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PERCEPTIONS AND NOTIONS
IN MEDITERRANEAN ARAB COUNTRIES**

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SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN: PERCEPTIONS AND NOTIONS IN MEDITERRANEAN ARAB COUNTRIES

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This paper deals with the perceptions and notions of Mediterranean Arab countries with respect to possible perspectives of multilateral or collective security cooperation in the Mediterranean area.

In the nineties, these countries have been parties to numerous attempts at establishing regional security cooperation: within the framework of the CSCE/OSCE (the tentative CSCM agenda put forward by Spain and Italy in 1990 and the revival of the early CSCE Mediterranean Dimension at the CSCE Ministerial meeting of Budapest in 1994) as well as the Arab Maghreb Union, the Western Mediterranean Group of the “Five plus Five”, the Working Group on Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) in the Middle East Peace Process, the Forum for Mediterranean Dialogue and Cooperation, the Mediterranean Dialogue with the WEU and the Dialogue initiated subsequently by NATO. In November 1995, Cyprus, Malta, Turkey, Israel, the Palestinian National Authority and seven Arab countries belonging to the Mediterranean area signed the Barcelona Declaration, thus establishing the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP). The latter envisages the achievement of a comprehensive scheme of security cooperation.

Many of these attempts didn't come into being or were discontinued very soon. Those that have survived look limited in their scope and effectiveness. Ultimately, the Barcelona partners, as a consequence of the standstill in the Middle East Peace Process, had to recognize their inability to establish in the foreseeable future a scheme of security cooperation in the realm of “hard” security. In the ad hoc Ministerial meeting of Palermo (June 1998), the EMP turned to a less ambitious and traditional agenda centered on socio-economic development, “soft” security and “partnership-building measures”.

This disappointing balance-sheet is not suggesting that security cooperation in the Mediterranean is unfeasible. There are limits, however, and specific directions that must be identified. Definitely, security cooperation in the Mediterranean cannot just be transferred from the blueprint of Central-eastern Europe. A key-element in this respect is a better knowledge of perceptions and notions of the Mediterranean Arab countries with respect to Mediterranean security as well as the to prospects of a joint management of regional security. There is no doubt that, beside other differences, the security perceptions of the basic Mediterranean players (Israel, Arab countries, Turkey, EU and the US) are very different from one another. While these differences do not rule out cooperation and understanding, players must be more aware of them, and more in details, if cooperation is to be attained. This is the point this paper tries to contribute to.

In the first section, the paper takes into consideration the factors of risk and threat perceived by the Arab countries, firstly in the Arab-Western context of relations and, secondly, in the South-South regional context. The second section considers, first, the domestic political factors which shape Arab response to these perceptions, and then argues on Arab requirements for security cooperation with the West to become relevant and acceptable. A final section sets out some conclusions.

Post-Cold War Arab security perceptions

As a consequence of the great transformations fostered by the end of the Cold War internationally and domestically, Arab governments' security perceptions and policies have undergone major changes in the nineties. These changes are briefly described in the first part of this section by going back to post-Cold War major events in the region and related Arab responses. In the second and third part, Arab perceptions of risk and threat are considered, first, with respect to the Arab/Western context and, then, to the Southern regional context.

The broad evolution after the Cold War - The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a world in which the United States is the only effective power left and can act unilaterally is the first factor which has affected and changed Arab security perceptions. The Arabs felt suddenly left without any leverage and thus impotent to pursue their interests. As first reaction, most Arab governments sought to get co-opted in the new international framework by conducting cooperative policies towards the West. This is one reason they intervened in the Gulf War against Iraq as parties to the US-led coalition set up by the United Nations.

Still, most Arab elites and large streams of public opinion reacted to the post-Soviet Union environment with deep alarm and anti-Western radicalization. The Gulf War catalyzed a strong anti-Western reaction in the Arab "streets" and played in the hands of the religious opposition [Faria, Vasconcelos]. These developments put on Arab governments a pressure, which has increased more and again in subsequent years also as a result of the impact on Arab public opinion of European attitudes towards the Bosnian Muslims and tendencies to cultural intolerance and xenophobia towards immigrants.

Despite this pressure, governments kept on with their internationally cooperative policies and attended the Madrid Conference. However, they had to take perceptions of elites and masses into due account so as to contain the impact of religious and nationalist oppositions. On the other hand, governments' perceptions were strongly affected, too. In fact, the Western show of power in the Gulf War and subsequent events, like the attempt at disarming Iraq, have triggered in the Arab "street" as well as in the Arab governments a deep sense of interdiction and likely coercion. The impact of these perceptions on security cooperation policies has been considerable.

