean is an area where East-West and North-South interests meet and come into conflict; it is an area where tensions and open conflict abound; it is also an area which the Soviets have repeatedly attempted to penetrate. These characteristics, combined

with the developments mentioned above, make the management of eventual crises much more difficult and complex, thus increasing the risk of a local conflict in the Mediterranean flaring up into direct confrontation between the two super powers.

The air and ground threat

The picture sketched above is only a part of the mosaic of transformation which has taken place over the past few years in NATO's Southern Theater.

Other parts of the mosaic are the deployment in Western Russia of mobile SS-20 IRBM; the increased threat represented by the Su-24 "Fencer" aircraft assigned to the Soviet Frontal Aviation; the progressive strengthening of the military capabilities of those Warsaw Pact countries whose armed forces, because of their geographic position, would be engaged in the operations in the Mediterranean theater in the case of conflict.

The SS-20s (range over 4,500 Km., three MIRV with a yield of 150 Kt. each, estimated CEP 450-600 m.) are capable of covering the entire Mediterranean basin. Their precision makes them particularly suitable for selective attacks and as counter-force weapons for the destruction of NATO nuclear capable aircraft, which constitute, together with the "Poseidon" missiles earmarked to SACEUR and the carrier-based aircraft, the only long-range theater nuclear forces of the Alliance.

The installation of 108 "Pershing II" and 464 "cruise" missiles in Great Britain, West Germany, Holland, Belgium

and Italy would only partly fill the gap and re-establish a balance. Moreover, Belgium and Holland have expressed reserves and have not yet definitely decided to accept the missiles on their territory.

The strengthening of the flight line of the Su-24 "Fencers" in the Soviet Frontal Aviation (450 planes in 15 regiments, with an estimated 760 to be built by 1986/87) represents perhaps the most serious threat to Western Europe. Equipped with avionic systems on a par with those of Western aircraft (its navigation and weapon-aiming systems are comparable to those of the American F-111), armed with two 30 mm cannons and capable of carrying nuclear and conventional weapons (including air-to-surface missiles, laser-guided bombs, cluster bombs, runway cratering weapons), with a maximum bomb load of 8000 kg., the Su-24 has a radius of action, with a Lo-Lo-Lo flight profile, of up to 950 km. From the forward bases of East Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Bulgaria -- where they would probably be deployed in the event of conflict -- the "Fencers" are capable of hitting targets in Europe situated beyond Paris, anywhere in Italy, Greece, Turkey, central and eastern Mediterranean.

A third piece of the transformation mosaic is the strengthening of the Hungarian and Bulgarian armed forces. Though not of an exceptional nature, this buildup is of a certain military importance.

The Hungarian armed forces have been strengthened mainly by introducing the Soviet T-72 tank into the armored divisions, by supplying the ground forces with the

Mi-24 "Hind" D combat helicopter, and by substituting the air force's Mig-21s with Mig-23s. The Mig-23 is better suited to carry out the double role of air defense/ ground attack than was the Mig-21 which it replaces. The Hungarian air force's previously limited capacity of conducting interdiction and close air support missions has thus been greatly enhanced.

Modernization of the weaponry and equipment of the Soviet forces stationed in Hungary (two armored divisions, two motor-rifle divisions and an air force of some 250 combat aircraft) is obviously even more evident and is proceeding at a quicker pace.

