

CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND COOPERATION
WITH ALLIED NATIONS: THE CASE OF ITALY

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intervention made at the Nato Workshop
on Political-Military Decision Making in the Nato Alliance

Goodwood House, Chichester, West Sussex, United Kingdom
June 22-25, 1987

1. The Mediterranean Region

There are two ways of looking at the Southern Flank of NATO, from the perspective of the Western countries. One I would term the "safety belt" approach, the other the "overall stability" approach. Both recognize the importance of the Mediterranean region for European security. The first one however is based on the assumption that this region is "crisis prone", basically unmanageable without the direct intervention of the Superpowers, too risky and volatile for long-term policy commitments: the main objective therefore should be a "damage limitation" operation. The principle instrument of Mediterranean policy would be military force and the capacity to enforce external will on the local powers.

The second one, on the contrary, is based on the idea that the basic instability of the Mediterranean region can be cured, that there is enough good will and political capacity inside the region to establish long-lasting and peaceful relationships, that a policy of stability can be based on the growing awareness of the existence of very important common interests between Mediterranean and European countries. The instruments of such policy would be more of an economic and political, rather than military, nature.

The problem is that in order to try to implement the "overall stability" approach, the Mediterranean countries need the cooperation of their allies, while the first strategy can be pursued, at least for a while, disregarding the wishes of the Mediterranean countries.

No one of course would willingly choose the use of force when other ways are readily available. Still, there is a great difference between a policy of "consensus gathering" consistent with the "safety belt" approach, and a policy of "decision sharing", needed for the "overall stability" approach. The first is in search of clients, the second of allies.

The Mediterranean moreover is torn in between. Some countries, like Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, are formally integrated within the Western system, from the Atlantic Alliance to the EEC, but with various degree of participation and influence. Other countries are divided between "moderates" and "radicals" and are frequently conflicting between them, in open or indirect wars.

The policies of the Western powers towards the Mediterranean are similarly divided and contradictory, going in either direction according to the prevailing mood and expediencies.

The Mediterranean area, therefore, cannot be considered a unitarian region. This area, moreover, is much larger than the Mediterranean sea and its riparian countries. Crises arising in this region are closely intertwined by ideological, ethnic and political factors, such as islamism, assertive nationalism, inter-Arab rivalries, Arab-African disputes and by the fact that boundaries of poorly constituted new States often cut across established ethnic and religious solidarities. For these reasons, when considering Mediterranean security, one cannot help identifying the Mediterranean with the wider "arc of crises" professor Brzezinski used to talk about. Twenty years ago the many different regions included in this "arc of crises" were strategically separated and Nato was essentially preoccupied with the Soviet presence in the Mediterranean. Today these different regions have merged and the Mediterranean, more or less consciously, has become short hand for a "Southern Region" which has expanded tremendously.

No single Mediterranean power is capable of imposing its will on the entire area, by the use of military force or otherwise. On the contrary, each Mediterranean country is a somewhat "junior" partner, in alliance with stronger powers. Local conflicts therefore are intertwined and mixed up with other international conflicts, larger and more important. The Mediterranean countries moreover are frequently interested in utilizing their alliances in order to strengthen their stance, to avoid any important concessions and to protract the local conflicts, until their freezing and their internationalization. All this creates a balance of mutual impotence.

That is why the "safety belt" approach has frequently failed to impose a long lasting order and stability to the Southern Region. Neither of the Superpowers, in the last forty years, has given the Mediterranean enough importance and priority and has invested enough resorces to become its master.

In Central Europe, the division and confrontation between East and West has effectivly frozen and put out of the political picture the traditional infra-European conflicts. No such result has been achieved in the Mediterranean, where the borders between the two "blocs" are muddled and dubious, while the alliances are frail and changeable.

This situation favours the growing impact of multiple threats, affecting both the Mediterranean and the European countries. Between them, international terrorism is now preeminent, but more traditional military, social and economic threats are also present.

Attempts have been made in the past, and still are being made to deal with this problem in a multilateral and peaceful way. None of these attempts however has fully succeeded yet. The most successful one was probably the so-called Camp David process, in bringing peace between Israel and Egypt, with the help of the United States and the military guarantee of the Multilateral Force in the Sinai. This same approach however has dramatically failed in Lebanon, and did not expand to embrace the other Arab countries bordering with Israel.

