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EUROPE, THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

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1. In view of the two main knots of the seemingly hopelessly tangled web of the area - the Israeli/Palestinian issue and the Gulf war - an old geographical distinction may be resumed between the Near East (with a North African appendix) and the Middle East.

Both actually have relevance to the Mediterranean stability as a consequence of : 1) their mutual links in geostrategic terms, 2) the traffic of oil and natural gas, and lately 3) the international terrorism issue. In addition, there is a degree of interprobability of the US military forces so that the capabilities in the Mediterranean can be redeployed in, or near the Gulf and viceversa. Similar choices confront the European countries as they have limited military capabilities. Finally, security problems stemming from both the Near and the Middle East that are relevant to the Atlantic Alliance have now steadily come under the "out-of-area" label; actually, they are out-of-area problems par excellence.

So why bother to make distinction? A few reasons exist: 1) there is a war between Iran and Iraq and not (at the moment of writing) in the Near East (though there is no peace either); 2) while in both regions the dominant ethnic group is Arab, the critical country is Israel for one and Iran for the other: the fate of the two countries may not be the same; 3) (more relevant to this Committee) the European interests and capabilities to influence solutions are not the same in the Near and the Middle East.

2. The decline of the European international role throughout the postwar period has been evident and important in the entire area. Actually, there is no other area in the world where it has been as evident and as important. It has not taken place along a steady pattern, rather in steps, with accelerations, crises and temporary returns.

That role has been lost to local actors of different orientations, to the United States and, only marginally, to the Soviet Union. Insofar as there exist "Western" interests, they may have not lost much ground. The trouble is that approaches to protect those interests are often different, sometimes straitforwardly divergent. There is no easy way, nor is there much political will to coordinate national policies. Differences exist in particular between the European policies on one side and the United States' policies on the other. Probably, again there is no other area in the world where these differences are as evident and as important.

Three factors are commonly cited as dominant in those differences: 1) according to most Europeans the crises of the area, particularly those in the Near East, are to be seen and treated as regional problems that must receive regional solutions, while the prevailing American point of view is that they are part of the global East-West geopolitical confrontation; 2) while support for the existence and the security of Israel comes from both the Old and the New Continent, the former is a mix of policy and moral debt - at times an ambiguous mix - and the latter has increasingly taken the form of an allegiance which a powerful lobby makes sure to translate into effective policy actions (or inhibitions); 3) Europe is a thirsty energy importer and has been highly dependent on Near and Middle East oil and gas, while the United States could do without it (but has not without it).

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3. The energy dependence factor has been deliberately listed last as the least important. The political consequences for Europe of such dependence have often been exaggerated. Despite its temporary popularity, the "oil weapon" has failed to demonstrate its efficacy. During the seven years when such a weapon should have reached the peak of its deadliness (1973 to 1980), the West - North America and Europe - was not strangled nor kicked-out of the area. On the contrary, those years witnessed events like Henry Kissinger's shuttle diplomacy - and consequent ousting of Moscow -, Anwar Sadat's visit to Jerusalem - defying the "oil lords" - to end up with the all-Western debate on which approach was preferable, the Camp David approach - the highest point in the US capability as the dominant mediator - or the Venice Declaration approach - the highest point for Europe to "speak with one voice" in this area of the world.

These two approaches were not incompatible, but the Europeans did not succeed in getting this compatibility point through in Washington and consequently saw their positions losing weight irreparably. The continued however to be fairly active, although with a decreasing degree of coordination among themselves, cooperation on terrorism possible being an exception. Contingents of different size and relevance from West European countries joined the multinational interposition force in the Sinai, the UNIFIL in Southern Lebanon and the peacekeeping force in Beirut. Ships were sent to the Red Sea for minesweeping purposes.

The propensity or at least availability for military presence is confirmed by a number of other examples, including the French role in Chad. As it is known, some of these operations were successful, some were not and some are still under way.

4. Meanwhile, terrorist actions have become a regular feature of the Near and Middle Eastern scene. Seizure of hostages of any kind (diplomatic personnel, journalists, residents), hijacking of civilian planes - in one case of a ship -, indiscriminate killings of people with time-triggered bombs, have all multiplied over the years. The Western countries have been not the sole target of these actions but by far the most frequent and preferred one. Without going into the nature and the origins of the terrorist phenomenon, which is beyond the scope of this paper, it is appropriate to underline the consequences terrorism has had on the policies of the different European countries and on the relationship of those policies with that of the United States .

