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**THE MEDITERRANEAN, THE MIDDLE EAST AND
THE PERSIAN GULF. UNIFYING FACTORS,
DIFFERENTIATING ELEMENTS, REFERENCE
PICTURES, FUTURE PROSPECTS AND
IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE**

by Maurizio Cremasco

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1. THE UNIFYING FACTORS

In geostrategic and geopolitical terms, it would be wrong to consider the Middle East and the Persian Gulf as two separate and distinct regions. In fact, they are closely linked to each other and to the Mediterranean area.

Militarily, the Mediterranean is the natural backyard for any conflict erupting in the Gulf, providing for strategic space and logistic facilities, as the 1991 coalition war against Iraq has clearly demonstrated. Any arms race, or any dramatic shift in the balance of military power in the Gulf is bound to have security repercussions on the Mediterranean area.

The proliferation of surface-to-surface missiles has made the military links even more evident. Today, Saudi CSS-2 ballistic missiles can target one third of Lybian territory and, on the north, they can reach beyond the territory of Turkey, Iraq and Iran. Israeli JERICHO II missiles can easily strike Riyadh, Badhdad and Bengasi. Iraqi modified SCUD missiles have demonstrated that they can reach Tel Aviv. The possibility that ballistic missiles with a range of 1500-3000 Km. would eventually be acquired by north-African countries will not only strengthen those military links -- Libya would be able to target Cairo and Tel Aviv, while even Algeria could attack Israeli territory with CSS-2 type missiles -- but will also present the southern European countries with a totally new strategic equation. The eventuality that the possession of ballistic missiles will be matched with a chemical and/or nuclear capability is an additional strong factor of instability with unifying interregional repercussions.

Politically, the links are just as strong and evident.

Egypt's participation in the coalition war against Iraq and its role in the most recent crisis in the Maghreb, which culminated in the UN sanctions against Tripoli, are two good examples of the multidirectionality of Cairo's foreign policy.

Saudi Arabia is certainly an important actor in the Gulf, but also plays a role in the Middle East and North Africa through its substantial financial aid.

Iran is a decisive element in the balance of power in the Gulf, but at the same time makes its presence felt in central Asia and from Lebanon to Algeria through its support to the Islamic fundamentalist movements.

¹. The analysis of this paper will focus on regional security and military developments.

Furthermore, the Arab-Israeli confrontation and dialogue involves Israel, its Arab neighbors (Syria and Jordan) and the PLO, but has repercussions in the whole Islamic world, and, directly or indirectly, in the Western world.

However, the Arab-Israeli issue is not the only factor linking the Middle East, the Gulf and Mediterranean together and with the West. The United States played a major role in setting the Arab-Israeli peace talks into motion, but it also played a decisive role -- with the cooperation of Europe -- in the liberation of Kuwait. Some European countries participated in the protection of the Kurds in northern Iraq and in the establishment of a "no-flying zone" in southern Iraq.

Moreover, the southern European countries have special political and economic relationships with the southern Mediterranean countries: Spain with Morocco (a relationship which is still marked by the unresolved issue of Ceuta and Melilla) France with Algeria and Tunisia, Italy with Libya and Tunisia.

On the other hand, the European Community began the implementation of a new Mediterranean policy in 1990 and by 1991, the majority of the new financial protocols with the Mediterranean countries entered into force. The new policy is based on six main components -- back-up for the process of economic adjustment; encouragement of private investments; increase in bilateral and Community financial assistance; improvement of arrangements governing access to the Community market; close involvement with the EC progress towards the single market; strengthening of economic and political dialogue at the regional level. It is also based on an overall aid package of ECU 4405 million through October 31, 1996.

These political and economic relations, including trade and financial support, act as additional unifying elements between the northern and the southern shores of the Mediterranean.

Another common factor is the fact that all regional actors, in the Gulf and the Mediterranean area, are engaged in the search for some strategic weight. This factor is determinant in the propensity of many countries to chemical, nuclear and high-tech weapons proliferation.

Furthermore, religion, as the primary component of national identity, is becoming a significant factor in regional politics in the Gulf and the Mediterranean.

