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GREECE, ITALY AND TURKEY: FACING NEW THREATS  
IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

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Changes in the Eastern Mediterranean picture

The decline of the Ottoman Empire initiated a period of unrest in the Eastern Mediterranean, as well as in other parts of its territory, which since then has never stopped. On the other hand, decolonization in that region did not turn out to be less difficult than elsewhere. Arab nationalism, first, and then the emergence of Sionism and the creation of the State of Israel, after the Second World War, have brought about one of the most complicated and dangerous conflicts of present international relations. After the Second Arab-Israeli War in 1956, the United States has replaced the British and other European powers, especially in the Eastern Mediterranean basin. US security requirements within the frame of East-West confrontation in the Middle Eastern area and the emergence of a special US-Israel relationship coalesced very early in preventing the United States from establishing a policy of steady cooperation with the Arab nations. After the Third Arab-Israeli War in 1967, an important group of Arab States opted for a new strategy of close alliance with the United States, in order to obtain from Israel the settlement which had proved unattainable on the battlefield. This new policy has brought about peace between Israel and Egypt, the most important event in the Middle East since the establishment of the Israeli State. It has failed, however, to provide a solution for the Palestinian issue as well, and this on at least two good occasions: first within the frame of the autonomy negotiations issued from the Camp David Agreements, and secondly when the so called "Reagan Plan" was put forward but never followed up. This failure has prevented peace from becoming a more comprehensive and stable arrangement in the region. Today, many important Arab States are allied with the United States bilaterally and on the whole the United States can be considered the most influential of the two Superpowers in the region. However, the failure of the United States to come to terms with the Palestinian issue and related Arab expectations has been tremendously resented by the Arab people. They often consider the United States as being mainly responsible for their frustrations and lack of success and therefore as their main enemy. This fact has opened the way to the influence of Islamic nationalism blowing from Teheran and is putting the moderate Arab regimes in grave danger. As a consequence of these developments the United States and the Western Alliance are dealing with Arab allies that are as numerous as they are weak and with a region which is as strategically important as it is politically unstable.

It must be pointed out, however, that presently the Palestinian issue is playing a role in the region which is not of primary importance, in the sense that its eventual solution would no longer be sufficient to bring stability and peace in the Eastern Mediterranean. This is because events in the surrounding regions at the end of the seventies have changed security perceptions more than is usually understood.

As is well known, it has been the chain of new crises in Eastern Africa and in Central Asia at the end of the seventies that has caused this change in security perceptions, both from the point of view of the global and regional powers. In Eastern Africa the defeat of the Arab coalition in the Ogaden war between Somalia and Ethiopia had strengthened the presence and influence of the Soviet Union in the region. On the other hand, in Central Asia the unexpected collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and the violent anti-American and anti-Western attitudes assumed by the Iranian revolutionary regime with the painful sequence of the seizure of the American hostages, all contributed towards the creation of a deep feeling of insecurity and change in all the actors involved in the Eastern Mediterranean scenario.

The process of change in security perceptions related to the Eastern Mediterranean is probably still in progress. In a number of respects mistaken policies have been drawn from such a process. I will first consider changes in security perceptions and then proceed to evaluate policies.

#### New security perceptions

From the point of view of the Western countries threat perceptions related to the region have changed mainly for three reasons.

First, new kinds of threats are emerging within the region. What is new in these threats is the fact that they seem to act independently from any East-West background and at the same time appear to be consciously directed against the West. Before the end of the seventies the Eastern Mediterranean countries could threaten the Western countries by supporting the Soviet Union against the Southern flank of the Atlantic Alliance. It was therefore only an indirect threat related to the East-West dimension. Today there are forces and powers in the Eastern Mediterranean which appear willing to have a direct confrontation with the Western countries. Furthermore, they are apparently looking for such a confrontation because of autonomous motives of hostility and not because they would like to take advantage of the Superpowers' competition. Quite reasonably, this is considered by the Western powers as a threat which may be more or less effective but which, in any case, is new and adds to the old, traditional Soviet and/or East-West threats.

Second, these new threats against the Western countries are also directed against their allies in the region, that is the moderate Arab States. The assassination of Sadat, although committed by a national opponent, was correctly perceived as a blow to the Western coalition in its widest expression, that is including the Third World's allies to the West. Consequently, the new threat which is emerging in the Eastern Mediterranean, as

a threat to the West in its most comprehensive notion, must be considered as an enlarged threat, not different in its nature from the Soviet one, though certainly much less effective than the latter.

