



MEDITERRANEAN PAPER SERIES 2011

## SOUTHERN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: NATIONAL APPROACHES AND TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVES

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Thanos Dokos  
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Cover photo: Mustafa Abdul Jalil, chairman of the National Transitional Council based in Benghazi, Libya, and leader of the rebels opposing Gadhafi meets with President Sarkozy of France at the Elysée Palace in April 2011.

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SEPTEMBER 2011

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# FOREWORD

**ROBERTO ALIBONI**

Proximity to the Mediterranean basin and the countries of North Africa and the Levant is a geographical feature shared by most Southern European countries. In this sense, the Mediterranean has always had a role in Southern European bilateral foreign policies, although this role has not necessarily been prominent. These countries also take part in multilateral Mediterranean policies set out by a variety of international organizations, in particular the European Union and NATO. Because of the centrality of these two alliances in the Southern European countries' foreign policies, involvement in their policies affects national and bilateral policies toward the Mediterranean in a deeper and more decisive way than that of any other international organization or alliance.

This collection of papers looks at Southern European policies toward the Mediterranean from a transatlantic point of view. In this framework, what affects and shapes Southern European countries' policies toward the Mediterranean is less the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue as such (NATO's specific policy toward the area) than transatlantic relations, that is relations with the United States.

The first four papers examine the Mediterranean policies of four Southern European countries, namely France, Greece, Italy, and Spain. These country-specific papers are followed by a paper that considers Southern Europe as a whole in the framework of Mediterranean transatlantic relations.

The paper on France, authored by Jean-François Daguzan, senior research fellow at the *Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique* (FRS), Paris, and editor-in-chief of the *Maghreb-Machrek* quarterly

journal, opens the series. He starts by stressing the long-standing and special significance of the Mediterranean in modern French history and the entrenched perception of the Mediterranean as an area of exclusive French influence that sprung from this history. In light of the growing U.S. presence in the Mediterranean after World War II, French–U.S. relations in the area grew more and more difficult, and in 1966, France withdrew from the NATO joint military command. As a result, the author points out, U.S.–French relations across the Mediterranean from 1945 until 2010 were a mix of competition (essentially in the bilateral field, i.e., in Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, and Syria) and cooperation (when needed).

The paper discusses France–U.S. relations over time until the turning point brought about by President Sarkozy's shift from traditional competition with the United States to a positive and cooperative approach. According to the author, however, Sarkozy's initiative, the Union for the Mediterranean, may once again usher in an exclusive vision of the Mediterranean. In view of the perspectives opened by the Arab Spring, the author recommends a) making France's rapprochement with the United States and NATO more effective so as to define a common policy agenda regarding the Mediterranean area in the context of the new strategic landscape; b) generously supporting any newly elected government in North Africa and the Middle East, even if not in line with the United States' and France's foreign policy interests; and c) addressing together the emerging problems arising from the interconnections between zones neighboring on the Mediterranean, such as the Middle East and Sahel/Africa.

In the second paper, author Thanos Dokos, director-general of the Hellenic Foundation for European and Foreign Policy (ELIAMEP), Athens, notes that “although a Mediterranean country, Greece’s active involvement in the region has been rather limited, especially in the multilateral context.”<sup>1</sup> This is due partly to the unresolved crisis of Cyprus, but most of all to Greece itself, which, for a number of historical, cultural, and political reasons, is more interested in its northern neighborhood (the Balkans, the Black Sea, and Russia) than in the Mediterranean. Nevertheless, since the end of the 1980s, in the country’s foreign policy “there is a gradual realization that Greece has regional interests that go well beyond its northern neighborhood,” so that “its regional policies *vis-à-vis* the South are evolving.”<sup>2</sup>

Dokos emphasizes the preferential relationship with Israel that Greece has recently initiated (to some extent intended to replace the Turkish-Israeli axis), to which Cyprus is associated, especially on the energy side. He also stresses Greek interest in the increasing role of non-regional powers such as China and Russia in the region. He illustrates these and other Greek approaches to the Mediterranean and the Middle East and points out that, while they are more often than not marginal to transatlantic mainstream approaches, they are never inconsistent with them. The author stresses Greece’s preference to act in the Mediterranean and deal with the transatlantic dimension of its Mediterranean relations as an EU member, including with regard to the Arab Spring and its problematic nature.

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<sup>1</sup> See in this Report Thanos Dokos’s paper on Greece, p. 21.

<sup>2</sup> *Ivi.*

Consequently, the author recommends that EU countries act jointly to agree upon a transatlantic agenda toward the region. In this regard, he emphasizes the role that finding a solution to the Palestinian–Israeli conflict is bound to retain even in the emerging Arab Spring perspective.

Valter Coralluzzo, associate professor of political science and international relations in the University of Perugia’s Department of Institutions and Society, first of all illustrates the continuity of Italian foreign policy toward the Mediterranean, amidst changes from Cold War to post-Cold War and most recently post-9/11 developments. Italian policy is based on a firm balance between Atlanticism and Europeanism and always tries to reconcile national interests with those of its alliances, albeit with an eye to ensuring the country’s international role and prestige as a final result.

To test these efforts, Coralluzzo takes into consideration Libya, the Middle East, Turkey, and Iran. Despite the significant domestic changes that have taken place in the country over time, in all these cases, Italy’s Mediterranean policy is characterized by fundamental continuity. Coralluzzo stresses that there has been continuity even under the Berlusconi government, which has been censured domestically for its uncritical tilting toward the United States and its staunch support for Israel to the detriment of the EU and the Arab countries respectively. In concluding his evaluation, he notes, however, a certain tendency of the current government to develop bilateral interests while neglecting multilateral ties or only opportunistically taking advantage of them.

Coralluzzo underscores the need for Italy to reinforce its important relations with the Arab world as a response to the Arab Spring. He stresses the need to do so keeping strictly in line with the Alliance and the United States. However, quantitatively more and more independent Italian initiatives are needed as, he says, “the greatest ‘added value’ that Italy can bring to its friendship with the U.S., as well as to its EU membership, is precisely its willingness and ability to have talks with the Southern Mediterranean countries and the Arab-Muslim world.”<sup>3</sup>

The last country-specific paper is authored by Jordi Vaquer i Fanés and Eduard Soler i Lecha, respectively director and research fellow of the Barcelona Center for International Affairs (CIDOB). The paper points out that, while Spain’s interests and security are principally affected by developments in the Maghreb, since the advent of democracy, Spain has developed a Mediterranean policy reflecting the increasing relevance of the regional dynamics for Spain’s national security and the country’s accession to the European Union.


The paper considers the transatlantic perspective of Spain’s Mediterranean policy first of all at the regional level and then in the Maghreb and the Sahel. In these two areas, the authors pinpoint convergence and divergence between Spain and the United States, coming to the conclusion that, while on specific crises — especially in the Maghreb and the Sahel — there are occasions for Spain to contribute to NATO’s interests and for Spain and the United States to cooperate, on the more global issues affecting the Middle East and the Greater Middle East, Spain can cooperate more easily and

fruitfully with the United States as a member of the European Union than bilaterally. The authors lay down a number of recommendations intended to improve bilateral cooperation, in particular with regard to connecting the Arab and African theaters (as in Daguzan’s paper). In the multilateral framework, they look forward to the Union for the Mediterranean being endowed with a transatlantic dimension.

A paper on Southern Europe’s Mediterranean role in the transatlantic perspective by Roberto Aliboni, director of the Mediterranean and Middle East Program, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Rome, and senior research adviser for the European Institute for the Mediterranean (IEMed), Barcelona, concludes the collection. The paper illustrates the changing role of Southern Europe in the framework of an enfeebled system of Western alliances from the end of the Cold War to the Arab Spring. In the context of the latter and the emerging responses of the Western world, the paper outlines a possible new role for Southern Europe in a transatlantic perspective with a view to helping consolidate ongoing political change in North Africa.

According to the author, Southern Europe could play a dual role. In the bilateral dimension, its proximity remains a factor of interest for the United States (with respect to energy, maritime security, counterterrorism, and so forth). In the multilateral dimension, Southern Europe has developed a number of sub-regional Mediterranean organizations (e.g., the “5 + 5” group and the Forum), which could be upgraded and even opened up to the United States.

<sup>3</sup> See in this Report Valter Coralluzzo’s paper on Italy, p. 37.



The paper concludes by suggesting a number of initiatives whereby Southern European countries could play a role in consolidating transitions to democracy in North Africa and encourage the United States to participate in common actions toward that area, with a view to ensuring the success of the Arab Spring in North Africa as a harbinger to change in the Levant as well.



# FRANCE, THE UNITED STATES, AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: FROM COMPETITION TO COOPERATION FROM A TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Jean-François Daguzan

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean has always been a French affair. In modern history, from the 18<sup>th</sup> century on, Spain and Italy tried but failed to develop imperial policies in the region. Only the United Kingdom was able to successfully challenge France. However, like the United States today, it saw the Mediterranean essentially as a corridor: a channel leading to the Persian Gulf and India. A “pure” Mediterranean policy remained a distinctly French view.

From Napoleon I (Bonaparte’s expedition to Egypt in 1798) to the Fourth Republic, France tried to make the Mediterranean a private lake, more or less peacefully. Essentially, this Mediterranean option was reactivated any time other powers happened to limit France’s strategic perspective on the European front.<sup>4</sup>

After the decolonization process and during the Gaullist era, French governments shifted to a more comprehensive Arab policy in an attempt to make the newly independent Arab Mediterranean states forget the colonial period. But when the Lebanon war (1983) tolled the knell of French influence in the Near East, President François Mitterrand tried to compensate for it with a new, reinvigorated Mediterranean policy — in the beginning specifically oriented toward the Maghreb countries. In 1985-95, France promoted the concept of a “Western Mediterranean” policy and launched the 5+5 project. Then, in 1995, it strongly contributed to launching the Barcelona process, targeting the whole Mediterranean basin.

From the end of World War II to the Lebanon crisis, the relationship with the United States was never empathetic. U.S. foreign policy supported, first, the decolonization processes and the independence of Tunisia and Morocco, then Algerian independence in the painful war that left France “a bit” resentful of its preferred ally. Moreover, the Suez crisis in 1956 and the negative U.S. attitude toward the Anglo-French intervention in Egypt increased the misunderstanding between the two powers.<sup>5</sup>

In 1966, France’s withdrawal from the NATO joint military command made French military policy exclude the transatlantic relationship from the Mediterranean setting, despite the fact that the Sixth Fleet and the NATO Southern Command were based in Naples. As a result, U.S.-French relations across the Mediterranean from the 1950s until now have been a mix of competition (essentially in the bilateral field) and cooperation (when needed).

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<sup>4</sup> See Jean-François Daguzan, “France’s Mediterranean Policy: Between Myths and Strategy,” *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, Vol. 17 No. 3, December 2009, p. 387-400.

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<sup>5</sup> See Jean-François Daguzan (Ed.), *Les Etats-Unis et la Méditerranée*, FMES-Publisud, Paris, 2002, p. 144-145.

# 1 1945–2010: “SMOOTH” COMPETITION ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN

When it comes to bilateral policy with the individual Mediterranean states, the relationship between France and the United States has involved two aspects: hard crises and “soft” competition for influence. And often hard and soft crises end up merging. The hard crises have been the Suez war (*Operation Musketeer Revised* in 1956), withdrawal from the NATO military organization in 1966, and the Iraq war in 2003.

In between these events, there has been more or less fair competition between the two players. France considered the Maghreb countries a private playing field and tried to maintain influence in the Near East after the 1967 strategic turning point and the rupture with Israel. Later on, the decision to initiate a comprehensive Arab policy made the relationship even more tumultuous with some mutual anger and at times low blows.

During George Pompidou’s and Valéry Giscard d’Estaing’s administrations, France tried to reinforce its links with Arab states further. This policy led France to sign the military “deal of the century” with Libya. Since Libya’s foreign policy was strictly anti-American, the United States perceived France’s supply of hundreds of heavy weapons to Libya as unfriendly. However, relations between France and the United States warmed up when France protected Chad’s stability and territorial integrity from Libya’s interference and designs. The terrorist destruction of two airplanes — one over Lockerbie in Scotland and the other over the Tenere desert — resulted in French-U.S. cooperation and an ensuing ten year quasi-embargo on Libya.

## *Tunisia: Who is the True Friend?*

Contrary to common wisdom, the relationship between France and Tunisia was not always that good during the Zine el Abidine Ben Ali period. The Tunisian president was soon regarded as a U.S. agent by French diplomatic and intelligence services. To quote Nicole Grimaud, “According to French diplomats, General Ben Ali, who received the second part of his training in the United States, informed Washington beforehand of former Tunisian president Habib Bourguiba’s overthrow in 1987.”<sup>6</sup> Comforted by that view, Ben Ali regularly used the “U.S. threat” against the French. That is why French policy was so cautious and tried not to irritate the Tunisian leader. Two examples are when a French television channel (*Antenne 2*) interrupted its broadcasting for some time after the publication in France of *Notre ami Ben Ali*, a book harshly criticizing the Tunisian president, and the “light” reservations concerning human rights conditions expressed by Minister of Foreign Affairs Hubert Védrine.<sup>7</sup>

Moreover, the United States always saw Ben Ali as a bulwark against radical Islam, and this perception was reinforced by the events of 9/11. Insured of impunity by these strategic positions, Ben Ali and his clan considered themselves untouchable. This situation inhibited France to the point that, when

<sup>6</sup> “États-Unis et Maghreb, un engagement limité,” in Jean-François Daguzan (Ed.), *Les États-Unis et la Méditerranée*, Paris, Publisud-FMES, 2002, p. 49.

<sup>7</sup> See Jean-François Daguzan, “France and the Maghreb: the end of the special relationship?,” in Yahia Zoubir and Haizam Amirah-Fernandez (Eds.), *North Africa, Politics, Region, and the Limits of Transformation*, Routledge, 2008, p. 335.

the “Jasmine Revolution” started in mid-December 2010, the French government was unable to react properly to the ongoing events and let the United States support the insurrection and press for the fall of the dictator.

#### *Algeria: Between Principles and Realpolitik*

The United States strongly supported the independence of Algeria. For this reason, the war in Algeria became a moment of great tension between the two allies (further aggravated by the French withdrawal from NATO). Under President Boumédiène, the Algerians joined the “progressive policy” line promoted by the Soviet Union. They armed themselves with Soviet equipment and became an objective adversary of the United States. At the same time, France was promoting strong Algerian-French cooperation (which included sharing secret military agreements).<sup>8</sup> When Algiers’ relations with Paris weakened because of French support for Morocco in the Western Sahara, the United States tried to upgrade the Algerian-U.S. relationship by promoting business in the oil sector. President Mitterrand countered this U.S. penetration, however, by signing an extremely important gas contract with Algiers in 1984 that froze the emerging U.S.–Algeria economic relationship.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Jean-François Daguzan, “France Democratisation and North Africa,” in Richard Gillespie and Richard Youngs (Eds.), “The European Union and Democracy Promotion: The Case of North Africa,” *Democratisation*, Vol. 9 Spring 2002 No.1, p. 139.

<sup>9</sup> Author’s interviews with various French and Algerian leaders.

During the last ten years, the influence of the United States has increased. The events of 9/11 made Algiers a reliable interlocutor in the global war on terror. The Algerian decision to move closer to NATO later reinforced ties. At the same time, France and Algeria have continued their very peculiar up and down dialogue — vacillating between a Treaty of Friendship and a war of memories. The treaty has never materialized and the dispute continues unabated, as if they were an old married couple!

#### *Morocco: Two Pretenders to One Throne*

The relationship with Morocco has been heavily dependent on circumstances and very connected to the personality of the various leaders. Relations deteriorated badly between General Charles de Gaulle and King Hassan II after the hijacking in Paris of the Moroccan leftist leader Medhi Ben Barka by Moroccan intelligence services. Relations were very good with President Giscard d’Estaing and awful with President François Mitterrand — due to Mrs. Danièle Mitterrand’s personal engagement in the defense of human rights in Morocco. After that, a sort of honeymoon prevailed between Jacques Chirac and the Moroccan king, which Chirac later tried to continue with the new king, Mohamed VI.

The U.S.-Morocco relationship began with World War II and the U.S. invasion of North Africa, when the State Department supported the independence movement in the region and established strong ties with the future king, Mohamed V. This alliance was confirmed by the long-term presence of U.S. mili-

tary bases in the country and the delivery of military materials.<sup>10</sup>

In relations with France, Hassan II's long reign was a mix of seduction and irritation. The economy was highly dependent on France, but King Hassan sought to diversify Morocco's relations with other European countries and the United States. The Western Sahara war, which later turned into a dispute, was the crucial turning point in the strategic relations between France, Morocco, and the United States. When President Giscard d'Estaing decided to support the position of Mauritania and Morocco (including military support to them), U.S. relations with France suddenly improved. After Mitterrand, Jacques Chirac stayed on the same course and in general defended the Moroccan position in the framework of competent international instances.<sup>11</sup> That situation has not changed today.

#### *Syria: A Highly Tense Dialogue*

Regarding Syria, the state of U.S.-French relations is strictly linked with the Lebanese crisis. Initially seen as a stabilization factor, the Syrian invasion of Lebanon during the civil war soon became a source of conflict between Damascus and Paris. Ambassador Louis Delamare's assassination at a

Syrian check-point in Beirut in September 1981 gave way to a dispute destined to last for years.

The United States saw Syria as the main threat to Israel and structured its policy toward this country so as to ensure its strategic interest in Israel's security. The situation changed with the Kuwait war, when Syria entered the U.S.-led coalition. At that point, France and the United States accepted Syrian dominance in Lebanon.

In the 1990s, though, France tried to reintroduce Syria into the Mediterranean game. President Chirac took advantage of Bashar al-Assad's accession to power to propose a reshuffling of French-Syrian relations. After a good start, however, the young Syrian leader deluded Chirac. The crisis between the two countries reached a climax with the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister Rafik Hariri (a close friend of Chirac) in Beirut on February 14, 2005. Relations with France went from bad to worse and relations with the United States were also frozen. The latter also felt that Syria was not engaging enough in the struggle against Al Qaida and failing to prevent insurgents from crossing the Syria-Iraq border.

Today the situation is more or less the same (following the vicissitudes of the Hariri International Tribunal). President Sarkozy invited Bashar al-Assad to the July 2008 conference inaugurating the Union for the Mediterranean and treated him as a guest of honor in the traditional July 14 military review. However, no real change in Syria's behavior followed. Similarly, for the United States, Syria remains a "usual suspect," despite the nomination of an ambassador in December 2010 after six years of vacancy.

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<sup>10</sup> Jean-Pierre Tuquoi, *Majesté, je crois beaucoup à votre père*, Albin Michel, Paris, 2006.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Aeschimann and Christophe Boltanski, *Chirac d'Arabie, Les mirages d'une politique française*, Grasset, Paris, 2006, p. 378.

With the ongoing Syrian revolt, both France and the United States are now keeping the country's power elite at a distance. Could a new page in the tale be turning?<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Nathalie Nougayrède and Gilles Paris, "Après avoir réhabilité Bachar Al-Assad en 2008, M. Sarkozy prend ses distances," *Le Monde*, March 26, 2011.

# 2

## 1991–2001: THE MEDITERRANEAN WITHOUT THE UNITED STATES: THE CONTINUATION OF THE FRENCH DREAM

From 1991–2001, the U.S. and European strategies diverged. While the United States proposed a global process based on security issues (the Madrid Talks that were launched in 1991), the Europeans avoided getting involved in the Gulf and initiated a regional cooperation process in the Mediterranean.

In fact, the strategic situation at the beginning of the 1990s was channeled by countries such as France, Spain, and Italy (but also Germany) toward a comprehensive agenda of cooperation with both the Eastern and Southern countries of the Mediterranean. A first attempt was the initiative, essentially supported by Spain and Italy, of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM, January 17, 1991), based on the model of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, previously the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe — CSCE) open to “the countries of the region and those having interests in the region (...) that might contribute to stability and cooperation in the region.”