Factors of risk and threats: (a) the Arab/Western context - In the nineties, two basic changes occurred in the Arab perceptions: (a) a strong systemic instability has emerged domestically, more often than not predicated on armed and violent opposition to incumbent regimes; (b) the East-West context having ceased to frame the West, Western and European countries are perceived as likely direct sources of threats and risks in the North-South circle. On the other hand, long-standing regional (i.e. South-South) threats and risks, like the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Western Sahara dispute, continue to have a strong political and economic impact on Arab countries, though renewed armed confrontation is deemed unlikely. Besides, new conflict seems to emerge, as in the case of Turkey. Domestic instability and the perception of an increased permeability to Western penetration tend to exacerbate regional perceptions of threats and risks.

While the collapse of the Soviet Union; the end of the East-West confrontation; and the experiences brought about by the 1990-91 Gulf War explain the upgrading of the "North" as a source of perceived threat by Arab countries, increased systemic instability in the

domestic arena is the result of an earlier process of erosion of nationalist regimes' legitimacy as well as growing religious activism. What happened in the nineties is that this earlier erosion of legitimacy and the incoming changes in the international context have combined to accentuate the weakness of nationalist regimes. This evolution has been so strong as to trigger acute and serious crises with respect to key-nationalist regimes, like those of Palestine and Algeria.

In fact, in the eyes of public opinion and large segments of the elites, the "high-tech crusader" stepping in with the Gulf War on the North-South as well as the South-South stage; the suppression of Iraq; the "occupation" of the Iraqi Kurdistan; the interferences in Tajikistan and Afghanistan; and the "ethnic cleansing" in Bosnia are all events that are taken to the door of Arab governments, seemingly unable or unwilling to stop the new "crusader". This evolution has created problems to traditional nationalist regimes and reinforced old and new brands of political (and now systemic) opposition.

Against this backdrop, more specific factors affecting perceptions in the North-South (or Western/Arab) and regional (or South-South) relations can be taken into consideration. Let's consider first perceptions in the Arab/Western context and, then, in the regional one. The process of change and adjustment of the Western/European security alliances (CSCE/OSCE, NATO, WEU, the CFSP of the EU and the emerging European Defense and Security Identity-ESDI within NATO) is regularly monitored by Arab governments and analysts. More often than not, it is not well understood or it is misunderstood. In fact, the reforms and transformations of Western/European security alliances contemplate clear directions, like the will of creating a flexible international structure to generate consensus to manage crises, beside more obscure aspects, like the coherence of Western/European alliances with respect to this structure. The latter are not obscure for Arabs only. They refer essentially to the political substance of the trans-Atlantic relations, which -as things stand today- is construed more as a set of technical instruments intended to surrogate political will than as a clear understanding on a shared political agenda.

As a matter of fact, difficulties to understand the political and institutional evolution of trans-Atlantic relations don't help Arab/Western security cooperation. Beside that, however, the real Arab concern remains related to the fundamental power imbalance characterizing the post-Cold War world order and the unilateralism allowed to the West by this imbalance in managing collective security via the UN or other regional security organization. The difficult process of reform the Western countries are going across is regarded as a factor which in any case will reinforce the West. This reinforcement is regarded in turn as a factor in any case detrimental to Arab countries for it sharply limits their options by threatening coercion. It can be helpful to recall here a remark made by Brzezinski, who says that the principal objection China moves to the US is not that much concerning what the US does, but what it is and where it is¹. Heir, like China, to an ancient civilization, the Arabs seems having the same kind of objection towards the West and Europe, thus regarding the latter as an objective threat to their status, independently of the nature and purposes of their agenda. If this is true, it must be noted that at the basis of Arab security perceptions there is a strong self-perception of cultural alterity and dignity frustrated by historical (i.e. non-rational) developments².

¹ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *La grande scacchiera. Il mondo e la politica nell'era della supremazia americana*, Milano, Longanesi & C., 1998, p. 225 (Italian translation of *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, 1997).