Third, despite the fact that in principle this enlarged threat is not linked to the USSR and the East-West dimension, it could easily combine with both of them and become more dangerous than the well known alignments of Third World countries with the Soviet Union and its allies in order to make their national goals more attainable.

In a parallel move the threat perception of the moderate Arab countries of the region has also undergone a change. This change has presumably been even more sweeping than that of the Western countries. Here again one can point out three motives for this change.

First, the Iranian revolution, besides the role it has assumed internationally, has emerged as a fearful threat to the stability of almost all the Arab regimes. To put it very briefly, this is due to the fact that the brand of nationalism adopted by Iran's shi'ite revolution is radically different from other forms of nationalism in the region. Despite the secular or religious character of their constitutions, and regardless of the competitive or cooperative attitude they may adopt towards Western countries, modern states in the Eastern Mediterranean take part into the international system with the aim of becoming integrated in it. They try to assert themselves as nations, but they do so by adopting Western success indicators. As assertive as any other brand of nationalism, Islamic -or Shi'ite- nationalism is by contrast entirely antagonistic towards the West and towards the leadership the latter maintains on the international system. It is because of this basically antagonistic character that Islamic nationalism constitutes the core of the new kind of threat the Western countries are perceiving in the Eastern Mediterranean. Furthermore, because of its antagonistic character, it is considered by the West to be a more evasive threat than that coming from traditional Middle Eastern nationalism. Finally, its basic hostility to the Western culture involves in its deadly hostility, all secular as well as religious regimes of the region so long as these regimes are committed to modernization along Western paths.

This Islamic antagonism is active in its character. As is well known, an important segment of the Iranian revolutionary leadership is convinced that to export Islamic nationalism is part of the revolutionary duties and acts accordingly. As a matter of fact, Iran is less effectively equipped to export its revolution than is usually believed. However, the important point is that, even if Iran were not willing nor sufficiently equipped to export revolution, the people in the region are in any case ready to receive its revolutionary message and it is here that the threat to regimes' stability principally lies. In many Eastern Mediterranean countries, regimes have often failed to deliver true modernization, political democracy, international prestige and more acceptable conditions of life. For this reason people are getting frustrated, rebuffing Westernization and looking towards Islam as the sound basis for implementing their expectations. Islamic nationalism as an ideology is no less dangerous to the stability of the Arab allies than a real war.

Second, as a consequence of the spreading of Islamic nationalism in the region, Arab regimes' perceptions of security in relation to their alliances with Western countries have also changed. Since Islamic nationalism

deadly opposes Arab regimes on the grounds of their "unfaithful" alliance with the West, a condition for their security and stability presently lies in keeping more or less aloof from Western alliances. This has not brought about a break with Western alliances, but in many cases, especially with the Arab Gulf countries, they have been downgraded. In conclusion, after being a factor of security for many Eastern Mediterranean countries Western alliances are becoming more and more a factor of insecurity.

Third, it must be pointed out that the rearrangement of security priorities has gone even beyond that. Islamic nationalism has also changed security perceptions related to Israel and the East-West dimension. Today, these threats are much less important for the Eastern Mediterranean countries than Islamic nationalism itself. By the way this has also contributed to the downgrading of Western alliances. Security extended by the alliances with the United States and other Western countries used to be based on two grounds: first, it was a protection against the Israeli threat (in the sense that the United States would never permit Israel to go too far in case of war with the Arab allies); secondly, it was a form of protection against Soviet and related Communist domestic threats. Since today these are no longer the most important threats, Western alliances appear to be less helpful than in the past. More generally, from the point of view of the Eastern Mediterranean countries, there is a bad correlation between threats and the Western attitude to countering them. In particular, Western and Arab patterns of security perceptions in relation to the Soviet Union seem to diverge seriously.