Strengthening of the Bulgarian armed forces has been achieved mainly by supplying the ground forces with new equipment and weapons, including T-72 tanks and "Hind" D combat helicopters, by equipping the Navy with Mi-14 "Haze" ASW helicopters, and by replacing Mig-17s with Mig-23 "Flogger" Hs and Mig-21s with Mig-23 "Flogger" Bs. The fact that the Soviet Union supplied Bulgaria with Mig-23s before deploying them in the central European WP countries marked a break in the usual practice of placing the Southern tier air forces at the bottom of the list of priorities in modernization programs, even behind recipients in the Third World, and would seem to indicate greater attention on the part of the Soviets toward the Thrace region. Unconfirmed reports that the Soviet Union has begun storing military material in Bulgaria could be interpreted as a further proof of a shift in priorities. Moreover, the fact that the Bulgarians have been supplied with Mi-24 ASW helicopters makes full sense

only if they are to be used in the Aegean Sea area; that is, only if the Soviets view the Thrace and the Straits as a possible zone of conflict and object of conquest. Furthermore, in November 1978 the Soviets opened a ferry link on the Black Sea

connecting the Bulgarian port of Varna with the Soviet port of Ilichevsk near Odessa. From Varna, 54 railway lines can transport cargo throughout Bulgaria. The ferries, the world's largest, are eliminating delays of up to four weeks that were encountered in sending goods by train across Romania and could easily be adapted for military purposes. In fact, each ferryboat has space for 108 railroad freight cars or for flatcars holding some 150 Soviet T-62 tanks. And this makes the ferry link strategically significant.

Finally, both Hungary and Bulgaria have modernized their radar systems in terms of new and more advanced equipment as well as in terms of greater coverage, especially at low levels. Their air defense systems too have been strengthened, with the procurement of SA-6 and SA-9 missile systems. And their passive defenses have also been enhanced, with the hardening of facilities and the construction of more hangarages and shelters in their airports.

The political framework

Our description of the changes which have taken place in the Mediterranean theater would not be complete without at least a schematic analysis of the political factors affecting the area, including those not directly a part of the East-West confrontation. As already pointed out, the political context is characterized by numerous points of

instability and by increasingly evident geostrategic links between the Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf and between the Mediterranean and central Africa. The first link was evidenced by events in southwest Asia, from the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, to the Islamic revolution in Iran and the Iran-Iraq war. The second link was made apparent with Libya's expansionist drive to the south -- military intervention in Chad, whose repercussions were felt in Niger, Sudan, Nigeria and the Central African Republic -- and by Qadhafi's drive to unite in a single "anti-imperialist" front Libya, Syria, Ethiopia, and South Yemen and to win over to a revolutionary and "progressive" vision of their socio-political development the Gulf, the Horn of Africa, central Africa, and the sub-Sahara region.

Yugoslavia has so far managed to disprove the pessimistic forecasts of a traumatic post-Tito, characterized by centrifugal drives internally and by attempts at destabilization by outside powers. Recent events in Kosovo have, however, sounded a warning bell. It is not merely an issue of ethnic minorities and of greater political representation. It is a problem which aggravates Yugoslavia's difficult economic situation and which could seriously undermine the fabric of Yugoslav federal unity if the unrest of Kosovo were to spread to the some 500 thousand ethnic Albanians now living in Macedonia and Montenegro. Since Tito's death, Yugoslav trade with the Soviet Union has more than doubled, due mainly to an increase in Soviet oil deliveries. Trade with other Comecon countries has also increased. Last June, Deputy Premier Zvone Dragan

warned that Yugoslavia's independence and non-alignment could be jeopardized by a shift in trade of such magnitude.

Albania, after breaking off relations with China, is almost completely isolated from the international scene. But not even Hoxa's rigid and dictatorial regime can afford to choose isolation as its only foreign policy for much longer. The armed forces are already paying the price of this policy in terms of a drastic decline in efficiency. Lack of spare parts and technical assistance has immobilized much of Albania's weaponry, provided by the Soviets and the Chinese. Out of 70 T-34 tanks only 10 are in good working order, all three Whisky submarines are practically unusable, and only a few of 100 planes, including MiG-19/F-6s and Mig-21/F-7s, can be flown. This might push Tirana, albeit gradually and with great caution, to resume relations with its former suppliers or seek new ones, diversifying its military arsenal.