² This self-perception is well known to the students of the Arab world and Islam. In an 1962 essay published recently, one such students, P.J. Vatikiotis, says that the Arab "is puzzled ... when confronted

Arab countries' considerable participation into international peace-keeping operations, into joint military exercises and their interest in developing forms and means of joint crisis management, even very close to forms of strategic cooperation, must be understood as an insurance against becoming a target of international crisis management under Western leadership (beside the obvious aim of increasing their international status, which in turn is consistent with the search for the insurance they look for).

The danger of a Western military coercion or of a more likely political interdiction as a result of Western security reforms and re-organizations is crucial in the Arab perceptions and is the most important factor shaping understanding and notions of their security with respect to the West and the possible security cooperation with the latter.

The Arabs have expressed their concerns and grievances with respect to a number of policies implemented by Western and European countries and to some extent related to the Mediterranean [Lesser; Ben Salem; El Dessouqi]. The most relevant cases are the following:

- the implementation of the CFE and the “rearmament” that in a way it has brought about in the Southern European countries;
- the strengthening of national capacities of power projection with the establishment of rapid intervention forces by France, Italy and Spain and, more generally speaking, the air-naval orientation and reinforcement of Southern European military doctrines and instruments (e.g. the French, Italian and Spanish carriers);
- the efforts, once again deployed by Southern European countries, to improve their capacities of monitoring and reconnaissance (with the “Helios” satellite program, then included in the WEU);
- the transformation of NATO Navocformed (Naval on-Call Force for the Mediterranean) into a Standing Naval Force in the Mediterranean (Stanavformed) and, more recently, the upgrading of Afsouth as the command for the operations in Bosnia;
- the establishment of Eurofor and Euromarfor.

Perhaps with the exception of the rearmament and redeployment of Turkey as a consequences of the CFE (and the Gulf War), none of the military measures mentioned above is targeting the Arabs in particular. However, consistently with the arguments developed above, Arab perceptions of threats or risks are generated less by the specific measures recalled in the above than by their broad significance in terms of growing mobility, power projection and political interdiction. All in all, in terms of Western military and political power.

For example, European explanations about the fact that Euromar and Euromarfor have been set up in order to achieve with military means the seven non-military missions established by the 1992 WEU Petersberg Declaration haven't silenced Arab grievances at all. Nor have explanations that the two forces are not necessarily geared to being deployed in the Mediterranean Sea. They could be deployed in the Indian Ocean, for instance. Despite explanations, the issue continues to be raised everywhere and once such explanations are provided what Arabs respond is that they were not “consulted”, anticipating a cooperative security framework they are hardly willing to accept for the time being. In order to be consulted they should cooperate, but full cooperation is

with the real failure of the Islamic world to halt first, actual European conquest and second, the intrusion of European ideas and civilization upon the minds and lives of the believers”: “Religion and Nationalism. The Study of the Politics of the Arab States”, in *The Middle East from the End of Empire to the End of the Cold War*, Routledge, London and New York, 1997, p. 5.

prevented by the vision of fundamental alterity that affects Arab security perceptions and the radical divergence they feel in respective security agendas.

A conclusion this deaf dialogue suggests is that the WEU and NATO dialogue don't manage to accomplish their tasks of informing, "dispelling" misperceptions and establishing confidence. Apart from the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the briefings which are supposed to take place within the two "Mediterranean Dialogues", it must be said that, on the other hand, the declaratory policies, particularly those by NATO, are hardly helping: no occasion is lost to stress that the focus of NATO is shifting southward or must shift there, or that it is in the South that most relevant post-Cold War risks or threats are located and, in an unforgettable statement, that Islam is replacing Communism as the West's archenemy.

One has to insist, however, on the fact that independently of rational explanations and mistaken statements the crucial perception doesn't regard this or that specific policy or measure but the overwhelming Western power: the coercion it may bring about and the interdiction it generates.

(b) the regional context - The regional context keeps on being dominated by the Arab-Israeli conflict. About five years of peace talks -between the end of 1991 and that of 1996- have brought about the peace between Israel and Jordan but the Israeli-Palestinian agenda remains undefined and very controversial; no peace is in sight between Israel, on one hand, and Syria and Lebanon, on the other; significant progress was made in the multilateral track of negotiations, but almost nothing concrete came from their deliberations.