#### Western policies towards the Eastern Mediterranean

In the Western countries this new set of security perceptions related to the regions ranging from the Eastern Mediterranean to Central Asia and different African areas (more or less what Brzezinski had named "arc of crises"), has given rise to the debate on the Out-of-NATO area operations and to a number of multilateral and bilateral interventions, such as that of the two Interposition Forces in Lebanon, the French presence in Chad, the mission of the mine-sweepers in the Red Sea, etc. Perhaps more intensely, it has given rise to the Western debate on what has been called "international" terrorism and to a considerable body of policies and inter-State security cooperation agreements destined to counter terrorist operations and their networks. These policies have proved far from being successful. The most important operation, the one in Lebanon, failed ignominiously, not only because the Western allied forces were obliged to withdraw under the pressure of the Islamic nationalists but also because at the end of the mission nobody could explain its rationale and its goals on the grounds of a consistent Middle Eastern policy. Today, while the Palestinian issue remains unsolved despite the emergence of favourable conditions during 1985, both Arab and European allies are subjected to terrorism and in the Eastern Mediterranean countries, instability and violence continue to prevail hopelessly. One has to argue that Western policies are somewhat mistaken.

The sequence of policies pursued by the Western countries, particularly by the United States, can be described as follows. First, the combination of events in Afghanistan and Iran, within the debate on the decline of the American power which characterized Carter's presidency, was interpreted

in the United States as a new threat to the East-West dimension. As a consequence the United States were driven to emphasize global security requirements in the area, to call for the ranks of the existing alliances against Soviet penetration to be closed and to urge for the enhancement of their direct military presence. Second, while the Americans were calling for a "strategic consensus" against the Soviet Union, the Eastern Mediterranean allies were moving in the opposite direction because of the priority they assigned to emerging regional threats. After the confused and contradictory interlude of the "Reagan Plan" and the intervention in Lebanon, the third stage is represented by the emphasis suddenly placed on "international" terrorism and the role of Libya. It is not very clear whether the American Administration identifies terrorism as a global or regional threat. Generally speaking, the United States conclusion seems to be that terrorism is putting its international presence in danger. In this sense terrorism is seen as a factor having an impact on the global level and hence requiring global rather than regional responses. In other words, despite the fact that in the Eastern Mediterranean one can note a shift in the American threat perception from the USSR to "international terrorism", the fact remains that the region is subjected to global threats.

There are two main errors in this set of policies. First, the Western countries cannot continue to neglect the fundamental divergence in threat preceptions between themselves and their regional allies. Too close a relationship with the West and its strategic interests has the effect of exposing moderate Arab regimes to Islamic nationalism, domestically and abroad. Insisting on giving our Arab allies what they are obliged to consider today as "deadly kisses" is a policy of destabilization.

Second, the Western countries must give a more realistic analysis of terrorism. Identifying terrorism as a global threat and qualifying it as an "international" factor is an arbitrary intellectual unification of events that are similar in their outward manifestation but prompted by very different causes. It amounts to defining terrorism as an actor, more or less like the USSR or Communism, whereas it is a state of affairs. Such a simplification prevents Western countries from becoming aware of causes and intervening on them with adequate policies. What is important today is the consciousness that the crucial source of terrorism is to be found in the spreading of Islamic nationalism from Teheran. Despite the existence of more or less old varieties of terrorism related to different political crises and entities, it is the upsurge of Islamism and its brand of nationalism which is fuelling terrorism today, domestically and internationally. The core of present terrorism, wherever it comes from, lies within the powerful ideological frame provided by Teheran. This is not to say that Teheran is directly responsible for all the acts of terrorism around the Mediterranean. However, the Islamic nationalism preached by Teheran is the factor which catalyses regional frustration and translates it into action. In this sense, Islamic nationalism is the factor which unifies events as different as the Palestinian struggle, state incentives to terrorism and Hezbollah's terrorism in Lebanon. As a consequence, the threat should be linked rather to Islamic nationalism than to terrorism.

In conclusion, the military struggle presently waged by the United States and the Western countries against terrorism, such as that against Libya, is not helpful. Terrorism is the wrong target: it is like the shadow on the

wall of the Platonian myth of the cavern. There are political roots to terrorism and this is the issue that the West must address. Islamic nationalism is today the most important political factor for the continued unrest in the Eastern Mediterranean, though poor economic management and absence of democracies are certainly no less responsible for what is happening there. What is needed is a regional policy towards Iran, Islamic nationalism and the Middle East with its diverse crises, with the aim of dealing with the political roots of terrorism, unrest and frustration. Western countries are simply lacking this policy.

#### Greece, Italy and Turkey: contributing to Western interests

However, if one considers Western policies towards Eastern Mediterranean countries more closely, there are differences between the United States and the European countries which cannot go unnoticed. First, European countries are fully aware of the importance of local security perceptions and maybe they realize better than the Americans the links between Islamic nationalism, Arab stability and their domestic Islamic opposition. Second, the European evaluation of terrorism is definitely more cautious and differentiated than that of the United States' Administration.