After six years of absence, Greece has returned to the Alliance's military organization, restoring the continuity of NATO's early warning and air defense system. Greater flexibility on the part of Turkey made Greece's re-entry possible. However, relations between the two countries are still tense and difficult. There have been signs of reconciliation, such as the reopening of air space over the Aegean Sea, followed by further measures to reduce restrictions. But the problem of Cyprus, the complex issues of the limits of their territorial waters, sovereignty over the Aegean continental shelf, exploration and development of underwater oil reserves still remain unresolved.

Besides the unresolved conflicts with Greece, Turkey is beset by a number of difficult problems: an economy in serious crisis; a dependence on foreign energy sources which weighs heavily on its balance of payments; the task of restoring democracy and escaping a return to the widespread terrorism and ungovernability of the past; the problem of keeping its foreign policy firmly anchored in the West, of faithfully respecting its NATO military commitments, while being a country with close ties to a changing Islamic world, a country whose geographic position, next to the Soviet Union and close to the Gulf, conditions it and makes it particularly vulnerable.

In the Middle East, Syria, in the wake of the Camp David peace accords and the Iran-Iraq war, has sought a way out of its international isolation, by forging closer military and political ties with the Soviet Union, with which it signed a friendship and cooperation treaty last year. For Damascus this meant not only a continuation of arms supplies, but also an implicit security guarantee. For the Soviet Union, these new ties with Syria gave it a foothold in the Middle East and a voice in any negotiations aimed at finding a global solution for the Mideast crisis, from which it had until now been more or less excluded.

The Israeli-Egyptian peace process has run into the shoal of the Palestinian question and not even the recent summit in Alexandria between Begin and Sadat managed to break the deadlock. Sadat is in a difficult position, beset by the need to achieve a number of often contradic-

tory goals. He has to justify his decision to realign Egypt and collaborate with the US by producing political results and socio-economic development. He would like to see Egypt resume its role as the leader of the Arab world, but this can be achieved only if a just and rapid

solution to the Palestinian issue is found. Sadat must also be aware of and keep under control the domestic situation and the growing political challenge posed by the Islamic fundamentalist movement. Time is working against Sadat, and the longer it takes to find a solution to the Palestinian problem, the harder will it be for him to maintain his political position, domestically and internationally.

Libya's foreign and military policies create further tensions in the Mediterranean. Among them: the role Tripoli allegedly plays in financing and supporting international terrorism; the systematic elimination of opponents to the regime living abroad; the attempts to destabilize nearby Tunisia, most recently by supporting the guerrillas who attacked the city of Gafsa in January 1980; the expansionist drive to the south, evidenced by its support of Amin in Uganda and its military intervention in Chad; its claims of sovereignty over the Gulf of Sidra; the extra-regional objectives of Qadhafi's policy, further confirmed by the friendship and "political, military and economic" cooperation treaty signed with Ethiopia and South Yemen, countries with ties with the USSR. Moreover, Libya possesses weapons (mostly made in the USSR) in quantity which exceeds its own defense requirements, and whose

technological sophistication (T-72 tanks, Tu-22 medium bombers, Mig-25, Mig-23/27, and Su-20/22 fighters, "Foxtrot" class submarines, "Wadi M'ragh" class corvettes, "La Combattante II" class fast attack craft armed with "Otomat" anti-ship missiles, "Frog-7" and "Scud" surface-to-surface missiles) exceeds its armed forces' capacity to use them to the fullest of their operational performance and to keep them in good efficiency. Therefore Soviet, North Korean, East German and Pakistani military advisers, technicians, instructors and pilots are present in Libya. The Mig-25 reconnaissance aircraft are reportedly piloted by Soviet crews.

In Tunisia there is the problem of what will happen when Burghiba dies, the problem of internal stability and continuity of leadership faced by all countries led for many years by a charismatic leader.