Finally, there are other factors with equalizing effects which link the Middle East and the southern Mediterranean: first, the high rate of population growth, ranging from 2.5 of Morocco and Tunisia to the 3.6 of Syria and the 3.8 of Jordan. By the year 2000 the population of the EC's Mediterranean neighbors is expected to increase by 49.6 million people (20.2 per cent over the 1990), while the EC itself is expected to grow by only 2.4 million; second, agricultural production appears insufficient to feed the population -- in fact, the region from Morocco to Egypt has become a net importer of agricultural produce; third, industrialization is often domestically oriented and unsuccessful by market standards, and every country depends, though to different degrees, on technical and financial aid from outside; fourth, all countries are

struggling with their debt burden.²

This is not to say that there is a complete cohesion among the various subregional entities which together form the Gulf and the Mediterranean regions, but just to underline that cross-cutting factors are more evident and important today than in the Cold War era, when there was greater fragmentation in terms of security terms.

2. THE DIFFERENTIATING ELEMENTS

The multiple (military, political and economic) linkages and the various unifying factors co-exist with specific differentiating elements.

The first element is religion. Sunni and Shi'ite differences have a direct bearing on political postures and foreign policies of the Islamic countries of the Mediterranean and the Gulf. Iran is openly supporting and covertly financing the Islamic fundamentalist movements in Algeria. It is fair to assume, however, that a fundamentalist regime in Algeria will be somewhat different from the one in Tehran, with distinctive domestic priorities and a diverse foreign policy, though a potentially anti-Western attitude is to be expected.

The second element is international alignment. Though this element has lost a great deal of its importance since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, it still plays a role in a situation of regional crisis when the response of the Arab countries assumes a specific value in terms of being pro or against Western policy. Iran is violently anti-American, as Iraq is, but not totally anti-European. Saudi Arabia and the other countries of the GCC supported, and seem willing to continue to support, the U.S. policy in the region. Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco can be considered basically pro-Western countries, but with all the reservations which have emerged so clearly during the Gulf crisis and the coalition war against Saddam Hussein. Syria's participation in the Gulf war was dictated more by national interests than by a reversal of policy towards the United States and Middle East issues. On the other hand, Damascus continues to maintain a special relationship with Russia. Libya is a unique case with all the contradictions of an unpredictable regime willing and capable of adopting policies and assuming attitudes which can be changed almost overnight.

The third element is diversity of domestic political regimes and economic development, against a background of similar population growths and domestic problems.

The fourth element is the dissimilar way the Mediterranean and Gulf countries view their security requirements and plan the build up of their armed forces.

3. THE REGIONAL REFERENCE PICTURES

². For a more detailed analysis, see "Challenges in the Mediterranean -- The European Response", Research Group on European Affairs Headed by Werner Weidenfeld, Bertelsmann Foundation, Gütersloh 1991.

a. The Gulf.

*** Iraq.**

Iraq is still a limited-sovereignty state, subject to the conditions imposed by the UN ceasefire and subsequent resolutions addressing the protection of the Kurds in the north and the Shi'ites in the south. Saddam Hussein, however, is still firmly in power and has abandoned neither his former objective about Kuwait -- still officially considered Iraq's nineteenth province -- nor the goal of rebuilding Iraq's military power.

After their last 1992 inspection in Iraq, a UN team of weapons experts declared that there were still points to be clarified in talks with Iraqi officials, while a senior Iraqi official reportedly stated that there would be no more cooperation from the Iraqi side.³

At the end of October 1992, the Iraqi National Congress met in the northern Iraqi town of Salahuddin. Iraq's opposition groups decided to forge a united front against Saddam Hussein and agreed on the federal structure for the country's future.⁴

Delegates were optimistic about the possibility of mobilizing the "Iraqi people to overthrow the dictatorship".⁵

It is difficult to assess whether the optimism is well founded. The impression is that the domestic opposition does not seem so strong and united as to pose a threat to Saddam, while his grip on the population through his security apparatus appears firm and pervasive enough to anticipate and crush any subversive attempt.⁶

A last point: the fact that Iraq offered the GCC countries its support in connection with Iran's occupation of Abu Mussa is a clear indication that Baghdad has not renounced to play a role in the regional power game.