These different European perceptions have not found their outlet, however. The European allies have responded consistently and substantially to the American call for participation in the Out-of-NATO operations, from Sinai to Lebanon and the Red Sea. Their participation, however, has been politically passive. Influence gained by the Europeans thanks to their participation into Out-of-NATO operations has remained unexploited. Any attempt to present and discuss a European point of view within the Alliance, as different as it may be, is still lacking. This is mainly due to the Europe's inability to get coordinated within their own institutions or "clubs", in the European Communities as well as in the NATO. Criticisms coming up from European different perceptions, as well-founded as they may be, have never been translated into a European posture. The same is true for terrorism. In this case, too, security cooperation has been more or less activated among the various members of the Alliance but almost all the European governments do not share the American analysis of terrorism as an "international" actor. Nevertheless they have given up any attempt to coordinate their point of view within Western institutions and convince the United States to come to terms with Middle Eastern realities, as the Europeans perceive them.

Us presence in the Eastern Mediterranean continues to be of the utmost importance for the Western allies. The dangers of Soviet penetration into the Gulf area and the Eastern Mediterranean feared by the USA and the Western countries after Afghanistan's invasion may have proved exaggerated. The true danger of instability today is the penetration of Islamic nationalism. This instability, however, is also a grave danger for the stability of the East-West relationship and for the interests of the Western countries, particularly the Europeans countries. As a consequence, the stabilization of the moderate Arab regimes and a policy aimed at supporting a moderate evolution inside the Iranian leadership are vital goals and a coordinated European contribution in this sense appears to be crucial. Europeans cannot keep on complaining about American policies and at the same time abstain from proposing any feasible, coordinated policy of their own.

Greece, Italy and Turkey, as countries which face the Eastern Mediterranean basin, may play a special role within the Alliance in order to contribute to the development of stabilization policies in the Middle East. The three countries are on the way to signing security agreements against terrorism. However, the most important link among them seems to be the fact that their perceptions in the face of the new threats emerging within the region are closer than perceptions prevailing in other European countries. Similarities in analysis and perceptions should favour cooperation between Greece, Italy and Turkey in policy making.

This cooperation should be devoted to preparing and presenting policies in the Western and European institutions. Sometimes the emergence of a Southern European point of view within these institutions has given way to divisions among Western and European partners. This has been particularly true within the European Political Cooperation, where often there is no search for shared policies but crude statements of immutable national postures. In order to become acceptable, Southern European points of view must be prepared as cooperative policies. This requires in turn a special cooperation among Southern European countries and , as far as the Eastern Mediterranean countries are concerned, among Greece, Italy and Turkey.

The three countries may be able to develop a set of cooperative relations in fields as different as culture, trade, security, etc. Their involvement in the European Communities, though presently with different statuses, is definitely an instrument of the utmost importance in order to increase relations with the Eastern Mediterranean countries. What is important is not so much the fact that, because of their geographical proximity and the opportunities offered by the European Communities, these relations will probably be more important than those eventually developed by other countries. The important point is that these relations, as important as they may be, would not have the same destabilizing effect today that the American presence is having on Middle Eastern people under the effect of Islamic pressure. For an irony of our history, between the "great satan" and the "little satan", former European colonial powers are perhaps somewhat despised for their weakness but more acceptable to former subjected people.

Another important aspect of the cooperation between Greece, Italy and Turkey may be found on military grounds. Exercises such as that of 1979 should become routine cooperation, because if these countries are willing to successfully propose policies of Mediterranean stabilization to their allies, they must be prepared to intervene in Out-of-NATO area operations. It is perhaps more important that their capacity should act as a deterrent and as an assurance in relation to the Eastern Mediterranean countries' different perceptions.

A special problem is Turkey's "front-line" position. This country has multiplied its cultural and economic relations with the Islamic countries in the last years. Greece and Italy have also enlarged their relations with the Arab countries within the Mediterranean. The tightening of relations with the Islamic world is definitely an important aspect of the stabilization policy which has been advocated in this paper. However, in the case of Turkey, this may pose some problems of domestic stability. The Turkish government is

certainly fully able to face any threat coming from Islamic integralism and associated nationalism. However, its continued cooperation with the Western institution and its deeper integration in them may be an important element for a more effective policy towards the stabilization of the Eastern Mediterranean.



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