No success whatsoever was possible for the idea, many times put forward by various Mediterranean governments, of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean, modelled on the experience of the CSCE. Even the limited Mediterranean participation in the CSCE process has been characterized by a number of failures, or at best by irrelevance. There is now the idea, championed by the Italian Government, of the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean "support group", involving at least three NATO countries (Italy, France and Spain) and three non-aligned countries (Jugoslavia, Egypt and Algeria), all interested in strengthening the chances of peace and stability in the Mediterranean. But it is easy to foresee the important limits and weaknesses of such a project, should it be implemented. Political differences between its members, their relative impotence vis-à-vis the major powers present in the Mediterranean, the absence of important countries (such as Greece, Turkey, Morocco or Saudi Arabia), the vagueness of the political aims, are themselves enough to increase scepticism.

An important development, is the creation of new linkages between "moderate" countries of the Arab world and European countries, on matters such as anti-terrorism cooperation, while some more "radical" countries are driven away from Europe and the West. This is not the result of a conscious "bloc policy" of the European powers, as the logical consequence of the aggravation of the Mediterranean conflicts and of the limited measures taken until now to circumscribe them.

The linkages created so far however are not strong enough to establish a new pattern of alliances and guarantees between European and Mediterranean countries. The divergencies existing among Europeans, and with the United States, on the best way to fight instability and counter the threats coming from the Mediterranean, are weakening the present relationship. Even the European Community, the biggest economic power of the area and the main partner of all the Mediterranean countries, was unable to produce a coherent and effective policy towards these regions, in order to bring about at least a modicum of economic development and prosperity.

This is not to say that the Community's Mediterranean policy has been totally ineffective, but that its successes seems to be a thing of the past. The establishment of strong association ties with almost all the Mediterranean countries is of course an important accomplishment. The substantial help given to the democratic political forces in Greece, Portugal, Spain and Turkey, is still the greatest achievement of Western Europe in the last years. But the practical failure of the Euro-Arab dialogue, and the inability to envisage and implement a common security and foreign policy in the Mediterranean, are not likely to be overcome in the near future.

2. Increasing military problems for the Southern Region

In the same time, the military problems of the Mediterranean are becoming more important.

In the past, the military threat against Nato's Southern Region has been largely an indirect threat. Soviet troop deployments and readiness levels have all pointed toward an attack in the central European region. No Soviet divisions have stood ready for short warning attacks against Italy, Greece or Turkey.

Under the "flexible response" strategy, Nato has declared that it will meet any attack with whatever level of force is necessary, including nuclear weapons. The intent has been to deter war by posing a grave risk of nuclear escalation. And the same risk would ensure that any war would be quickly ended through negotiations or exhaustion.

For the Southern Region, "flexible response" has meant a minimum role. If Nato held in the Center with conventional forces, or if necessary, nuclear weapons, peace would soon come, with little action on the Flanks. If Nato were defeated in the center, the Flanks would have little choice but to accommodate to Soviet desires. Thus, Southern Region countries have had a vital stake in the success or failure of Nato defenses, but have had little effect on the outcome.

The situation has changed in the '80s. The growing nuclear capabilities of both sides have culminated in a fundamental change in both Nato and Soviet perceptions. Both appear to recognize that the only way to achieve a reasonably satisfactory outcome would be to limit any conflict to conventional means. The arms control negotiations, under way between the Usa and the Ussr, are reinforcing this trend, proposing the progressive elimination of theatre nuclear weapons from Europe. Nato, therefore, is striving to increase its defense budgets so that nuclear weapons will not have to be used at an early stage. On the Soviet side, there is continued growth in numbers of divisions and conventional weapons of all types.

It remains true, however, that both sides have interests so vital that nuclear war at some level could appear preferable to abandoning them. For Nato, these interests are located in the Central Region of Europe: avoiding catastrophic defeat on Flanks also would be a vital Nato interest and could trigger nuclear defenses, but the fact is that there is more room for maneuver (either political or military, or both). If the Soviets choose to launch a military attack against Nato as a means toward limited gains, therefore, they will have to do so without total victory over Nato forces and without seeking to capture West Germany. Consequently, a war for limited gains would make the Southern Region of Nato as attractive a target for the Soviets as the Center Region (and a less risky target).

Should the trend towards increasing "conventionalization" of military strategy continue, both in Nato and in the Warsaw Pact, this could further increase the threats against the Southern Region of Nato. Nuclear deterrence as

what can be termed a "unitarian" effect of common solidarity, and sharing of risks, between allied countries, while the conventional dimension is strictly linked to the the geo-strategic features of the various military theatres, widely scattered and far from each other.

