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CONFERENCE AND SECURITY BUILDING MEASURES (CSBMs) IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AREA. WAYS IN WHICH TRANSPARENCY COULD BE FOSTERED. A TENTATIVE ASSESSMENT

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1. Introduction

Achieving stability through confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) and arms control is a step-by-step process, a bloc-by-bloc building effort. As in the LEGO system, the final product -- in this case, confidence and trust -- can be reached only by patiently adding the pieces one at the time to form the final structure. Parts of the structure can be built separately and then carefully assembled at a later stage. But the step-by-step technique remains the same, and this technique is very important in the Mediterranean region because of its peculiar security features.

High perception of threat and ensuing militarization of all Mediterranean countries, confrontational attitudes between states in North Africa and the Middle East, differing international alignments, Arab-Israeli conflicts, and domestic instability are all factors which have played in the past against any chance of bilateral or multilateral arms control agreements. In fact, arms control in the Mediterranean has never been seriously attempted.

Moreover, there is no security identity among the Mediterranean countries and thus, less chance for the creation and sustainability of a cooperative multinational security regime.

However, the end of the Cold War and the Arab-Israeli peace process have open a window of opportunity.

The end of the Cold War has freed the region from the negative influence of Soviet-American confrontation, while a successful outcome of the Arab-Israeli peace process would eliminate a major obstacle on the path of regional stability.

In fact, the situation has changed in the Mediterranean after the end of the Cold War, even though not so radically as in Central Europe.

Thus, time might have come that serious efforts can be made by all Mediterranean countries, but particularly by the Southern Mediterranean countries, to realize a stable security system in the region.

In this context, the direct and indirect involvement of the Western countries is necessary, either on a bilateral basis or within the framework of their security and defence organizations (NATO and WEU).

Obviously, the first step would be to establish a wide set of accepted rules and build a certain level of confidence between Mediterranean countries capable of leading to subsequent arms control agreements. In turn, confidence and trust can be built only through transparency of all military related activities. CSBMs could be the means through which transparency is achieved and they can be borrowed, with the adjustments eventually needed, from those agreed upon in Europe during the Cold War.

It can be argued that, in terms of CSBMs applied to the Mediterranean strategic environment, very little has to be invented. All the issues about possible measures, control techniques, systems for verification, etc. have been fully addressed in the recent past in the framework of the arms control process in Central Europe. Thus, much can be adapted from the achievements of the NATO-Warsaw Pact negotiations within the frameworks of the CFE and the results of the 35-state Forum for Security Cooperation (FSC) of the Conference on Security and

Cooperation in Europe (CSCE).

2. Transparency of Military-Related Activities

As previously stated, transparency of all military-related activities appears to the first block on which to build trust and confidence and this may be realized through the following measures.

(i) Exchange of data on military forces.
The data should include information concerning military organization, manpower and major weapons and equipment systems in the zone of application for CSBMs.

Information on the command organization of the military forces should specify the designation and subordination of all formations and units,[1] down to an agreed level of command. Moreover, the information should indicate for each formation and unit at least the peacetime location, the personnel strength (and its eventual increase above an established level in a given time) and the number of major organic weapon and equipment systems (and of their new versions), as agreed upon by the participating states.[2]

The same rules would basically apply to the air and naval forces.

As far as defence policy, doctrine and force planning are concerned, the information should focus on medium to long-term programs as regards to size, structure, training and weapons systems of the armed forces, as well as defence policy and doctrine.

As for the reporting of military expenditures, the defence budgets should be published in a way to be easily understood. Budget figures may be tabled on the basis of the categories as set out in the U.N. "Instrument for Standardized International Reporting of Military Expenditures".[3] In particular, details should be given about funds dedicated to the modernization of the armed forces and to programs for high-tech weapons systems with specific offensive potential, such as attack aircraft expecially when supported by air refueling and, above all, surface-to-surface missiles. It is true that combat aircraft can carry conventional, nuclear and chemical warheads even at longer ranges than those of the ballistic missiles presently operational in the inventories of the southern Mediterranean countries. But ballistic missiles are the only carriers for which they have no defence, except for the very limited point defence eventually provided by the PATRIOT missile systems in Israel.

(ii) Exchange of data on arms import and export.
In this context, the U.N. Conventional Transfer Register has a role to play.