A problem immediately cropped up with the mention of “those having interests” because these words were mainly understood by France as opening the door to increased U.S. influence. This supposed “subliminal intention,” the feeling of the project being overambitious, and the hostility of the United States, which saw it as competing with the Madrid Talks, very soon killed the initiative. As stated by Alberto Bin, “the main criticism aimed at the Italo-Spanish initiative was concerned above all with the geographical area taken into consideration, considered to be too large, and with how applicable to the Mediterranean the experience of the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe could be. (...) The initiative [was] eyed with

hostility by the United States and welcomed somewhat coldly even by some European countries, especially Germany and Great Britain.”<sup>13</sup> But the harshest criticism came from France, involved in the Western Mediterranean project and fearing, as said, deeper involvement of the United States in the Mediterranean.<sup>14</sup>

Eventually, France (together with Spain and Italy) launched a new process: the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. At the beginning, during the negotiation period, the question was debated whether the United States should be formally associated with the Euro-Mediterranean project (on the model of the aborted Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean). But once again, France opposed this. Finally, the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was born in November 1995 on the basis of the Barcelona Declaration, which was produced by a conference bringing together the then-members of the European Union and the states of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean (excluding Libya but including Jordan and the Palestinian Authority). The Partnership was conceived as an extremely ambitious project encompassing security concerns, human and political values, and co-development. As stated by Youngs and Echagüe, “traditionally such an approach has been justified as an attempt to carve

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<sup>13</sup> Mediterranean Academy of Diplomatic Studies, University of Malta, “*Mediterranean Diplomacy. Evolution and Prospects*, January 1997, <http://www.fscpo.unict.it/EuroMed/jmwp05.htm>.

<sup>14</sup> See Bichara Khader (Ed.), *L'Europe et la Méditerranée, géopolitique de la proximité*, L'Harmattan/Academia, Paris-Bruxelles, 1994, p. 274.



out a parcel of influence within the dominant U.S. policy toward the Middle East. The Mediterranean offered an area where the EU could claim an advantage and did not have to follow the United States' lead."<sup>15</sup>

Meanwhile, France's desire not to involve the United States in the Euro-Mediterranean process was balanced, thanks to the initiative of Spain and Italy, by the establishment of the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, which France finally — if only half-heartedly — accepted.

Thus, France continued to advocate (whatever the political orientation of the various French governments) for an exclusive conception of the Mediterranean. The old notion of "the Mediterranean without the major players"<sup>16</sup> remained the leading principle of France's Mediterranean policy.

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<sup>15</sup> Richard Youngs and Ana Echagüe, "Europe the Mediterranean, the Middle East and the Need for Triangulation," *The International Spectator*, vol. 45, No.3, September 2010, p. 28.

<sup>16</sup> See Charles Zorgbibe, *La Méditerranée sans les Grands*, Puf, Paris, 1980.

# 3

## 2001–2010: THE UNITED STATES: FROM A SECURITY-ORIENTED VISION TO ENGAGEMENT WITH THE ARAB WORLD

The return of war was the big surprise of the new century. Post-Cold War hopes had let people and even leaders dream of a perpetually peaceful era. In the Mediterranean, the Israeli-Palestinian Oslo Accords, followed by the Euro-Mediterranean process, was seen as the direct manifestation of this new period, whereas the Balkan wars were regarded as the last event of a period otherwise gone forever. But the Al Qaeda attack against the United States definitively changed the perception of the sole superpower. Once more, war became an option in international relations. This position directly affected the Mediterranean region from 2001-2010 as well as the U.S. relationship with France.

After the 9/11 attacks, the U.S. strategic vision became dramatically oriented toward security issues. The fight (war) against terrorism imposed the pursuit of crude and concrete goals. The first result was to give authoritarian regimes in the Mediterranean and elsewhere the right, by endorsing U.S. goals, to reinforce their security systems and put democracy aside. This position defeated the European Union's ambition of trying to pursue the Euro-Mediterranean goals of political reform on the southern and eastern shores of the sea.<sup>17</sup> Furthermore, in combination with the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, that position made the United States totally and definitively unpopular in the Arab-Muslim world.

When elected, Barak Obama tried to balance the U.S. "naming and bashing" approach and proposed a new ambitious policy. The speech given in Cairo on June 4, 2009, was precisely intended to modify

the Arab perception of the United States. From the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (his first phone call as president was to Mahmoud Abbas) to the condemnation of Islam-bashing, he tried to put forward a global agenda to the Arab world based on cooperation in education, economic development, and democratic issues. As Stuart E. Eizenstat said, Barak Obama pledged "a new start."<sup>18</sup> Obviously, contrary to his predecessors, the new president no longer considered the Mediterranean a burning issue.<sup>19</sup>

The situation in French-U.S. relations regarding the Mediterranean remained frozen until Nicolas Sarkozy was elected president of the French Republic. Already as presidential candidate, Sarkozy announced his positive feelings toward the United States and his willingness to tighten links with it. At the same time, he advocated a new and ambitious strategy for the Mediterranean (symbolically announced as a priority in his foreign policy) based on the establishment of a "Mediterranean Union."

However, as illustrated in the next section, a contradiction was embedded in these two policies.

<sup>17</sup> Ian Lesser, "The United States and the Mediterranean," *Med.2003*, IEMed-CIDOB, Barcelona, pp. 20-23.

<sup>18</sup> Stuart E. Eizenstat, "U.S. Foreign Policy Towards the Maghreb: The Need for a New Beginning," *Med.2010*, IEMed-CIDOB, Barcelona, pp. 17-22.

<sup>19</sup> Ian Lesser, "De Bush à Obama: une année de transition dans la politique américaine envers la Méditerranée et le Proche-Orient," *Med.2009*, IEMed-CIDOB, Barcelona, p. 36.

# 4 THE PARADOX OF SARKOZY'S PARANOID MEDITERRANEAN POLICY: INCLUDING AND EXCLUDING THE UNITED STATES

During the first period of Sarkozy's mandate, the double approach regarding Mediterranean and transatlantic relations left observers a little dubious about France's new "grand strategy." On the one hand, Sarkozy announced France's rapid "rapprochement" with and complete integration in NATO, entailing a substantive rapprochement with U.S. military and foreign policy. On the other hand, he launched an initiative — later to become the Union for the Mediterranean — reserving access to only the countries bordering on the Mediterranean and thus excluding other European countries as well as the United States, with the European Union only as an observer.

The Toulon speech (Sarkozy's most important speech as a candidate<sup>20</sup>) promoted the "Mediterranean Union" as an anti-Barcelona process. In fact, the concept was based on a concomitant rejection of the European Union's federative project, the "Euro-Med acquis."<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, the Mediterranean Union was seen as a substitute for the old French

Arab policy. "It is in the perspective of the Mediterranean Union that we must rethink what we previously called the French Arab policy."<sup>22</sup>

At the same time, Sarkozy's team was organizing France's complete return into NATO. This was an incredible breach of the Gaullist dogma of national strategic autonomy, which had provided the platform for French defense policy for 42 years! The president's March 13, 2009, speech at the *Ecole Militaire* foretold a new era in transatlantic relations. "The Atlantic Alliance is also the symbol of the community of transatlantic values and interests."<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, French foreign and strategy policy had a dual nature during the first years of Sarkozy's administration. But nobody took the contradiction seriously. Actually, the exclusive vision of the Mediterranean, defended by Sarkozy's advisor Henry Guaino ("father" of the "Mediterranean Union" concept), clashed with the stark relevance of the new French approach to NATO and the United States (and presumably met with internal opposition from the president's other diplomatic advisor, Jean-Daniel Levitte, who was working hard for U.S./French rapprochement).

Ironically, the Union for the Mediterranean was perceived by the Americans as more of a complementary than contradictory development. In fact,

<sup>20</sup> "C'est d'abord aux pays méditerranéens eux-mêmes de prendre en main la destinée que la géographie et l'histoire leur ont préparée. C'est à la France, européenne et méditerranéenne à la fois, de prendre l'initiative avec le Portugal, l'Espagne, l'Italie, la Grèce et Chypre, d'une Union Méditerranéenne comme elle prit jadis l'initiative de construire l'Union européenne. (...) C'est dans la perspective de cette Union Méditerranéenne qu'il nous faut repenser ce qu'on appelait jadis la politique arabe de la France, (...)." Speech of Toulon, July 2, 2007, <http://sites.univ-provence.fr/veronis/Discours2007/transcript.php?n=Sarkozy&p=2007-02-07>

<sup>21</sup> See Jean-François Daguzan, "France and the myth of the Mediterranean," *Journal of Contemporary European Studies*, *op.cit.*, p. 395.

<sup>22</sup> Toulon Speech, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Full text in [http://www.frstrategie.org/colloque\\_otan/discours/sarkozy.pdf](http://www.frstrategie.org/colloque_otan/discours/sarkozy.pdf): "La France, la défense européenne et l'Otan au 21ème siècle," Actes du colloque de la Fondation pour la recherche stratégique, Paris, March 11, 2009.

the new concept was considered a widely open initiative involving concrete projects and a broader multilateralism (including the Arab League) and was much appreciated. As Ian Lesser has stated: “the new initiative’s pragmatism and project-oriented approach made the U.S. observers more sensitive.”<sup>24</sup> So, finally, a pragmatic option seems to have prevailed — albeit in a contradictory way — in France’s Mediterranean policy.

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<sup>24</sup> “De Bush à Obama : une année de transition dans la politique américaine envers la Méditerranée et le Proche-Orient,” *Med.2009, op. cit.*, p. 35.

# 5 FRENCH-U.S. PATHS TO CLOSER COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN? ADDRESSING THE NEW TRANSATLANTIC CHALLENGES

Almost a decade after the beginning of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, the strategic situation is completely different. However, despite the differences, the broad picture of the Greater Middle East and North Africa remains unstable and risky. Important issues, such as the Arab-Israeli conflict, remain unsolved or have been exacerbated. Throughout the region, a conflict has developed between the West and the “moderates,” on the one side, and the “resistance camp,” on the other.

Most recently, starting in December 2010, unexpected transformations have occurred in North Africa and the Arab world at large (the revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt; the conflict in Libya; serious revolts in Yemen, Bahrain, and Syria; troubles in Jordan, and Algeria; ferment in Morocco). The strategic landscape in the Mediterranean and the Middle East is dramatically changing.

Neither the military staffs nor the diplomats were expecting a military intervention in Libya to oust Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and his regime. The strategic and diplomatic coordination between France, Great Britain, and the United States and, later, other allies in response to developments in Libya and the other ongoing crises in the region is an example of successful transatlantic cooperation, which badly needs to be extended and reinforced to tackle long-term challenges such as the stabilization of North Africa and the Middle East more generally.

In this framework, the following paths of cooperation between France and the United States can be recommended:

- *To make France's rapprochement with the United States and NATO more effective so as to define a common policy agenda regarding the*

*Mediterranean area in the context of the new strategic landscape.* France and the United States could work together to involve the other allies (in the EU and Wider Europe) in the fields of security, anti-terrorism, disarmament, nonproliferation, and economic cooperation, but also democracy and fundamental human rights.

- *To support generously any newly elected government in North Africa and the Middle East.* A number of Arab states are about to enter a democratic process. While leaders in Europe and the United States applaud this process, it should not be overlooked that the current revolutionary events are more the product of the economic crisis than of democratic demands. The emerging democratic governments will have enormous difficulties in satisfying the people's most basic demands: employment and bread. Thus, their hopes may soon be swept away by disappointment and anger. Because of this dramatic challenge, the European Union and the United States should combine efforts with a view to launching a sort of modern “Marshall Plan” for the Mediterranean as soon as possible. A significant and symbolic transatlantic effort would give the new governments a boost and provide the critical mass to engage a new economic strategy.
- *To develop together the concept of “interconnecting zones.”* Even from a European point of view, an exclusive vision of the Mediterranean area no longer fits with reality. Addressing emerging problems requires that interconnections between neighboring zones such as the

Middle East and Sahel/Africa be identified.<sup>25</sup> This is not to say that the Mediterranean has to be put aside. However, it could be useful to organize a more cooperative approach between the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the Maghreb and the Sahel states by developing structural bridges between these various areas. The Mediterranean area needs the economic dynamism of the Persian Gulf to improve its economy and needs to secure the Sahel region from the threat of Islamic terrorism. Both could be French-U.S. initiatives with a view to convincing other European states to endorse such a dimension.<sup>26</sup> The central question to be addressed is how to combine two different perceptions: the United States' corridor vision<sup>27</sup> with strategic hubs (Sahara, Aegean Sea, Sahel, Syria, etc.) and the long-standing political concept of France and Europe. France (and the Europeans) and the United States have to reach a compromise: more globalism in their regionalism for France and Europe; more regionalism in its globalism for the United States. The consequences of the global

economic crisis, the spread of Al Qaeda and the current political-economic crisis in North Africa and the Middle East call for an inter-connected approach. Faced with these very risky emerging challenges, today nobody can go it alone.

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<sup>25</sup> Ian Lesser, *op.cit.*, p. 35.

<sup>26</sup> See Richard Youngs and Ana Echagüe, "Europe, the Mediterranean, the Middle East, and the Need for Triangulation," *The International Spectator*, *op. cit.*, p. 27-39. And on the interconnection with the Sahel region, Abdenmour Benantar, *Contribution de l'OTAN à l'établissement de la confiance et de la sécurité au Maghreb*, NATO Defense College, Rome, September 2010.

<sup>27</sup> See Abdenmour Benantar, "Quel rôle américain pour la Méditerranée?," *Med. 2009*, Barcelona, p. 45.

# THE EVOLVING MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVE OF GREECE IN THE TRANSATLANTIC CONTEXT

Thanos Dokos

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## INTRODUCTION

Greece is located near the crossroads of three continents (Europe, Asia, and Africa). According to a RAND Corporation study, the Greek strategic space is wide, encompassing Europe, Eurasia, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean, and spanning the Atlantic.<sup>28</sup> Greece is an integral part of the Balkans (where it was for a long time the only member of both the European Union and NATO and still maintains a position of political and economic influence, despite its current economic crisis) and is also in close proximity to the Black Sea. The Aegean Sea is an important shipping route, connecting the Black Sea with the Mediterranean, and a major transit route for energy products. The Mediterranean has historically been a body of water of considerable value for Greece, as well as a region endowed with special significance, either as a familiar route for trade and culture, or as a fault line between hostile states and civilizations. In the post-Cold War era, it is a crucial area of contact between the North (a region of stability and affluence) and the South (a region characterized by multiple flash-points and areas of tension and a highly unequal distribution of wealth).

In much of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the main strategic dilemma for Greek decision-makers was

whether or not to ally themselves with the sea power dominant in the Eastern Mediterranean or the land power dominant on the Balkan peninsula and Central Europe. In most cases, mindful of their responsibility to defend more than 2,000 Greek islands, as well as the interests of the Greek merchant marine (then, as now, the largest fleet in the world, if one includes ships of Greek ownership under flags of convenience), they chose to ally themselves with the sea power — Britain — throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and up to 1947, and the United States after that.

During the Cold War, Greece had several important reasons to maintain a moderately active foreign policy vis-à-vis the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The main drivers of Greece's policies were a) its energy needs;<sup>29</sup> b) the interests of Greek communities in the region (especially Egypt, at least until the late 1950s when the economy was nationalized by the Nasser regime and many Greeks were forced to leave); c) the Greek-Orthodox religious presence in the region (Patriarchates in Jerusalem, Alexandria, and Antioch and St. Kathryn's Monastery in the Sinai); d) economic relations with certain Arab countries (for example, in 1981 almost 30 percent of Greek exports went to the Middle East); and e) the need for diplomatic support from the Arab countries on the Cyprus problem after 1974 (and the nonrecognition of the "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" after 1983).

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<sup>28</sup> At the broadest level, Greece has been affected by the complex of trends described as "globalization." The contemporary strategic environment is characterized by a series of functional issues that cut across traditional geographic lines. Ian Lesser has argued that the strategic environment around Greece is being shaped by the development of new lines of communication for energy, and other nonenergy infrastructure projects. Ian Lesser, "Greece's New Strategic Environment," in Lesser *et al.*, *Greece's New Geopolitics*, RAND-Kokkalis Foundation, Santa Monica 2001, p. 2.

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<sup>29</sup> The majority of Greece's energy needs — especially oil — have traditionally been covered by suppliers in the Middle East. This may not have been the decisive factor in shaping Greek policies vis-à-vis the Middle East, but it was not completely irrelevant either.

In the late 1970s and 1980s, Greece tried to shield itself from the side effects of terrorist acts in the context of the Palestinian struggle for self-determination. The strong support for the Palestinian cause by socialist governments in the 1980s, as well as privileged relations with radical Arab regimes such as Libya and Syria, often led to tension with U.S. administrations, and occasionally with Greece's European partners. Since the early 1990s, Greece has moved considerably closer to the core of European integration, both politically and economically, and its views and positions on a number of foreign policy and security issues have converged considerably with those of its EU partners. At the same time, there has been an improvement in relations with Israel, although a further strengthening of relations between Athens and Tel Aviv was prevented by the strong strategic partnership that developed between Israel and Turkey.

It was not until 2010 that the situation changed again, with an impressive thaw in Greco-Israeli relations as the result of two factors. First, Athens' urgent need to acquire a role in its southern neighborhood, increase Greece's strategic value, and seek a number of potential benefits (bilateral cooperation in the economic, defense/security, and tourism sectors, as well as support from the Jewish lobby, which is quite influential both in Congress and on Wall Street). Second, (b) the rising tensions in relations between Ankara and Tel Aviv forced Israel to look for, if not a replacement, then at least an alternative regional partner. The rapprochement with Greece was also useful for Tel Aviv in the context of Israel's increasing isolation in the West as a result of the Netanyahu government's policies vis-

à-vis the Palestinians.<sup>30</sup> Recent events in Egypt and the possibility of a future government in Cairo that may be less accommodating to Israel's security needs and concerns — as well as the evolving upheaval in Syria and the possibility of instability in Jordan — have already reinforced that trend. It is not clear, however, whether Israel has drawn the necessary conclusions and is considering the re-adjustment of its policies vis-à-vis the Palestinians.

Another quite promising field of cooperation between Athens, Nicosia, and Tel Aviv is energy. Substantial deposits of natural gas have apparently been discovered inside the exclusive economic zones of Israel and Cyprus and the two countries have been considering various forms of cooperation.<sup>31</sup> One option would be the construction of a terminal for liquefied natural gas in Cyprus and then transportation to Western Europe (which remains strongly interested in alternative energy suppliers in order to reduce its dependency on Russia); the other option would be the construction of an underwater pipeline to Greece and then perhaps through the ITGI (Interconnector Turkey-Greece-Italy) pipeline to Italy.

Some analysts (mostly Israelis) are already referring to a strategic axis between Israel, Greece, and Cyprus. Such assessments are certainly premature as there is some concern in Athens that this relative shift in Greece's regional policies in the Eastern

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<sup>30</sup> Greece remained critical of the Netanyahu government's policies on the Palestinian issue, but its related statements became more muted.

<sup>31</sup> Although there are different — even substantially diverging — estimates of the Leviathan and Tamar gas deposits.

Mediterranean might have negative implications for its relations with the Arab world, with which it has traditionally enjoyed cordial relations (as a result of its policies and its lack of a colonial past). The unfolding developments in Arab countries further complicate the situation. To prevent or minimize substantial damage to its relations with Arab countries, Greece is emphasizing its newly acquired capability to reach out to both sides of the Arab-Israeli confrontation and to offer its services as a (supplementary) facilitator.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> To a considerable extent because of institutional weaknesses in its strategic policy planning mechanisms, Greece has failed in the past to exploit its links with some regimes in the Middle East (eg Libya, Syria, PLO, Iran) in an effort to moderate their policies and act as a facilitator in various attempts to bridge their differences with the West.

# 1 GREECE AND NATO: AN UNEASY RELATIONSHIP

Greek perceptions of NATO are certainly unique among Alliance members. As a result of U.S. support for the military dictatorship in Greece (1967–74) and NATO’s noninvolvement in the 1974 Cyprus crisis, which resulted in the occupation of almost 40 percent of the island by Turkey, a substantial portion of Greek decision-makers and public opinion became increasingly alienated. They blamed not only the United States but also NATO as a U.S.-dominated security institution, which was willing to accommodate Turkish security interests at the expense of Greek ones. In combination with the declining feeling of threat from the Soviet bloc, this led to the conviction that NATO was at best irrelevant and at worst harmful for Greek security. As a result, Greece was for more than two decades a rather unenthusiastic member of the Alliance, often labeled as the “asterisk country” or the “black sheep” of NATO. The situation began to improve after the mid-1990s. Nevertheless, Greece still relied relatively more on EU institutions for its policies vis-à-vis the Mediterranean than NATO. It was felt that because of the synergistic effect of security problems in the Mediterranean, they could only be dealt with in a holistic manner and that the EU was best suited for such a role.

One of the reasons was that NATO, in the eyes and minds of the “Arab street” (but also of many officials in the Arab world) is a U.S.-led alliance and has a negative image (especially after Iraq and, to a lesser extent, Afghanistan). Furthermore, despite NATO’s ambition to become the guarantor of stability in regions around Europe, the Mediterranean has not been very high on NATO’s agenda and its public diplomacy activities

(Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative) have been rather modest.