Moreover, while the great concentration of allied conventional forces in the Central region (American troops included) could be regarded as a guarantee for nuclear deterrence, the absence of such a massive land presence in the Southern Region could further diminish the credibility of deterrence. The eventual agreement on a "double-zero" disarmament in the field of LRINF and SMINF singles out a number of Nato countries as more exposed to tactical nuclear threats. While West Germany is one of them, Turkey and Greece (together with North-Eastern Norway and possibly North-Eastern Italy) are the others.

The Southern Region of Nato, moreover, is not merely a regional defense line. It is also the guarantee of a Western strong presence in the oil rich Middle East, and the strategic cover of the Western dominance of the entire Mediterranean region. Thus, in the event of a Warsaw Pact-Nato conflict, the Soviets might well turn to the Southern Region of Nato as an opportunity for important military and political success, in Europe, in the Middle East, in North Africa and in the entire Mediterranean.

The increasing conflictuality of the Mediterranean region, the "sabre rattling" coming from many local powers and little wars, the direct and indirect threats stemming from "low level conflicts" (such as international terrorism, civil wars etc.), the Arab-Israeli and the Iraq-Iran wars, could easily become the focus of international conflicts and the occasion for Soviet military operations against the West, even avoiding a direct Nato-Warsaw Pact confrontation.

The conventionalization of war in Europe (and in the Southern Region in particular) is bringing to the forefront the inadequacies and the problems of the conventional forces of the southern European states.

3. Different perceptions inside the Alliance

These events have made the issue of the allied presence in the Mediterranean and in the out of Nato area more interesting and important, for the overall Western security. The Usa has encouraged the European allies to operate direct interventions or to intervene side by side with them. Otherwise the European allies have been asked to increase their own capabilities on the European Front to allow American forces to move out of the Nato area. More or less the Europeans have responded. If one has to appreciate prospects, in relation to the fact that instability in the Southern Region is likely to continue unabated, a balance sheet is in order. This balance sheet doesn't seem very positive. There are basic dissensions between the Usa and Western Europe, as well as among European countries themselves, regarding how to manage crises, their origins and cures. Moreover, the absolute pragmatism and unevenness which govern allied cooperation in the Southern Region, is detrimental to the effectiveness of allied policies in the area, not to speak about inter-allied relations.

Dissensions and ineffectiveness are due to a number of elements. First, while the Europeans are convinced that local security perceptions are the starting point to come to manage or to solve crises, the Usa is looking at the region from an exclusively East-West angle or from the very peculiar angle of its relationship with Israel. The tendency of the American administration is to cash in the "American option" taken by an important group of Arab countries -the so called "moderate" countries- as an asset on East-West ground. At the same time it doesn't take any interest in assuring its consistency with local security perceptions. In the eyes of Arab opinion this means that the "American option" is not paying off, nor in internal nor in international security terms. On the contrary, it can isolate governments and their policy of staying allied with the West. It emphasizes anti-Western feelings, reinforces Islamic opposition domestically and exposes Arab allied countries to "more principled" regimes -like Damascus- and anti-imperialist countries -like Iran. As a result pro-Western alignments weaken and their weakness is certainly among the causes for the clear shifts underway in the region as far as the East-West balance of power is concerned. Moreover, in the eyes of local allied powers -as in the case of the Arab Gulf countries- this American attitude is turning Western countries from security guarantors into factors of insecurity.

Second, American and European attitudes regarding the possibility of inviting responsible cooperation from the Soviet Union are also different. Apart from a number of propagandistic moves, like the recurrent proposal to withdraw the respective fleets from the Mediterranean, prospects for an International Conference on the Middle East and more generally, for the participation of the Ussr into the peace process are more or less regarded positively by the Europeans. So were, quite recently, prospects for a Usa-Ussr cooperation in the Gulf to protect navigation. In European quarters this was also considered an opportunity to test the likeliness of a more responsible and reliable Soviet attitude toward the region. On the contrary, the fundamental American attitude, after the very short-lived attempt included in the Joint Declaration of 1977, is simply to keep the Ussr out of the region. More or less consciously, the Europeans do not consider this option consistent with their security, especially in the very moment East-West summitry is managing to reduce tensions inside Europe, while leaving them intact in the Southern Flank.