*** Iran.**

Since Khomeini's death, changes in Iran have been ambiguous. The domestic revolutionary fervor has somewhat subsided and the economic situation has imposed a new course. Internationally, Iran is pursuing an ambitious and wide-ranging foreign policy spanning from the attempt at assuming larger influence and greater weight in Persian Gulf security -- the occupation of Abu Mussa is a stark reminder of the continuity of Iran's regional ambitions, which date back to the Shah's era -- to the attempt at exploiting the openings in the non-Arab Muslim Asian republic of the former Soviet Union, more likely to be receptive to Islamic fundamentalist credo. Groups of Tagiki militia men reportedly received guerrilla training in military camps in Sudan (where Iran supports Islamic fundamentalism) under the guidance of

³. International Herald Tribune (IHT), 14 December 1992, p. 2.

⁴. The Congress elected a Kurd, a Shi'ite Muslim and a Sunni Muslim to lead the group. See "Hussein Foes Create Joint Front for a Federal Iraq", New York Times (NYT), 2 November 1992, p. A-7.

⁵. Ibid.

⁶. On Iraq's internal situation see the three articles of Pietro Veronese published by La Repubblica (LR) on 25 and 29 September, and 8 October 1992.

Pasdaran instructors. They are now back in Tagikistan sustaining the party of Islamic Renaissance and taking part in the fighting against Russian troops and government forces. It is widely assumed that the weaker Tagikistan is only the first target of Tehran's grand design for the emergence of radical Islamic states in central Asia. Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are expected to be next.⁷

Particularly troubling are the pattern of Iran's alliances with Syria,⁸ Pakistan, China and North Korea and its developments in the military and nuclear fields.

Iran appears to be on its way to becoming the most powerful military force in the region.⁹ In 1991, Iran reportedly spent \$5 billion with China, \$4 billion with the Russian Federation and \$3 billion with North Korea for modern weapons. North Korea supplied 170 SCUD B and SCUD C missiles (presumably more than 100 of the C model),¹⁰ while China supplied 600-mile range M-11 ballistic missiles.

Iran is reported to have tested two new ballistic missiles in 1991 -- the first with a range of over 700 Km. and the second with a range of over 1000 Km.¹¹ These are believed to be the result of a joint Chinese-Iranian project.

In March 1992, Tehran signed a \$1 billion contract with the Russia Federation for the delivery of 400 T-72 tanks, including crew training in Russia as well as maintenance and repair. Another contract for \$175 million was signed for the purchase of 500 MBP-2 armored fighting vehicles (AFV), while China has granted a \$14 million credit for spare parts for the AFVs already in Iran's possession.

Apart from the Iraqi combat aircraft redeployed to Iran during the Gulf conflict and eventually requisitioned as compensation for the damages of the 1980-1988 war, Russia has recently sold to Tehran advanced aircraft such as SU-24s and Mig-29s. Moreover, the acquisition of two (with an option for a third) KILO class conventional attack submarines -- the first has already been delivered -- will give Iran a unique undersea capability of disruption of commercial traffic in the Gulf of Oman, northwest Arabian Sea and Strait of Hormuz.¹² The military importance of the KILO

⁷. Luigi Ippolito, "Offensiva Islamica nell'Asia ex-Sovietica", *Corriere della Sera* (CS), 8 November 1992, p. 7. See also Guido Olimpico, "Nuovi adepti nella legione di Allah", *ibidem*.

⁸. In this context, it is significant that an agreement on joint production of SCUD C missiles was apparently reached in October 1991 during a visit to Tehran of the Chief of Staff of the Syrian Army. See, "Syria and Iran Pool SRBM Resources", *Flight International*, 16-22 October 1991, p. 15.

⁹. For data on Iran's weapons systems acquisition, see Arnold Beichman, *Insight*, 29 June 1992. On the sale of state-of-the-art technologies by European, Asian and American companies, see Steve Coll "Iran Devours Technology as Wahington and Allies Differ on Export Controls" and R. Jeffrey Smith, "U.S. Opposes Sales That Aid Armaments", *International Herald Tribune* (IHT), 11 November 1992, p. 1.

¹⁰. B. Gertz, "Iran Fired Ballistic Missile", *The Washington Times* (WT), 24 May 1991, p. A5. Other reports suggest that the contract was for 200 missiles. See K. Royce, "The Gulf War Briefing: Iran's Arsenal Worries Analyst", *Newsday*, 30 January 1991, p. 16.