Despite Greece’s unease<sup>33</sup> with some of the decisions practically imposed by the United States on its NATO allies (such as the intervention in Kosovo, efforts to enlarge the Alliance to include Georgia and Ukraine, plans for the deployment of the anti-missile shield in Eastern Europe, an out-of-area role for NATO with no clear rules or criteria, etc.), Athens honors its obligations and has been a regular participant in NATO and other European and transatlantic activities since the mid-1990s such as KFOR, IFOR, STANAVFORMED, Active Endeavour, ISAF, Desert Shield, UNIFIL II, as well as Operation Iraqi Freedom (in some cases in a rather discreet manner because Greek public opinion has been strongly opposed). Greece also offered immediate support to Allied operations for the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1973 (imposition of a no-fly zone over Libya) through the use of Souda Bay and the participation of Greek warships in enforcement of a maritime exclusion zone.

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<sup>33</sup> In most cases, that skepticism was not based on ideological grounds or specific Greek interests that might be affected by such actions, but on the belief that such moves would prove to be counterproductive for the general interests of the EU and NATO.

## 2 GREECE'S MEDITERRANEAN POLICIES

Although a Mediterranean country, Greece's active involvement in the region has been rather limited, especially in the multilateral context. Because of other foreign policy priorities (mainly strong concerns about Turkish policies in Cyprus and the Aegean since the 1960s, Balkan instability in the 1990s, and the promotion of Greek political and economic interests in Southeast Europe), its participation in activities and initiatives in the context of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) has been rather infrequent and clearly an issue of lower priority. There has also been limited cooperation between Southern European countries (with the exception perhaps of the Integrated Mediterranean Programmes<sup>34</sup>), as the EU's Mediterranean member states have never acted in a coordinated manner as a bloc.

A brief reference to Greek perceptions regarding the EMP might be useful. There was a consensus among Greek policy- and opinion-makers that the Barcelona Process was a commendable and necessary initiative that attempted to create the framework for the future development of a zone of shared peace, prosperity, and stability in the Mediterranean. However, it made very limited progress toward meeting these goals, even though this assessment depends on whether expectations were realistic or not. Pragmatic observers, who understood that such an ambitious project in a region of high turbulence and instability like the Mediterranean would be faced with many obstacles and had

to be seen as a long-term exercise, expected this rather mediocre performance.

Recognizing that the security of Europe and of the (Southern) Mediterranean are closely linked and that Europe has a number of vital interests in the Mediterranean, the Greek security elite perceived the EMP's security basket as a general framework for various confidence-building measures. The objective was perceived as being twofold: a) to stabilize the South and (in conjunction with the economic basket) contain and manage problems such as migration; and b) to reduce misperceptions, promote a substantive dialogue and better understanding between the two shores of the Mediterranean, and eventually develop a common security culture. The economic dimension of the Barcelona Process has, unfortunately, been considered a low priority for the Greek public and private sectors, which have chosen the Balkans as the main target of Greece's investment and economic activity.<sup>35</sup>

Greece offered its support for the French proposal to create the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) both because it believed in the concept of coopera-

<sup>34</sup> These are programs launched by the EU in the 1980s, aimed at improving the socio-economic structures of the Mediterranean region.

<sup>35</sup> Despite the rather limited volume of Greek trade and investment in the Southern Mediterranean, bilateral activities with select countries are not insignificant. More specifically, as a result of both historical ties and opportunities created by association agreements, Greece has notable trade relations with Egypt, Israel, Algeria (although in this case the main commodity is natural gas), Cyprus (until very recently an EMP partner), Turkey (with a considerable increase in trade and investment since 1999, but this has more to do with the Greek-Turkish rapprochement than with sub-regional dynamics), and to a lesser extent with Lebanon.

tion between the two sides of the Mediterranean and because of Athens' close ties with Paris. For a number of reasons, including the economic crisis, Greek participation in the UfM has been rather hypotonic (for example, Greece was allotted the position of assistant secretary-general for energy but has not yet filled it). As will be argued in the concluding section, there is uncertainty in Athens as to whether the UfM can still play a useful role.

Looking at the evolution of Greek foreign policy in the period after the country joined the EU, one notices a general change. In the 1980s, the perception of many Western governments and foreign analysts was that “reactionary” policies, unreliability, and unpredictability were the dominant characteristics of Greek foreign policy. In the 1990s and early 21<sup>st</sup> century, the pattern has been that of a more pragmatic, reliable, rational, multi-dimensional foreign policy, placing emphasis on multilateral diplomacy (although to different degrees by different Greek governments). There are a number of causes for this change, but there can be little doubt that it is mainly due to the influence and impact of the deep “Europeanization” process that has shaped various facets of Greek political, economic, and social life.

# 3

## GREEK FOREIGN POLICY IN THE “NEW” MEDITERRANEAN SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The regional environment has been radically transformed since the end of the Cold War, and even more so after 9/11 and the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. In this context, several of the drivers of Greece’s Mediterranean policy have either changed in terms of importance or are no longer relevant. New ones have emerged, including:

- new or qualitatively transformed existing functional challenges in the region (the extremely slow pace of political reform and substantial imbalances in the distribution of income at the national level), demographic changes — i.e., more than 60 percent of the total population is under 25 years of age in some countries — and population movements;
- the growing influence, at least in some countries, of political Islam, terrorism, and climate change;
- new extra-regional actors (China, India) in the Mediterranean or the return of old ones (Russia), the declining influence and appeal of the EU’s soft power, the reduced military presence in the region, the region’s declining weight in U.S. strategic planning, and the emergence of regional powers with increasing influence (Turkey, Iran); and
- the increasingly felt impact of globalization on a region that, with few exceptions, has not benefited greatly from this trend.

At the same time, most regional conflicts remain unresolved (Israel-Palestinian/Arab conflict, the Kurdish issue, and the Cyprus problem), while new ones have appeared, such as Iran’s nuclear program,

Iraq’s future after the gradual withdrawal of U.S. forces, and the domestic situation in several Arab countries.

Regarding the role of extra-regional powers, Greece is not in principle uncomfortable with a greater role for Russia and China in the region, provided their presence and activities fulfill the criteria of mutual economic benefit and no destabilizing political consequences. China appears to consider Greece a regional hub for increasing its economic (and perhaps in the future political) footprint in southeast Europe and the current economic crisis cannot but increase the attractiveness of such a prospect for Athens. Chinese companies have invested in the Port of Piraeus,<sup>36</sup> with the promise for additional investment, and Greece is hardly in a position to discourage foreign direct investments of almost any legitimate origin. As long as China’s Mediterranean presence remains basically economic and does not cause any friction with Greece’s Western partners, Athens will not be faced with difficult dilemmas. At present, there is little concern about the possible transatlantic implications of the Chinese presence in Greece’s maritime economic activities, as there is no Chinese involvement or ownership of Greek ships. Furthermore, once the ISPS (International Ship and Port Facility) code’s security provisions are implemented in major Greek ports, there will be sufficient security over-

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<sup>36</sup> For a pattern of Chinese economic behavior in the Mediterranean, see Rajan Menon, *New Mediterranean Players*, Mediterranean Paper Series, German Marshall Fund, 2010, p.24.  
[http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication\\_view?publication.id=828](http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication_view?publication.id=828)

sight from an independent authority without the involvement of foreign companies that might be operating inside Greek ports.

In the case of Russia, there are historical ties and the two countries have been exploring various schemes for energy cooperation (it should be noted that Greece is heavily dependent — approximately 77 percent of total imports — on Russia for its natural gas needs). Furthermore, Russia has always maintained excellent economic and political relations with Cyprus. Thanks to the recent improvement in relations between the West and Russia (after the Lisbon NATO summit), the problems and dilemmas for Greek foreign policy appear much more manageable.

The Greek perspectives of Turkey and its regional role are always influenced to some degree by bilateral problems between Athens and Ankara. Greece has moved away from zero-sum game perceptions vis-à-vis Turkey and, overall, the two countries are on much better terms today in their bilateral relations (including trade and people-to-people contacts) than they were a few years ago (specifically before 1999). Having said that, neither country has moved from its firm position regarding “high politics” issues, and Greece and Turkey continue to perceive each other through a Hobbesian prism — skepticism and distrust linger on.

There is considerable interest in Athens in the AKP’s “zero problems with its neighbors” policy, its new and quite ambitious multi-directional foreign policy, and Turkey’s evolution into a more autonomous regional actor and important energy player. Yet this is mixed with some degree of

concern about the upgrade of Turkey’s regional role over the past few years and its implications for Greek-Turkish relations (especially in the context of Ankara’s so-called “Neo-Ottoman” ambitions). Some of the questions debated by the Greek foreign policy establishment include whether the AKP government has been transforming Turkey into an Islamic-“lite” country, whether its regional policies are compatible with transatlantic interests and whether it is drifting away from the West. There is also a feeling that Turkey may have fallen into the trap of strategic overextension, but this remains to be proven. The majority of policymakers insist that it is in the best interests of all for Turkey to remain anchored to Western institutions, but that this may not be an option as far as EU membership is concerned, given the increasing opposition not only in Europe but also in Turkey. Greece remains supportive of Turkey’s EU membership (provided, of course, that it meets the required criteria, the Cyprus problem is resolved, and Greek-Turkish relations fully normalized), but its influence both inside the EU and vis-à-vis Cyprus is quite limited (if there is no willingness on the Turkish side for mutual compromise).

There are historical ties and mutual respect in the cultural field between Greece and Iran. Greek officials are preoccupied with the regional tensions that Iran’s nuclear program is creating, as well as the consequences for the international nonproliferation regime.<sup>37</sup> Taking into consideration the concerns of

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<sup>37</sup> It should be noted that Athens is relatively less alarmist than other Western capitals regarding the direct threat that Iran’s nuclear program poses for international security, because it considers the Iranian leadership basically rational. Therefore, in its view, even if Iran were to acquire a nuclear capability,



government officials and military officers in many countries about the risks of a military attack against Iran's nuclear infrastructure (including the strengthening of the current regime), Athens would support a diplomatic solution with the aim of creating a regional security architecture encompassing all regional states and perhaps some extra-regional actors. In this context, Greece would be willing to host unofficial meetings or assist contacts between the various sides (with its expanding relationship with Israel being both an inhibiting and a facilitating factor).

Regarding functional issues, migratory movements from Asia and Africa constitute a cause for strong concern for Greece, as the Dublin II Agreement creates an obligation for the country of first arrival to the EU not to allow illegal immigrants to continue on to other EU countries. Greece is trying to deal with the problem with a package of measures, including a more efficient asylum mechanism, employment of FRONTEX assets in the Aegean and along its land border with Turkey, as well as the construction of a security wall in a 12.5 km-long section of that border. Recent developments in North Africa and the increasing number of refugees and illegal immigrants — mainly headed for Italy — have led to a renewed debate on revision of the EU's immigration policy. Greece is also concerned about the consequences of climate change and has launched, in cooperation with Turkey, the Mediterranean Climate Change

Initiative (MCCI) in an effort to raise awareness of the issue and promote cooperation among countries in the region.

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Greek leaders think it would probably not contemplate the use of nuclear weapons against any country in the region (including Israel) or any Western state because of the inevitable retaliation.

# 4

## REVOLTS IN THE ARAB WORLD AND REGIONAL CHALLENGES FROM A TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Like the rest of Europe, and indeed the whole world, Greece was rather taken by surprise by the demonstrations and revolts in several Arab states. The fragility of many regimes and the willingness of the citizens of those countries to stand up and even sacrifice their lives for democracy (although the extremely difficult economic conditions were an equally, if not the most important motive, for many) also came as a surprise. As a result of the Arab revolts, the Middle East can be compared to a seismic fault line that will continue to produce tremors of unpredictable size in various parts of the region for at least the next few years. Considerable uncertainty will be a standard feature of the region, and several regimes will face substantial challenges for their survival, including Syria and — in the future — Saudi Arabia.

Currently, Greek concerns fall into two categories: a) immediate (evacuation of nationals and citizens of the EU and other friendly nations; preparations to receive refugees and immigrants from some North African countries; and the nondisruption of energy flows) and b) longer-term (possible changes in the regional security environment; the nature and stability of new regimes; the consequences for relations between the West and the Arab world, including the impact on oil prices; and implications for transatlantic policies towards the region).

While the situation is still evolving and continuous policy reassessments are needed, Greek foreign policy officials have reached a number of preliminary conclusions:

- (a) Any action of a military nature should have sufficient authorization and legitimacy (through the UN Security Council and, if

possible, the Arab League and/or the African Union) and should be conducted either by NATO or a coalition of the willing. Some form of Arab participation would go a long way to avoid the impression of yet another Western attack on an Arab/Muslim country. Learning from past mistakes, the Western powers managed to secure sufficient legitimacy for military operations against Colonel Gaddafi's regime in Libya.

- (b) As already mentioned, the wider Middle East is gradually evolving into a multi-player security system and the West may have to adjust to a new reality in which it collectively holds less power and influence in this highly strategic region. To prevent such a development or at least to maintain substantial influence in the Middle East, both the EU (which is in dire need of a re-examination of its aspirations for a meaningful regional and global role) and the United States must remain involved and work together to protect their interests and project stability. In this context, a coherent joint Western strategy vis-à-vis the Mediterranean/Middle East is required. Such a strategy should be based on a common vision, which is currently lacking, and could lead to a functional division of labor between the EU and the United States on the basis of interests and capabilities. As always, the critical and most difficult question to answer is “what are the modalities of cooperation and the exact division of labor”?

(c) Although there will be national initiatives (especially in the case of Egypt, which is a country of special interest for Greece) from Southern European countries, Athens will rely mainly on the EU for developing a comprehensive policy vis-à-vis the Arab world. The EU has timidly started preparing for the “day after” the revolts. In this context, a new policy (in which “conditionality” cannot be absent) vis-à-vis the wider Middle East<sup>38</sup> will be necessary. The EU seems inclined to focus its revision on its Neighbourhood Policy, while little guidance has so far been provided regarding the future role of the UfM, despite its not insignificant shortcomings, to deal with the region. NATO is not trusted by the Arabs and is therefore not perceived as a suitable institution for playing an independent role in dealing with various regional problems. However, in combination with the EU and with a sensible division of labor, it could probably complement transatlantic efforts in conflict management in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.<sup>39</sup> In this context,

NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative should:

- Focus attention on emerging, younger elites. Although one cannot afford to ignore the present leadership, it may be unrealistic to expect a significant change of attitude vis-à-vis NATO and the West from them. Educational opportunities should be offered to young intellectuals, officers, parliamentarians, government, and NGO officials and journalists from partner countries;
- Promote “low cost” confidence-building and transparency measures: for example, the notification of future military activities, discussion of a code of conduct for military activities, and exchange of information among military staff; and
- Move toward practical, Partnership for Peace-like defense-related activities (mine clearance, search and rescue, evacuation,

<sup>38</sup> It would make little sense to examine the Mediterranean from a security perspective in isolation from developments in the adjoining regions of the Persian Gulf, Transcaucasus/Central Asia, sub-Saharan Africa, and Horn of Africa. Therefore, for functional reasons, it is advisable to avoid a narrow geographic definition and use the concept of the wider Middle East.

<sup>39</sup> As then-NATO Secretary-General Solana said several years ago: “To help stabilize the Mediterranean region and build a peaceful, friendly, economically vibrant area is ... a major

strategic objective for all Euro-Atlantic institutions. The EU must take the lead, yet NATO, too, can lend a helping hand.” Roberto Menotti, *NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue initiative: Italian Positions, Interests, Perceptions, and the Implications for Italy-U.S. Relations*, Final report, NATO Individual Research Fellowship 1997-1999, p. 9. A conclusion shared by a RAND study, which acknowledges the central role of the EU in the longer-term stability of the Mediterranean. Ian Lesser, Jerrold Green, Stephen Larrabee, and Michele Zanini, *The Future of NATO’s Mediterranean Initiative. Evolution and Next Steps*, RAND Corporation, Santa Monica 2000, p. xii.

humanitarian, and refugee control operations, etc.).<sup>40</sup>

- (d) The EU and the United States should open channels of communication with all political forces in the Arab world (including Islamist movements) and, after some reflection on what the West has done wrong so far, should make an effort to win back the “Arab street.” The most efficient way to do this would be to resolve the Palestinian problem, where the influence of the EU remains quite limited. The United States, despite its own internal problems, as well as a difficult relationship with the Netanyahu government, is perceived as the only external power that can apply sufficient pressure to drag both sides to the negotiating table and “impose” a viable solution.

By developing country-specific strategies, the Western objective should be to prevent, as much as possible, a takeover by radical Islamic groups and to establish moderate regimes in the Eastern Mediterranean that would be willing to work together with the EU, as well as NATO and the United States (which will remain a powerful influence, despite its gradual military withdrawal from the Mediterranean). Furthermore, a strategic understanding with Iran should be sought along the following lines: a) de-emphasizing the nuclear question and expanding the dialogue agenda; b) adopting a “dual track” strategy,

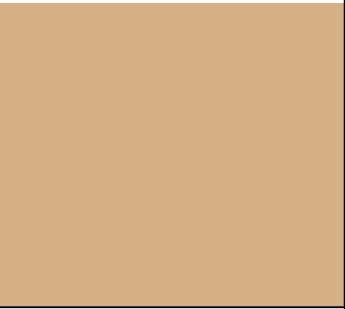
emphasizing the possible gains, while quietly explaining the possible cost of heavier sanctions; and c) based on the “Iraq and its neighbors” format, initiating a dialogue to discuss perceptions of regional security challenges (participants should include Gulf Cooperation Council countries, Iran, Iraq, Yemen, the United States, and the EU).

To conclude, there is a gradual realization that Greece has regional interests that go well beyond its Northern neighborhood and that its regional policies vis-à-vis the South are evolving. Although Greek economic and political interests in Southeast Europe and relations with Turkey will continue to be Greece’s top foreign policy priorities, the Mediterranean/Middle East will be a region of growing importance, in both the regional context (for example, Greek companies will be looking for ways and markets to increase their exports to compensate for the reduction of domestic purchasing power as a result of the economic crisis) and in transatlantic relations. Greece has the relative luxury of being able to stay on the “sidelines” of the transatlantic and Mediterranean chessboards, if it wants to — paying, of course, a price in terms of its regional role, influence, and exploitation of political and economic opportunities. But it could also choose to play a more active role in a region where instability, fluidity, and unpredictability are likely to remain standard features for the foreseeable future. Given that few countries are both reliable partners for Washington and Tel Aviv and acceptable interlocutors for Muslim countries, Greece’s recent geostrategic repositioning closer to the U.S.-Israeli partnership might be of potential interest.

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<sup>40</sup> Thanos Dokos, *NATO’s Mediterranean Initiative: Prospects and Policy Recommendations*, ELIAMEP Policy Papers, No. 3, 2003.

Such an active role will be a difficult task for a country with limited resources, but the alternative is strategic irrelevance in the wider region. The best option would probably be Greece's active participation in the shaping of new EU and transatlantic regional policies, without, however, ignoring the need for national initiatives and the further multilateralization of Greece's foreign policy within the general transatlantic framework.



# ITALY'S MEDITERRANEAN POLICY FROM A TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Valter Coralluzzo

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# 1 THE “THIRD CIRCLE”:

## ITALY’S FOREIGN POLICY AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

Referring to the metaphor of the three concentric “circles” that Italian observers often use to describe the main pillars of Italy’s foreign policy (i.e., Atlanticism, Europeanism, and Mediterraneanism), the “third circle,” corresponding to the Mediterranean basin and its neighboring areas, has always been relevant to Italian national interests. Because of its geographical position, which makes it “a kind of centaur, with its head well planted in Europe and hooves sinking into the Mediterranean,”<sup>41</sup> Italy is far more exposed than other countries to the risks stemming from any increase in Mediterranean turbulence. Therefore, it is hardly surprising that during and after the Cold War, the aim of the various Italian governments with respect to this region has been to contribute to its stability, security, and prosperity through bilateral and multilateral initiatives aimed at promoting political dialogue and economic cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Over the past 20 years, in particular, the Mediterranean region has occupied an increasingly central role in Italy’s foreign policy agenda because of the country’s need to ensure continuity in energy supplies as well as more effective management of trans-Mediterranean migratory flows (also to guard Italian territory against the risk of infiltration by Islamic terrorists).