Third, there are dissensions on the evolution of terrorism. The Usa look at terrorism as at a global factor. As a matter of fact, events in Iran, Lebanon and among Palestinians have radicalized existing crises by emphasizing on both an ideological and a political level, their anti-imperialist (therefore anti-Western and anti-Usa) character of a struggle for liberation from colonial rule. It has been chiefly Iran's role and initiative to project this struggle internationally by means of terrorism, as a new form of war, against the Usa and other Western targets. Iranian initiative has brought about a more general radicalization of other crises and has encouraged and revived the use of terrorism from other quarters as well. At least according to local perceptions, this war waged against the Usa is successful and it is certainly true that the Usa did not manage to counter it either in Lebanon (wherefrom they withdrew under a succession of blows) or elsewhere. This actually amounts to a threat to their international status of superpower which cannot be easily tolerated. Though indirectly, it is also true that it plays into the hands of the Ussr. In this sense, terrorism is a global factor. Still -so European argument runs- bombing over Beirut and Tripoli are useless because Western countries are here again confronted with a new manifestation of old regional factors, that require

political as well as military responses. Military responses alone may be counterproductive.

Who is right? Comparing two cases of Western intervention in regional conflicts, the French combination of military presence with subtle intra-Chad and inter-African diplomacy appears to have been much more successful than the presence of the Western Multinational Force in Lebanon, that acted on the basis of different political approaches to the problem and a Us policy that proved mistaken. Actually, while the Italians were there to "protect Palestinians" -according to the terms of reference given by their Parliament-, French intervention was motivated by their supposed "national" interests. On the other hand, the Americans supported a Lebanese national unity based on the Israeli policy of Maronite dominance and a separate peace of Lebanon with Israel. Quite obviously this policy provoked national disunity and the upheaval of the Shi'ites against Israel (and the Usa) in South Lebanon, a problem which previously didn't exist.

4. The Italian case

Clearly Italy is for many reasons deeply involved in the issues I have just discussed. As a matter of fact Italy is participating in Unifil and the Mfcs; has participated in the successive Multinational Interposition Forces in Lebanon and in the Red Sea minesweeping operations; has extended a guarantee to Malta's neutrality. Perhaps the most important trend amidst this Mediterranean reorientation is the debate about reshaping the Italian military model, to date almost entirely directed toward the defense of Nato's South-eastern Front (i.e. the North-eastern boundary of the Peninsula). In 1985 the Defence White Paper clearly identified a number of new missions in the Southern Flank and gave guidelines for re-organizing forces and adopting necessary weapons systems. More or less this transformation of the Italian military instrument has started and, if it will be pursued, it will become an important factor in the debate on the Italian Mediterranean role. At the same time the Italian government, particularly under Mr. Craxi's guidance, has engaged in an active diplomacy directed toward support for the moderate Arab countries and their efforts to involve the Plo's mainstream in peace negotiations.

Whith these Mediterranean debates and initiatives underway, in 1985 and 1986 Italy has been affected by two serious crises: first, the "Achille Lauro" liner hijacking followed by events at the Sigonella military base, after the Americans had diverted and forced to land the Egyptian aircraft carrying the authors of the "Achille Lauro" hijacking and their bosses; second, the succession of American clashes with Libya and the Libyan attempt to bomb the American guarded Loran station on the islet of Lampedusa with two missiles.

The "Achille Lauro-Sigonella" crisis shed a vivid light on the existing differences of opinion between Southern European countries -Italy in the event- and the Usa. The entire sequence was managed by the Italian government with two main priorities in mind: first, the aim of saving Mr. Arafat as the essential partner in the Jordanian-Palestinian process; second, and perhaps most important, the aim of protecting Egyptian role and credibility in the inter-Arab arena. The Italian government's decision to allow Mr. Abul Abbas to leave despite American pressures has proved carefully justified on legal

grounds. However, that decision was taken essentially for political reasons. The nature of that decision underscores the emergence of the kind of dissensions I have described above: the Usa wanted to give priority to terrorism as a global factor, while Italy has given priority to regional factors.