¹¹. It is possible that the same missile was tested over two different ranges. See, Joseph S. Bermudez jr., "Ballistic Missiles in the Third World -- Iran's Medium-Range Missiles", *Iran*, April 1992 *Jane's Intelligence Review*, pp. 147-152.

¹². The Bush Administration was so worried about the prospective sale that it tried to convince Saudi Arabia to pay Russia the cost of the submarines (about \$600 million) in order to abandon the transaction. See, Barton Gellman, "U.S. Sought Saudi Aid on Iran Subs", *Washington Post* (WP), 30 October 1992,

submarines should not be overestimated, but it is fair to say that they can provide a measure of sea denial,¹³ and a means to intimidate and harass with significant political effects.

On the other hand, this new development will force the other Gulf countries to reassess their security requirements and arrangements. Oman, considering the interest of New Dehli to balance the loose alliance between Iran and Pakistan, is reportedly contemplating the enlistment of India's large anti-submarine warfare capabilities. It is likely that Saudi Arabia will consider the acquisition of submarines or ASW assets of its own. In the longer term, Iraq might follow suit.

Iran is a party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty and a member of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and its declared nuclear facilities are all open for IAEA inspections.

There is increasing concern that Tehran may try to acquire nuclear weapons. Suspicions about Iran's nuclear propensity and intentions have grown because of a series of elements all pointing towards an expansion of its nuclear programs. In the framework of the 1990 scientific agreement with China, which included nuclear cooperation, Iran bought a minitype reactor (27 kilowatt) and an electromagnetic separator (calutron) that produces fissionable isotopes. Though there is no evidence that China is assisting Iran in making nuclear weapons, the equipment could be used to produce fissile material and eventually build an atomic bomb.¹⁴

According to other experts, the Chinese small reactor and calutron are not capable of producing significant quantities of bomb-grade material, but they certainly contribute to Iran's nuclear technology and can indirectly facilitate the development of a nuclear weapons program.

Moreover, Iran tried to import nuclear technology from Argentina, Brazil, France, Germany, India and Russia. Considering Iran's large oil and gas resources, there appears to be little scope for the procurement of powerful civilian reactors.

There have been widespread reports about Iran having received three tactical nuclear weapons, which disappeared from a former Red Army depot in Kazakhstan.¹⁵ To date, press reports have not been substantiated or confirmed. Nuclear experts believe that even if the Iranians obtained nuclear weapons from a CIS republic they could not explode them in the short term. Their fissile material, however, could be used for weapons of Iran's own design and the devices for acquiring knowledge about design and construction of nuclear weapons.

p. A-29.

¹³. The KILO submarines carry up to 18 torpedoes or 24 mines. The possibility of laying mines is the more subtle element of its sea denial capability.

¹⁴. WP, 30 October 1991, p. A1, A20. NYT, 5 November 1991, p. A11. On Iran's attempt at nuclear proliferation see also David Albright and Matk Hibbs, "Spotlight shifts to Iran", The Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists (BAS), March 1992, p. 9-11.

¹⁵. U.S. News & World Report, 23 March 1992, p. 62. About the denial of Lt. Gen. Sergei Zelentsov in Moscow, WP, 18 March 1992, p. A-18.

In May 1992, the U.S. CIA director Robert M. Gates confirmed earlier intelligence assessments about Iran's willingness to pursue a nuclear military capability,¹⁶ though it was not to be expected before the year 2000.¹⁷ But after the Iraqi experience, any prediction about nuclear developments in a country dominated by a dictatorial regime, and in which the only controls are those performed by the IAEA, should be taken with caution.

b. The Middle East.

*** The peace talks.**

The Israeli-Arab peace talks are proceeding along a roller coaster of hopes, disappointments, set-backs and stalling political posturing.

There has been a good sign.

Israel and Jordan formally agreed for the first time that their objective is a peace treaty within the framework of a comprehensive settlement. Israeli and Jordanian officials cautioned against excessive optimism, pointing out that the road to an actual treaty is still long and difficult. At the same time, the fact that after forty years of a technical state of war Jordan accepted the term "peace treaty" as a principal goal of a far-reaching agreement can be considered a real break-through, and the draft document could become a model for the Israeli-Syrian talks.¹⁸

But there are also bad signs.

