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THE SECURITY ARCHITECTURE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: A SOUTHERN EUROPEAN VIEW

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DISINTEGRATION AND INTEGRATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Fragmentation into subregions lacking genuine convergency or strategic homogeneity in terms of security concerns is the pattern in the Mediterranean today, a fragmentary pattern that is much more visible today than in the days of the Cold War. An obvious exception to this general pattern are the EC member states of southern Europe, and more particularly so Portugal, Spain, France and Italy. Diversity and conflict coexist with association and integration endeavours. Both factors characterise the Mediterranean today, making it difficult and almost meaningless to talk about the security of the Mediterranean as a whole and would seem to recommend a subregional approach to security issues. Specific, subregional solutions have to be sought for each individual grouping, for each individual piece of the greater Mediterranean puzzle, while in the realm of the dialogue of civilisations, in checking the two-way spread of misleading perceptions or in such matters of common concern as environmental protection or fighting terrorism, global initiatives remain valid, and should indeed be a part of any comprehensive security policy. The multiple nature of the crises, which nonetheless have common economic and social roots, combined with security and nationalistic ingredients, make the European Community a strongly committed partner, one without which most of the crises cannot be managed and eventually solved.

Patterns of the past

Already during the Cold War and when compared to other regions where Europe has a strategic interest, the Mediterranean appeared quite fragmented. From a security perspective, the rule was rather defence policies of northern shore countries ruled by national priorities, which did not always seem to converge with those of the Atlantic Alliance or, conversely, falling under the East-West dimension. The United States were the 'strategic federator' of countries with such different national priorities as Portugal under Salazar, Spain under Franco and other Nato members such as Greece and Turkey who were involved in a serious conflict against each other. This 'federating' role of the United States was performed through a network of bilateral defence agreements by which they were militarily present across the Mediterranean, from its extreme gateways in the Azores or Ardahan to Rota, Kenitra or Sigonella.[1]

In the southern shore 'security convergence' was much looser still. During the eighties, the former Soviet Union had security relations with some of the Arab countries, namely Libya, Sirya and Algeria. Other Arab countries favoured relations with the West -- the United States and France in the case of Morocco, Tunisia and Egypt, for example. The Soviet fleet in the Mediterranean (Sovmedron) had a fairly limited role, in no way comparable to the 'federating' role of the Sixth Fleet. Related to the East and to the West in varying degrees, all Arab countries in the Mediterranean were seeking in the non-aligned movement the possibility of a special position both in the East-West and the North-South context. The chief 'federator', in the southern shore, was perhaps the Arab-Israeli conflict -- the single most important politico-strategic factor speaking for Arab unity.

The effects of strategic 'decompression'

Contradictory effects are felt in the Mediterranean after the Cold War in what concerns association or integration processes. From the point of view of security, the end of the Cold War contributed to the existing trend towards fragmentation which is currently the rule. The 'decompression effect'[2] wrought by fading bipolarity created unprecedented opportunities for cooperation between the great powers, but also made it easier to affirm nationalistic designs and designs for regional hegemony. Strategic deglobalisation makes it unnecessary and almost impossible for western powers to justify their softness towards authoritarianism in many countries of the South, and thus the lack of convergence between north and south in terms of political regimes adds yet another factor to the existing tensions.

The current situation, however, owing precisely to the danger of nationalistic drifts it generates, makes it more necessary than ever to work for integration and cooperation at the subregional level, which in turn calls for convergence at least to some extent on the basis of democratic principles and the rule of law.

As a result of European integration, Southern Europe is today by far the most cohesive grouping within the Mediterranean,[3] and for that reason has a particular role in initiatives for the region. Cohesiveness is further reinforced by the fact that in Southern Europe North Africa, especially the Maghreb, is a foreign policy priority for each one of the countries, and they share a vision of European policy that tends to balance the East and the South in terms of economic support. Both the initiative for a CSCM and the Five+Five process in the Western Mediterranean were taken by France, Italy, Spain and Portugal. Simultaneously, military cooperation between the first three countries is intensifying and the strategic interests of the said four EC member countries are

today almost coincidental in their essence, in spite of minor differences in what concerns their attitude towards NATO and the WEU. Their points of view should be fully taken into consideration in what concerns Mediterranean issues, and more particularly in what concerns relationships with the Arab-Islamic world.