Three aspects characterize the European approaches to terrorism in the initial phase: 1) deal with the problem separately, trying to take advantage of specific bilateral situations; 2) take the Palestinian issue into consideration as an important basic root of the phenomenon; 3) avoid that the response to terrorism dictate your policies in the area. The first approach was flawed by the fact that terrorism is transnational in goals and actions. As a result the Europeans have gradually worked out cooperative instruments among themselves and with the United States in various ad hoc or existing frameworks, including the Summit of the Seven, which involves also Japan and Canada. Such cooperation has been of utmost importance not only to take preemptive and punitive actions against terrorists, but also to exert effective pressure on those states which are protecting and/or using terrorism for their own purposes.

Taking into account socio-political motives of terrorism as part of the policy has also been corrected to a large extent for three reasons: 1) terrorist actions were often taking place when even slight prospects of agreement were at the horizon; 2) it was becoming evident that the Palestinian issue was instrumental for a number of factions or governments to carry out or

to encourage terrorist actions separate from, or even detrimental for the Palestinian cause; 3) new terrorist groups - the Islamic fundamentalists - were being added to the old Palestinian one and have now become dominant.

The majority of the European governments still hold on to their view that the struggle against terrorism, however sacrosanct, should not come to dictate policies in the area - with London possibly making the exception. The two main reasons for the Craxi government to diverge from the Reagan administration during the Achille Lauro-Sigonella crisis were reliance on Arafat for mediation and desire not to spoil the special relations established with Mubarak. At least the second reason stands valid under scrutiny two years later.

Despite national and international intense activity (all governments have commissioned studies, set up special diplomatic and intelligence units and trained military task forces) terrorist actions continue. The reason is that terrorism seems to pay. Of the three types listed above, bombing, hijacking and hostage taking, particularly the latter does create formidable constraints for the country held hostage as well as flaws into policy consistency - insofar as covert action and secret negotiations are outside international cooperative frameworks and even appropriate domestic machineries, thus generating suspicion and distrust between and within Western states. Apparently no democratic government can afford to simply ignore the fate of the hostage(s) and, statements of no negotiations notwithstanding, will find it hard to resist temptation to earn the popularity deriving from citizens safely brought home at the minimum known cost.

5. It appears as if the Near and Middle East affairs irresistibly invited policies characterized by cunning and devious or covert actions and continued to do so, despite the undisputable fact that the very seldom have such policies been rewarding. An analysis of responses to terrorism provides a long list of known examples and it is reasonable to assume that the list of covert dealings or attempts to deal is even longer. The Italian case shows that in the mix of "fermezza" and negotiations that inevitably characterize any treatment of this tricky matter the former has prevailed when dealing with domestic terrorism and the latter when dealing with international terrorism.

There are examples also outside the terrorist issue. The 1984 Crete meeting with Mohammad Qaddafi under the auspices of Andreas Papandreu to come to an agreement of parallel military withdrawal from Chad represents one of the shadows of the François Mitterand presidency. Of course now the most outstanding case of backfiring policy of the kind has been the Irangate affair, which, even if considered without its contras appendix, has to do only in part with trying to free the hostages.

6. So far this paper has spoken of "European" policies and interests as they converge or diverge with those of the US. Actually, only to a limited extent do they describe the national policies and interests. Looking at the latter, France comes naturally first as the European country most active in the area. Paris has had special relations with Iraq, Tunisia and Algeria; it has a military stronghold in Djibouti, on the Red Sea, and has military counselors in Chad. It also used to have special relations with Lebanon and has suffered most from Lebanon's near annihilation. Thus the withdrawal from Beirut first of the French military contingent and later of the counselors has to be viewed as a major turning-point. Together with the status of preferred target for international terrorist actions, it marks the end of a period that started with the special treatment awarded to France during the 1973-74 oil embargo. The widespread view that attributes to the Israeli problem (on which France has

often been ambiguous) and to the divergencies with the US most of these difficulties, is contradicted by the limited success of the French policies in Northern Africa.

Because of the past colonial heritage and cultural rayonnement and because of the insistent seeking of a special position, France's more active role in the area did not generally translate into leadership of the European Community. As a consequence of this state of affairs and of the recent agonising guerre des ambassades, the French government is increasingly given - domestically and internationally - the suggestion to take a low profile as far as its Near and Middle East policy is concerned.