Besides, seven years after the end of the Gulf War, Iraq is still under international tutorship with very uncertain results and perspectives. The vacuum in Northern Iraq fuels instability and disputes in the relations between adjoining countries. There is no doubt that Turkey's key role in Iraq's guardianship makes Arabs nervous about its possible outcome, in particular with respect to Northern Iraq. In Arab eyes, this role of guardianship on Iraq has quite naturally merged with the "strategic alliance" with Israel. Beside other more specific concerns, this alliance is regarded by the Arab world as a confirmation that Israel is going back to a security self-reliance certainly incompatible with the cooperative security conceptions on which the peace process has been predicated. Iran was in the nineties and, despite changes in its leadership, still remains a source of threat perceptions in the Arab worlds. The political (more than material) support provided by this country to religiously-inspired groups in Palestine and Lebanon has played a decisive role in stopping the peace process and weakening the state-building task of the nationalist Palestinian leadership in the West Bank and Gaza. Less credible are grievances about Iranian impact in individual Arab countries, like Egypt or Algeria. The real and disastrous impact is on Palestine. There is no doubt that religious political action in Palestine and the Palestinian situation in itself broadly ignite and promote religious movements and violence (whose roots remain prevalingly domestic, however).

All in all, it is clear that Israel continues to be regarded by Arab as the central source of instability and conflict in the region. This is also true with respect to the issue of proliferation of WMD. It must be stressed, however, that proliferation gives way less to military perceptions of threat than to perceptions of unacceptable imbalances and inequalities in power and political status. Proliferation is triggered by wider "systemic, regional and internal motives" [Lesser, Tellis: 32] which regard political weight in the region and counter-interdiction towards the West beside defense and deterrence. It is a

response to insecurity perceptions, but also a political instrument for deliberate power competition and politics. Beside perceptions of military threats, unequal status with respect to Israel remains a fundamental Arab perception at the core of their security concerns.

In relation to today's Arab central security concerns in the region, i.e. Israel and Turkey, Western power is perceived by the Arab majority as a negative and adverse factor. In any case, it is not helping. The regional role of the West is normally regarded by Arabs as nothing but an aspect of the overall threat it represents with the end of the Cold War. Even if this threat is not likely to be turned into direct military aggression, still it materializes in the "systemic" support the West provides to regional enemies.

To sum up, while there is no doubt that the regional or South-South dimension is objectively conflict-prone as much as the North-South dimension is conflictless, Arab perceptions are homogeneously distributed along the full range of the two dimensions. From the Arab point of view, threats and risks come from the region as well as from the West and Europe, though they may give way to actual conflict in the South and not necessarily so in the North-South relations. In the South-South dimension, however, Western power, though not necessarily an actual military threat in itself, is regarded as supporting a number of crucial regional military threats as well as unable or unwilling to solve and avert them satisfactorily.

All in all, beside specific and actual threats, particularly in the regional dimension, the West is perceived as a factor of power which prevents the Arab world from evolving its full potential and legitimate interests. This is due less to a deliberate Western agenda than to the objective role the West plays in the international relations. It is due, from another perspective, to the strong sense of Arab alterity with respect to the Western world. The West is thus a paramount and permanent factor of interdiction and a risk of coercion with respect to Arabs' interests.

The Arab policy response

What is the Arab policy response to the security perceptions and visions considered in the previous section?

Generally speaking, the response has been cooperative. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the trend to globalization in international economic relations have compelled Arab governments to move towards less pan-Arab, more cooperative international policies. They have supported the UN military intervention against Iraq and the subsequent military, industrial and territorial restrictions as well as economic sanctions imposed by the UN on this Arab country. They have also supported the imposition of sanctions against Libya and contributed military contingents under different international umbrellas to help manage conflicts and crises. They have initiated bilateral and multilateral negotiations with Israel within the Middle East Peace Process started in 1991 by the Madrid Conference and are presently participating into the MENA Economic Summits as well as in the Barcelona process and other political and security "dialogues", with the OSCE, the WEU and NATO and within the Forum for Mediterranean Dialogue and Cooperation.

How firm and credible is this cooperative response? To answer this question, the first part of this section considers the dynamic of and the varying stances in the debate which is taking place in the Arab countries on international perspectives and security cooperation. The second part takes into consideration Arab requirements for security cooperation in the Mediterranean to become feasible and firmer than it is today.