After a brief period of hope and positive expectations the negotiation with Syria has encountered some difficulties, and Damascus appears to be less cooperative.

The Palestinian delegation was not satisfied by the results of the latest round of the Washington talks, which recessed on October 28, 1992, and accused Israel of trying to legitimize its intended continued control of the occupied territories.¹⁹ Even though Israeli and Palestinian negotiators have established working groups to discuss in detail the arrangements for Palestinian self-rule, whether the Palestinians will eventually accept a solution which falls short of their ultimate goal of a Palestinian state is still an open question.

There has been -- and continues to be -- increasing violence in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip which alarmed the Israeli public and forced Israel to respond with harsh police actions. Moreover, ambushes in southern Lebanon with the death of Israeli soldiers and the almost daily rocket attacks by pro-Iranian guerrilla added to Israel's problem of striking back at Hezbollah, and maintaining law and order in the

¹⁶. In October 1991, Iran's deputy president, Ayatollah Mohajerani, explicitly declared that "because the enemy has nuclear facilities, the Muslim states too should be equipped with the same capacity." WP, 30 October 1991, A-1, A-20.

¹⁷. WP, 28 March 1992, p. A-1, A-17.

¹⁸. On the detailed terms of the draft accord see Clyde Haberman, "Israel and Jordan Agree They Want a Formal Treaty", NYT, 2 November 1992, p. A-3.

¹⁹. The frustration with the lack of an agreement on Palestinian self-rule was expressed by the head of the Palestinian delegation Haidar Abdel-Shafi. For an assessment of the October round of talks, see Robert Pear, "Mideast Talks Get Promising Reviews", NYT, 30 October 1992, p. A6.

occupied territories, without shattering the peace talks. The Israeli Labor Government is presently walking on a tight rope. It must show its flexibility and willingness to make compromises at the peace talks, but at the same time it must demonstrate to its adversaries and the Israeli people that the flexibility will not be at the expense of Israeli security.

*** Syria.**

Apart from the important, but still uncertain, openings toward Israel in the framework of the Arab-Israeli peace talks, the developments which raise interest and concern are those related to security.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Syria has lost a secure friend and a good source of armaments. It is worth recalling that most of Syria's foreign debt is military debt to the former Soviet Union in concessional form.

This has not prevented Damascus from proceeding to a further strengthening of its military capabilities, finding other willing suppliers. Thus Syria received 200 T-72 from Czechoslovakia and 20 SCUD-C missiles and 20 mobile launchers from North Korea. Moreover, Syria is widely believed to have ordered M-9 ballistic missile (with a range of 600 km.) from China.²⁰

Even more disturbing are the developments in the nuclear field. Ten years after the nuclear cooperation agreement with India in 1981,²¹ Syria is reportedly seeking to proceed with a nuclear program with the eventual goal of building nuclear weapons. The first step is the attempt to acquire a research reactor from China. The sale approved by Beijing is presently stalled by the Syrian refusal to sign the standard agreement with the IAEA required by the NPT.²²

Though it might be attributed to a growing sense of isolation stemming from the loss of the Soviet Union as the protector power, and the fragmentation of the old international system based on military alliances and treaties of friendship and cooperation, it seems odd that Syria would try to become a nuclear power when Iraq's nuclear ambitions have been drastically curtailed, and talks with Israel are supposed to address arms control issues and strict security arrangements.²³

c. North Africa.

*** Algeria.**

²⁰. On November 1991, China agreed to adopt MTCR guidelines which preclude the sale of M-11 missiles to Pakistan and M-9 missiles to Syria in exchange for the removal of U.S. sanctions imposed on 1991. Moreover, in February 1992, China gave written assurance to the U.S. that it will abide to the MTCR guidelines. See "The Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)", The Arms Control Association, Background Paper, July 1992.

²¹. Very little is known about the actual sharing of nuclear technologies and the range of the cooperation.

²². Leonard S. Spector, "Nuclear Proliferation in the Middle East", Orbis, Spring 1992, pp. 189-190. On the press reports of the Syrian attempt at acquiring uranium from Namibia, see Guido Olimpio, "Quel piccolo jet é straordinario: sembra proprio una bomba", CS, 21 ottobre 1992, p. 8.