One could argue:

- that the Register is not a very adequate instrument of transparency because it is based on the voluntary reporting of U.N. member states about their arms imports and exports, military holding, and arms procurement through national production;

- that certain arms contracts may never be revealed because of political and/or industrial reasons;

- that the register cannot give an early warning of military build-ups since the reported data

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[1]. As in the Vienna 1994 Document, formations are armies, corps and divisions and their equivalents, while units are brigades, regiments and their equivalents.

[2]. The type of weapon and equipment systems to be included may range accordingly to the level of openess, and then of confidence, to be achieved.

[3]. Adopted on 12 December 1980.

relate to arms that have already been delivered;

- and that there is a wide range of weapons that do not need to be reported.

On the other hand, the Register should be seen as a simple step toward a more comprehensive system of cooperative security allowing a crosschecking form of verification through which declared data can be compared with other information and assessed within a broader framework. Considering that the Register provides the first set of "official" information, it fullfils a useful role.

In fact, one could also argue that what it is really needed is a "Code of Conduct" in the field of arms transfer to bind all supplier and recipient states politically, if not legally.

This could become part of the CSBMs concerning the exchange of data on arms export in the Mediterranean region, thus building upon and integrating the information provided in the U.N. Register.

(iii) Exchange of data on military exercises and information on movements of troops.

The exchange of data on military exercises is quite simple and requires -- as a minimum -- the transmission to the other party/ies of the annual program of ground, air and naval exercises, with the indication of their scheduled dates, locations and units involved. As for the prior notification of all relevant military activities, the CSBMs of para IV of the 1994 Vienna Document could be adopted, and eventually modified if deemed necessary.[4]

As far as unusual military activities, a mechanism of consultation and cooperation may be established, thus to rapidly dispel any concern that movements of troops could create, particularly if it is close to the border.

This mechanism could eventually evolve into a Conflict Prevention Center, if and when arms control agreements are reached within the wider framework of a regional organization.

(iv) Exchange of information on hazardous incidents of a military nature.

This is certainly a measure capable of fostering trust because it will contribute to prevent possible misunderstandings and reduce the effects of the incident.

3. Joint and Cooperative Measures

Under this generic heading fall a number of CSBMs all capable of providing a high level of military transparency.

The list may include:[5] (i) the establishment of direct communication links similar to the Spanish-Moroccon "red line" created in June 1996; (ii) the exchange of military training programs; (iii) the exchange of visits between members of the armed forces at all levels; (vi) the exchange of experts on specific security issues; (v) the contacts between relevant military institutions (military schools, academies, training centers, etc.), and between military units; (vi) the participation of observers in military exercises;[6] (vii) the participation of Southern Mediterranean units in joint exercises and joint training;[7] (viii) the participation of observers in

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[4]. See Appendix 20B. The Vienna Document 1994. SIPRI Yearbook, 1995, p. 808.

[5]. The list does not claim to be complete. Other items could be added in accordance with the 1994 Vienna Document.

[6]. This has been provided by the European countries during the exercises "Tramontana 1994" and "Eolo 1996".

[7]. This has been done in the military exercise "Bright Star 1995" held in Egypt with the participation of units from Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, the United States, France and the United Kingdom. And in the naval

tests of new weapons systems; (ix) joint seminars and conferences on military doctrines and on security and defence issues.

4. Naval CSBMs

As far as CSBMs applicable to naval forces, there are many which could be derived from the agreement reached in 1972 -- and supplemented over the ensuing two decades -- by the United States and the Soviet Union, specifically aimed at preventing incidents at sea.[8] The political aspects and the technical measures of this agreement could be borrowed, and eventually modified (taking into consideration also the Law of the Sea provisions) to suit the different security requirements of the navies of the Mediterranean countries. They would serve to build, together with the CSBMs related to the exchange of information on military forces, a system based on trasparency and confidence, thus more in the nature of broad regional "Maritime Safety and Confidence Building" accords than narrow agreements on the prevention of naval incidents.[9]

5. Open Skies

The agreement on an Open Skies regime in the Mediterranean, similar to the 1992 Treaty on Open Skies,[10] would establish a wide-ranging and very intrusive CSBMs regime, capable of enhancing military openess and transparency by allowing states parties to conduct observation flights over each other's territory. The flights would provide warning of possible surprise attack and reduce the risks of threat misperceptions, thereby promoting mutual trust.

6. Arms Control Agreements

If and when the first block of CSBMs is agreed upon, it would be possible to proceed on the construction of the second "layer" of a Mediterranean security system composed of a set of arms control agreements.