In the name of defending legitimate national interests, especially in relation to Libya and Iran, some Italian governments have sought and actually practiced (explicitly or not) a more or less pronounced autonomy within the Mediterranean region. In some cases this has caused friction with

Washington and seemed at odds with the country’s transatlantic orientation. Consider, for example, the *Achille Lauro/Sigonella* affair in 1985 and the Italian opposition to the U.S. bombing of Tripoli and Benghazi in 1986.<sup>42</sup> Yet, the fact remains that Italy has never really conceived its “Mediterranean vocation” as a resource to be used to counter Atlanticism and Europeanism, but rather as a means to increase its strategic importance in the eyes of the United States and within NATO and the EU. As Alessandro Brogi highlights, Italy has always made reference to the Mediterranean as the traditional and natural sphere of Italian interests with a view to emphasizing its Atlanticism rather than its Mediterraneanism and supporting its ambition to become a privileged partner of the United States within the so-called *mare nostrum*.<sup>43</sup>

### “Low Profile” versus “Emerging Profile”

Not surprisingly, it is in the Mediterranean region above all that Italy, from the early 1980s, began to pursue an increasingly dynamic and assertive policy. Just think of the many political-military initiatives undertaken by Italy (jointly with others) in this crucial area (from Sinai to Lebanon, from the Red Sea to the Persian Gulf). In view of these initia-

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<sup>42</sup> Authoritative Italian and Libyan sources (Giulio Andreotti and Abdurrahman Shalgam) have recently confirmed that the Craxi government warned Gaddafi of the impending U.S. raid, thus probably saving his life (<http://www.repubblica.it/2008/05/sezioni/esteri/libia-italia/attaccousa-conferma/attaccousa-conferma.html>).

<sup>43</sup> Alessandro Brogi, *L’Italia e l’egemonia americana nel Mediterraneo*, La Nuova Italia, Florence, 1996, p. 344.

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<sup>41</sup> Valerio Castronovo, *Grandi e piccoli borghesi. La via italiana al capitalismo*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 1988, p. XXXVII.

tives, mostly conducted under the United Nations umbrella but in some cases concerted only with western allies, many observers argued that there was a “new style”<sup>44</sup> or an “emerging profile”<sup>45</sup> in Italian foreign policy. As Fabio Tana rightly puts it, little or nothing has changed in the dynamics of the Middle East crises. “What changes is the way in which they are interpreted by the government of Rome, which, with increasing frequency, although not without sudden turnarounds, has rejected the role (and distinction) of a minor ally,” seeking to show that “not only France and Britain are able to support the United States in their more onerous obligations, but that Italy also is mature enough to take on major responsibilities.”<sup>46</sup>

This constitutes an undeniable change with respect to Italy’s “low profile” in the first decades after World War II, when its contribution to collective security consisted mostly in allowing the United States to use military bases and facilities located on Italian territory — and this usually by means of simplified bilateral agreements, meaning they are exempt from parliamentary scrutiny and made enforceable through the signature of a single

member of the government. But the granting of bases, which Italy considered a low price to pay to offset its military weakness and its timid Atlanticism — a kind of “lazy substitute for providing forces” — was “a very shaky, if not negative, attendance fee for being present at the international negotiating table.”<sup>47</sup>

Referring to the military operations in which Italy found itself involved from the early 1980s onward, some observers have talked about “unintended,” if not “recalcitrant,” involvement in operations decided and led by others.<sup>48</sup> Yet, even though they were almost always made at the request of the U.S. government, which was assigning increasing responsibilities to allies in order to establish control over the “diffusion of power” going on in a region (the Mediterranean) where Western countries had (and still have) vital economic and security interests, these operations should not be interpreted in terms of “involvement by chance.” Rather the Italian government was clearly intent on avoiding Italy’s exclusion from stabilization operations in the Mediterranean (and its neighborhood) in which leading members of the Atlantic Alliance were participating, albeit without formal coordination and cooperation (as in the case of naval missions in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf).

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<sup>44</sup> Carlo Maria Santoro and Stefano Draghi, “Sondaggio tra i professionisti italiani della politica estera. Lo stile diplomatico di una media potenza,” *Relazioni internazionali*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 1988, p. 84.

<sup>45</sup> Roberto Aliboni, “Il contesto internazionale e il profilo emergente della politica estera italiana,” *Politica internazionale*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1985, p. 5.

<sup>46</sup> Fabio Tana, “L’obiettivo della stabilizzazione nella politica mediorientale dell’Italia e nella cooperazione allo sviluppo,” in Carlo Maria Santoro (Ed.), *I problemi della cooperazione allo sviluppo negli anni ‘90*, il Mulino, Bologna, 1993, pp. 217-218.

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<sup>47</sup> Luigi Caligaris, “L’Italia, l’Europa e il nucleo duro,” *Affari esteri*, Vol. 28, No. 110, 1996, p. 320.

<sup>48</sup> Alessandro Massai, “Le responsabilità di una media potenza nell’azione politica e nel dibattito in Italia,” *Politica internazionale*, Vol. 17, No. 1-2, 1989, p. 6.

### *Innovations in the 1990s*

In the early 1990s, after the end of the Cold War and the demise of bipolarity, the reference framework of Italian foreign policy changed radically, both internally and externally. Foreign policymakers were forced to face the urgent problem of redefining policy objectives, geopolitical priorities, and the working methods of national diplomacy. This task (common to all countries) was made even more urgent for Italy by the loss of the benefits accruing from its crucial geographic location, guaranteed by bipolarity and the underlying certainty (in which it irresponsibly indulged for decades) of being able to rely at any time on assistance and defense from major allies (above all the United States).

In fact, the radical changes that have occurred in the global strategic landscape since 1989 have increased Italy's vulnerability considerably with respect to the Cold War. Not only is the country close to the two most important "arcs of crisis" (one extending from North Africa, through the Middle East, to the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa, and the other extending from the Balkans, through the Caucasus, to the former Soviet Central Asia), but in the changed context of the post-bipolar world, "the automatism of international involvement can [no longer] be taken for granted."<sup>49</sup> The eclipse of East-West antagonism has posed a series of threats to Italy that are less intense, but more elusive and more difficult to manage than before, and which are not always perceived by Italy's traditional allies (primarily the United States) as serious enough to

threaten their vital interests and therefore justify their intervention. Just think of the inattentiveness with which the Albanian crises in 1991 and 1997 were followed at the international level — to the point that the Italian government was forced to promote, plan, and lead two operations ("Pelicano" and "Alba") that contributed to the stabilization and democratic and socio-economic development of the "land of eagles."

In the 1990s, Italy was actively involved in many other peace support operations. Of particular importance was its contribution to the stabilization of the Balkans, which for Italy "is a strategic necessity, since trafficking in drugs, arms, and human beings continues to threaten the peninsula from the East, without overlooking the jihadist platforms rooted mainly in central Bosnia."<sup>50</sup>

### *The Post-9/11 Era*

The increased frequency and intensity of Italian military missions abroad during the 1990s, made possible by the radical reform of the entire structure of the Italian armed forces, inevitably became intertwined with the global war on terror undertaken by the United States in response to the 9/11 attacks. The Italian government, particularly under Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi, did not hesitate to respond positively to the Bush administration's "call to arms," and participated in operations in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was careful, however, to keep a low profile in Iraq through the "nonbelligerence" formula and to emphasize the

<sup>49</sup> Filippo Andreatta, *L'Italia nel nuovo sistema internazionale*, il Mulino, Vol. 50, No. 394, 2001, p. 260.

<sup>50</sup> Lucio Caracciolo, "Cronopios e famas," *Limes*, No. 3, 2007, p. 12.

humanitarian aspects of Italy's missions, thus providing a smokescreen for the Italian public to cover up the real nature that the missions necessarily ended up taking on. This reflects a well-known trend not to call things by their name, which has risen to levels that not only border on the ridiculous, but also risk undermining the morale of Italian soldiers.

In fact, rather than out of "thirst for servility," the Berlusconi government's position on the Iraqi crisis and its foreign policy more generally were motivated by the conviction that, more than ever, Italy had a specific interest in strengthening ties with the United States. Faced with the disturbing post-9/11 scenarios, the Italian government felt that, lacking credible alternatives, the United States, whose leadership was believed to be benign, was seen as the most effective guarantor of international order and security.

#### *Berlusconi's Mediterranean Policy*

Many observers have argued that, under Berlusconi, Italy's foreign policy has moved significantly away from the traditional balance between its historical pillars, Atlantic loyalty, and commitment to Europe toward a gradual strengthening of bilateral relations with the United States. This has involved a considerable weakening of the Europeanist and multilateralist approach that inspired the finest periods in Italian foreign policy history. This is certainly true. Much less convincing is the argument that Berlusconi has distanced himself from the line traditionally followed by Italy in the Mediterranean region.

The only aspect of Italy's Mediterranean policy that has changed significantly under Berlusconi with respect to the past is the approach toward Israel. The traditional Italian line, upheld over time by leading politicians such as Enrico Mattei, Amintore Fanfani, Aldo Moro, Giulio Andreotti, Bettino Craxi, and Massimo D'Alema, was characterized by a decidedly pro-Arab and pro-Palestinian stance, albeit under the cover of the "equidistance" formula (recently reinterpreted by D'Alema as "equicloseness").<sup>51</sup> Instead, Berlusconi's approach to the Middle East peace process is undoubtedly tilted in favor of the interests and concerns of the Israeli government. This was clearly shown, for example, in the case of the Israeli military offensive in the Gaza Strip (December 2008–January 2009). The Berlusconi government uncritically supported Israel, arguing that the campaign was nothing but a legitimate response to repeated Palestinian rocket attacks against southern Israel and that the responsibility for what happened fell upon Hamas, which has been branded a terrorist group that deeply undermines the fair creation of a Palestinian state. The center-left opposition, on the other hand, as voiced by D'Alema (who was photographed walking down the street in Beirut arm-in-arm with a Hezbollah member), stigmatized the Israeli action in Gaza as a "punitive expedition" and argued that

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<sup>51</sup> The formula of "equicloseness" means "equally close to the cause of the Palestinians and to that of the Israelis" ([http://www.massimodalema.it/documenti/documenti/dett\\_dalema.asp?id\\_doc=1606](http://www.massimodalema.it/documenti/documenti/dett_dalema.asp?id_doc=1606)).

the West had to engage with Hamas, which was democratically elected.<sup>52</sup>

As regards the other components of Italy's Mediterranean policy, however, Berlusconi's stance is much less different from that of his predecessors than is commonly believed. In fact, all Italian governments, whatever their political orientation, have conceived of the country's Mediterranean role in much the same way, and have pursued similar policies. All have fully adhered (with occasional reservations) to U.S. wishes and priorities, and generally aimed at reinforcing Italy's bilateral relations with all the countries in the region.


According to many critics, Berlusconi's Mediterranean policy, due to an uncritical acquiescence in the U.S. hegemonic plans, has in only a few years squandered the valuable capital of good bilateral relations with the countries of the Arab-Muslim world that Italy patiently accumulated over previous decades. But the truth is that Berlusconi, despite his unashamed advocacy of the "superiority" of Western civilization over that of Islam, and accompanied by the repeated anti-Muslim invectives of the right-wing coalition partner, the Northern League, has not only paid special attention to bilateral relations with countries bordering on the Mediterranean, but has established even closer ties with some historical partners such as Libya, Algeria, Egypt, and Turkey, not to mention the unprecedented warmth towards Israel.

It is worth noting that the strengthening of these bilateral relations and "the increasing role that the trade and energy interests of Italian companies are playing in defining Italian foreign policy priorities in competitive terms with European partners"<sup>53</sup> have caused tension on several occasions in the traditional multilateral contexts. First and foremost is the EU, whose activism in the Mediterranean region has been considerably reduced since the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership lost its momentum and the Union for the Mediterranean has revealed its essentially unrealistic nature.

Finally, it should be noted that Berlusconi's Mediterranean policy, in spite of the inevitable rhetoric about values, has taken special care — not that differently from the policy of center-left governments — to obtain the cooperation of the countries in the region to create a buffer of guarantee and security around Italy's maritime border, against such risks as instability of energy supplies, an uncontrolled increase in illegal migration, and the infiltration by Islamic terrorists. One of the main drawbacks of this policy is that, especially in recent years, it has culpably neglected the issue of democracy and respect for human rights in the countries of the southern shore of the Mediterranean, mostly dominated by authoritarian and oppressive regimes led by autocrats inclined to exercise steel control over society, as well as to

<sup>52</sup> Quoted in *Corriere della Sera*, December 10, 2008, p. 10 ([http://www.corriere.it/esteri/08\\_dicembre\\_30/diplomazia\\_israele\\_gaza\\_frattini\\_f68909c8-d675-11dd-894c-00144f02aabc.shtml](http://www.corriere.it/esteri/08_dicembre_30/diplomazia_israele_gaza_frattini_f68909c8-d675-11dd-894c-00144f02aabc.shtml)).

<sup>53</sup> Gianni Bonvicini, Andrea Carati, Alessandro Colombo, Raffaello Matarazzo, and Stefano Silvestri, "La politica estera italiana a 150 anni dall'Unità: continuità, riforme e nuove sfide," Rapporto introduttivo dell'Annuario *La politica estera dell'Italia. Edizione 2011*, Iai/Ispi, il Mulino, Bologna, 2011, p. 9.



manage the country's resources as if they were private property. Of course, this is a fault not only of Italy, but also of the EU and the West more generally. However, there can be no doubt that, faced with the so-called Arab Spring, to which we will return later, Italy found itself in difficulty and more embarrassed than any other European country, in so far as Berlusconi largely entrusted the defense of Italian national interests and his own international visibility to his special relationship with some autocratic leaders.

## 2 RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ITALY'S MEDITERRANEAN POLICY

To expand on the question of continuity and discontinuity in Italy's Mediterranean policy, let us look more closely at the most recent developments as regards the main actors.

### *Libya*

Normalizing the relationship with Libya in order to protect vital national interests (in the fields of security, immigration, and energy supply) and encourage the reintegration into the international community of a country broadly stigmatized as a "rogue state" has been highlighted as a priority on Italy's foreign policy agenda since the mid 1990s. Indeed, this brought about some tension with Washington before U.S. President George W. Bush's decision to gradually normalize relations with Tripoli. In any case, Berlusconi's pragmatism must be given credit for having laid the foundations for a special and privileged relationship between Italy and Libya through the Treaty of Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation signed in Benghazi on August 30, 2008.<sup>54</sup>

Even after it was signed, however, there were disagreements and disputes between Rome and Tripoli (for example, when one of the Italian ships delivered to Gaddafi for joint patrol of the Libyan coasts unexpectedly machine-gunned the Italian fishing boat "Aries"), which led to speculation about the ability of the Treaty of Benghazi to fulfill its

promise. Nevertheless, it was reasonable to hope that the agreement would be honored as it served the interests of both parties. Libya received considerable material benefits, starting with US\$5 billion in 20 years in compensation for the damage caused by Italian colonial rule, while Italy achieved two strategic goals, which Berlusconi candidly summed up as "fewer illegal immigrants and more oil" (or, rather, more business).<sup>55</sup>

In the following two years, the governments took several successful steps in this direction. On the one hand, ENI signed an agreement with Libya that extends its contracts for oil until 2042 and for gas until 2047. On the other, the Libyan government was never more cooperative in keeping illegal migrants from reaching Italian coasts, and accepting the repatriation of those who were caught in international waters. It should be noted, in passing, that this repatriation policy, which Berlusconi proudly boasted about, received a lot of criticism, especially from the Catholic Church, the Council of Europe, and the UN High Commission for Refugees because, in violation of international conventions, it does not bother to check whether the illegal migrants driven back by Italy are entitled to refugee status. This criticism has been useful for highlighting the need to shape EU immigration and asylum policies, as well as the inadequacy of a purely repressive approach to migration like the one adopted by Italy.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> See Natalino Ronzitti, *The Treaty on friendship, partnership and cooperation between Italy and Libya: new prospects for cooperation in the Mediterranean?*, Istituto affari internazionali, Rome, 2009 (Documenti Iai 0909, available at <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/IAI0909.pdf>).

<sup>55</sup> Claudia Gazzini, "Il 'grande gesto' dell'Italia verso la Libia," *Limes*, Supplement to No. 3, 2009, p. 136.

<sup>56</sup> See Vincenzo Delicato, *The Fight Against the Smuggling of Migrants in the Mediterranean. The Italian Experience*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington,



Just when many had begun to look upon the future of Italian-Libyan relations with optimism (and the hope of lucrative business), and despite Gaddafi's sometimes peevish and unpredictable attitude, everything suddenly changed. The long wave of the Arab Spring swept over Libya too, and Gaddafi's brutal crackdown has led the UN (at the request of Paris and London, in concert with Washington) to authorize a military intervention for humanitarian purposes (but clearly aimed at regime change). Very reluctantly, Italy is participating in this war, but its main concern is obviously the future of its energy supplies, as well as the containment of illegal migratory flows. Even so, although the landings on Italian soil are intensifying because of the war and fewer controls by the Maghreb countries, the number is not so high as to justify the ongoing political exploitation of this phenomenon by the ministers of the Northern League, whose alarmist (and some would say slightly vulgar) expressions have certainly contributed to increasing Italy's isolation in the EU.

It is still too early to say how things will play out, but what is certain is that Italian foreign policy, against the backdrop of the war in Libya, is exhibiting the whole repertoire (or at least most) of its flaws (which will be discussed in detail later): a wavering line with no coherent strategy; a mix of rhetoric, inappropriate statements, unspoken reservations, and calculated silences; the reluctance to call war by its name and the consequent tendency to emphasize the humanitarian aspects of a military

mission; excessive trust in personal relationships (which is often a source of disappointment) and pronounced (although not always convinced) subordination to major allies; an obsession with mediation and for being a part of things (giving rise to repeated tirades against summits that exclude Italy); the exploitation of foreign policy for domestic purposes and endless disputes within government and between government and the opposition.

#### *Middle East*

Although they have maintained good relations with the Palestinian National Authority, the Berlusconi-led governments have never missed an opportunity to reaffirm their pro-Israeli stance. There is copious evidence of this. For instance, in September 2003, during the Italian EU presidency, the then (as at present) foreign minister, Franco Frattini, persuaded the other member states to include Hamas in the EU list of terrorist groups, thus satisfying U.S. and Israeli demands. Also, there have been countless expressions of pro-Israeli sentiment by then-Foreign Minister Gianfranco Fini, as well as his defense of Israel's decision to build a protective wall along its border with the occupied West Bank, not to mention the Italian delegation's withdrawal from the Durban II UN conference, in protest against its equation of Zionism with racism.

Especially with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Berlusconi has supported U.S. foreign policy whole-heartedly, even to the detriment of Italy's alignment with its European partners. There are many issues related to the Middle Eastern question, with respect to which Italy, under Berlusconi,

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September 2010 (Mediterranean Paper Series; available at [http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication\\_view?publication.id=1254](http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication_view?publication.id=1254)).



has become isolated or has risked isolation within Europe. Suffice it to think, for example, of Berlusconi's conduct in June 2003 when, during a visit to the Middle East in preparation for the Italian EU presidency, he refused to meet PLO leader Yasser Arafat despite the European Community's decision not to stop diplomatic relations with the PNA president. Not only that, but the subsequent statements by Berlusconi and Fini in favor of the Israeli barrier in the West Bank forced the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to publicly reaffirm the opposite position of the EU<sup>57</sup> (which was not, however, enough to prevent the leader of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, from boycotting the 6<sup>th</sup> Euro-Mediterranean Ministerial Meeting held in Naples in December 2003). Another example is the lower level of the Italian delegation at Arafat's funeral in November 2004. Giving the impression of slavishly aligning itself with the positions of Israel and the United States, both strictly against Arafat, the Italian government, unlike almost all European ones, decided not to send its foreign minister to the funeral of the historic leader of the PLO, whose death has been hailed by Fini as a historic day for Israeli security.

The alignment of Berlusconi's government to the U.S. Middle East policy has continued under U.S. President Barak Obama. Only the increasing coldness between Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin

Netanyahu and Obama can explain the statements made by Berlusconi during his visit to Israel in February 2010. Interviewed by the Israeli newspaper, *Ha'aretz*, the Italian prime minister, after a conventional tribute to the two-state solution, affirmed that "Israel's settlement policy could be an obstacle to peace" and that "persisting with this policy is a mistake," as "it will never be possible to convince the Palestinians of Israel's good intentions while Israel continues to build in territories that are to be returned as part of a peace agreement."<sup>58</sup>

Despite his declarations to *Ha'aretz*, Berlusconi's pro-Israeli stance has never really changed. It is also justified by the belief that supporting the only democratic country in the Middle East is a geostrategic imperative. Berlusconi has said that Israel is part of Europe and belongs to the West. As such, it is entitled to apply for future EU membership.

Indeed, the reckless and repeated pronouncements on the advisability of extending the EU borders to include, in addition to Turkey, even Israel (and Russia) are additional evidence of Berlusconi's propensity to take up positions on many issues that are not shared by the majority of his European

<sup>57</sup> The EU position regarding the Israeli West Bank barrier, set down in the final statement of the Summit of Heads of State and Government on October 17, 2003, was that this barrier compromised future negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians and made it physically impossible to implement a solution based on the coexistence of two states.