²³. The Jordan-Israel draft accord considers the discussion of issues regarding arms control and the destruction of unconventional weapons. The same issues could be part of a Syria-Israel agreement.

The instability of Algeria's domestic situation, and the possibility of the eventual access to power of the Islamic fundamentalist movement, add elements of true concern to the elements of ambiguity in the Algerian nuclear program.

As for that possibility, at the end of 1992 the military-backed government appeared in control of the situation. A major crackdown on the Islamic fundamentalist movement involving more than 30,000 army and police men was conducted in December, while an indefinite curfew was imposed in several provinces, as well as in Algiers. However, the fundamentalists seemed capable of striking back.²⁴

Regarding the nuclear program, apart from the small (one megawatt) research reactor bought from Argentina, which has been operational since March 1989,²⁵ Algeria did not appear to have nuclear ambitions until recently. But in 1991, a significant nuclear project was finally unveiled after being kept secret for some years: a Chinese-supplied research reactor²⁶ was being built near the town of Ain Oussera.

Many aspects of this project are cause for concern:

- its initial secrecy,²⁷ and the fact that the facility is said to be encircled by anti-aircraft guns;
- the military potential of the reactor, the technical feasibility to operate it at higher power than declared, and eventually to enlarge it;
- the scarce justification of a civilian nuclear program in a country rich in oil and gas;
- the fact that Algeria is still not a party to the NPT, and the uncertainty about the pledge made by the Benjedid government to join the treaty, and to put the facility under IAEA controls, after its resignation and the events which followed;
- the lack of a clear military threat and of security requirements which could stimulate and justify nuclear ambitions.

*** Libya.**

Just a brief note concerning the issue of Libya's chemical weapons production program.

Libya apparently obtained chemical agents from Iran in 1987 and used them against Chad's military forces.

Photographic satellites provided the first indication that the activity going on at Rabta, a facility in the middle of the Lybian desert protected by high fences and anti-aircraft defense composed of radar sites and CROTALE surface-to-air missiles, could be related to the production of chemical weapons. The first report appeared in

²⁴. On 14 December, five policemen were ambushed and killed in Algiers. IHT, 15 December 1992, p. 2.

²⁵. Though Algeria is not a signatory to the NPT, the reactor was placed under IAEA safeguards.

²⁶. The power of the reactor was initially rated at 40 megawatts or larger (a size more apt for plutonium production than for peaceful reseach) and then downgraded to about 15 megawatts. In May 1991, China and Algeria revealed that 15 megawatts was actually the maximum power rating and that normal operations would be conducted at 10 megawatts. See John M. Deutch, "The New Nuclear Threat", Foreign Affairs, Fall 1992, pp. 131-132, and Leonard S. Spector, cit. pp. 190-192.

²⁷. The project was discovered only through U.S. intelligence satellites.

the press at the end of December 1987.²⁸ Subsequent acquisition of the German engineering design of the plant and additional, more detailed information on the work conducted there, confirmed the initial suspicions that Rabta was intended to produce chemical weapons. In October 1988, the U.S. CIA Director, William H. Webster, disclosed that Libya was developing the largest chemical weapons production plant the Agency had yet detected anywhere.²⁹ Eventually, on March 7, 1990 the White House firmly stated that "available evidence suggested" that chemical weapons were produced at Rabta.³⁰

After the fire that incapacitated the plant only a week after the U.S. accusation -- and the unanswered questions about possible sabotage, real extent of damages, presumable length of work stoppage -- new press reports surfaced again in April 1992 about the full operational status of the chemical plant and the other facilities in the Rabta Technology Center, which apparently produce missiles and missile trailers.³¹

4. THE FUTURE PROSPECTS

This section is basically a series of considerations related to the analysis of the regional situations.

* Though not in the program of the Iraqi opposition, the dismemberment of the country as the eventual outcome of Saddam Hussein's overthrow may unleash a wave of sectarian struggles and open a power vacuum ready to be filled. This would not be in the interest of the West, but the prospect of a stable and more democratic and pluralistic regime, capable of playing a stabilizing role in the region appears today, and for the near future, to be simply wishful thinking.