(i) The first efforts could focus on a total ban of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), ballistic missiles included, which would cover both possession and construction.[11]

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exercise "Cleopatra 1996" which involved vessels from the Egyptian, French and Italian Navies.

[8]. The text of the INCSEA agreement, formally the "Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics on the Prevention of Incidents on and over the High Seas" of 25 May 1972, is provided in U.S. Department of State, United States and other International Agreements, Vol. 23, Part 1, U.S. GPO, 1973, pp. 1168-1180. See also, Sean M. Lynn-Jones, "Applying and extending the USA-USSR Incidents at Sea Agreement" and Patrick Howard, "Naval confidence-buinding measures: a CSCE perspective" in Richard Fieldhouse (ed.) "Security At Sea. Naval Forces and Arms Control", SIPRI, Oxford University Press, 1990.

[9]. See Dr. Stanley Byron Weeks, "Measures to Prevent Major Incidents at Sea", in "Arms Control, Confidence-Building and Security Cooperation in the Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East", Fred Tanner ed. Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta, December 1994, p. 135.

[10]. For the text of the Open Skies Treaty, see SIPRI Yearbook 1993, Appendix 12C, pp. 653-671.

[11]. Proliferation of weapons of mass destruction is considered the most challenging threat in the Mediterranen region and the Gulf area. The efforts on the part of some North African countries to achieve a nuclear military capability go far back to the Cold War era. It was the time when Libya tried to buy a nuclear device from China and financially supported Pakistan's nuclear program, hoping for a return in terms of technology and weapons. Today, the tendency towards nuclear proliferation appears to be still alive, while ominous signs are emerging in

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As far as nuclear proliferation is concerned, the control measures established by the NPT and the related system of safeguards implemented and monitored by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) do not appear capable of providing neither a deterrent against proliferation, nor the confidence that secret nuclear programs are not carried out. The case of Iraq is, in this respect, very sobering.

Moreover, the problem of proliferation is complicated by the inherently contradictory elements of the NPT: preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons and, at the same time, encouraging the peaceful use of nuclear technology.

In the case of ballistic missiles, the attempt to curb their spread through the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) has been only partially successful because there are countries which are willing to export medium-range ballistic missiles and missile technology.

(ii) The second agreement could be on the establishment of a Nuclear Free Zone (NFZ). On this subject just a short notation. It is difficult to see how a Nuclear Free Zone could be established in the Middle East and in North Africa without taking into consideration the parallel establishment of similar zones in the Gulf and in the Indian sub-continent.

(iii) The third agreement could address the freeze and the subsequent build-down of the armed forces in the region in a way similar to that realized through the CFE Treaty in Europe.

7. The Role of the Western Countries

As previously stated, the Western countries have an important role to play in encouraging and supporting the establishment of a Mediterranean security architecture.

Western countries should be ready to do at least the following:

(i) Provide expertise on crises management, for example through the participation of Mediterranean countries in WEU's CRISEXs.

(ii) Foster the process of CSBMs by providing military and civilian expertise, political support and economic assistance, and locations for meetings and conferences: and by sharing the experiences gained during the Middle East peace process. This could promote the extension to other areas of the conflict resolution mechanisms utilized in the Middle East.

(iii) Help the setting of a Conflict Prevention Center by providing communications networks and early-warning systems.

(iv) Promote the establishment of "round tables" similar to those of the Stability Pact for Europe.

(v) Make available the technical means needed to fully verify the agreements. This is a very important commitment which could represent a key element for the successful outcome of the CSBMs process. It should include the dissemination to the parties of intelligence information collected by satellites, the supply of special aircraft for the implementation of an Open Skies regime, and eventually a political and/or military guarantee in support of regional arms control agreements.

(vi) Ban all the sales to the Mediterranean countries of advanced weapons systems which could undermine and jeopardize the CSBMs process by altering the military balance and enhancing threat perceptions.

(vii) Raise the quota of officers and NCOs of the Mediterranen countries who may participate in Western military schools, academies and centers of defence studies.

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the field of chemical proliferation.

(viii) Promote and help the establishment of a Euromed Defence College.

8. Issues which Militate Against the CSBMs Process.

It has been stated earlier that times might be ripe for the initial phases of a CSBMs regime in the Mediterranean region. But it would be naive to think that it could be a short-term prospect. Moreover, the window of opportunity appears to be quite small, requiring strong political wills to be fully exploited

In reality, the elements capable of jeopardizing all efforts are still many and very present and alive throughout the region.