The situation in the western parts of Europe deeply contrasts with the situation in its eastern parts, where the affirmation of the right to self-determination and democracy is accompanied by disintegration and ethnic strife which find a sad illustration in the Serbian aggression against Croatia and Bosnia-Hercegovina. The Yugoslav conflict is in turn both a serious threat to stability in the Balkans and a motive for disagreement opposing Greece to the rest of the EC member countries. To the difficult and complex situation in the European part of the Eastern Mediterranean, should be added the Greek-Turk dispute should be added and the question of Cyprus, which remains unsolved to date, and the difficult transition in successor states bordering the Black Sea, a region which is, strategically, a natural complement to the Mediterranean.

In the Arab-Islamic world, the end of bipolarity and the collapse of the Soviet Union has put into question the fundamental assumptions underlying foreign policy options of many countries. While for some it meant the loss of a powerful ally, for most it means that non-alignment and 'tiers-mondisme' no longer make any sense. The Gulf War helped undermine over-ambitious designs based on (ideological) motivations such as pan-Arabism that were already gradually losing political credibility. In this light, and not least owing to the paralysis the Arab League suffered during the Gulf war from which it has so far been unable to recover, it is understandable that the French should abandon the idea of having 'one Arab policy', since even 'the term "Arab world" is in itself a myth'.[4] Essentially the notion, although put in a different perspective, can be found in Arab intellectuals like Hamadi Essid,

who recognises the validity of the concept of Arab unity while considering that it will not come about in the absence of 'democratic sovereignty.'[5]

Seeking integration into the world economy, many countries of the South have entered a difficult process of economic and political reform. At the same time they are making efforts to overcome disputes between them and reinforce intraregional trade through regional cooperation. Such is the case with the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) created in February 1989 by the Treaty of Marrakesh.

Both existing or potential crises and existing or emerging cooperation processes shape up distinct although interacting regions (or subregions) in the Mediterranean. In the Western Mediterranean, the questions are fundamentally of a politico-economic and social nature; in the Middle East, the Arab-Israeli conflict and the occupied territories are the core issue, combined with the rights of the Palestinians, the status of Jerusalem and the never ending confrontation in Lebanon; to these should be added the problems ensuing from the demise of the Soviet Union in the countries bordering the Black Sea. The Black Sea, the Middle East, the Balkans, the Western Mediterranean -- all these Mediterranean segments are affected in varying degrees by the struggle for hegemony in the Gulf and the irradiation of ideological influence exerted by Iran and Islamic fundamentalism.

Even a brief description of the crises and conflicts across the Mediterranean suffices to highlight both their diversity and their complexity and the seriousness of the challenges Europe and the West are faced with.

From a security point of view, there is a fundamental difference between North and South in the Mediterranean. Whilst in the north there is an institutional framework for the management of tension and conflict, the CSCE, and a powerful defensive alliance,

NATO, to which the project of a European defence identity should be added, in the South there is a total vacuum from the point of view of common security structures, which no project for a common north-south cooperation structure is designed to fill in for. The Mediterranean dimension of the CSCE does not encompass North Africa and the Middle East, and the CSCM is far from materialising. The proposal of a Conference for Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean, which stemmed from the Italian/Spanish 'no-paper' of September 1990, seeks to apply the experience and the success of the CSCE to the relationship between the west and the Islamic world as a whole. The almost impossible task of addressing such a wide variety of issues and the sheer number of participants it would involve have so far put insurmountable obstacles in the way of the CSCM. The United Nations have taken up a greater role in the region, namely through legitimising the action of the US-led coalition in the Gulf and the blockade in the Adriatic by NATO/WEU naval forces to enforce the UN embargo on Serbia.

As the Gulf War ended, and in view of the military success of the US-led military coalition, there were many (in Europe and also in the Mediterranean) who believed that a new international order had been set in place essentially by virtue of the power and leadership of the sole remaining military superpower. The US role as 'world policeman' would be legitimised through the UN. As the United States remained relatively indifferent to the war in former Yugoslavia, the notion of a 'unipolar' world was put aside. The fact that the victor of the Gulf War was defeated in the presidential election and president-elect Bill Clinton seems anxious to concentrate on the domestic economy, a priority if the United States wish to avoid decline, further substantiates the fact that Europe is called upon to play a larger role in crises in its strategic environment.

There is no US solution -- there never was -- to the full fledge of issues in the Mediterranean, and the probability of renewing the effective and vast coalition that terminated the Iraqi aggression against Kuwait is rather low, although it cannot be totally discarded while recognising its truly exceptional character. The sheer impotence of the international community to terminate Serbian aggression against Bosnia and their obscene ethnic cleansing is a clear demonstration of this.

NATO in the Mediterranean

A fundamental question that should be brought into the picture in defining the security instruments in the Mediterranean is the fundamental difference in the perceptions of East and Central Europeans (governments and public opinion alike), on the one hand, and Arab countries, including the Maghreb, as regards the institutions concerned with European security.