<sup>58</sup> But soon afterward Berlusconi added that "condemning the settlements using the same arguments to condemn Islamic extremism is too simple, hypocritical," because (referring to what happened in Gaza) "it is not possible to evacuate communities to [then] face burned synagogues, acts of destruction, and inter-Palestinian violence and missiles being shot into Israeli territory" (<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/berlusconi-to-haaretz-israel-s-settlement-policy-is-unwise-1.262445>).

partners. Someone observed that “we don’t know whether such repeated pronouncements derive from an insufficient community culture, or whether they must be ascribed to the category of ‘*ballon d’essai*’,” in which case “we would be faced with a plan to reorganize the EU into a large, harmless, free trade zone.”<sup>59</sup>

### Turkey

In Italy, there is a very noisy chorus of people who, succumbing to the phraseology and stereotypes of identity politics and out of fear of improbable Turkish “invasions,” decidedly oppose the prospect of Turkey entering the EU. Turkey is seen as a tool for the future Islamization of the old continent or at best as a country whose features are incompatible with those of its Western neighbors on historical, religious, and cultural grounds. From this perspective, Turkey and “Europeanness” are at odds. Furthermore, there are many who believe that the accession to the EU of a country like Turkey, which “is not really in Europe but embedded in a dangerous and unstable Middle Eastern neighborhood, and touched by the instability, terrorism, illegal migration, and drug smuggling, which are associated with the region,”<sup>60</sup> would significantly increase Europe’s vulnerability to these dangers, compromising its security. Thus Turkey has become the symbol of a growing hostility

toward any further enlargement of the EU, which could undermine both its identity and security. That is why, despite the considerable progress made by Turkey on the path toward complete democratization, its accession process has been stalled for quite some time.

On the other hand, there is the view expressed by Olli Rehn, the former EU commissioner for enlargement, which sees “Turkey [as] an anchor of stability in the most unstable region of the world, in the wider Middle East. It is a benchmark for democracy for the Muslim world from Morocco to Malaysia. With a successful accession process of Turkey to the EU, she can become a sturdier bridge of civilizations.”<sup>61</sup> But Turkey is not only an oriental bulwark against the rising tide of Islamic fundamentalism or, as argued a bit too confidently by some observers, a viable model of democracy for the countries of the Arab-Muslim world;<sup>62</sup> Turkey also controls access to the Black Sea from the Mediterranean and plays a key role in the “Great Game” that has been developing concerning the energy

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<sup>61</sup> Quoted in David Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 34.

<sup>62</sup> Nathalie Tocci has duly noted, that “rising arguments regarding Turkey’s role as a ‘model’ for the Muslim world” may “have a boomerang effect on the EU, consolidating the — alas — widespread view of Turkey’s ‘difference’.” (Nathalie Tocci, “Turkey: Reluctant Mediterranean Power. An Introductory Note,” in Meliha Benli Altunışık, Kemal Kirişçi, and Nathalie Tocci, *Turkey: Reluctant Mediterranean Power*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, February 2011, p. 3 (Mediterranean Paper Series; available at [http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication\\_view?publication.id=1586](http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication_view?publication.id=1586)).

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<sup>59</sup> Gerardo Mombelli, “Se l’Unione esce dalla sua storia,” *il Mulino*, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2003, p. 404.

<sup>60</sup> David Logan, “Turkey and Its Middle Eastern Neighbours: Threat or Opportunity for the European Union?,” *Asian Affairs*, Vol. XL, No. 1, March 2009, p. 34.

pipelines destined to connect Europe to the Caspian Sea.

There are a number of good reasons why the EU should offer Turkey (whose formal application dates back to 1987) full membership, instead of a more limited form of association such as a “privileged partnership” or some similar arrangement, which Turkey contemptuously rejects. To be sure, it is hard to dispel doubts as to whether Turkey is really European, especially since the government of Turkish Prime Minister Tayyip Erdoğan has come to power. With the “neo-Ottoman” orientation of the new foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoğlu, the architect of Turkey’s “zero problems” policy, the country has begun to focus more attention on the wider Middle East.<sup>63</sup> Moving from a static to a dynamic and multidimensional diplomacy, the aim is to make Turkey a global power, wielding its influence in geostrategic terms (also by virtue of its unique cultural identity, combining Islamic, European, and Asian elements) in several crucial areas. It would be a serious mistake, however, to talk about “Islamization” of Turkish foreign policy, or to believe that Ankara is deliberately distancing itself from the West, even if the EU, denying Turkey accession, could drive an outraged Turkey to turn away from Europe. All the more reason to facilitate Turkey’s entry as a full member. As John Redmond observed, “Turkey has brooded on the fringes of EU threatening “European trouble” for long enough

and should now be taken in as (another) “troubled European” — and the sooner, the better.”<sup>64</sup>

So, Berlusconi, whose personal relationship with Erdoğan is excellent, has been right to provide continued support for Turkey’s application for EU membership. Already at the time of his first meeting with Erdoğan (November 13, 2002), Berlusconi was clear: “We are your best friend in the EU. Italy will bring you into Europe.”<sup>65</sup> Since then, in spite of the anti-Muslim campaigns of the Northern League, he has never deviated from this line — also because Turkish membership is taken as a means to redress the balance within the EU between Mediterranean and Northern European countries.

One wonders, however, to what extent Berlusconi, whose lukewarm (if not openly critical) attitude towards the EU is well known, is truly interested in Turkey’s progress toward EU membership, or in EU-Turkey relations. Actually, while the Italian government has embraced (albeit in an increasingly ritualistic way) the cause of Turkish accession to the EU, it has, at the same time, strengthened bilateral relations with Ankara, to the point that over the years, these relations have become a true strategic partnership, as witnessed by the annual Italian-Turkish summits. In particular, trade exchange between the two countries has grown considerably

<sup>63</sup> According to David Logan, “this new-found Turkish interest in the Middle East reflects the commercial interests of the new Anatolian middle class particularly in the Gulf States and Saudi Arabia” (David Logan, *op. cit.*, p. 36).

<sup>64</sup> John Redmond, *op. cit.*, p. 317. See also Dibar Nigal Göksel, *Europe and Turkey — Back to the Future?*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, March 15, 2011 (Analysis; available at [http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication\\_view?publication.id=1618](http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication_view?publication.id=1618)).

<sup>65</sup> Quoted in Domenico Naso, “L’Europa del sì,” *Ideazione*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2007, p. 59.

in recent years (in 2010, Italy was firmly in fourth place among Turkey's trade partners). In the field of energy cooperation also, the relationship between Italy, Turkey, and Russia has become increasingly close. This is in keeping with the main trends of Berlusconi's Mediterranean policy, that is, a strong propensity for bilateralism (albeit in the framework of unquestioned loyalty to the United States) and a special focus on the defense of national economic interests.

At the strategic level, Rome and Ankara also share a common interest in stabilizing the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the wider Mediterranean region. Italy consequently welcomed the new dynamism of Turkish foreign policy, although it is unlikely that the Berlusconi government really appreciates Turkey's unique potential as an actor that can improve cooperation and understanding across different cultures and religions, since there are many in the center-right coalition who consider multiculturalism a lost cause and wholeheartedly believe in the idea of a clash of civilizations, viewing the "other" (e.g., non-EU immigrants, especially Muslims) with suspicion and serious concern.

#### *Iran*

The international dispute over Iran's nuclear program is a concern for Italy, which perceives the current negotiations as the gradual institutionalization of an informal directory that includes — alongside the United States, Russia, and China — the "Big Three" of Europe: France, Germany, and

the U.K.<sup>66</sup> Linked to fears of some kind of strategic downgrading of the country, this perception was attenuated in 2008 when Italy obtained a privileged channel of communication over the nuclear issue from the Big Three, but concerns have not been completely dispelled.

The truly ironic aspect of this story is that, in the second semester of 2003, during its EU presidency, Italy ignored Teheran's requests to set up a negotiating table on the Iranian Nuclear Program. "It's true," an Italian diplomat recently confided, "Iran offered us Italians the negotiations. We debated for a long time, and then the line not to do anything prevailed. My impression is that Berlusconi didn't want to do anything unpleasant to the Americans, or that could even remotely irritate them."<sup>67</sup> Indeed, this seems to be the only plausible explanation for a strategic mistake, which threatens to seriously undermine Italian national interests.

There can be no doubt that Italy's position toward Teheran (with which Rome had established a special relationship in the 1990s, thus putting Italy among Iran's major European trade partners) is heavily influenced by Washington. Thus, when the Obama administration, after having deluded itself about the possibility of negotiating with the Iranian regime, hardened its stance and requested a tightening of sanctions against Iran (without however with-

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<sup>66</sup> See Riccardo Alcaro, *Betting on Perseverance. Why the Double Track Approach is Still the Best Way to Deal with the Iranian Nuclear Conundrum*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Rome, October 2010 (Documenti Iai 1020, available at <http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iai1020.pdf>).

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in *La Repubblica*, February 1, 2006, p. 12.

drawing the offer of dialogue), Italy basically went along with this. Described by Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad in 2008 “as a friendly country, the most friendly of all,”<sup>68</sup> Italy reached (however unwillingly) the brink of diplomatic crisis with Iran, as witnessed by the eggs and stones thrown at the Italian embassy in Teheran in February 2010 accompanied by calls of “Down with Italy! Death to Berlusconi!” This protest was a response to statements by the Italian prime minister who, during his visit to Jerusalem, called for stronger sanctions against Iran, promising to reduce Italian investments in that country,<sup>69</sup> and compared Ahmadinejad with Hitler because of his repeated threats to the existence of the Jewish state and his declarations denying the Holocaust.

On the whole, Berlusconi’s government has given the impression of being at the mercy of Teheran’s whims, as well as under pressure from more powerful countries. This is also attested to by the behavior of Foreign Minister Frattini, who announced a visit to Iran twice in 2010 (March and May) and then twice backed down.

### *The Arab Spring*

It has already been mentioned that instead of focusing on the democratization of the Mediterranean region as the only way to ensure its

long-term stability and prosperity, Western countries (starting with Italy) tended primarily to support the regimes in power (as long as they were secular). They were viewed as essential bulwarks against fundamentalism and terrorism, i.e., “as the lesser evil in a region supposedly plagued by religious extremism, [even] if not as reliable partners in pursuing foreign policy agendas, commercial and energy interests, and the management of migratory flows.”<sup>70</sup> In turn, the specter of Islamic movements was cleverly exploited by local governments to get the West to suspend judgment on the ways in which they retained control of their people.

Certainly, it is interesting to recall that in 1997, D’Alema summed up the lesson that the Italian government had learned from the Algerian crisis in the following terms: “As regards Algeria [...] a mistaken view has prevailed, i.e., the idea that you have to uncritically support a military regime to fight Islamic terrorism. The truth is that, in this way, the military regime and Islamic terrorism are mutually supportive. The only way out is to resume a national dialogue capable of bringing to light even moderate Islamic forces.”<sup>71</sup> However, there is no doubt that, in Italy and elsewhere, a misguided *realpolitik*, oblivious to the urgency of the request for change coming from the people (especially from the

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in *Corriere della Sera*, February 5, 2010, p. 5.

<sup>69</sup> In fact, Berlusconi’s promise of reducing Italian investments in Iran was a boast, so much so that a few days later, the Italian government had to backtrack and leave ENI free to pursue new initiatives, if they so wished. However, about six months later, ENI’s leeway was restricted by EU sanctions.

<sup>70</sup> Nathalie Tocci and Jean-Pierre Cassarino, “Rethinking the EU’s Mediterranean Policies Post-1/11,” IAI Working Papers 11, March 6, 2011, p. 2 (<http://www.iai.it/pdf/DocIAI/iaiw1106.pdf>).

<sup>71</sup> Quoted in Mario Giro and Marco Impagliazzo, “Pace in Algeria: una speranza nata a Roma,” *Limes*, No. 1, 1998, p. 182.

younger urban, unemployed generation) of the Middle East and North Africa (where poverty, inequality, corruption, and repression are widespread), overshadowed one of the main goals of the Euro-Mediterranean policy. Outlined in Barcelona in 1995, that policy was intended to promote and actively support the democratization of political regimes in the region. Nor can we say that this gap has been remedied by the Union for the Mediterranean, which is little more than one item of expenditure in the EU budget or, as stated by Italian Foreign Minister Frattini, “an empty shell,” completely unable to influence the geopolitical destinies of the region.<sup>72</sup>

No wonder, then, that the Arab Spring, spreading from Tunis to Cairo, from Tripoli to Benghazi, from Manama to Sanaa and beyond, surprised and (at least initially) embarrassed Western countries. Someone said that the Arab Spring is also the winter of the West, a sign of the moral bankruptcy of its short-sighted policies towards the Arab world.<sup>73</sup> What is certain is that the wave of insurgency that recently shook the autocratic governments in the Middle East changed the face of North Africa. The overthrow of long-lasting regimes like those of Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali in Tunisia, Hosni Mubarak in Egypt, and Gaddafi in Libya (even if in this latter case the last word has not yet been spoken) represents a difficult challenge for the West, but above all for the EU (which is, once again, paying

for its inability to speak with one voice),<sup>74</sup> and particularly for Italy (which until last January defended the stability of the old regimes and pointed to the Libyan regime as a model for the Arab world). But at the same time, it represents a valuable opportunity, because this time the Muslims took to the streets to demand more freedom and more civil and political rights (in addition to socio-economic reforms), rather than to demonstrate against the Satanic West. That is, they were mobilized in the name of democracy and universal human rights.

The lesson we must learn from these events, which were largely unforeseeable in the way and time they unfolded, but certainly predictable in substance,<sup>75</sup> is that “stability cannot be pursued at the price of

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<sup>72</sup> Quoted in *La Stampa*, February 2, 2011, p. 5.

<sup>73</sup> See Roger Cohen, “La primavera araba e l’inverno occidentale,” *La Repubblica*, March 9, 2011, p. 33.

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<sup>74</sup> As rightly put by Cesare Merlini, “the abstention of the German ambassador to the UN Security Council on the resolution that authorized military action in Libya, and Sarkozy’s unilateral recognition of the National Council of Transition in Cyrenaica on the day before the summit aimed at defining the EU’s response to Libyan crisis are but two examples of a systematic cacophony, which, among other things, definitively confirms the irrelevance of foreign policy instruments created by the Treaty of Lisbon” (Cesare Merlini, “Rivolte arabe, il pesante passivo dell’Italia,” *AffarInternazionali*, March 31, 2011, p. 2 (<http://www.affarinternazionali.it/articolo.asp?ID=1711>)).

<sup>75</sup> See, for example, Claire Spencer, *North Africa: The Hidden Risks to Regional Stability*, Chatham House Briefing Paper, April 2009. See also Peter David, “Waking from its sleep,” *The Economist*, July 25, 2009 ([http://www.economist.com/node/14027698?story\\_id=14027698](http://www.economist.com/node/14027698?story_id=14027698)).

democracy.”<sup>76</sup> The United States, despite some hesitation and uncertainty, and partly motivated by a concern not to look like the outside instigator of popular uprisings in the Arab world, seems to have learned this lesson earlier than others. Then again, Obama had already openly sided with the people who, throughout the world, were fighting for freedom in his famous speech at Cairo University on June 4, 2009. And if it is true that the United States joined the war in Libya with some reluctance for fear of entering into yet another conflict involving Islam, it is also true that insistence on the universality of human rights, as well as on the need to put strong pressure on governments that seriously violate them (within a truly multilateral approach), can be regarded as one of the main features of the Obama administration’s foreign policy.

What Italy and the EU have to do is commit themselves (not only rhetorically, but also through diplomacy and economic aid, as well as actions in the social and cultural fields) to promoting — in agreement with the United States — peace, democracy, prosperity, and stability in a region, the Mediterranean, that is otherwise condemned to perpetual turbulence, which is dangerous for all. Of course, extreme caution must be exercised to avoid the risk that Jihadist cells closely related to Al Qaeda benefit from the current phase of instability. But what both the West and the protagonists of the Arab Spring must bear in mind (and to this end, the

memory of what happened in the East after the collapse of communism can be helpful) is that democracy cannot take hold in a few months, but must be built brick by brick, without being knocked off course by the inevitable difficulties that will arise along the way.

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<sup>76</sup> Arturo Varvelli, *Sponda sud: I colpevoli ritardi dell'Europa*, ISPI Commentary, February 2, 2011, p. 2 ([http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Commentary\\_Varvelli\\_02.02.2011.pdf](http://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Commentary_Varvelli_02.02.2011.pdf)).



# 3 THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS OF ITALY'S MEDITERRANEAN POLICY

Looking at Italy's Mediterranean policy from a wider perspective, one cannot but agree that, over the past decade, it has been marred by seven deadly sins, some of which relate to Italian foreign policy as a whole. These are:

1. *An increasingly weak Europeanism.* Apart from the risk of Italy's increased marginalization within the EU, which can hardly be offset by being considered of greater strategic value in Washington, Berlusconi's choice to foster closer ties with the United States to the detriment of Italy's traditional commitment to the Union has had a negative impact on Italy's foreign policy toward the Mediterranean and the Middle East as well. This can be explained by the fact that the EU is "the potential multiplier of the influence that Italy can exert on the issues in which it is most interested,"<sup>77</sup> and those concerning the third circle are no exception. On several Mediterranean issues, Italy under Berlusconi has taken a stance completely dissonant with the prevailing views within the EU. This has generally weakened rather than strengthened its initiatives, as the latter are far more effective when they are in line with Brussels' stances. It is not on its own account nor on behalf of the United States, but above all "on behalf and in the name of the EU and with the EU"<sup>78</sup> that Italy must

recover its political and cultural role as mediator or "bridge-builder" between Europe, North Africa, and the Arab-Muslim world. The center-left governments have proved far more aware of this than the center-right ones; think only of the attention they dedicated to the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or their repeated statements in favor of genuine, effective, and lasting accountability on the part of the EU, especially in the Middle East (like when it came to promoting the mission in southern Lebanon in 2006).

2. *A rather opportunistic Atlanticism.* The Italian priority of following U.S. foreign policy in the Middle East and the Mediterranean seems to be not only the result of a shared vision of the wide range of threats typical of the post-Cold War and post-9/11 era, but also, in a sense, a means to legitimize a policy of national assertion — "a sort of neo-nationalism dovetailing with a form of neo-atlanticism"<sup>79</sup> which, in more than one case (Italian energy policy, the special relationship with Russia and Libya, and the close trade ties with Iran) have led to friction and disagreement with Washington (as borne out by the Wikileaks revelations). Italy's Mediterranean policy, especially under Berlusconi, seems to be guided by the prin-

<sup>77</sup> Sergio Romano, "Gli interessi nazionali dell'Italia," *Ideazione*, Vol. 8, No. 6, 2001, p. 286.

<sup>78</sup> Fabio Mini, "Primo: recuperare la nostra dignità," *Limes*, No. 2, 2006, p. 217.

<sup>79</sup> Roberto Aliboni, "Neo-Nationalism and Neo-Atlanticism in Italian Foreign Policy," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2003, p. 89.



ciple that the more loyal (not to say subservient) you are to the United States, and willing to support it uncritically on what Washington considers major issues, the more you can afford the luxury of autonomous and even unorthodox initiatives at the regional level in relation to not strictly bilateral issues.<sup>80</sup> But all you really attain with this kind of Atlanticism, which smacks of opportunism, is to be taken for granted on the crucial issues and to be viewed with suspicion or irritation on the others.

3. *An overly compliant bilateralism.*

Promoting dialogue as well as developing successful bilateral relations with the countries of the Mediterranean region with the aim of fostering their reintegration into the international community is a good thing. But it was also understandable that the logic of *realpolitik*, especially when prominent national interests came into play, would lead to overlooking repeated human rights violations in these countries, some of which (such as Libya, which

according to Freedom House ranks among the ten most illiberal countries in the world) are brutal dictatorships. But caution does not mean subservience or the willingness to welcome the grotesque performances of embarrassing allies. It is hard to imagine that Gaddafi could be received in London or Paris in the same theatrical, flattering way he was greeted in Rome. It is certainly necessary to deal with the neighbors we have, but unconditionally legitimizing dictators arouses suspicions — quite apart from the fact that “bowing down” before Gaddafi, as Berlusconi did during an Arab League summit in Libya in March 2010 when he kissed the Libyan leader’s hand (an act that cannot be justified by the defense of any national interest) means jeopardizing Italy’s international reputation.

4. *The lack of a coherent strategy.* A view widely held by observers is that, beyond Atlanticism and Europeanism, “Italy’s foreign policy is and remains a set of acts lacking a precise and articulated strategy reflecting an Italian vision and set of interests.”<sup>81</sup> As far as the third circle of its foreign policy is concerned, Italy has in recent years oscillated between two different approaches to the Mediterranean, which are regarded as competing (by the

<sup>80</sup> For an article that develops the same argument, see Emiliano Alessandri, “La politica estera italiana e l’amministrazione Obama: tra nuove opportunità e nuovi vincoli,” in Marco Giuliani and Erik Jones (Eds.), *Politica in Italia. Edizione 2010*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2010, also published in *Italian Politics*, vol. 25, Berghahn Books, Oxford and New York, 2010; see also Emiliano Alessandri, *Assessing the New Course in Italy-U.S. Relations*, The Brookings Institution U.S.-Europe Analysis Series, 47, May 25, 2010.