7. Recent continuing British disentanglement from the area has been more cautious, deliberate and consistent than that of the French. Periodic diplomatic actions (which eventually brought Margaret Thatcher to visit Egypt and Jordan in 1985), do not conceal a general prudence that is meant both to keep fingers off the dangerous plays, while not remaining totally excluded from them, and to avoid differences with the US while not being entirely identified with it. Britain's participation in peacekeeping forces from the Sinai to Beirut has been at the lowest possible level, preferably only symbolic. Still today, despite the ditto "no involvement East of Suez", a small number of Her Majesty's Navy units cruise outside the Gulf - again rather symbolic.

Britain has been victim of terrorist actions to a limited extent. Whether this fact has any consequential link with the Prime Minister's unsurprising preference for tough stands and dislike for devious policies is doubtful. London broke diplomatic relations with Libya and Syria but the former decision came a consequence of an event that has to do little with terrorism and the latter as a consequence as a missed terrorist attack targeted more at Israel than at Britain. (One may note en passant that the Italian embassy in Tripoli is kept pretty busy in looking after the many remaining British citizens and interests perhaps even more than for its own concerns).

It may even be said that the United Kingdom is the only Western country for which the over-all balance sheet of the Near and Middle East affairs is not in the red due to the fact that the oil crisis was very timely and generated ideal conditions for investment in the North Sea - again a gift more than an achievement. With the exception of the joining of the Venice declaration, London has been very lukewarm about European common stands or cooperative actions in the area. With such a multilateral constraint, it would be difficult for the British government to continue a policy of apparent rigidity and real low profile, as a consequence of which British influence may be smaller than one may expect but damage is effectively limited.

8. The two great "inhibitors" of German policy in the area have been constitutional constraints on military activities outside the NATO framework and geographical competence and the moral debt with the Jewish people.

The former has prevented participation in peacekeeping forces while the latter has made it difficult for Bonn to act as a "civilian power" as it did in other areas; i.e. in the Iberian peninsula (with remarkable success). Such inhibitors have at times been welcome, particularly for the Near East. They have been less so in the Gulf, where potential interests and partners for Germany abound. The uneasy story of trying to get around the inhibitors and to sell arms to Saudi Arabia is telling. Kohl, first German Chancellor, has paid a visit to Israel in 1986.

Terrorist actions have taken place in and against the FRG. As for other European countries a chain is established between jailing terrorists and being

blackmailed through hostages. This situation turns out to be a de facto third inhibiting factor that brings additional weight to the side of those who suggest Germany should stay as much as possible out of the Near and Middle East. Reduced dependence on Middle Eastern oil subtracts weight from the other side.

Bonn's support for cooperation with its European partners has been oscillating between using the Community as a vehicle for a more active role and the fear of being used to finance somebody else's policies.

9. Italy's patient efforts to mediate in Near East conflicts (more recently also in the Gulf), have often ended up with trying to reconcile the irreconcilable. At times Rome found itself at odds with one or more countries (including the US) and a frequent target or battlefield for international terrorists. The picture actually is not always bleak. Italian relations with moderate arab countries, Egypt above all, are strong; presence and interests in Libya have been scaled down to a level which is no longer politically binding; Italian contingents have been present in practically all peacekeeping forces of the area and the one in Beirut has come out of the unsuccessful mission with a relatively good domestic and international image; the political constraints deriving from large oil and gas imports have been reduced through differentiation of suppliers; Italian embassies have been asked to represent British interests in Tripoli and now french interests in Tehran. Priorities however, are not always clear. Italy lacks the political and military weight (despite the mentioned readiness of the last decade) to be an effective actor and mediator in the area. Efforts to generate European cooperation have not met with success and this, in itself, represents a motive of caution for the Italian government.

The proposal of a joint step by Italy, France and Spain to act in the Mediterranean as a caucus for broader stabilizing initiatives, has apparently been met with more enthusiasm in Madrid than in Rome where it originated. Spanish policy in the Near East and in Northern Africa has acquired more momentum after the change of regile and particularly after the establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel. The bilateral issues with Morocco, however, often overshadow Spanish action in the Maghreb area where the major potentials exist.

10. Even without doing justice to all but negligible attitudes and policies of other European countries, it is not suprising that with so many tunes the European Community members - of growing number - have found it difficult to harmonize, let alone speak with one voice.(1) It has, however, been rather frequent that those governments which were about to take the six-month Community presidency would list the Near and the Middle East as a priority for common external action, with the possible addendum that its foreign (or even prime) Minister would make a trip to the area as a spokesman for Western Europe. Most frequently the other partners have been rather lukeworm. The last example has been the Belgian efforts during the first half of 1987 to put the EC behind the proposed international conference for a Near East peace settlement. For once there has been relative success as the Twelve have described to a common position of support, though inevitably only declaratory.