Central Europeans regard the reinforcement of the security institutions of the West as a factor for stability and are more than willing to join them, in their quest for security guarantees, uneasy as they are with the consequences they fear from unpredictable developments in the former Soviet Union.

For the former Soviet republics, including Russia, taking part in such structures as the NACC (North Atlantic Cooperation Council) is not only a way of pulling out of marginalisation but of pushing towards a democratic and prosperous world.

In North Africa and the Middle East the perceptions are of course totally different. During the Cold War and in spite of the identification of Nato with the United States, and the United States with Israel, Nato was understood in its real dimension, i.e. as a part of the East-West equation. The rapprochement or the alignment of certain Arab countries with the Soviet Union obviously

had a bearing in the existing perception of Nato; Arab analysts consider however that Nato was not perceived then as something that directly concerned the Arabs. As the Cold War ended and the debate on a new strategic concept for the Alliance began, and with it the rhetorics and analyses of the 'threat from the South', Nato inevitably entered the strategic literature in the Arab countries and the perceptions of North Africans as an element of the threat which they in turn perceive as coming from the North.

The logistical participation of the Alliance in the war against Iraq is regarded by many, as in the so-called 'Arab National Security' and the radical Islamic sectors, as sound proof of this, a view which some sectors of the ruling political elites seem to share.

The Gulf War contributed powerfully to this view. In Europe and the United States, the main reason why the war was fought was to liberate Kuwait and to oppose the hegemonic pull of Iraq in the Persian Gulf -- in other words, to reinstate international law where it had been broken as a result of an inter-Arab conflict. But in the Arab world, particularly the Maghreb, the occupied territories and Jordan, things were not seen quite in the same way: for the Arab publics, it was a war waged against a powerful Arab state by the United States and their allies, driven primarily by the desire to expand their control over its wealth in oil. Even in Morocco, who sent troops to the Gulf to help protect Saudi Arabia against Iraq, a country moreover who maintains a security relationship with the United States, the king was forced to take up a non-belligerent stance under the pressure of a profoundly dissatisfied public opinion.

The possibility of an expansion of the Nato area would certainly not be perceived here as in Central Europe. Instead of enhanced security, it would be widely perceived as enhanced insecurity. Perceptions would not be identical in every country, there would certainly be different attitudes on the part Morocco or

Egypt, at least in government circles. In all of them however, the publics and relevant political sectors would regard such a development as an unwelcome manifestation of the fact that the north was in fact seriously considering a 'threat from the south'. Islamic radicals would be quick to ripe the political dividends. This 'gigantic misunderstanding,'[6] as Burhan Ghalioun calls it, is a major obstacle to any form of security cooperation in the Mediterranean that needs to be overcome.

All institutions dealing in one way or another with the Mediterranean should cooperate -- as the UN, the EC, Nato and the WEU are doing at present in the Adriatic. But they should refrain from seeking new missions or new mandates designed to justify their existence beyond any measure of necessity.

This competition has been particularly notorious between Nato and the WEU: duplication in fact reached the point of certain countries having committed naval forces to the Adriatic part of which assigned to Nato and part to the WEU. It was all the more ludicrous since they were perfectly useless for the purpose of enforcing the UN embargo against Serbia and Montenegro until they were recently allowed to halt and search vessels on their way in or out of Serbia. This recent progress was matched, moreover, by improved cooperation between Nato and the WEU in this particular mission.

The debate within Nato on its role in the post-Cold War era has not reached a conclusion as yet. Some argue that the Alliance does not have a future unless the geographical area it covers would be stretched to the south, or unless its areas of concern were extended to allow for significant action in economic or other relevant areas. The Gulf War is taken as an example to substantiate this view, the argument being that Nato should be ready to intervene wherever the vital interests of its member countries are at stake. The definition of vital interests is one that has no regard for geographical boundaries, and the case is

therefore made for intervention well away from the borders of member states, in specific regions or for specific and limited purposes: to prevent nuclear proliferation, for instance.

An extended geographical area of Nato (to encompass primarily North Africa and the Middle East) would, however, have a harmful effect on the very objective sought, i.e. enhanced stability in those regions.

The fact that Nato would be ill-advised to seek new responsibilities towards the south does not bar it from having an important role in the Mediterranean, especially in what concerns its fundamental objective of defending member countries against an aggression and making an European war something utterly unthinkable. It is obvious that the supremacy of the Alliance in military terms would make aggression seem a rather foolish venture, and this will be so as long as the Alliance retains its cohesiveness. It should be made perfectly clear that the ambiguities which were allowed to persist during the Cold War regarding what precisely was meant by 'an aggression against one member state' (and there was indeed some controversy on whether Article 5 should apply in the case of an attack on Turkey during the Gulf War) are put aside for good, and that any attack against each and every one of the member states will actually be considered an attack against all.