<sup>81</sup> Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Nathalie Tocci, “Italy’s politics without policy: Balancing Atlanticism and Europeanism in the Middle East,” *Modern Italy*, Vol. 13, No. 2, May 2008, p. 148.

center-right governments) or complementary (by the center-left ones). On the one hand, there is the idea of strengthening the EU's southern dimension, supporting all initiatives aimed at shifting its focus toward the Mediterranean (from the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership to the European Neighbourhood Policy and the newer, though already moribund, Union for the Mediterranean); on the other, there is the Bush administration's idea of a "Greater Middle East" extending beyond the traditional geographical boundaries of the region. Over the past decade, Italian foreign policy, following the evolution of the international policy framework (it is difficult to tell whether or not consciously), has orientated itself toward the Greater Middle East rather than toward the Mediterranean. While the former has become an area of central geostrategic concern for Italy under both Prime Minister Romano Prodi and Silvio Berlusconi, the latter has gradually weakened its strategic relevance, while remaining a high priority as a neighborhood policy perspective.<sup>82</sup> One point, however, has to be emphasized. As it was primarily interested in rebalancing the pendulum of Italian foreign policy, putting Europeanism once again on an equal footing with Atlanticism, Prodi's government took care to shape its Middle

Eastern policy within a European context, without antagonizing Washington (as broadly shown by Rome's engagement in the UNIFIL mission in southern Lebanon). Berlusconi's orientation, on the other hand, has been (and is) decidedly Atlanticist, or rather, unquestioningly pro-American, and fully in line with U.S. standpoints on the most important issues relating to the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Turkey's accession to the EU, and U.S. military bases in Italy). More generally, it should be noted that, above all in relation to its military missions abroad, Italy has oscillated between two different ideas of multilateralism. That of the center-left, sensitive to institutional aspects, tends to emphasize the role of the UN and the EU, often as an alternative to that of the United States, and aims to lay the foundations of an international order that is truly multipolar. Conversely, that of the center-right, more concerned with the defense of Western identity and national interests, tends to privilege the alliance with the United States, viewed as the principal and irreplaceable pillar of international stability and security in the Mediterranean region and elsewhere. When entering into the Union for the Mediterranean, for example, the Berlusconi government seemed to support the idea of promoting a Mediterranean dimension in the EU, while its real purpose, in addition to endorsing an intergovernmental rather than supranational project, was "to strengthen its

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<sup>82</sup> See Roberto Aliboni and Natalino Ronzitti, "L'Italia e il Mediterraneo," in Gianni Bonvicini and Alessandro Colombo (Eds.), *L'Italia e la politica internazionale. Edizione 2009*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2009, pp. 115-116.

“special relationship” with France with the aim of achieving other goals.”<sup>83</sup>

5. *The prevalence of domestic politics.* Of all the criticisms raised against Italian foreign policy as a whole, the most well known is that it “is driven overwhelmingly by internal, not external, considerations.”<sup>84</sup> In order to avoid misunderstandings, it should be stressed that no foreign policy can escape the influence of domestic politics. Nevertheless, a situation of “politics without policy,” in which the logic of domestic political competition inevitably undermines the government’s ability to work out coherent and substantive foreign policy strategies, to the point of jeopardizing the country’s international image, must be considered seriously pathological. Yet, this is the case of Italy, characterized by “the prevalence of litigious and navel-gazing coalition politics over long-term strategic policies,”<sup>85</sup> and by the lack of a genuine bipartisan consensus in the realm of foreign policy. Some have noted that, as there are many international issues that have fallen “hostage to the

conflictual nature of Italy’s domestic policy,” so the exacerbation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “has often served as a background to the political scene in Italy, a symbolic evocation of its ‘Manicheanisation’.”<sup>86</sup>

6. *Rhetoric.* Another vice affecting Italian foreign policy is rhetoric, meaning that “declarations and statements to which we end up giving credit, are followed by little or nothing.”<sup>87</sup> An example of this is the purely rhetorical “Marshall Plan” for Palestine put forward by Berlusconi. Apart from revealing a narrow-minded understanding of Palestinian political demands, it is a typical initiative destined to remain dead, serving only as a filler when he has doesn’t know what else to say. And what about the reduction in funds destined for Italy’s development cooperation? Berlusconi repeatedly pledged to increase these funds to 0.33 percent of GDP by 2006, 0.51 percent by 2010, and 0.70 percent by 2015. Instead, Italy is currently in last place among donor countries, with a measly 0.09 percent.

<sup>83</sup> Maurizio Carbone and Valter Coralluzzo, “The Politics of Italy’s Foreign Policy in the Mediterranean,” *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 14, No. 3, November 2009, pp. 434-435.

<sup>84</sup> Joseph LaPalombara, “Politica estera italiana: immobilismo al tramonto,” *Relazioni internazionali*, Vol. 53, No. 7, 1989, p. 101.

<sup>85</sup> Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Nathalie Tocci, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

<sup>86</sup> Manlio Graziano, “The Rise and Fall of ‘Mediterranean Atlanticism’ in Italian Foreign Policy: The Case of the Near East,” *Modern Italy*, Vol. 12, No. 3, November 2007, p. 302.

<sup>87</sup> Pietro Quaroni, “Chi è che fa la politica estera in Italia,” in Massimo Bonanni (Ed.), *La politica estera della Repubblica italiana*, Comunità, Milan, 1967, p. 817.

7. *Obsession with being “part of it”* (and, in some cases, delusions of grandeur concerning “special, personal relationships”). Finally, there is not a single observer who has not joked about Italian leaders’ mania for being present at important venues, which means attending high-level diplomatic meetings — always and wherever. If they are not invited, they spew invective against imaginary conspiracies aimed at keeping Italy on the sidelines. This obsession with being a part of things, even when fulfilled, rarely leads to greater prestige or credibility because, as Pietro Quaroni states, “we want to be present, but in the sense that we settle for that.”<sup>88</sup> The truth is that the usual perspective, according to which Italy matters if it is included, should be reversed. In reality, exactly the opposite is true: if and when it actually matters, Italy should be included. Nor can Italy ensure that it is held in high regard by strengthening personal relationships with leaders of other countries, in an attempt (in which Berlusconi is a master) to convert almost all bilateral contacts into friendships. With respect to Berlusconi, even more than his obsession with being part of it, the joke should be about his so-called “catering diplomacy,” which refers to his willingness to offer beautiful Italian locations to host international conferences and the like (this is the case of Erice,

repeatedly proposed as venue for a possible international conference on Palestine).

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<sup>88</sup> Pietro Quaroni, *op. cit.*, p. 811.

## CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

These seven sins are flaws that Italy has to quickly correct, or irretrievably lose international credibility. In order to avoid its gradual marginalization, both globally and regionally, to which other factors obviously also contribute, Italy must overhaul the way it projects itself in all three traditional “circles” of its foreign policy. As far as the Mediterranean policy is concerned, we would like to outline some policy recommendations that, if followed, could help Italy successfully manage its role as a middle power in the Mediterranean region in the current hectic and confusing phase of change in world politics. Following these recommendations may seem an impossible task (rather like “squaring the circle”), but these are precisely the thorny questions that a country like Italy, which has never enjoyed a great international reputation and today runs the growing risks of isolation and irrelevance, needs to solve.

The tasks at hand can be summarized as follows:

- The evolution of the “Greater Middle East” is bound to exert an overwhelming influence on a broad range of issues (primarily relating to security, development, energy supply, and management of migratory flows) in which Italy, as a regional middle power, has vital interests to defend. Therefore, the stabilization and pacification of this region must be highlighted as a top priority on Italy’s foreign policy agenda.
- Italy must recognize that the Mediterranean, which is emerging as a strategic platform for international trade, is not a burden but, potentially at least, an extraor-

dinary resource for the countries bordering it.<sup>89</sup> Italy has to fully exploit this potential, without pursuing absurd dreams of hegemony, for which it is not equipped.

- Italy must restore the balance between the two traditional pillars of its foreign policy. Atlanticism must obviously remain a lodestar of Italy’s international action. But a somewhat different type of relationship with the United States is needed: loyal, but neither subservient nor opportunistic, and less centered on personal relations between the Italian prime minister and the White House. At the same time, Europeanism must be significantly strengthened in order to correct the shift of Berlusconi’s government toward the Atlanticist end of the EU-U.S. axis, to the detriment of Italy’s traditional commitment to the EU.
- Italy must emphasize that, even (or rather mainly) in regard to the Mediterranean, “Italian foreign policy works at its best when Atlanticism and Europeanism are not in contradiction but reinforce each

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<sup>89</sup> See Franco Zallio, *Beyond Free Trade: Mediterranean economic integration after the crisis*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, June 2010 (Policy Brief; available at [http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication\\_view?publication.id=826](http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication_view?publication.id=826)); see also Rajan Menon, *New Players in the Mediterranean*, The German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, May 2010 (Mediterranean Paper Series; available at [http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication\\_view?publication.id=828](http://www.gmfus.org/cs/publications/publication_view?publication.id=828)).

other.”<sup>90</sup> Moreover, Italy “must remain a European country geographically located in the Mediterranean and not a Mediterranean country located in Europe,” that is, “rather than pursuing an independent Mediterranean policy, Italy should provide its Atlantic and European policy with a Mediterranean dimension.”<sup>91</sup>

- According to a humorous metaphor used to describe the country’s Mediterranean policy during the 1980s, Italy had “an American wife and an Arab mistress,” in a ménage in which the wife, although jealous, continuously exploited her husband’s affair for her own interests. Later, “the mistress was abandoned and the wife remained, who had meanwhile become more demanding, less tolerant of lovers, more bad-tempered and despotic.”<sup>92</sup> What Italy needs to do, above all in the interest of its U.S. wife, is to pick up again with its Arab lover, because the greatest “added value” that Italy can bring to its relations with the United States, as well as to those with the EU, is its willingness and ability to talk with the Southern Mediterranean countries and the Arab-Muslim world.

- Italy must regain its traditional ability “to open safe channels for contact between worlds and cultures, which would otherwise never be able to communicate with each other.”<sup>93</sup> However, it should refrain from pursuing “an “omnidirectional” policy of appeasement towards the other regional actors, which would involve the risk of looking substantially weak to the most aggressive ones.”<sup>94</sup> Italy must reject both the myth of the Mediterranean as a crossroads of civilizations but also the pessimism of those who, succumbing to the perverse logic of the “clash of civilizations,” emphasize that the dream of a Europe able to develop amicable and profitable relations with the Southern Mediterranean and the Arab-Muslim world is doomed (perhaps even definitively).
- There must be no confusion about ends and means. Italy needs a clear, coherent vision of its foreign policy priorities, and the resources at its disposal, so as not to take on commitments that it cannot honor. It is unacceptable that, on many issues, Italy’s international credibility has been seriously compromised by the inability to concretely follow up on its solemn declarations of intent.

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<sup>90</sup> Quoted in Osvaldo Croci, “Not a Zero-Sum Game: Atlanticism and Europeanism in Italian Foreign Policy,” *The International Spectator*, Vol. 43, No. 4, December 2008, p. 151.

<sup>91</sup> Linus, “Perché ci serve Gheddafi,” *Limes*, No. 2, 1994, p. 229.

<sup>92</sup> Fabio Mini, *op. cit.*, pp. 219-220.

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<sup>93</sup> Stefano Latini, “Dall’euro-mediterraneo all’italo-mediterraneo,” *Limes*, No. 3, 2005, p. 239.

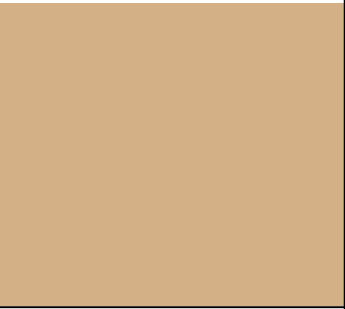
<sup>94</sup> Fulvio Zannoni, *La logica del disordine. La politica di sicurezza italiana nell’era post-bipolare*, CeMiSS/Franco Angeli, Milan, 1997, p. 104.

- Italy's demands to be involved in decisions affecting its vital national interests are certainly legitimate. But it is worth recalling that "when you ask and are then included, you embark on a path that doesn't allow for any mental reservations later on, requests for exemption from liability or "discounts."<sup>95</sup>
- Finally, Italy must always keep in mind that, as emphasized by former Foreign Minister Carlo Sforza, "there is no such thing as a policy of prestige because prestige is the result of a policy."<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Roberto Toscano, "Interessi e valori," *Aspenia*, No. 34, 2006, p. 149.

<sup>96</sup> Antonio Sterpellone, "Vent'anni di politica estera," in Massimo Bonanni (Ed.), *op. cit.*, p. 345.





# SPAIN AND THE MEDITERRANEAN FROM TRANSATLANTIC PERSPECTIVE

Jordi Vaquer i Fanés  
Eduard Soler i Lecha

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## INTRODUCTION

Spain, part of which was included in the Arab world for more than seven centuries, has defined its external identity in relation to its Arab neighbors since its very birth as a modern state. Geographic vicinity has ensured permanent interest in this area, in particular for Northwest Africa, but it was with democracy and the return to the European community in the late 1980s that the Mediterranean became one of the top foreign policy priorities of all Spanish governments, with a particular stress on the Maghreb. By contrast, while this area is also important for the U.S. administration, which refers to it as “Middle East and North Africa” or even the “Greater Middle East,” U.S. interests lie mostly in the Eastern half of the Arab World. The following pages analyze the Spanish Mediterranean policy from a transatlantic perspective. It will consider the degree of cooperation and complementarity between Spain and the United States in this particular area and whether there is something more than a difference in terminology and geographical priority in the two countries’ approaches to this area.

Spain only articulated a Mediterranean policy relatively recently: the term came into being in the late 1970s, after the disastrous decolonization of the Western Sahara. The policy originated from an attempt to balance the opposing pressures from regional rivals Morocco and Algeria, but progressively took on a more global scope. Since then, this policy has been influenced by two main factors: the internal dynamics of the region and the accession of Spain to the European Union (EU).<sup>97</sup> In the case of

the first factor, a few areas of concern deserve note: the wide economic, political, and social gap between the Southern and the Northern Mediterranean, unresolved regional conflicts, social, and political unrest, and radicalization of significant parts of the Arab societies. This situation has forced neighboring countries such as Spain to remain vigilant regarding the region’s evolution and to pursue policies that could mitigate the potential spillover effects of regional crises such as terrorism, energy insecurity, or humanitarian emergencies.

Accession to the EU gave Spain the possibility to channel these efforts to the European level, taking on the role of a leading advocate of a proactive Mediterranean strategy before other member states as well as in European institutions. At the same time, this was a way of securing the resources that Spain alone could not have mobilized and of achieving a higher foreign policy profile within the EC/EU.<sup>98</sup> Spain also saw its EU membership as a means to tackle certain bilateral disputes, particularly with Morocco, regarding the sovereignty of Ceuta and Melilla and the fisheries negotiations.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, Spain has not only

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Mediterranean Policy of Spain,” *Mediterranean Policies from Above and Below*, Berlin: Nomos, 2009, pp. 38-62.

<sup>98</sup> Esther Barbé, Laia Mestres, and Eduard Soler i Lecha, “La política mediterránea de España: entre el Proceso de Barcelona y la Política Europea de Vecindad,” *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Internacionals*, no. 79-80, December 2007.

<sup>99</sup> José Ignacio Torreblanca, *Ideas, preferences and institutions: Explaining the Europeanization of Spanish Foreign Policy*, ARENA Working Papers, WP/01/26, 2001 and Jordi Vaquer i Fanés, *Spanish Policy Towards Morocco (1986-2002): The*

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<sup>97</sup> Richard Gillespie, *Spain on the Mediterranean. Developing a European Policy towards the South*, Basingstoke: MacMillan, 2000 and Miguel Hernando de Larramendi, “The

developed its own Mediterranean policy, but has also been a key actor in increasing the European focus on this region. Furthermore, it has been in the forefront in promoting a broad multilateral approach and boosting regional integration dynamics that, admittedly, have failed to consolidate into genuine Mediterranean regionalism.

First, the article analyzes Spain's support for multilateral and regional initiatives, whether in the framework of the EU or through other channels. Second, it focuses on the Maghreb and the Sahel as areas in which Spanish and U.S. interests converge. Finally, it moves to the Middle East, where there have been some episodes of dissent, but also many issues on which Washington and Madrid have had similar positions and mutually reinforcing strategies.

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*impact of EC/EU membership*, PhD Thesis, London School of Economics and Political Science, 2004.

# 1 THE REGIONAL APPROACH: MEDITERRANEAN VS. MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

The Mediterranean is an area in which several cooperation initiatives have been developed. Spain has been particularly active in these joint efforts. The idea behind most of them has been to build confidence among partners and create the conditions for dialogue in a large variety of domains. The most comprehensive of these initiatives is the Barcelona Process, also known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), which since 2008 has been partially subsumed by the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM).

Spain played a key role in the launch of the EMP in 1995 and in persuading Chancellor Helmut Kohl's Germany to support and ensure appropriate funding of the initiative.<sup>100</sup> Spanish diplomacy was also very active in the following years and tried to revitalize the project even in trying circumstances. Despite these efforts and even if several bilateral association agreements were signed between the EU and the Mediterranean partner countries, a widespread feeling of fatigue dominated policymakers and observers ten years later. The Barcelona summit of 2005 achieved mixed results: while a visionary work plan was agreed for the following five years, this success was overshadowed by the scarce presence of Arab dignitaries.<sup>101</sup> Indeed, the unsatisfying results of this summit paved the way

for claims for a revision of the entire Barcelona Process.

Taking note of this frustration, French President Nicolas Sarkozy proposed the creation of a Mediterranean Union, initially foreseen as an alternative or, at best, a complement to the Barcelona Process. The Spanish instinctive reaction in defense of the achievements of the Euro-Mediterranean policy was moderated by the need to avoid open confrontation with France, since relations with Paris were of vital national interest. Spain was worried about the risk of renationalization and fragmentation of the EU's Mediterranean policy, but also feared losing centrality, prestige, and influence in the Mediterranean. In these conditions, Spain tried to persuade France to Europeanize its initial proposal and great efforts were made to locate the headquarters of the UfM Secretariat in Barcelona. The government in Madrid also saw the six-month Spanish EU Presidency of 2010 as an opportunity to reaffirm its Mediterranean commitment and boost multilateral dialogue and cooperation.<sup>102</sup> However, this proved to be an impossible mission for the Union for the Mediterranean, which had become hostage to the Arab-Israeli conflict, as evidenced by the difficulties experienced in technical areas (e.g., lack of agreement on the Water Strategy) and the fact that the summit was postponed twice.

The degree of cooperation in this sphere between the United States and the EU has evolved in parallel

<sup>100</sup> Esther Barbé, "The Barcelona Conference: Launching pad of a Process," *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 1, no. 1, 1996, pp. 25-42 and Federica Bicchì, *European Foreign Policy making toward the Mediterranean*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

<sup>101</sup> Eduard Soler i Lecha, *El Medi-terráneo tras la Cumbre de Barcelona. La necesidad de una voluntad política ampliada*, Documentos CIDOB, no. 5, June 2006.

<sup>102</sup> Eduard Soler i Lecha and Jordi Vaquer i Fanés, "The Mediterranean in the EU's Spanish Presidency: A Priority in Turbulent Times," *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 15, no. 1, March 2010.

and with very little coordination in the last decades. For instance, at the same time as the Barcelona Process started, the United States promoted its own Middle East and North Africa (MENA) dialogue in Casablanca.<sup>103</sup> These were seen as competing and overlapping initiatives, particularly in the economic domain, led by two actors (the EU and the United States) who wanted to expand their respective influence in the region. In contrast, as Spain tried to convene the second summit of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2010, Spanish authorities toyed with the idea of inviting a high-level U.S. presence to Barcelona as a way of raising the prestige and persuading the Mediterranean partners of the importance of this summit. U.S. involvement in a Euro-Mediterranean framework was no longer seen as a danger but as a means of reinforcing it. Characteristically, the response of the Obama administration was polite but noncommittal.