In the Maghreb, the problem of the ex-Spanish Sahara and of tense relations between Morocco and Algeria, which support the Polisarian Front's guerrilla activities, have yet to be resolved. The self-determination plan for the Saharoui population recently elaborated by the Committee of Seven of the OAU could be a first step toward the solution of the conflict. But there are still a number of problems to be resolved and the road to a solution may very well be longer and bumpier than expected.

Finally, in the western Mediterranean, there is tension between Morocco and Spain over Ceuta and Melilla and between Spain and Great Britain over Gibraltar. The latter, in particular, is an obstacle to Spain's entry into NATO.

The Alliance's response

From the above analysis, though sketched rapidly and schematically, emerge those elements of instability, tension and conflict mentioned earlier.

Moreover, an eventual crisis in the Gulf region would almost certainly have repercussions in the Mediterranean. If the Soviet Union should decide to intervene in the Gulf area, it would almost certainly use the Mediterranean as a diversion, rendering the West's response in the Gulf more difficult by putting political and military pressure on the Mediterranean. It follows that a strengthening of the West's defenses in the Mediterranean theater would also act as a deterrent against eventual Soviet initiatives in the Gulf. This is a further reason for paying greater attention to and placing higher priority on the enhancement of security in the Mediterranean, which can no longer be considered simply as NATO's "southern flank".

In the context of a reordering of priorities, the European Mediterranean countries would of course have a special role to play and could step in to replace the American presence. Events in southwest Asia have obliged the United States to reduce the Sixth Fleet, thus limiting its capacity to control the sea. The gap must be filled. And it is the European Mediterranean countries that will have to take on greater responsibility and a more trenchant role. This could be achieved at two levels.

The first level involves fuller operational and logistical integration of forces, in coordination with the United States. It involves those programs of reinforce-

ment of the Allies' military instruments which would enable the Mediterranean NATO countries to take on greater responsibility, thus making it easier for the United States to shift their military presence to other areas.

More suitable tools for managing crises in the Mediterranean area, especially extra-NATO crises, will also have to be developed. Europeans tend to view such crises as economic and political rather than security problems, while the Americans place them in the wider context of their worldwide interests and of the complex struggle for power and influence fought with the Soviet Union around the world. The United States and Europe must therefore achieve closer consultation on Mediterranean security issues, starting with compatible, if not shared, definitions of crisis situations and the possible responses. For particularly serious crises, the Allies should work out the essential elements of eventual diplomatic and military initiatives, deciding on and coordinating each country's role in the event of such crises. X

At the second level, more strictly European, France, Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey will have to come to realize the limits of a nationalistic Mediterranean policy aimed exclusively at defending their own interests and the futility of seeking to achieve a wide range of goals without possessing the effective capacity to reach them. They must also recognize the limits of developing their armed forces (especially their naval and air forces) independently and without coordination. These forces are designed to be projected into the Mediterranean in the

defense of what are essentially common interests. At this level too, it is therefore necessary to achieve closer coordination and consultation of the Allies' respective Mediterranean policies.

The Allies must also work toward a settlement of the disputes between Greece and Turkey. In order to effectively face the threat posed by increased international instability, the Alliance needs a solid structure, union of interests and responsibilities, and continuity of its defense perimeter. Thrace and the Turkish Straits are of vital importance to NATO and military cooperation between Greece and Turkey is decisive for their defense. It is all the more decisive in that the Greek and Turkish fronts in Thrace lack sufficient depth to permit maneuvers, making forward defense a necessity.

In recent years, the European countries have paid greater attention to the problems of Mediterranean security.

France (which since 1976 has kept the greater part of its naval force, including the two aircraft carriers Foch and Clemenceau, stationed at Toulon) is strengthening its ties with NATO; has decided to build more aircraft carriers which clearly would also be used in the Mediterranean; has sent warships to the Gulf of Gabes following the attack on the Tunisian city of Gafsa; has reinforced its presence in central Africa following Libya's incursion into Chad; has strengthened its ties with Algeria; has supplied Tunisia with arms and military equipment. West Germany has shown a special interest in Turkey, supplying weaponry and economic aid. Greece has cancelled the contract allowing repairs to the auxiliary ships of the Soviet Mediterranean Fleet on the Island of Syros. Great Britain has resumed its naval presence in the Mediterranean, though with deployments of a short duration. Italy

has signed an agreement to safeguard Malta's neutrality.