The failure to conduct even a modest Community initiative is shown by the fate of the Euro-Arab Dialogue, which after the high points reached in the pre-Venice Declaration phase is now prevented from formal death only by periodical exchanges of letters between the Secretary General of the Arab League and the Chairman of the Community. A second attempt, an economic

agreement with the Gulf Cooperation Council, associated with a political dialogue would seem to encounter similar difficulties, only in reverse: in the EC-GCC negotiations the Europeans are apparently keen on the political side (to limit the spreading of Islamic fundamentalism) and reluctant to fully cooperate on the trade side (under pressure of the oil industry), while in the Euro-Arab Dialogue they were pushing the economic side (oil transfer) and prudent on the political one (support for the Palestinian cause). The common feature is that the drive has been weak for both, although the Arabs have frequently invited the European countries to act cohesively in order to have Western alternative to the US.

The quite unsatisfactory Community cooperation in the Near and Middle East has to be qualified with two considerations. One is that it is often assumed this cooperation is particularly difficult because of 1) the intractable problems of the area, 2) the frequent divergence with American policies and 3) the absence of common military instruments, which here are indispensable. It has however to be recognized that in the North African appendix of the Near East and in particular in the Maghreb, where all three obstacles are far less relevant, the EC has not been much more successful, despite the often proclaimed objective of helping regional development and integration elsewhere. The Community contribution to the stability of the Mediterranean, which has been so important on the northern shore, as it has "internalized" problems through enlargement, has been disappointing on the southern one where its external relations apparatus should be operating.

The second consideration is that, as I have tried to show here, if cooperation has been unsuccessful, nation policies and achievements are not much better.

11. The years from 1980 through 1986 have thus confirmed the historical trend of a diminishing role (not activity) for the West European countries, both individually and as a whole. During the same years the role of the US had gradually changed from one of dominant mediator at the highest political level, including the President (Camp David), to the one of military presence and occasionally action, associated with relatively low political and diplomatic activity. (2) But the most relevant change has been the increasing role of the Soviet Union, brought about by : 1) this new American policy style in the area, 2) the near-disappearance of Lebanon and consequent coming in of Syria, a Soviet protégé, and 3) the compounding of the Near East problems with the Iran-Iraq war, something closer to the USSR "vital interests" than the Israeli-Palestinian issue. (3)

At the end of 1986, came the revelations of the attempted covert dealings of White House emissaries with Tehran, which have had the known devastating impact on the US position in the Middle East and to a lesser but not negligible extent also in the Near East. To the already questionable mix of high military profile and low diplomatic profile were added unprofessional, inconsistent, improbable operations aimed at freeing American hostages and/or approaching more flexible Ajatollahs - neither aim, incidentally, being in itself totally unreasonable. The negative impact has affected, of course, the entire West, insofar as the US remains indispensable for any solution for this troubled area. All might not be negative if out of the accident the Washington decision makers become more open to the allies' views so that with appropriate advance consultations, compatible, possible consistent, hopefully cooperative actions may be taken.

12. It appears first of all that the two knots - the Israeli/palestinian issue and the Gulf war - are distinct despite their inevitable and important interrelations. Thus solutions must also be different. In the Near East (at the moment of writing) nothing is dramatically pressing from the West. The security of Israel is not in question - its problems are domestic rather than external -, the PLO reunification has not been so far any more threatening than in the past and the Arab world is as fragmented as ever, its major concerns coming from Islamic fundamentalism more than anything else. The US is unlikely to be in a position to control substantive evolutions before a new president is well in place.

On the other end the stalemate has also serious drawbacks, particularly for the moderate Arab countries, Jordan and Egypt above all. The main virtue of the proposed international conference, however slim its chances of being actually convened may now be, is that it sets things in motion (preferably in slow motion). For this reason the European governments were right in responding positively as early as February 1987 to the Peres' rather peculiar diplomatic activity and lead the way to the later near-support of the US State Department. A limited supplementary role of the Community and of those member states that want to be active is necessary. It will help in maintaining the now inevitable participation of the Soviet diplomacy at the level of its merits, i.e. its capacity to exert a positive influence on such actors as Syria and the PLO. It will help the US and Israel to understand the importance of the economic development of the region and, at the core of it, of the occupied territories as an indispensable background of any settlement.