Alongside its Mediterranean and European policies, note should be taken of Spain's strong support for southward enlargement of the EU and particularly towards Turkey. While several European governments publicly express their reluctance to accept Turkey as a full member, all Spanish governments, regardless of the party in power, have been supportive of Turkey's accession. Growing trade and investment, upgraded bilateral cooperation, common initiatives in the international arena, such as the Alliance of Civilizations, are all elements that prove the dynamism of Spanish-Turkish relations. Together with Spain's willingness to strengthen the

EU's Mediterranean character, the absence of bilateral disputes between the two countries and a widespread feeling among Spanish elites that it would be unfair to refuse Turkey the prospect of enlargement when Spain has benefited so much from its own EU membership, these are all factors that explain this unchanged support for Turkey's EU bid.<sup>104</sup> Yet, even though Spanish and U.S. positions on this particular topic coincide, this has not resulted in intense cooperation or dialogue between Washington and Madrid regarding Turkey. There is one single exception: when then-Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar supported the start of accession negotiations, he aligned himself with Washington's stance instead of the dominant position of European conservatives. The irrelevance of Turkey in the Spanish-U.S. agenda stems from the fact that U.S. authorities have understood that Spain's support is not a factor that can shift the EU's policy toward Turkey, more specifically because Spain is unlikely to confront key EU allies such as France and Germany on this topic.

In parallel to the EU channels, Spain has also been an active member in the 5+5 dialogue. This subregional forum unites representatives from five European countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Malta, and Italy) with the five Maghreb countries (Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) on issues such as foreign and domestic affairs, defense, transportation, etc., in a more informal and

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<sup>103</sup> The first MENA Economic Summit took place in Casablanca in 1994. The MENA conferences are considered an integral part of the peace process.

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<sup>104</sup> Eduard Soler i Lecha and Irene García, "Spanish Perceptions," in Sait Aksit, Ozgehan Senyuva & Çigdem Üstün, *Turkey Watch: EU Member States' Perceptions on Turkey's Accession to the EU*, Ankara: CES-METU, 2010, pp. 74-89.

flexible format in which its members are on an equal footing. Smaller and more pragmatic projects are implemented. Moreover, the 5+5 has gained momentum, benefiting from the fact that they are less vulnerable to the escalation of regional conflicts in the Middle East. Traditionally, Northern Europeans and also the United States have disregarded this dialogue as a mere “talking shop” with almost no resources.<sup>105</sup> It remains to be seen whether they will reevaluate its importance if the current situation of stalemate in the UfM persists.

Finally, reference must be made to NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue, launched in 1994 in the informal ministerial meeting in Seville. This dialogue, which currently involves Egypt, Morocco, Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Israel, and Jordan, aims to strengthen political dialogue, fight terrorism, modernize the armed forces, and improve the interoperability of the various countries’ forces.<sup>106</sup> Spain played a leading role in its inception and development and has always used its position in NATO to advocate the strengthening of this forum, as in the recent November 2010 Lisbon summit. Thus, the Mediterranean Dialogue has become not only a genuine effort to expand cooperation with some Mediterranean countries in the realm of security, but also one of the rare Mediterranean frameworks where U.S. and Spanish officials actually work together.

Spain is probably the most enthusiastic advocate of “Mediterranean regionalism,” partly mirroring its attitudes toward Europe (Spain and the Spanish remain among the most ardent Europeanists in the EU) and Latin America (where it launched the Iberoamerican summits, bringing together all Latin American countries along with Spain and Portugal). Despite all failures, Madrid refuses to see the fault lines as defining elements and devises strategies to bridge the potential lines of confrontation (North versus South, Arabs versus Israelis, Moroccans versus Algerians, Cypriots versus Turks), while it advocates inclusiveness of even the least friendly regimes. By contrast, the U.S. strategies foresee a series of bilateral relations and make no secret of the distinction between friends and foes. To the United States, the Mediterranean is not a region, but the space where two crucial areas, Europe and the Greater Middle East, meet. In their approach, Spain and the United States share the belief that the Arab region can be transformed, but that instability would be too high a price to pay. Whereas Spain advocates regionalism, positive conditionality, noninterference, and socialization, the United States prefers bilateralism and a combination of carrots and sticks and, when necessary, does not shy from explicitly differentiating between countries and, as in the case of Iraq, even resorting to the use of force.

Another difference between Spain and the United States lies in their approaches to the issues of democratization and human rights. Spanish diplomacy has grown increasingly shy of expressing any criticism of human rights abuses and democracy regression in the area, prioritizing economic and security concerns. Spain, whose growing natural gas demand is satisfied mainly by Algeria, a country

<sup>105</sup> Richard Gillespie, *op. cit.*

<sup>106</sup> Alberto Bin, “NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue: A Post-Prague Perspective,” *Mediterranean Politics*, vol. 7, no. 2, Summer 2002, pp. 115-119.

lying only 150 kilometers away, was one of the most supportive countries of the Algerian government's iron-handed repression in the years of the civil war (when Spain never closed its embassy, unlike most European countries). The Algerian experience (in which political opening led to the rise of Islamism and an extremely bloody war) was for Spanish democracy promotion policy in the Arab world what Hamas' 2006 election victory was for U.S. policy.

Spain lost most of its appetite for democracy promotion shortly after the inception of the Barcelona Process and became one of the "democracy agnostics"<sup>107</sup> in the EU, advocating the use of conditionality for migration objectives, but opposing any attempts to do the same when it came to political reform goals. Opposition to the Iraq war and the arrival of European Union Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process Miguel Angel Moratinos and his team of diplomats with long experience in dealing with the Arab countries consolidated the tendency that has made Spain a close friend of countries like Syria. Spain's support for the Union for the Mediterranean, an initiative that set aside the goal of any political transformation in favor of a pragmatic, business-like approach, epitomized the absence of any reformist aspiration in Spain's approach to the Mediterranean. Efforts to transform the region were confined to fruitless mediation efforts in the Western Sahara, Cyprus, and the Middle East, and fruitful cooperation with Italy and France in stabi-

lizing Lebanon. U.S. reformist instincts in the region were initially much more explicit, and the United States never abandoned its democratization rhetoric, even if it was subsequently tempered by the War on Terror approach, the Iraq fiasco, and Hamas' victory in the Palestinian legislative elections and was matched less and less by actions. The consequence was a gradual convergence to a position of tolerance for abuses of human rights and political freedoms punctuated by disagreements over some specific issues such as Iraq and Mauritania, as will be detailed in the following sections. The limits of that position became clear with the Arab Spring, which completely changed the equation on this issue and demands a realignment of EU and U.S. policies in the region.

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<sup>107</sup> We borrow this expression from Richard Youngs (2010), *Europe's Decline and Fall. The Struggle Against Global Irrelevance*, London: Profile Books, p. 123.



## 2 NORTH AFRICA AND BEYOND: UNDERLYING CONVERGENCE

For historical, proximity, and interdependence reasons, the Maghreb is an area of paramount importance for Spanish national interests. Traditionally, the United States focused its attention more on the Near and Middle East than on North-west Africa. Yet, U.S. interests in this region are growing as a result of the will to improve relations with the Arab world after the Iraq fiasco, the global fight against jihadist terror, and some country-specific issues such as energy trade with Algeria, the reopening of relations with Libya, and a free trade agreement with Morocco. The Libyan crisis in 2011 is also obliging the United States to pay more attention to the Maghreb. These converging trends are bringing Spain and the United States into a closer working relationship, both in their bilateral relations and in the framework of broader transatlantic cooperation. For instance, Spain and the United States cooperate in the deployment and operationalization of AFRICOM activities in North Africa.<sup>108</sup> Some contextual factors, such as the emergence of new forms of radicalization, the emergence of a North African branch of Al Qaeda (known as Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb — AQIM), shared concerns about the consequences of destabilization in the Sahel, increased tension in the Western

Sahara, support for democratic transitions in Tunisia and Egypt and for reform in Morocco and Mauritania, and uncertainty about the future of the regimes in Algeria and Libya are all factors that may increase the attractiveness of this cooperation.

Despite the differences outlined in the previous section, Spain and the United States have shared a strategy towards this area that has favored stability over democracy and human rights protection. The fear of radicalization and, particularly, the aversion to a political takeover by Islamist parties have been arguments used by both the international actors and the regimes in place. In the case of Egypt, the support for the Mubarak regime was also justified by Egypt's key role in the Middle East peace process. In the EU context, Spain, together with Italy and France, has been one of the countries that has most vocally argued that dialogue and not interference in domestic affairs is the best way to promote political pluralism without destabilizing a very fragile region.<sup>109</sup>

The 2011 popular uprisings in North Africa have forced the international community, including Spain, to re-evaluate their status quo policies toward this region. In an early stage, and especially compared with the rapid and assertive reaction from the United States, the EU lagged behind. The European response to these events was characterized, initially, by complicit support for the regimes in place, which was followed by silence or

<sup>108</sup> In order to face the terrorist threat, the United States has created the United States Africa Command (USAFRICOM or AFRICOM), which is responsible for military operations in cooperation with most African countries. Worth noting among their actions is the Trans-Saharan Counterterrorism Initiative, which supports countries involved in counterterrorism against alleged threats of Al Qaeda. See Núñez Villaverde, Jesús A.; Hageraats, Balder, and Kotomska, Malgorzata (2009), *Terrorismo internacional en África*, Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata.

<sup>109</sup> Laura Feliu, *España y la promoción de los derechos humanos en el Mediterráneo (1996-2007): Propuesta de un modelo de análisis*, Documentos CIDOB (Mediterráneo), n. 14, 2009 and Kristina Kausch, *Spain's Diminished Policy in the Mediterranean*, FRIDE Policy Brief, núm. 26, 2010.

late declarations. Spain was no exception, but it does seem to have drawn some lessons from the Tunisian revolution. For instance, Spanish authorities were among the first EU leaders to publicly back the democratic aspirations of the Egyptian people;<sup>110</sup> Prime Minister José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero was also the first head of government to visit Tunisia after the revolution. Finally, it should be mentioned that the Spanish government, with the almost unanimous backing of parliament, decided to take part in the military operations in Libya to enforce United Nations Security Council resolution 1973.

Geographic proximity and historical ties are key factors in understanding the development of Spanish relations with three countries in particular: Morocco, Algeria, and Mauritania. The centrality of the Western Sahara, the need to find a balance between the two main regional powers, the pursuit of stability, and containing old and new threats has characterized Spain's recent strategies toward this area.<sup>111</sup> Moreover, in all three countries, the transatlantic factor has to be taken into account.

Morocco is a preferential partner for Spain but their bilateral relations have experienced ups and downs due to different positions on sensitive issues such as migration and fisheries and, above all, the contested sovereignty of the two Spanish North African

enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. In order to prevent a major crisis, Spanish governments have tried to design "a policy geared towards normalizing Spanish-Maghreb relations, by buffering their joint interests and establishing an institutionalised political dialogue that would limit the scope of bilateral tensions and encapsulate the crises that periodically stirred the tensions".<sup>112</sup> Although this approach has strengthened the ties between the two countries, it has been unable to prevent crises like the 2002 dispute over the sovereignty of the islet of Perejil/Leila.<sup>113</sup> This particular episode required U.S. mediation to end the military standoff over what then-U.S. Secretary of State Collin Powell called "a stupid little island," evidencing the U.S. leverage on both countries.<sup>114</sup> After this crisis, both countries were able to redress the situation and intensify cooperation at the bilateral level in areas such as trafficking of human beings, narcotics, organized crime, and terrorism. In parallel, Spain has also tried to boost Morocco's relations with the EU

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<sup>110</sup> "Zapatero apoya 'una transición pacífica' para Túnez y Egipto," *El País*, January 30, 2011.

<sup>111</sup> Haizam Amirah Fernández, "Spain's Policy towards Morocco and Algeria: Balancing Relations with the Southern Neighbors," *North Africa: Politics, Region, and the Limits of Transformation*, London & New York: Routledge, 2008.

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<sup>112</sup> Miguel Hernando de Larramendi, "The Mediterranean Policy of Spain," *Mediterranean Policies from Above and Below*, Berlin: Nomos, 2009, p. 40.

<sup>113</sup> Ignacio Cembrero, *Vecinos alejados; los secretos de la crisis entre España y Marruecos*, Barcelona: Galaxia Gutenberg, 2006.

<sup>114</sup> Richard Gillespie, "This Stupid Little Island": A Neighbourhood Confrontation in the Western Mediterranean," *International Politics*, vol. 43, no. 1, 2006, pp. 110-132.

through a privileged partnership known as “advanced status.”<sup>115</sup>

Inevitably, the unresolved conflict in the Western Sahara has been a key issue not only in Spain’s relations with Rabat but also in its policy toward the Maghreb as a whole, as the Polisario Front, Algeria and, to a lesser extent, Mauritania are relevant actors. Once more, the transatlantic factor has to be brought into the picture. Both the United States and Spain are members of the UN Group of Friends (which also includes France, the United Kingdom, and Russia) and consequently, have a particular role to play.<sup>116</sup> Both Madrid and Washington understand that the current status quo is detrimental to the interests of the various parties involved, as it poses a major obstacle for region-building dynamics in the Maghreb and constitutes a threat to the region’s stability. While the United States has traditionally been seen as deferential toward Rabat and supportive of the Autonomy Plan as a possible solution, Spain’s policies have fluctuated depending on contextual factors and the overall state of relations with Morocco.<sup>117</sup> Recent incidents such as the expulsion and consequent hunger strike by Saharawi activist Aminatu Haidar, as well as the

tension caused by the dismantling of a protest camp close to Laayoune by Moroccan security forces have shown, first, the vulnerability of Spanish-Moroccan relations to contextual factors and, second, the need for U.S. intercession when purely bilateral channels prove insufficient to reduce the tension.

Traditionally, Spain’s policy towards Algeria has been influenced by the Western Sahara, the ups and downs of relations with Morocco, the fear of destabilization in Algeria, and the dependence on energy supplies coming from that country. More recently, issues relating to the fight against terrorism and migration have been added to the agenda. Both countries’ alarm regarding the proliferation of terrorist groups in the Sahel area has constituted an area of cooperation.<sup>118</sup> Interestingly, the fight against terrorism and instability in Algeria’s neighborhood has also been a main priority for Algeria’s rapprochement with Washington after 9/11 and this would most probably be a top issue in

<sup>115</sup> Larabi Jaid and Ivàn Martín, *Comment faire avancer le Statut avancé UE-Maroc?*, Documentos IEMed, Barcelona: IEMed, 2010.

<sup>116</sup> The Friends groups are made up of a small number of UN members, usually three to six members, which keep in close contact with the UN Secretary-General and support his efforts to find a peaceful solution to a specific crisis.

<sup>117</sup> Jordi Vaquer i Fanés, “España y el Sáhara Occidental: la dimensión parti-dista,” *Revista CIDOB d’Afers Ietrnacionals*, no. 79-80, December 2007, pp. 125-144.

<sup>118</sup> Louisa Dris-Aït-Hamadouche and Chérif Dris, “Argelia-España: unas relaciones de geometría variable,” *Anuario Internacional CIDOB* 2006, 2007, pp. 489-498. Despite overall good cooperation between both countries on this issue, in 2010 strong disagreement was caused by Algiers’ disapproval of the way in which Spain negotiated the liberation of three Spanish volunteers kidnapped in Mauritania by an Al Qaeda branch, which was led by an Algerian national. The Algerian press denounced Madrid’s payment for the release of the three Spanish volunteers as an amount that may be used in the future by a terrorist group attempting periodic attacks against Algeria. Furthermore, it complained about the liberation of an AQIM terrorist in exchange for the liberation of the three Spanish volunteers. See “Madrid a payé la rançon,” *Le temps d’Algérie*, August 23, 2010, available at: <http://www.letempsdz.com/content/view/43619/1/>.

any trilateral dialogue or cooperation among the United States, Spain, and Algeria.

Finally, Mauritania is a country causing growing concern both in Washington and Madrid. Whereas the former includes Mauritania in its Africa strategy, Spain considers it a part of the Arab Maghreb and is acutely aware of any destabilization effects on the security of Morocco and Algeria, but also on its own (Mauritania is relatively close to the Canary Islands and connected to Spain by fisheries and illegal migration routes). Just as the United States does not conceive of a Mediterranean strategy that does not take Iran and Iraq into account, Spain is increasingly linking events in Mauritania (and other Sahel countries) to its overall vision of the Maghreb. The issue is not unimportant in the transatlantic context, since Spain and the United States found themselves on opposing fronts after the August 2008 Mauritanian coup d'état that the United States repudiated almost as quickly as Spain acquiesced in it. The U.S. reaction was in line with a more general policy in Africa rejecting coups d'état and with its analysis of Mauritania as a rare case of Arab and African democracy. Spain, by contrast, was more worried about the increasing inefficiency of the Mauritanian government and its weakening control of the territory, and was relieved to see a more muscular government take power rather than have to watch Mauritania become a failed state. With a pragmatic team in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and having relegated any democratic rhetoric almost exclusively to Latin America, Spain's diplomacy was quick to accommodate the new situation in Nouakchott. The evolution on the ground, with the putsch's leader, Mohamed Ould Abdelaziz, becoming the president through elec-

tions in less than one year, has facilitated a gradual convergence of views on a country that is crucial to both Spain and the United States as a potential haven for AQIM (a group that is currently tucked away in Northeast Mali and a few pockets in Algeria).

# 3 THE MIDDLE EAST AND GREATER MEDITERRANEAN STABILITY

The evolution of the Mediterranean as an area for conflict or cooperation is inextricably linked to the situation in the Middle East, particularly to the evolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, but also to the situation in two non-Mediterranean Middle Eastern countries: Iraq, as its internal conflicts may affect its neighbors, and Iran, as it is becoming a Mediterranean power through proxies, such as Hezbollah, and could destabilize the whole region in the event of a clash with Israel.

Since Spain's ability to modify the preferences of the major players in the Middle East is rather limited, it has advocated a stronger common EU policy and also greater transatlantic cooperation to find ways to promote conflict resolution, particularly after Obama's election and his self-declared goal to actively contribute to peace efforts in the Middle East. This is one of the areas in which Spain is trying to leave previous differences behind, such as the deterioration of Spanish-U.S. relations after the rapid withdrawal of Spanish troops from Iraq when Rodríguez Zapatero was elected prime minister in 2004.<sup>119</sup>

Spain feels that its most important contribution could be made to the Arab-Israeli conflict and often recalls that it hosted the Madrid Peace Conference in 1991. Together with other countries such as France and Italy, Spain has also pushed for more European involvement in the peace process, trying to come up with innovative ideas. More specifically, support has traditionally been given to the Pales-

tinian National Authority<sup>120</sup> and, more recently, to the Fayyad Plan and statements in favor of the creation of a Palestinian state. Madrid is also trying to profit from its excellent relations with Damascus, in recognition of the thesis that Syria should become part of the solution instead of being seen as part of the problem. Consequently, Spain facilitated the participation of Syria in the Annapolis Conference and has called for the resumption of talks between Israel and Syria. In the case of Lebanon, Spain's preoccupation with stability is very much connected with the strong Spanish contribution to the UN mission in Lebanon (UNIFIL) after the 2006 war, especially since Major-General Alberto Asarta assumed command of the mission in January 2010. Lebanon is a rare example of close cooperation between France, Italy, and Spain in taking the lead to tackle a security crisis in the Mediterranean. On a different matter, Spain has advocated an upgrading of Israel relations with the EU and, in parallel, was one of the early supporters of the so-called "Arab peace initiative," which consists, broadly speaking, of the recognition of Israel by all Arab countries, as long as this country withdraws from all the territories occupied in 1967, including East Jerusalem, which would become the capital of a Palestinian sovereign state.<sup>121</sup>

Seen from a Spanish angle, the Middle East has been an important topic in its transatlantic relations and

<sup>119</sup> This was one of the first decisions of the new government and was in response to widespread popular opposition to the war in Iraq and the Popular Party's support for it. In fact, this became a top issue in the 2004 electoral campaign.

<sup>120</sup> Ignacio Álvarez-Ossorio and Isaías Barreñada (eds.), *España y la cuestión palestina*, Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 2003.

<sup>121</sup> Eduard Soler i Lecha, "The EU and the Arab Peace Initiative: Promoting a regional approach," *Israeli European Policy Network Working Paper*, June 2010.

U.S. involvement has always been seen as a *sine qua non* condition for any progress in an area that, rightly or wrongly, is considered a priority for Spain. Seen from the United States, however, Madrid's diplomatic assets in the Middle East can be useful on certain occasions (such as in Annapolis), but are not considered a structural element in its bilateral relations. Once again, Iraq stands as the exception to this rule, both when Spain's Aznar gave full support to the engagement and when Zapatero withdrew the troops.

## CONCLUSION

Leaked cables from the U.S. Department of State offer insights into U.S.-Spanish dialogue on Mediterranean issues,<sup>122</sup> showing U.S. appreciation for Spain's knowledge and contacts in the region. Although the United States seems aware of the potential for Spain's role in some areas of crucial U.S. interest (such as the potential reintegration of Iraq into the international community), there is an obvious divergence between the areas where Spain thinks it can make a contribution (for example relations with Syria) and those where the United States asks for it (Iraq and Iran). The cables confirm the tendencies outlined in this paper: different interests that converge in the Maghreb and the Near East and perceived complementarity on both sides, despite disagreements over specific issues such as Iraq or Mauritania. This may signal the future path for transatlantic cooperation in the Mediterranean, and Spain is particularly well positioned on that account. While the EU, after the setbacks in its multilateral initiatives, embraces bilateralism as a productive strategy, the United States may start to consider the potential for region-building in this part of the world. As their overall strategies are seen as compatible, the United States and Spain will be able to make better use of their comparative advantages in a complementary manner.