Nato should therefore be closely following developments in former Yugoslavia. The conflict is spreading to Macedonia and Kosovo. It is obvious that this could be the prologue to a new war in the Balkans. Developments in the Black Sea region may in turn cause problems in Turkey's southern borders. And there is also of course the whole question of proliferation, particularly of mass destruction weapons and ballistic missiles. The Alliance would seem to have more than enough on its hands. Without taking up any new and uncalled for responsibilities, Nato will not lack a significant Mediterranean dimension.

Nato would be ill-advised to consider extending its geographical scope for yet another reason, namely to prevent Euro-American differences on out of area crises to put Nato at stake. Serious transatlantic differences during the Cold War such as the Suez in 1956 or the Yom Kippur in 1973 had no serious repercussions on the Alliance, precisely because there was a clear distinction between in- and out-of-area issues.[7]

As the binding 'cement' that the Soviet threat represented has irrevolcably eroded, the future of the Alliance is paradoxically more dependent on its not expanding towards the south than on its seeking new missions in the Middle East or North Africa.

The Gulf War cannot be used to exemplify that the Alliance should extend to areas beyond its present perimeter. Not only the Alliance as such did not become involved in the conflict, but the international isolation of Iraq cannot count as a precedent. And even in this case the Europeans, especially the Mediterranean Europeans, did everything they possibly could to find a diplomatic solution thus proving that their interest, or at least their approach, was not fully coincidental with that of the United States.[8]

Conflicts outside Europe in which military intervention is conceivable should be faced on a case by case basis. There may be some in which the Europeans alone make the case for military action to protect vital interests, there may be others in which only the United States consider their crucial interests are at stake. And more often than not they will not be able to agree on the exact nature, or scope of the military action required.

European Union is indispensable

The general view in Europe is that there is no significant military threat to western Europe originating in the South. The notion of a

'threat from the South' that would replace the former 'threat from the East' is widely rejected in Europe, more strongly so in southern Europe. The great champions of the 'threat from the South' which they want to eradicated even within their own national borders are of course rightists and neo-Nazis. It is clear that the potential for inter-state conflict in North Africa is primarily south-south and a result of attempts at hegemonising the region.

The consensus among Europeans is that a security policy for the Mediterranean should be developed in close cooperation with the countries in the southern shore. Security and cooperation are clearly interlinked, and military action would only be conceivable to protect a country under attack from a more powerful neighbour (as France did in Chad to protect it from Lybia).

The WEU, contrary to Nato, has no geographical boundaries to its action, and should be regarded as the best equipped European security organisation to develop security and defence cooperation with non European regions, such as the Maghreb or the Middle East. This was moreover the direction in which the mandate conferred upon it by the Foreign and Defence ministers meeting in their June 1992 Petersberg declaration, when it was decided that the WEU should endeavour to establish a growing dialogue with the Maghreb countries. Of course serious differences may also occur within WEU members which would make it impossible for it to take action. Looking at EC Europe's relations with the regions in which crises are more likely to occur, and the stances taken within EPC, however, it is apparent that convergency would be more frequent than disagreement in what concerns Europe's relations with the Mediterranean countries.

As expressed in the documents adopted by the European Council in Lisbon, in June 1992, on the identification of areas for common action within the framework of a common foreign and security policy, it is worth noting the step taken in including the

Maghreb and the Middle East as areas of priority concern to Europe, in parallel with Central and Eastern Europe. The view expressed by the EC, furthermore, is that the problems south of the Mediterranean are of an essentially economic, social and political nature.

The crisis in most of the regimes across North Africa is a result of the failure of the political and economic choices made by the governments in the aftermath of independence. Economic liberalisation and political reform are indispensable that will eventually lead to the establishment of democratic political regimes. The success of Islamic radicals derives from the fact that they were able to establish themselves as the sole alternative to the powers in place (as the Algerian case plainly demonstrates) and they grew in strength out of the popular discontent with those regimes.

The documents adopted at the Lisbon summit are based on the same approach of comprehensive and preventive strategy that presided over the Five+Five process in the Western Mediterranean and the CSCM proposal.[9]

Both the AMU and the Five+Five are today faced with notorious difficulties, the external action of Algeria being more or less frozen by the extent of its domestic problems and also owing to the Lybian question. Europe is now seeking to reinforce its trade relations with Morocco and Tunisia, and a free trade area with the 'Smaller Maghreb' is sought as a way out.