In this last respect the 3mECU plan for aid and trade cooperation for the benefit of the West Bank and Gaza communities is a modest but not negligible indication of a policy, which cannot remain purely declaratory. An current pressures on the Israeli government in order to remove the obstacles posed to it may also be the symptom of some political will. Also Jordan has put forward a development scheme, which requires financial support by Western countries. If, however, the international conference will be central to the Near East process, it will likely raise the usual competence issue inside the Community. The hypothesis, raised by Belgium, of participation of common institutions in the conference has in fact little chance of withstanding the traditional preference of governments to act directly and defend any trace of a special role. This, of course, applies particularly to the Security Council permanent members, France and the UK.

13. In the Middle East, on the contrary, events are moving fast and the local situation at the time of reading this paper by conference participants may be quite different from the one at the time of writing by the author. In confronting such a situation the West has to go through different layers of problems. 1) The US has here the central role. But the decision making and the consensus building processes are under way in Washington while still suffering from the Irangate wounds. A crisis may help recovery, but counting on that may be very risky. 2) While using military instruments and keeping the option of scaling up this use if necessary, the American government will have to carry out a crisis negotiation with the Soviet Union, while other non-critical negotiations are under way. 3) The UN Security Council remains a multilateral forum for crisis management and conflict settlement. Western countries have an opportunity here to reverse an unfortunate trend of the last decade and regain leadership in the UN. 4) Effective consultations previous to action are required with allied Council members, first of all with France and Britain, who are military present in the Middle East - at whatever level, for whichever

reason - but not only with them. 5) France and Britain have different stakes in the crisis and different positions vis-a-vis the US. Still the crisis, at least in its initial phase, has not foreclosed options for convergence between them and with Washington. 6) Mediating capabilities developed with war parties - for instance by Germany, Italy and Japan with Iran - may help solutions of common interest, but pressure and mediation must be consistent to avoid politically dividing the Western world, particularly Western Europe.

With a situation as open as it looks while these lines are being written, not much more can be said than hoping, indeed dreaming that all these layers will be crossed safely.

14. Looking a little, just a little beyond the current critical outlook of the Middle East, two issues will have to be dealt with. One is the growing flow of weapons and munitions to the region, which receives more than half of the world arms exports. (4) The Near East is included, but Iraq and Iran are the best clients. France, Britain, Germany and Italy (in that order) are relevant exporters but the main suppliers remain the US and the USSR. Pleas for an agreement to stop this flow have been numerous, but the nature, the motives and the structure of the transfers are such as to make this agreement unlikely. However, if a framework for a broader East-West accord is generated, some limiting scheme and code of conduct may be worked out. The second issue derives from the instability of oil prices. Between Summer '84 and Spring '87, after a period of relative steadiness, these prices have come down to levels close to the profitability margin of the American and European producers. (5) It is well known that Middle Eastern oil has far lower production costs and has abundant reserves. Consequently, exports from the Gulf area are growing and will grow more.

15. Crises in the Near East, with respect to the Atlantic Alliance, are not only out-of-area in location (though just at the border of it) but are also at a threat level below the one for which NATO was set up. Past exchanges with Libya in the Mediterranean are a case in point. Crises in the Middle East have a somewhat higher threat level but are also further removed from the NATO area. Both the political relevance of distance and the threat are differently appreciated in the Western capitals and there is a very little inclination to accept constraints from the allies when making this appreciation. The past experience with bilateral and multilateral consultations concerning out-of-area crises - political, military and those related to terrorism - has not been very positive. Still there is no way out other than reduced unilateralism by all. Strains are inevitable, especially when practical issues come out, for example, the use of NATO bases in out-of-area operations.

16. The distinction suggested at the beginning of this paper between the Near East and the Middle East is meant to identify two sets of problems that, although subject to mutual influence, currently present different urgencies and different opportunities for the West Europeans to help work out solutions.

The interests of the European countries - those of the continent in particular - are convergent to a degree and consist, broadly speaking, of making the Mediterranean an area where stability and development go hand in hand. To this end, they could make use of collective economic and political instruments. The problems of the Near East are an important obstacle to such a development. Military capabilities in the Mediterranean are necessary for the Alliance in order to confront the Soviet threat, which has certainly not diminished. Local tensions require capabilities which are somewhat different in nature.



In the Middle East, European interests are less direct and more differentiated. Though not entirely absent, comprehensive security schemes and instruments are less important. European institutional frameworks can be used for consultation, at best, but are unlikely to generate concerted action. The military means are decisive.

A number of steps are being taken or at least considered in order to bring about more defense cooperation among West European countries. Any idea of extending this cooperation for military purposes outside the European theater appears to be premature.

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