As a consequence of the "Achille Lauro-Sigonella" crisis, the governmental coalition split and this split caused the first governmental crisis Italy has suffered since the second World War as a result of foreign and security policies. The split occurred between those who were willing to maintain Italian political options in the Mediterranean and those who suggested that these options were untenable in view of the tensions they were causing in Italy's relationship with its major ally. Originally a regional affair, the "Achille Lauro-Sigonella" crisis evolved into a major crisis between Italy and the United States. At the end the governmental crisis was overcome by a shared decision of the coalition to get closer to the American notion of terrorism and by downgrading the Italian Mediterranean policy profile.

The incidents in the Gulf of Sidra and the bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in the first months of 1986, after Libya had been identified as the sponsor of the attacks at the Rome and Vienna airports in December 1985 and other terrorist acts in the following months, led to similar consequences in the relationship between Italy and the Usa. Again, Italy corrected its Mediterranean policy amidst furious domestic wrangles.

Many lessons were taught by these events. The Italian opposition has complained about the role of Nato, but problems arose precisely because Nato was not there to regulate relations among the allies. The absence of institutions in the Southern Flank has left Italy isolated in its bilateral relationship with its major ally. Corrections made by the Italian government to its Mediterranean policy are a good example of "consensus gathering" vs. "decision sharing". This absence of institutions must be also noted on the European side. In order to counter American pressures, Italy tried to rely on the European Political Cooperation framework. However, Epc's weakness prevented European countries from producing firm decisions and, most of all, prevented Epc from offsetting the Atlantic institutional vacuum. Again, Italy remained isolated.

As already stated, the absence of multilateral procedures for dealing with this kind of Mediterranean crises has made security in the Southern Flank suffer from policy contradictions between allies. The Usa wants the allies to take initiatives but is not ready to accept their initiatives. When dissent erupts, the only procedure left to reconcile policies is that of bilateral relations. But bilateralism between individual allies and the Americans is not a healthy procedure. It brings about tension and frustration and discourages precisely the aim of the out of the Nato area cooperation, that is multilateral allied initiatives and contributions.

5. Problems of crisis management in Italy

The international problem is coupled with internal Italian problems. The Italian constitutional structure and laws are as yet insufficiently clear on the issue of crisis management and political lines of command and control, in case of military crises, or even war.

According to the Italian Constitution, the political and executive powers are in the hands of the Council of Ministers (where the President, or Prime Minister, is somewhat a "primus inter pares"), while the President of the Republic, without political responsibilities, still is the Head of the Armed Forces, presides over the Supreme Defense Council (formed by members of the Government, including the President of the Council, and by the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces and other persons invited discretionally by the President of the Republic), declare war, following a parliamentary decision to do so, and countersign the nominations of the higher military ranks. There are no special powers to be exerted in case of crises or war, but the Parliament, while declaring war, should also determine, on case by case basis, which special powers would be necessary to give to the Executive. There is no constitutional tradition of the Executive exercising "special privileges". While there is a kind of Interministerial Group, inside the Council of Ministers, for dealing with crisis and emergency situations of a military or security nature, there is no provision allowing this Group to proceed without the backing of the full Council, except on very time-urgent emergencies.

There is a "de facto" increasing of role and importance of the President of the Council, generally accepted but not formally legalized by constitutional or normal law. The increasing international tendency to manage big international problems through Summit meetings, the growing awareness of interconnections between political, economic and security choices (cutting through the competences of single Ministers), and the existence of modern systems of communication and control, has brought about a progressive change of the internal balance inside the Council of Ministers, favouring its President, to an extent unforeseen in the past. A new law on the working procedures and attributions of the Presidency of the Council, is recognizing this development, without however attempting to modify the letter of the Constitution. As a matter of fact, other laws to be discussed in Parliament in the near future, are proposing a reform of such key administrations as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence (together with the military chain of command), in some ways challenging this "presidential" evolution of the Italian government.

That is to say that the Italian system of crisis management is still in a state of flux. During the recent crises, for example (but especially during the "Achille Lauro-Sigonella" affair), the President of the Council has played a key role, practically by-passing the Council of Ministers, and (as far as they could be considered competent), the Parliament and the President of the Republic. The system did work, demonstrating a resilience and a flexibility greater than expected, possibly however because no really important "active" decision (of utilizing military forces in an active mode) had to be taken. This is no real guarantee for the future, therefore.