* Iran is posed to become one of the main actors in the Gulf, but unfortunately its policy toward the region, and the former Soviet Asian republics, and its willingness to acquire a huge military power appear as a troubling trend and open a bleak prospect about the stability and the security of the region. Moreover, its political and financial support of Islamic fundamentalist movements and organizations from Turkmenistan to Sudan and from Lebanon to the Maghreb countries is bound to re-create -- this time in terms of north-south confrontation -- Brzezinski's "arc of crisis".

Additional problems are the political fragility and military weakness of Saudi Arabia -- no matter how many F-15s they buy -- the present disarray of the GCC, and the incapacity of the small Gulf countries to defend themselves.

* The prospect of Arab-Israeli talks will be influenced by the strong currents of change which flow from the Gulf to the western Mediterranean. Israel will continue

²⁸. Michael R. Gordon, "U.S. Thinks Libya May Plan to Make Chemical Weapons", NYT, 24 December 1987, p. A1.

²⁹. David B. Ottaway, "CIA Chief Says Libya Builds Massive Chemical Arms Plant," WP, 26 October 1988, p. A2.

³⁰. U.S. Says Libyan Plant Produces Mustard Gas", International Herald Tribune, 8 March 1990, p. 1, and U.S.I.S. Wireless File, Rome, 8 March 1990, p. 7.

³¹. "British firm helped Gadaffi make poison gas missiles", Sunday Times (ST), 5 April 1992.

to assess the situation in terms of its own security, and the Israeli military explicitly stated that it will react to any attempt by Arab countries at acquiring nuclear weapons.³²

* Prospects about Libya's missile arsenal and its chemical capacity must be inserted in the larger framework of its foreign policy aims. Gadhafi's attitude towards the Gulf crisis and war was ambivalent and ambiguous and, at present, his policy seems to have lost some of the radical pan-Arabic, anti-imperialist, and transnational elements (with expansionist projections and support to international terrorist organizations) of the 70's and the 80's.

In this context, it is significant that in the last two years there were no acquisitions of major weapons systems.

A domestic factor with a direct bearing on Tripoli's foreign policy, and on the ultimate importance of its military arsenal in terms of Mediterranean security, is the serious challenge posed by fundamentalist movements.³³

The eventuality of a fundamentalist state in Algeria will very likely have deep repercussions in Libya with long term effects on the internal stability of the country. In fact, it cannot be excluded that a radical Islamic government in Algeri would be tempted to subvert Gadhafi's regime.

A similar development in Tunisia, where the Islamic radical movements are becoming stronger, would actually transform the political landscape of the entire Maghreb and radically change the security parameters of the Mediterranean strategic equation.

* The future of the Algerian nuclear program should be seen in the prospect of the Islamic Salvation Front taking power -- an event that French intelligence services reportedly believe to be possible in less than two years.³⁴ More militant leaders might have different ideas about the nuclear program remaining totally peaceful. Thus, the future of the program will depend on the political future of the country.

* Even though there are still serious uncertainties on the final outcome of the current political and economic process in the former Soviet Union, at least three interconnected considerations can be drawn from it.

First, the political and security interests of Russia, the republic which has inherited the largest part of the Union's political and military power (conventional and nuclear), will be necessarily different from, and have more limited scope than, those of the Soviet Union.

³². Lorenzo Cremonesi, "Monito dello Stato Maggiore. L'esercito israeliano pronto a fermare l'atomica degli arabi", CS, 18 April 1992, p. 11.

³³. On the activism of Libyan Islamic fundamentalists and the problems they have already created, see Jennifer Parmelee, "Moslem Fundamentalists Pose Domestic Challenge to Gadhafi", WP, 10 January 1989, p. A16.

³⁴. Roger Faligot, "France warns of coup in Algeria", The European (EU), 22-25 October 1992, p. 2.

The Mediterranean would probably be considered as a low priority region, unless the new Commonwealth succeeds in forging a common foreign policy, and in maintaining centralized control of the conventional armed forces, Navy included.