Any attempt to build a Mediterranean policy on the sole basis of the Renewed Mediterranean Policy would be doomed to failure. Even to pursue this less ambitious EC policy, more resources than those available at present are needed. Economic cooperation and cultural dialogue, immigration or common measures to prevent low-intensity conflicts such as terrorism -- these are necessary steps, which fall short however of an open discussion of the military aspects of security, military doctrines, armaments budgets

(a significant share of the GDP, as a rule, in the southern part of the region), application of the concept of 'strategic grounds' for such expenditures and improving transparency and mutual trust between the states of any given region.

After the Maastricht Treaty has been ratified and enters into force, the European Union will be the sole pillar of the European architecture equipped with the necessary political, economic and also defence-related instruments, through the role the WEU will come to play within the EU, to apply a concept of comprehensive security in the Mediterranean. That the European Union should come into being is therefore a fundamental contribution to stability in the Mediterranean. If Europe were to remain solely a 'civil power', an immense Switzerland neutralised by the contradictory interests of its member states, i.e. if the European Union would not be, all would stand to lose, namely the Mediterranean area.

The very particular role that the European Union is called upon to play in the Mediterranean does not mean that the EC should be the only or even the leading western actor in every subregion, and that it is any less important to establish a functioning partnership between Europe and the United States to face some of the major problems of the Mediterranean. This is particularly so in the Middle East, where the US is an undisputed major actor. And where Europe and the United States have a common interest in the success of the present negotiations and where they should emphasise the importance of the solution of the Palestinian issue.

Their cooperation is also essential in other areas such as the Balkans and the Black Sea, in promoting regional cooperation and the peaceful settlement of disputes and respect for human rights, including especially the rights of minorities, the major challenge in this respect being to stop ethnic cleansing in former Yugoslavia. Support to democratic and economic reforms all across the Mediterranean are equally important and also provide scope for

cooperation between Europe and the United States, who should, through their combined influence in international financial institutions, pay closer attention to the social dimension of those processes. Europe and the United States should also agree on self-imposed controls on arms sales to the whole region, namely to the Persian Gulf, putting a decisive end to what is dangerously becoming the creation of new 'Iraqs'.

Notes

1 For a discussion of the national security policies of Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece and Turkey, see chapters by A. Vasconcelos, A. Viñas, M. Cremasco, Th. Veremis and A. Karaosmanoglu, and J. Chipman's concluding chapter, in John Chipman, ed., Nato's Southern Allies: Internal and External Challenges, Routledge, London, 1988.

2 To my knowledge, the term was coined and the concept discussed for the first time by Thiago Cintra, in 'Regional Conflicts: Trends in a Period of Transition', Adelphi Papers, 237, IISS, Spring 1989.

3 See Roberto Aliboni, ed., Southern European Security in the 1990s, Pinter Publishers, London and New York, 1992.

4 In a notable departure from De Gaulle's approach, French foreign minister Roland Dumas said in an interview to Le Monde (12 March 1991: 'Evoquer le "monde arabe" est un mythe en soi. "Une" politique arabe en est un autre.'

5 See Hamadi Essid's article 'Les termes de l'équivoque' in Le nouvel Observateur, Collection Dossiers, 5, in which he argues: 'Les disparités économiques et surtout la diversité des régimes et des institutions font de l'unité arabe une notion humainement réelle, idéologiquement juste, culturellement nécessaire mais politiquement irréalisable tant que, dans tous les pays arabes, les peuples ne seront pas démocratiquement souverains.'

6 Burhan Ghalioun, 'La guerre du Golfe: enjeux et conséquences. Le devenir du monde arabe', in Peuples Méditerranéens, 52-53, July-December 1990.

7 See Douglas T. Stuart, 'Can NATO Transcend its European Borders?', SSI, US Army War College, February 1991.

8 See Nicole Gnesotto and John Roper, coord., L'Europe occidentale et le Golfe, IES/UEO, Paris, 1992.

9 For a better understanding of the Five+Five and the CSCM approaches to Mediterranean security, see 'The Mediterranean and the Middle East after the war in the Gulf: the CSCM', Ministero degli Affari Esteri, Rome, March 1991; Miguel Angel Moratinos, 'La Política Española y los Cambios en el Maghreb', in Elecciones, Participacion y Transiciones Politicas en el Norte de Africa, Instituto de Cooperación con el Mundo Arabe, Madrid, 1991; Roberto Toscano, 'Prospects for Cooperation in the Western Mediterranean', paper given at the seminar on Security and Cooperation in the Western Mediterranean, ISS/WEU-CERI, Madrid, October 1992.