The European countries can do a lot to support and integrate, even substitute, the United States' policy and presence in the Mediterranean, which is often conditioned by their status as a superpower. They can also do a lot to reduce the Arab countries' dependence on Moscow, thus contrasting Soviet attempts at penetrating into the region.

But this is not enough. Efforts to deepen the Euro-Arab and Euro-African dialogues; active political mediation in crisis situations, contributions to regional stability through closer political and economic ties with the coastal countries, support of their industrial development and enhancement of their autonomous defense capacities by means of military supplies, training and technical assistance are all necessary and important initiatives. But they will be truly effective in the long run only if a wider-ranging and closely-coordinated Western policy is developed, whose objectives are shared and pursued by all members of the Alliance.

This may seem a fanciful and utopistic prospect, especially in view of Europe's present state. The alternative is to meet eventual crises unprepared, without having elaborated (even conceptually) the possible responses and without having at hand the political and military tools most suitable to face ~~them~~.

Militarily, the Mediterranean countries of the Atlantic Alliance could take a number of steps aimed at reinforcing the defenses of the Mediterranean theater.

- Strive for closer cooperation within the Independent European Program Group on ~~weapons~~ projects considered useful as instruments of a common military policy in the Mediterranean.

- Prepare the necessary technical support for the use in the Mediterranean of the AWACS planes, which will soon be delivered to NATO, and for the rapid elaboration and utilization of the data collected.

- Strengthen the radar system, especially for detection at low and very low altitudes, and reinforce the defenses of major targets.

- Enhance the capacities of the land-based air forces, which could play an especially important role in a closed sea such as the Mediterranean. The Turkish air defense system, in particular, could function as a screening barrier for aircraft from southern Russia and this would ease the task of carrying out naval operations in the eastern Mediterranean.

- Increase the air forces' rapid reaction and survival capacities by hardening their bases and improving their capacity to rapidly repair damaged runways.

- Strengthen the naval forces' anti-submarine and mine warfare capabilities.

- Transform the NATO "on-call" naval force of the Mediterranean (NAVOCFORMED) into a standing naval force (STANAVFORMED) similar to the one of the Atlantic. With the participation of French and Spanish contingents, such a force could eventually become the core of a truly "European" military presence in the Mediterranean.

- Create intervention forces which could be used both to defend specific national interests and to integrate the American Rapid Deployment Force in the event of a crisis.

Italy's role

Because of its geographical position, its ties with both central and southern European countries, its relations with the Arab and African worlds, its history and traditions, Italy is perhaps the country most suited to play a geostrategically and geopolitically important role as a bridge between North and South.

It could therefore become the privileged center for the consultation and coordination processes deemed necessary to effectively cope with the problems of the Mediterranean area.

A number of initiatives taken by Italy show that it is at least partly aware of its particular position and of the greater responsibilities imposed on it by the new international situation and the increased instability of the Mediterranean theater. Italy has taken steps to encourage a reconciliation between Greece and Turkey. It has committed itself to safeguarding Malta's neutrality and has signed a treaty for economic, technical and military assistance to the island. It is elaborating a new military policy which places more emphasis on defending the Mediterranean theater. Italy's Navy has taken over some of the tasks previously carried out by the Sixth Fleet and has also been willing to operate outside its assigned areas of gravitation.

But there is room for other initiatives. Politically, Italy could act as a front-line promoter of more frequent consultations and closer cooperation among the European countries most interested in what happens in the Mediterranean. Its efforts should be directed to stimulating a serious exchange of views as to the security problems of the area, greater coordination of the Allies' programs of economic and military aid to friendly countries, as well as standardization and integration of the Allied countries' military instruments earmarked for use in the Mediterranean theater.