The Arab debate on security cooperation - The picture of security perceptions provided in the previous section shows a world in which Arab nationalism remains a dominant force. Though nationalist aspirations are largely shared, they give way to two different responses, however. Beside the traditional pan-Arab response and the new kind of nationalism brought about by political Islam, there is a growing stream of national-liberal thought in the Arab world which looks at international cooperation and globalization as an opportunity [Said Aly]. According to this stream of thought, a positive inclusion in the current international trend to cooperation and globalization may help the Arab countries to reform their political regimes and find that place and prosperity in the international community they have unsuccessfully looked for in the outgoing century. The supporters of this more modern nationalism are aware that, just in case, Western power could be used against Arabs as well. But they understand that this is the reason why international cooperation and economic integration must be developed as the best way to materialize shared interests and prevent disputes or conflicts.

All in all, the policy pursued by most Arab governments is closer to these innovative national-liberal elites than to traditional pan-Arabism. However, for their own stability to be preserved, Arab governments cannot entirely espouse national-liberal ideas as much as they cannot entirely abandon pan-Arabism. The long-standing absence of a democratic legitimacy make them captive to the very pan-Arab legitimacy they used to get in power in a kind of vicious circle: in order to uphold a legitimacy originally predicated on pan-Arab nationalism, policies aiming at meeting normal national interests (i.e. the interests of the actual individual Arab states) must be presented or construed as pan-Arab policies. This in turn perpetuates a public opinion which remains largely pan-Arab and makes Arab governments more principled and less cooperative than they really are or would like to be.

In the post-Cold War framework, Arab regimes are confronted by a difficult dilemma. In order to reinforce their legitimacy they should pursue assertive policies that cannot be actually sustained, however, and that, in case they were pursued, would prove unsuccessful and erode rather than reinforce legitimacy. On the other hand, if they fully and sincerely espouse cooperative policy and these policies -as it is presently the case- don't pay off or will pay off only later on, their legitimacy is weakened all the same.

There is no doubt that in pursuing international cooperation Arab government are walking on a tight rope. For this reason, as already noted, current Arab cooperation must be considered less a strategic option than a policy of insurance with respect to stronger players. Still, a cooperative response towards the new international environment is there and it cannot be overlooked nor underestimated. There are cooperative forces at work in the Arab polities. For these new cooperative political players, the West is no longer an enemy. Still, they consider that Western interests in the region work as tremendous stumbling blocks with respect to domestic stability, political normalization, economic development and the possibility to make the Arab world to shift decisively and permanently to a culture of cooperation and international inclusiveness. These forces are keen to cooperate internationally to achieve security, but in their view there are

incongruities in Western proposals that have to be hammered out for security cooperation to become achievable.

Arab requirements for cooperation - Against such variegated backdrop, which are the Arab requirements for achieving security cooperation in the Mediterranean with the Western countries? [Selim 1995 and 1997; Salem; Joffé; Fenech; Soltan].

A first and paramount Arab argument is that, as a matter of fact, the varying agendas for security cooperation in the Mediterranean which have been put forward so far by both European and Western security alliances (CSCE/OSCE, WEU, NATO and the EU) are less concerned (or not at all concerned) by Mediterranean and Middle Eastern security issues than by Western and European security concerns towards these areas. This is fundamentally true.

With respect to this grievance, Fenech maintains that, unlike previous proposals, the EU-promoted Euro-Mediterranean Partnership -in particular its aim of achieving an “area of peace and stability”- can be regarded as the first scheme properly concerned by the achievement of collective security in this area. In fact, it is the first scheme to introduce, thanks to the notion of partnership, a mechanism for shared decisions and joint responsibility. However, it must be stressed that the critical point raised today by Arab counterparts in debating the Mediterranean security issue is not firstly related to collective security and the ability or inability of Western proposals to secure it. The point is that Western security schemes prove incongruous with respect to what Arabs regard as actual security issues, i.e. issues that need to be actually solved for them to get security.

According to the Arabs, there is a basic incongruity between Western and Arab respective security agendas. With reference to NATO, Soltan says that “Since help settling the Arab-Israeli conflict is not among the task of NATO, the Mediterranean initiative assumes that the Arab-Israeli problem is not a factor in the Mediterranean security”. Such assumption cannot be true and acceptable to the Arabs.