Special unities for crisis management have been created, of interministerial nature, to be called in by the President of the Council. A better coordination in the command, control and communication, as well as in the evaluation and sharing of informations and intelligence, is on the making. These "technical" measures will certainly eliminate some of the shortcomings experienced in the past (especially in the field of communications and assesment of the intelligence gathered): they are no sufficient answer, however, to the constitutional problem of defining a clear relationship between the various national authorities. The President of the Republic has officially asked both the previous and the present government, for a complete clarification of the matter, with the approval of a new law or constitutional regulation. The internal political crisis, the holding of new general elections and the perspective of a new government to be formed in the near future, have until now pre-empted any answer to the President of the Republic initiative. He will have to try again, with the next government.

6. Problems of crisis management between allies

Nato has its own mechanisms for dealing with Nato crises, regularly exercised by the various allies. The problem however is twofold: first, many of these crises are considered to be outside Nato area of responsibility (at least at the beginning) and second, there is a difficult question of identifying the real nature of the crisis. It happens frequently that the crisis is at a low level of violence, of an indirect nature, and while international, not to be identifiable with the kind of military threat that would clearly require a Nato level of response.

Nato does not identify the lower level of the threat that should be treated as a common threat by the Alliance. Its only limits are political (it has to be an "attack") and geographical (it has to happen inside the boundaries of the Nato area of responsibility). Moreover, no Nato action is fully justified if the interested member countries (i.e., those who are directly threatened) do not ask for Nato assistance. A big gray area exist however, where these distinctions are at best ambiguous. The hijacking of the Achille Lauro, for instance, did happen inside the Nato area of responsibility, in the international waters of the Mediterranean. The Libian missiles fired against the island of Lampedusa, were a military attack against a Nato country. The Sixth American Fleet in the Mediterranean is both a Nato force and a national force covered by the guarantees of the Atlantic Treaty: when threatened by foreign powers, as it happened in the Gulf of Sidra (that all Nato member countries consider as international water), it has a right to claim allied solidarity, even if it is acting on purely national orders. American bases and assets hosted by countries of the Southern Region could be threatened by foreign powers, in retaliation or defense against American attacks on them: would that create an automatic obligation for Nato to stand in defence of the Usa interests? There is an unfortunate precedent, created by the American government itself in 1964, when President Johnson did communicate to the Turkish government that, should Turkey be threatened or attacked by a foreign power (in that case, the USSR), following its military threats against the Greek government in Cyprus, the US government could consider it inappropriate to stand for Turkey, on the lines established by the Atlantic Treaty. While the Turkish government did strongly reject this interpretation (and, in my opinion,

quite rightly so), no official clarification or correction came from Washington. It is certainly not by chance that such a contention did happen in the Eastern Mediterranean. Other similar problems may arise from other crises such as a Moroccan attack against the Spanish Plazas of Soberania, Ceuta and Melilla (even if, after all, Nato remained outside the Algerian conflict, in the Fifties). The permanent risk of conflict between Greece and Turkey are of an even more complex and disturbing nature, for the Alliance. Defensive military initiatives, taken in case of war in order to pre-empt the establishment of unfavourable strategic and tactical situation, might appear as "attacks", unjustified and uncovered by the Nato mechanism (forward defense operations, counter-air missions, holding of more secure defensive lines in the Yugoslav territory, etc.).

International terrorism in particular creates difficult problems of joint management. These acts are generally dealt with through Police and Internal Security Forces, with the direct involvement of the Judiciary powers and possibly with the assistance of the Foreign Affairs Ministry. Military forces can be called in, but are generally utilized in a framework and through a chain of command sensibly different from the normal one. Political and legal factors have a far greater impact than military considerations, throughout the crisis. Different national perceptions and priorities, and different evaluation of the utility of utilizing force, can create enormous difficulties. To take again the example of the Achille Lauro, there were obvious differences between Italians, Americans and Egyptians, that have probably had a negative impact on the crisis management. While the Italians and the Egyptians were speaking of an "highjack", the Americans were speaking of an "act of piracy", thus positioning themselves on the legal ground for intervening unilaterally, with military force, against the "pirates" holding the ship. Should the killing of Mr. Klinghoffer have been made known before the surrender of the terrorists, a military unilateral American attack to regain control of the ship, with the high casualties likely deriving from it, would have become highly probable. It is not far from the reality to say that these differences between allies have contributed to the difficulties and conflicts experienced during and after the crisis.