First, there are still unresolved bilateral issues between states, which could lead to increased tensions and even open conflict. Apart from the Arab-Israeli issues, the controversy between Algeria and Morocco is a good case in point. The endemic tensions between Egypt and Sudan is another notable example. Moreover, even when specific controversial issues are missing, relations between Mediterranean countries are characterized by a sort of antagonistic and suspicious feelings, which tend to mar relationships.

Second, the Arab-Israeli peace process is still far from being completed. A peace treaty between Israel and Syria will certainly create a more stable environment with positive repercussions in the whole region. But, even then, the existence of Israel might not be accepted by all Arab countries, thus keeping threat perceptions high and hampering dialogue and negotiations.

Third, high-tech weapons systems (long-range ballistic missiles and attack aircraft armed with Precision Guided Munitions) allow an extra-regional country to threaten a Mediterranean country, thus complicating the security picture and the attempt to reach regional arms control agreements.

Fourth, some Mediterranean countries include in their threat assessment not only the possibility of a South-South, but also of a North-South confrontation. This is bound to create problems when it is expected that Western countries participate, though indirectly, in the overall CSBMs process and when global arms control issues are addressed.

Fifth, the access to power of a militant Islamic fundamentalist regime in North Africa would be considered a threatening development by several Mediterranean countries. This is bound to fuel instability in the whole region, stimulate a new arms race and jeopardize the prospect of a CSBMs regime.

9. Conclusions

Let me conclude with few considerations.

In technical terms, a CSBMs regime is simple. But in political terms is very complicated. The political will needed to build it and implement it is enormous and difficult to shape. Only if a certain degree of stability is achieved in the Mediterranean region, it would be possible to start the process with a minimum chance of success.

It can be argued that CSBMs and arms control in the Mediterranean is likely only within a clear institutional framework. But it can also be argued that it may be possible on a bilateral basis between countries which have achieved a certain degree of mutual trust. Obviously, in this case,

the range of agreable measures will be limited by the fact that they will have to consider their regional security requirements. On the other hand, if Syria and Israel are discussing about arms control measures in the framework of a peace agreement, then why it should not be possible between other countries in the region? In theory, it should be even easier, taking into consideration that they do not need to sign a peace treaty.

The problem is which framework could be used to push CSBMs and arms control in the Mediterranean. Establishing closer links with the European Union, and then utilize the WEU framework is the way to be followed? Or, instead, would it be better to start by using the Five-plus-Five Forum as the initial framework, to push arms control in the Western Mediterranean? But, is it possible to imagine CSBMs and arms control negotiations among the Maghreb countries in the present situation? And even assuming a totally different situation in the Maghreb, would CSBMs and arms control agreements be possible, in the face of the still unresolved Arab-Israeli issues, when the globality of the Mediterranean security issues is considered?

Could NATO offer a credible framework in today's Mediterranean region? In January 1995, the NATO Council decided to establish regular contacts with several Southern Mediterranean countries (Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, and later on Jordan) with the aim of strenghtening dialogue and confidence.[12] However, it is difficult to imagine how NATO, even if geostrategically reoriented, could effectively address the range of ethnic and national disputes which may explode in the region and provide a regional framework for arms control. The range of actions NATO could eventually take in this field appears quite limited, and a cautious attitude on the part of the interested Arab countries should be expected. WEU seems to be better positioned than NATO to play a significant role in promoting stability and security in the Mediterranean.

On the other hand, NATO and WEU could sponsor, support and eventually guarantee regional CSBMs and arms control agreements. NATO and WEU could assist the CSBMs process through a commitment to technically support an Open Skies treaty in the Mediterranean and share those sensitive intelligence information which may be determinant for the verification of any true CSBMs regime based on transparency. And they could provide those technologically advanced C3 assets which would facilitate command and control of the armed forced and offer reliable, secure, and rapid communications.

The possibility of a OSCM, i.e. extending to the Mediterranean the security framework of the OSCE appears a very long-term prospect, while, if the present window of opportunity closes,[13] there is a good chance of a renewed nationalization of the defence systems of the Meditteranean countries, This will probably bury the prospect of a transparent CSBMs regime in the region.

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[12]. Atlantic News, No. 2688, 25 January 1995, p. 1. See also "La OTAN crea una politica mediterranea que excluye de momento la colaboracion con Argelia", El Pais, 9 February 1995.

[13]. Under the pressure of a further destabilization of the political situation and the security picture of the whole region.