Soltan’s remark about the persisting centrality of the Arab-Israeli issue for Arab security regards NATO but must be applied to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership as well. If the latter is taken into consideration, the remark stresses even more vividly the strong limits of the cooperative security agenda put forward by the EMP from the Arab point of view. This agenda envisages the implementation of an ambitious set of measures of confidence and arms control. The well-known Arab point of view, however, is that they cannot proceed to the implementation of operational and structural CBMs/CSBMs and measures of arms control, pending unsolved territorial disputes and what the Arabs perceive as “strategic instability” with respect to Israel and its nuclear armament [Selim 1997: 87; Kemp. 410]. In other words, the Arab condition for starting a security cooperation in the Mediterranean/Middle Eastern area is a political solution within the Middle East Peace Process. In this situation, the EMP’s scheme of cooperative and collective security can hardly be pursued actually, for the Arab countries cannot give Israel in the EMP framework what they aren’t prepared to give to this same country in the Middle East Peace Process, unless the latter is successfully achieved.

The same question can be put in another way. Would NATO or the EMP be able to take on the Arab-Israeli issue in their Mediterranean agendas, thus making it more sensible in Arab (and Israeli) eyes?

By the way, it must be noted that NATO might appear to both Arabs and Israelis more acceptable and instrumental than the EMP. This is because: (a) NATO includes the US and is led by the latter (by and large, both Arabs and Israelis believe that the only effective

partner in trying to solve the Arab-Israeli conflict is the US); (b) thanks to its transformation, NATO can intervene under different international umbrella and, unlike the EMP (geographically limited to the Mediterranean basin) can reach out the Gulf area; (c) in the eyes of the Arab opinion, NATO (thanks to US leadership) has acquired in Bosnia (and maybe it will acquire in the Kosovo) all the merits and credits the EU has lost, instead. As things stand today, there is no doubt that, in case there were an Israeli-Syrian agreement on the Golan heights and this agreement asked for an international force of observers, the request of setting up such force would be more likely addressed to NATO than the EMP or the EU/WEU³.

One can speculate about whether a NATO intervention enshrined by the UN would be more likely than an action taking place within the cooperative frame of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. In any case, what it matters to stress here is that an intervention would be in tune with Arab requirements and could be an important building block in the perspective of a Mediterranean security cooperation.

Yet such intervention would be possible only if predicated on a strongly inclusionary process. In fact, the second Arab grievance about the schemes of Mediterranean cooperation is that they are affected by Western or European unilateralism. This is particularly the case in the EMP, the most articulated scheme of Mediterranean security cooperation to date. The Senior Officials Committee, which is the EMP body dealing with security issues, can be chaired by European officials only. Furthermore, this body is catered by the secretarial work of the European Commission and the European Council, not by its own secretariat. This structure can't help generating a sense of alienation in the Arab partners and convincing them that security cooperation proposed by the EU or the West is geared to the security of the latter rather than common security.

In this sense, one can understand that the Arab reaction to the establishment of Euromar and Euromarfor has been that they had to be consulted. Formally, in the event Arabs were not entitled to consultations, but in the framework of Western pressures and admonishments to establish a Mediterranean security cooperation more transparency on the European side would have been definitely in order. On the other hand, it is also true that there is a fundamental ambiguity in the Arabs' attitude towards multilateral security cooperation: they see the political and strategic advantages of being parts to regional security processes (at least as an insurance); at the same time, they are afraid of finding themselves committed to common policies that would harm their interests. This ambiguity is the result of Arab perception of alterity and weakness with respect to the West which were commented in previous section. In sum, their claim to inclusiveness is right and should be met by the EU and the West. But whether inclusion would be earnestly accepted remains to be seen.

In conclusion, a shared security agenda, taking more in account Arab security concerns, and more inclusiveness in the decision-making processes of common security schemes are the two basic requirements of the Mediterranean Arab countries with respect to security cooperation in the area. Such requirements reflect their security perceptions and, despite ambiguities, should be taken into consideration by Western countries if multilateral security cooperation in the area is really to be advanced.

³ To be sure, things may change and both European and trans-Atlantic political requirements could emerge for joint military mechanism, like the CJTFs, to work effectively. In this case a European force would act as the arm of a wider Western security organization, in a different security scenario. It remains to be seen whether this scenario would stir more positive or negative Arab security perceptions and be more or less conducive to security cooperation.