In the military field, too, further initiatives could be taken. Italy's programs for the modernization of its armed forces will have to take account of the new threats which have emerged in the Mediterranean area. The air, missile and naval threats, especially the first, have increased quantitatively and qualitatively, have become preeminent with respect to the ground threat, are more diversified and have assumed more markedly "offensive" characteristics.

Another factor which must be taken into consideration is that the Mediterranean is essentially a closed sea with a number of choke points, where survivability of large ships has become more difficult.

Finally, there is the possibility of an air or naval threat originating from the context of a Mediterranean crisis, involving pre-eminently national interests.

Without overlooking the requirements of the ground forces, the Italian military programs should keep these factors in mind when developing their capacity to effectively respond in crisis situations.

The procurement programs of the naval forces should concentrate less on large "Garibaldi" class through-deck cruisers (and the idea of transforming them into aircraft carriers for VTOLs) and more on fast units with enhanced ASW capabilities and anti-ship missile weaponry, more effective mine-countermine forces, and a larger number of auxiliary units which would make it possible to operate outside the present areas of responsibility.

The air force should direct its efforts to: modernizing its interceptors squadrons and its entire air defense system; utilizing the airports of Lampedusa and Pantelleria, in order to move the line of defense and attack against air and naval threats further south thus expanding the air coverage of the Mediterranean and enhancing sea control; training the pilots of fighter-bomber squadrons for support of naval operations; procuring adequate stocks of war material, especially weaponry with specific anti-aircraft and anti-ship characteristics (for example, Kormoran, Harpoon or Otomat air-to-surface missiles); supplying the Maritime Patrol forces with anti-ship stand-off capability; and improving command, control and communication systems.

Conclusions

It is evident that the Mediterranean can no longer be considered simply as a "flank", an extension of the central and northern European fronts. The area may be the soft underbelly of Europe and the weakest political and military link of the NATO front. But little has been done to seriously analyze the causes of and find solutions to the problem. Until now, the Alliance has limited itself to reacting, often in a confused and uncoordinated way, only when crises have actually flared up.

Today, especially in view of crises which might occur in the Persian Gulf and in northern and central Africa, such scarce attention is no longer acceptable. The risk has grown and the persistence of elements of crisis and tension creates areas of dangerous instability. And it is no longer only a matter of military threats or tensions in the framework of the East-West confrontation. Hence, efforts aimed exclusively at maintaining the East-West regional military balance, though indispensable, are no longer sufficient.

The European countries of the Alliance, especially those on the Mediterranean, could play an important role as mediators, stabilizing the area, defusing eventual crises and thwarting Soviet expansionism, by establishing closer diplomatic ties and wider economic exchanges and by increasing development aid and technical and military assistance to friendly countries. Such initiatives will be truly effective, however, only if accompanied by measures aimed at strengthening and improving the Alliance's capacity to respond militarily if the need arises.

This capacity should be developed within the framework of a specific Mediterranean policy, whose aims are clearly set out and unanimously agreed on and whose elements are closely coordinated. The security problems of the Mediterranean must in fact be tackled in an organic and unitary form.

In this context, Italy should work to promote the kind of consultations and coordination among the Allied Mediterranean countries necessary to effectively defend the area's security.

From the military point of view, solutions to the problem of giving force and credibility to the Alliance's strategy in the Mediterranean, even in a long-term prospect, can be found. The real problem is that of establishing a solid political base which lends purpose and direction to military force. Such a base can be developed only if the Europeans show a greater sense of responsibility and firmer commitment.

Many - for lack of courage, will, foresight and imagination - will be tempted to leave things as they are, satisfied with reacting to crises only when they actually occur.

But the inability to make choices at the moment when they are necessary has always meant having to pay a higher economic, political, and military price in the long run.

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