There is obviously the need of some clarification and greater coordination between allies, to avoid isolated responses and conflicting behaviour. The absence of such a clarification and coordination could, in the longer term, favour a further fading away of Nato solidarity. The fear of isolation is a case in point, already having negative effects on the military planning and international policies of Greece and Turkey. It has also had some effects on the Italian military planning, stressing the need of a purely national military posture, unrelated with the perspective of joint Nato operations. While it can be said (and it is officially stressed) that the strengthening of the Italian military instrument, whatever its justifications and aims, cannot but help the overall Nato posture in the Southern Region, it might be also interesting to note that some of these decisions could increase "double emploi", might divert resources from areas considered of greater importance by Nato than by the Italians, and are certainly based on a deep mistrust and devaluation of the possible allied (and American) contribution to Italian security. More self-reliance could certainly be a good thing, but the loss of confidence and solidarity might, in the longer term, have far greater negative effects.

On the positive side, however, there is evidence of a stronger cooperation

between Mediterranean countries. In the Nato area, military and operational agreements established between Italy and France (including the provision of a new optical satellite for surveillance and crisis monitoring), Italy and Spain, France and Spain, are the necessary first step for increasing the security of the Western Mediterranean. Antiterrorist agreements already established between these countries, in the European Community and, bilaterally, with a number of "moderate" Arab countries, and other Mediterranean governments, are changing favourably the "rules of the game". No overall common structure or agreement exist however, clarifying the nature, means and objectives of crisis management. Nato has, for any practical purpose, called itself out. The Western European Union is still struggling with its ambitions to a fruitful and worthy existence, without any concrete result, so far, nor in this field, nor in any other security related field. The European Political Cooperation and the anti-terrorist cooperation of the European States (together with the US), has made some progress, without however confronting the bigger political issues.

On the more classical military ground, moreover, Nato's actual situation, in the Southern Region, leaves Italy in a position of singularity. Portugal's history, economy and politics set it's identity and interests outside the Mediterranean region, strictly speaking. It participates fully to the defence of Northeastern Italy, with the provision of an Army brigade, something which the Italians regard with the deepest appreciation, but is otherwise very much outside the perceptions and problems of the other Mediterranean countries of Nato. France and Spain, while members of the Alliance, do not belong to its military organization. France does not have any operational military agreement with the Usa, and Spain is dramatically reducing its military bilateral relationship with Washington. As for Greece and Turkey, their dispute is creating increasing problems for the Alliance (ex.: military exercises, status of American bases in Greece, etc.). As a consequence of this situation, Italy may be faced by more security demands from Nato and the Usa than it can actually meet. The problem is one of isolation and of the building up of expectations which in the end will never be shared and/or supported either by Northern and Central European or by Southern European allies.

There are clear limits to any isolated Italian military role in the Mediterranean, while the upgrading of the international profile of the country requires a sensible and feasible mix of weapons, economic ties and alliances. A secure Mediterranean environment depends first of all on the capacity to create a firm and stable network of consensus, economic links and political alliances.

7. Some conclusions

The considerations outlined above suggest a new attention to the problem of crisis management in the Southern Region, not limited to the Southern Flank of Nato, but enlarged to many, so called, out of area problems.

It might well be that Nato, and the Atlantic Alliance, will be unable or unwilling to confront this wider problem. It might even be unwise to press for greater Nato commitments towards the Southern Region, underestimating the importance and persistence of political differences between the allies, on the better way to deal with it.

It has to be made clear, however, that the present situation is getting worse. The Eastern Mediterranean is militarily less and less secure, and politically far from the perceptions and priorities of the rest of the Alliance. The projection of Nato's military power towards the Eastern Mediterranean, in case of need, could be very costly and difficult, and might be considered at best uncertain and slow. Deterrence is slowly diminishing its credibility. The management of local crises appears more as wishful thinking than actual policy. The crisis in the Gulf, coupled with the Lebanese civil war and the persistence of the terrorist threat, are not dealt with jointly by the Western allies.

Unilateralism has its day, both in the Usa and in the various Western European countries: it is possible that some initiatives (such as the greater naval American commitment in the Gulf) will bring about positive developments. Should however bigger problems arise, and harsher confrontations develop, it is very likely that national commitments and decision will be widely scattered and diversified. No real solidarity is been sought or expected.

Some technical means for improving consultation and joint crisis monitoring might be established, as well as sharing of intelligence and timely circulation of informations: this would be a positive step, without counterindications, relatively easy to make. A better policy of crisis management however has to confront squarely the problem of differing perceptions and interests, and of possible "divisions of labour" between Europeans and Americans.

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