Conclusion

Domestic instability is commonly regarded by analysts as the primary source of the post-Cold War Arab perceptions. For Arab governments and regimes the primary and most important source of insecurity -so the argument runs- is the growing internal opposition stirred by the end of the bipolar international system and the advantages it allowed. To be sure, there is an interplay between domestic instability, on one hand, and regional/global threats and risks, on the other, but internal opposition and turmoil is what most urgently and dangerously affects security. In fact, in the regional framework, a renewed armed confrontation with Israel (as well as one between Algeria and Morocco) has become unlikely, but post-Cold War international pressure to go to peace with Israel combined with the fact that, as a matter of fact, a just and satisfactory peace is never achieved reinforce opposition from both old pan-Arabs and new Islamists. As for Western/global players, their inability or unwillingness to help impose a just peace in the Middle East and their intrusive pressures for democracy to be introduced and human rights to be respected reinforce opposition and, at the same time, weaken the regimes with respect to such opposition.

By making Arab regime's perceptions principally functional to their own stability, this interpretation may be too reductive. This paper is based on a less Elizabethan vision of the Arab political reality and its regimes as well as on the persuasion that, despite the absence or weakness of democratic institutions, Arab regimes represent more complex and multi-faceted interests than their own interests only. In fact, they represent the basic will of the Arab peoples for their identity to survive and get dignity in the international community. This will is based on a deep sense of alterity with respect to other cultures and -in the actual historical context- with respect in particular to the West. This sense of alterity or distinctiveness represents a factor of profound national unity, beyond the sharp opposition prevailing today between the different political components of the Arab polities.

In the post-Cold War framework, the Arab societies, like many other in the world, are facing a strong challenge by trends to globalization and inclusiveness. They are far from deaf to such trends, yet they are strongly willing to preserve identity while embodying foreign elements. This question is not new at all to them, but is today particularly pressing. The real problem of the Arab polities today cannot be formulated in terms of regimes' survival but in terms of a transition to international cooperation and integration that still would prove able to keeping the stability of the modernist components adopted by Arab nationalism with respect to pre-modern polities. In this sense, today's central Arabs' perception of security concerns their international weakness, both politically and militarily, and the consequent objective possibility of the West to exercise interdiction, intrusion and coercion against Arab countries. To be sure, this threat regards domestic stability as well, but is primarily linked to the broad question of assuring Arab survival in the transition to the a globalizing and integrative world, in which there are no enemies any more but strong contestants.

This perception of weakness, and the actual political and cultural circumstances in which it emerges, explains the Arab strong interest in security cooperation as well as the limits and ambiguities of this interest. Participating into the bodies which today carry out security cooperation, like the OSCE Mediterranean Dimension, the EMP, etc., and into

the international missions geared to manage conflicts or crises, gives the Arabs a say in the international security debate, provides information and transparency as well as an assurance against Western unilateral decisions or analyses and broadly enhances Arab political status and authority internationally and regionally. For the reasons just stressed, however, this participation can be cooperative but not inclusionary: the Arabs stay in these ventures to assert and reinforce their distinctive interests and not to get integrated in them -like, for example, the Central-eastern European countries in NATO or in the Partnership for Peace. An aspect of this general limiting factor is that they don't want to find themselves compelled by the automatism of multilateral game to moves that may happen to be contrary to their fundamental interest. For example, one reason, the Arab Euro-Mediterranean partners are reluctant to accept the notion of a Pact of Stability in the EMP is the fact that -according to its OSCE blueprint- this kind of understanding functions like the MFN clause in the international trade. i.e. bilateral agreements eventually become compulsory for all the members of the Pact. This reluctance to multilateralism has strongly hindered progresses in the security agenda of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. As regrettable as it may be this limit is inherent to present Arab security perceptions, however, and should be recognized by the West in shaping Mediterranean security cooperation.

In view of these limitations, a greater and more effective Arab involvement in Mediterranean security cooperation is difficult an encounter many limitations. It can be eased, however, by two policies. First, Arabs should be assured that the agenda of the Mediterranean cooperation includes, beside other partners' concerns and problems, their concerns and is geared to solve their problems, too. This essentially means that no multilateral Mediterranean security cooperation can fully work independently of a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict (or of the existence of a South-South security organization). Second, in participating into the frameworks of security cooperation, the Arab countries should be assured of the equality of their political status with respect to other partners. In present circumstances, both these Arab requirements for collaborating to achieve security cooperation reveal a feeling of weakness. Yet, it cannot be denied that what the experience of the Mediterranean security cooperation suggests so far is that the Europeans and, more in general, the West tend to seek Arab cooperation more to secure their own security than common security and, consequently, set out schemes of cooperation in which Arabs may not feel completely at ease in front of the difficult political transition their polities are facing today.

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