Second, it would be now very unlikely for the Mediterranean Third World countries to use -- as they often did in the past -- US-USSR ideological differences, political rivalries and confrontational attitudes in the international arena for pursuing national interests, or to utilize their special relationship with the Soviet Union for shielding their foreign policy objectives and somewhat constraining the potential range of American actions. Third, NATO has ceased to see the East as its potential "enemy" and Russia has even indicated it considers its membership a possible future prospect. Moreover, apart from the eventual changes in the command structure and military posture of the former Soviet forces, SOVMEDRON's presence and operational readiness have been already affected to the point of practically voiding the NATO maritime forces' mission in the Mediterranean.

It is fair to assume that in addition to having lost its military tasks vis-à-vis NATO, any residual naval presence will be incapable of performing a credible function as an instrument of foreign policy.

There is another consideration to be drawn from the dissolution of the traditional threat picture and this is the weakening of the perceptions of NATO as the indispensable framework for European security and defense.

This weakening appears to be greater in the South where peculiar geopolitical and geostrategic factors play a more evident role. In particular, new requirements seem to be emerging in Greece and Turkey, which are more in line with a national vision of foreign and security policy interests.

The tendency toward the re-orientation of foreign and security policy is clearer in Turkey partly as a result of its unsuccessful attempt to become a member in the EC, partly as a consequence of the emerging of religious and nationalistic sentiments in the population, and partly as the result of the independence of the Islamic republics of the former Soviet Union. This creates new prospects for Turkey's foreign and economic policies.

This re-orientation might, in the long run, not only progressively detach Ankara from Europe -- an outcome which would kill the prospect of a true European security and defense identity -- but also stimulate a national approach to present and future regional crises. Turkish support for the Islamic population in Bosnia-Erzegovina, or Greek involvement in Macedonia are hypotheses which may not be excluded if Yugoslavia's civil war expands. Even in the case of a possible renewal of traditional Greek-Turkish controversies over Cyprus and the Aegean Sea, the uncertainty about the Soviet attitude and potential threat would not play its constraining role on national behaviors, as it had in the past.

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR EUROPE

The prospects of a situation of endemic instability in the whole Mediterranean area with sudden crises and an increase in the North-South confrontation -- in terms increasingly envisioned by radical, and now also by moderate, Arabs -- is bound to be matched by the prospects of a European Community still unprepared to confront the international challenges of the 90's.

The way the European Community acted throughout the course of the Yugoslav crisis from its warning signs in 1989 to the outbreak of hostilities in June 1991, and the tragedy of the civil war in Bosnia-Herzegovina, tells a lot about EC's political weakness and the uncertainty in the actualization of a true common foreign and security policy (CFSP).

The WEU suffers from the same lack of strong political will and, in scenarios of out-of-area crises, does not possess the military capabilities -- long range air transport, high definition satellite reconnaissance, high-tech weapons systems, total control of the battlefield through JointSTARS -- which constitute the conditions sine-qua-non for playing a credible role.

This means that for complex crisis management and peace keeping roles, or particularly for peace enforcing roles, the participation of the United States military power -- and the U.S. leadership, as in the case of the 1990 Persian Gulf crisis -- would be of paramount importance.

It is still difficult to foresee if and how NATO will become the military arm of the CSCE. In any case, if hypotheses of crises in the Mediterranean area are taken into consideration -- with the inevitable overtones of north-south confrontation that such crises would entail -- NATO's intervention might radicalize Arab attitudes and policies, unless it is carried out under the authority and within the limits of a United Nations' mandate.

On the other hand, it is difficult to imagine that the potential differences and divisions among the European countries which might emerge in the EC and the WEU would not arise also in the Atlantic Alliance, especially if the intervention is envisaged solely as a NATO operation.

The political and military trends in the region from Morocco to Iran have ominous implications for Europe, particularly if they are added to the signs of political instability and social disintegration evident in eastern Europe and in the former Soviet Union.

In the southern Mediterranean countries the growing North-South economic gap is bound to fuel domestic instability, radicalization of the political life with chances for the Islamic fundamentalist movements to expand their influence, and eventually gain access to power, and a further increase in the migration toward Europe with direct repercussions on France, Italy and Spain.

In the longer term, the proliferation in the fields of high-tech weapons systems, ballistic missiles, and chemical and nuclear armament will pose serious

security problems by radically changing the strategic situation of the whole Mediterranean area.

Unfortunately, the EC is presently divided about its economic and political future and the European countries do not appear ready to take prompt action on these issues with the necessary foresight.