The wave of protest and upheavals that shook the Arab world in early 2011 has changed the equation in the region, a change that is being echoed by the

foreign policies of the United States and the EU and its member states, including Spain. Tunisia and Egypt represent the most obvious challenges as they explicitly embark on democratic reform. Other countries where reforms have stalled, such as Jordan or Morocco, may well be ready for further democratization, whereas countries like Algeria might witness an opening that needs to be balanced against internal stability concerns. The sudden transformation in Tunisia is a stark reminder of the fact that the stability and continuity of corrupt and illiberal regimes, even those that look most stable like Saudi Arabia, cannot be taken for granted. In this changing environment, the opportunities for cooperation between Spain and the United States in the Mediterranean and the Middle East will multiply.

As a final conclusion, seven specific recommendations can be made on how to contribute to the achievement of the objectives that the United States and Spain share in the Mediterranean region:

1. At the moment, Spain's efforts to engage the United States in Euro-Mediterranean cooperation seem to hold little promise for the future, as the fundamentals of the project are in utter disarray. But, as the EU rethinks its Mediterranean strategy and the United States resets its policy towards the Arab world in light of the changes in the area, Spain should not abandon its efforts to include a transatlantic dimension in future configurations of the UfM project — or whatever initiative may come to substitute or complement it. Mediterranean regionalism, for all its faults, may be a good way to channel support for the emerging

<sup>122</sup> See, in particular, the report about the visit to Spain of David Welch, Assistant to the Secretary of State for the Near East and North Africa, reproducing his conversations with the leading figures in Spain's Mediterranean Policy (ID 176136, 2008-10-31 09:42:00, Embassy Madrid, Confidential).

democracies in Tunisia and Egypt and to uphold the reformist momentum elsewhere in the Mediterranean, and U.S. support could lend the extra credibility that the project has lacked for a long time.

2. The processes of change in Tunisia and Egypt have opened new opportunities for cooperation and complementarity. Despite the overwhelming centrality of Egypt in U.S. strategy, Spain must work hard to ensure that Washington devotes enough attention to the Maghreb, and that Tunisia in particular is not “left to the Europeans.” The United States’ surplus of credibility comes with its commitment to democracy elsewhere and its means, whereas Spain’s credibility is based on cultural affinity, geographic closeness, and the perception of it being an example of successful transition to democracy as a means of success in globalization. Dialogue and cooperation in assisting democracy could ensure that the same sort of EU-U.S. complementarity witnessed in Central and Eastern Europe is also achieved in Tunisia, Egypt, and other potential transitions. Rather than let it play an alternative role, Turkey, a crucial bilateral partner of both Spain and the United States, should be brought into this cooperation — a task that Spain could accomplish with U.S. backing.
3. Now that the idea that democracy is an essentially Western idea, foreign to the Arab countries, has been discredited by the events of the Arab Spring, the United States and Spain should rediscover their

appetite for reform in the region. In places where reform has stalled, in particular Morocco and Jordan, the competition to be the “least demanding partner” should be reversed. Algeria’s announced opening should be encouraged in a concerted manner without setting security concerns aside. The Tunisian and Egyptian examples, the pressure from the citizens, and the concerted and combined pressure of direct neighbors like Spain, the EU as a whole, and the United States should yield results. Once again, Spain’s role should be to keep the focus on the Western Mediterranean too, avoiding an exclusive U.S. concentration only on the sensitive cases in the Mashrek and the Gulf.

4. The situation in Lebanon is not stabilizing, and Spain, together with the other Southern European partners, could play a complementary role to that of the United States, in particular given Spain’s good links to Syria and its direct presence in UNIFIL. The difficult decoupling of the issue of Iran’s nuclear ambitions and its role in Lebanon reduces the U.S. room for maneuver; European actors such as Spain could play a complementary role in avoiding another open crisis in Lebanon. Moreover, this is an area where Spain could join forces with Turkey, whose diplomacy is also very active in this field and whose government also has strong relations with Syria.
5. As the revolt in Egypt and Tunisia has thrown into doubt the wisdom of dividing

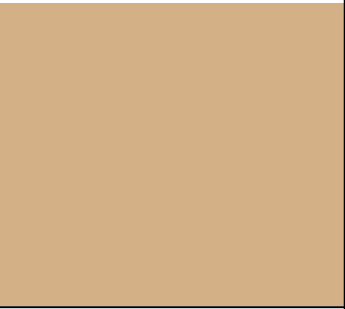


the Arab countries between moderates (i.e., those ready to cooperate with the United States and less aggressive toward Israel) and radicals, regardless of their internal policies, the balance between engagement with and pressure on Middle Eastern regimes should probably be revisited. Neither unconditional and uncritical engagement of the sort that Spain had favored toward the likes of Libya, Syria, and Morocco or that the United States had toward Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, nor the unrelenting exclusion and pressure practiced by the United States toward what it terms “rogue” regimes are fruitful. The complementarity and division of roles between the transatlantic partners will need to be complemented by a less geopolitical and more principled approach in that highly unstable and sensitive region.

6. Spain’s sustained interest in the Maghreb could be the engine of closer transatlantic cooperation to remove obstacles to further reform in the region. The United States can still play a role in the solution of the main issue, the Western Sahara conflict, an area where Spain can do very little bilaterally but could contribute to renewed EU activism. A combined transatlantic effort on the Western Sahara within the UN framework should not be delayed. The consolidation of reformist processes in the Maghreb would also ease Morocco-Algeria rivalry and could favor a more defined transatlantic strategy for the three central Maghreb countries (Morocco, Algeria, and

Tunisia) with a subregional approach that the United States has so far lacked and that Spain and other EU Mediterranean countries have avoided for fear of further weakening the EMP/UfM project.

7. The disconnect between Africa and the Arab world in the U.S. and Spanish strategies has been progressively addressed, but total integration of the Sahel dimension in the policy towards the Arab West (from Mauritania to Libya) is a pending area of concern that transatlantic cooperation could jointly address. Beyond the already existing links, for example in sharing intelligence about AQIM activities, Spain and France should lead the EU in a concerted action with the United States to devise a strategy for state consolidation, control of illegal trafficking, and joint action to address the negative effects of growing Algerian-Moroccan rivalry in the area.



# SOUTHERN EUROPE AND THE MEDITERRANEAN: FROM COLD WAR TO THE ARAB SPRING

Roberto Aliboni

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## INTRODUCTION

The Mediterranean region attracted the interest of both policymakers and analysts throughout the Cold War era.<sup>123</sup> In fact, Southern Europe, as the southern flank of NATO, was guardian of the Alliance's security in the Mediterranean and therefore was a key area in transatlantic cooperation. Strategic changes that came about subsequently diluted Southern Europe's strategic role and significance in the framework of a loosening transatlantic Alliance. In early 2011, the events that started to affect North Africa and the Levant promised to be the beginning of a long-term transformation in the global strategic setting, which Western nations should be interested in supporting. In this emerging context, there are opportunities for revived transatlantic cooperation in the Mediterranean and a renewed role for Southern Europe in it.

This paper focuses on the opportunity for reviving transatlantic cooperation and the role of Southern Europe in the Mediterranean. First of all, it briefly

outlines the concept of Southern Europe and its geopolitical underpinnings. In the same section, it summarily recalls developments in the Cold War as the time in which Southern Europe's contemporary geopolitics were formed. Second, it considers the evolving role of Southern Europe from the end of the Cold War to today, through the post-Cold War and the post-9/11 periods, including developments initiated in 2011 — conventionally referred to as the Arab Spring. It discusses, from a transatlantic perspective, whether Southern Europe can play a role in the present Mediterranean situation and, if so, which. Finally, it draws some conclusions and sets out several policy recommendations.

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<sup>123</sup> John Chipman (Ed.), *NATO's Southern Allies: Internal and External Challenges*, The Atlantic Institute for International Affairs, London and New York, Routledge, 1988; Douglas T. Stuart (Ed.), *Politics and Security in the Southern Region of the Atlantic Alliance*, London, MacMillan Press, 1988; Jed Snyder, *Defending the Fringe: NATO, The Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf*, SAIS, Papers in International Affairs, No. 11, Boulder, Westview Press, 1987; Ciro Elliott Zoppo, "American Foreign Policy, NATO in the Mediterranean, and the Defence of the Gulf," in G. Luciani (Ed.), *The Mediterranean Region: Economic Interdependence and the Future of Society*, Croom Helm, Beckenham, 1984; Roberto Aliboni (Ed.), *Southern European Security in the 1990s*, London and New York, Pinter Publishers, 1992; Antonio Marquina (Ed.), *El Flanco Sur de la OTAN*, Madrid, Editorial Complutense, 1993.

# 1 THE GEOPOLITICS OF SOUTHERN EUROPE

## *After World War II*

When we move from a purely geographic definition to consider other factors, the boundaries of the Southern European Mediterranean area become somewhat blurred. On one hand, there are countries that are not included in the geographic definition that nevertheless have strong historical, cultural, and political ties with the Mediterranean. Portugal is a case in point. On the other hand, the significance and extent of the Mediterranean identity of several of the countries included can be challenged. While Italy and Spain are commonly perceived as Mediterranean countries, the northern regions of these two countries are undoubtedly less Mediterranean than the southern ones. As for France, it definitely has an important Mediterranean side, yet the idea of France being a Mediterranean rather than a Central European country can easily be put into question. As for Greece, this country is certainly more involved with its northern approaches, from the Balkan peninsula and the Black Sea to Russia, than with its Mediterranean ones.<sup>124</sup>

That said, all arguments about a country's geopolitical identity are, in the end, futile because, like human beings, countries have more than one identity. A country's identity depends very much on the political environment in which it happens to be embedded. In this sense, the two big alliances, NATO and the EU,<sup>125</sup> which encompass most of the

countries mentioned so far, have strongly contributed to shaping the modern identity of Southern Europe and still do so. From this perspective, Portugal is part of Southern Europe's Mediterranean "face" more than the majority of the Western Balkan countries. The latter are in the process of acceding to the two alliances but are still not a part of them. From the political and security point of view, while geographically part of Southern Europe, they are not a part of its politics. As a result, this paper focuses on the set of Southern European countries that lie on the Mediterranean Sea and belong to the two alliances.<sup>126</sup>

In addition to the countries' membership in the two big alliances, the geopolitics of Southern Europe is strongly influenced by its larger Mediterranean neighborhood and exposure to security trends and factors stemming from the other shores of the basin.

Therefore, despite many differences among the countries it includes, Southern Europe must be regarded as a rather homogeneous area on geopolitical grounds. This homogeneity stems from two factors, location or proximity and alliances,

<sup>124</sup> See in this Report Thanos Dokos's paper on Greece, p. 21.

<sup>125</sup> In this paper, NATO and the EU, despite their significant differences, are for the sake of brevity both broadly quoted as 'Alliances'.

<sup>126</sup> In this sense, Southern Europe should include Turkey. However, Turkey will not be specifically taken into consideration in this paper as a paper specifically devoted to Turkey and its Mediterranean dimension in the framework of the country's changing transatlantic and European relations has been already published in this same series. See Nathalie Tocci, Meliha Benli Altunışık and Kemal Kirişçi, *Turkey: Reluctant Mediterranean Power*, German Marshall Fund of the United States and Istituto Affari Internazionali, February 2011. [http://www.gmfus.org/publications/publication\\_view?publication.id=1586](http://www.gmfus.org/publications/publication_view?publication.id=1586)

which deserve closer consideration, above all because their significance and the relationship connecting them has changed over time.

#### *During the Cold War*

Security in the Mediterranean has shifted from a concentrated threat emanating from the USSR and the Warsaw Pact during the Cold War — that is, from outside the Mediterranean — to a fragmented and multidimensional range of challenges and threats coming directly from the Mediterranean area after the Cold War. During the Cold War, what brought Southern European allies together was much less proximity than NATO. After the Cold War, changes in security conditions have partly loosened cohesion in NATO — in general and in the Mediterranean — and partly changed the Alliance's objectives. At the same time, the multidimensional character of security after the Cold War has contributed to introducing a security dimension in the EU as well (migration, human security, environment, and so forth). As a result, while the alliances continue to bring together the Southern European countries vis-à-vis the Mediterranean, proximity has definitely acquired more prominence, as security challenges and threats today stem more directly from the Mediterranean area. Thus, the impact of the two geopolitical factors making up Southern Europe with regard to the Mediterranean varies considerably over time as does their relative importance.

If we take Southern Europe into consideration from the end of World War II to today, the essential divide is between the Cold War and post-Cold War eras, with the former being a period dominated by

rather uniform political and security conditions and the latter by decade-long cycles of key changes in those conditions. While post-Cold War cycles of events will be considered in the next section, here we will delve a little more into Cold War times. The Cold War was a formative period for Southern Europe, and a few features of that era, while having lost importance today, continue to be relevant in that they provide analytical insights and help illuminate subsequent developments.

During the Cold War, the Southern European countries were peripheral with respect to the central security threat and thus had to deal with a sense of marginality. More often than not, this was perceived as a kind of abandonment by the Alliance.<sup>127</sup> Furthermore, the need to concentrate on the overarching threat to the Alliance repressed any national and security interests the Southern European countries might have had in the region, from major national interests, as in the case of Greece and Turkey after the 1974 Cyprus crisis, to minor national interests, as in the case of Italy's trade with and energy supply from Southeastern Mediterranean countries. This gave all these countries a sense of "entrapment" by the Alliance. National and security interests were also repressed by the diplomatic and, above all, military actions eventually undertaken by U.S. forces in the

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<sup>127</sup> This paper has not adopted Prof. Glenn H. Snyder's conceptual framework on alliance politics. However, Snyder's theory is particularly relevant to Southern Europe and to this paper's intellectual background. See Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics*, Vol. 38, No. 4, July 1984, pp.461-495. See also by the same author, *Alliance Politics*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1997.

Mediterranean, which leveraged on the “two hats” of U.S. military commanders, and triggered a sense of “singularization” and isolation in Southern European allies (as in the case of the 1986 U.S. bombing of Libya).

In the 1980s, the first stage of the “30-year” Middle Eastern war unleashed by Egypt’s peace with Israel (still lasting today) was raging in the Mediterranean. While regional conflict had not directly involved the Western countries in the previous years, this time the conflict created unprecedented spillover effects that affected Southern European countries’ security as never before and multiplied frictions with the United States. The trade-off between autonomy and security grew more pressing, and the Southern European countries reacted to the situation by coalescing in order to acquire more autonomy in the Mediterranean with respect to the Alliance and the United States. This brought about a number of transatlantic crises — in particular, a clash between Italy, Egypt, and the United States during the *Achille Lauro* and the subsequent Sigonella incidents<sup>128</sup> — which subsided with the end of the Cold War and its overall strategic setting.

While this was the only important case of a coalition among Southern European countries during the Cold War, such coalitions became almost a regular *modus operandi* in the post-Cold War NATO and even more so in the EU. However, while borne of perceptions similar to those of the 1980s coalition (marginality, singularization, entrapment, and so forth), post-Cold War Southern European

coalitions responded to these perceptions by implementing cooperative rather than conflictive policies. Southern European countries, in fact, began to coalesce with a view to influencing, rather than countering, allied policies, that is with a view to promoting the Southern European area’s shared security interests, negotiating with other groupings of allies having different interests, and bringing the alliances’ resources and might to bear where Southern European interests were concerned.

The end of the Cold War changed the function of Southern European coalitions. In the next section we examine these changes in more detail, as well as the historical and political process that led to the present situation. Can Southern Europe’s cohesion and role with respect to Mediterranean security be restored? Would a more cohesive and strengthened Southern Europe make sense? These questions are discussed in the final section.

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<sup>128</sup> Annette Jünemann, *Italiens Nahostpolitik von 1980 bis 1990*, Baden-Baden, Nomosverlagsgesellschaft, 1993; Alessandro Silj, *L’alleato scomodo*, Milano, 1998.



## 2 FROM THE COLD WAR TO THE ARAB SPRING

Since the end of the Cold War, changes in the security perspectives and strategic relevance of Southern Europe have occurred almost every ten years as a consequence of major strategic changes in the wider context of international relations from the post-Cold War 1990s to the post-9/11 2000s. In these 20 years, the shifts from one period to another produced two significant turning points: a) the divergence of U.S. and European strategic perspectives during the shift from the Cold War to the post-Cold War and b) the fragmentation of EU security cohesion in the shift from the post-Cold War to post-9/11 events. The Arab unrest that started in 2011 is certain to bring about further changes in the broader strategic context as well as the role and situation of Southern Europe.

### *From Cold War to Post-Cold War: Transatlantic Divergence*

With the end of the Cold War, two noted developments affected the Mediterranean's strategic situation. In the first development, with the end of the Cold War, the Alliance came to face — as underscored by the 1991 NATO Strategic Concept<sup>129</sup> — a set of nonmilitary multidimensional

risks along the wide arc stretching from the Maghreb to Russia that stemmed from varying forms of instability and related spill-over effects. To deal with this situation, the Atlantic Alliance, while deciding to maintain its broad military capabilities, underwent a transformation by evolving as a security cooperation organization: the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean Dialogue. In the same vein, the EU launched the process of accession of the Central and Eastern European countries and established the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), a kind of multipurpose cooperative security organization to deal with the multidimensional risks coming from that area.<sup>130</sup>

In the post-Cold War context, the Mediterranean evolved from being the southern flank of an alliance engaged in a global confrontation to a regional neighborhood with security mostly tackled by nonmilitary policies and instruments.

In the second development, the United States, while cooperating on the sidelines of the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, focused its strategic security concerns on the Gulf and became militarily engaged in that region through the framework of the dual containment of Iran and Iraq. The Europeans, although urged to join, remained in their Mediterranean neighborhood, letting the United States (supported by the U.K.) deal with Gulf security alone. From the point of view of the

<sup>129</sup> George Joffe, "Europe Security and the New Arc of Crisis: Paper 1," pp. 53-68 and Curt Gasteyger, "Europe Security and the New Arc of Crisis: Paper 2," pp. 69-81, in IISS, *New Dimensions in International Security*, Part 1, Adelphi Papers No 265, Winter 1991-92, Brassey, London; more in general, Zbigniew Brzezinski, "The Consequences of the End of the Cold War for International Security," *Ibidem*, pp. 3-17; Álvaro de Vasconcelos (coordinator), *A European Strategic Concept for the Mediterranean*, Instituto de estudos Estratégicos e Internacionais, Lisbon, 2002.

<sup>130</sup> Álvaro Vasconcelos and George Joffé (Eds.), *The Barcelona Process. Building a Euro-Mediterranean Regional Community*, London and Portland (Or), Frank Cass, 2000; Federica Bicchì, *European foreign policy making toward the Mediterranean*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

United States, the Mediterranean became an important logistical asset, but the U.S. strategic focus was eastward to the Gulf and the Middle East.

These two developments introduced a divergence, if not a kind of decoupling, in NATO — mostly emerging in the form of variable geometries. This has never stopped being a source of unease and discord in transatlantic relation. On one hand, the United States, rightly or wrongly, became more and more strategically involved eastward, specifically in Afghanistan and Iraq, with individual European allies providing support in their national capacity or as NATO allies. On the other hand, the Europeans and the EU concentrated strategically on their Mediterranean neighborhood (as theorized in their official 2003 European Security Strategy).<sup>131</sup>

In the Mediterranean this created a favorable outcome for Southern Europe. The region's risks of singularization and marginality (so important in the Cold War era) essentially evaporated. U.S. attention was focused on the Gulf, that is, far away from the Mediterranean. At the same time, the establishment of the Mediterranean Dialogue satisfied the demands of the Southern European (mostly Spanish and Italian) coalition for some kind of balance with respect to NATO's cooperative endeavors on the Eastern rim of the Alliance (putting an end to Southern European perceptions of marginality). NATO was engaged in organizing security cooperation on both the eastern and southern edges of European territory. The EU was doing the same, as the enlargement to Central and Eastern European countries was matched by the organization of the

Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the so-called Barcelona process.

#### *9/11 and its Aftermath: EU Fragmentation*

While the shift from Cold War to post-Cold War thinking entailed a turning point in transatlantic relations, the transition from the post-Cold War time to the aftermath of 9/11 was a turning point that affected, above all, security relations among the EU members.

The 9/11 events stimulated security cooperation, especially with regard to counterterrorism, in the transatlantic and European frameworks as well as in U.S. and European relations with the southeastern countries of the Mediterranean (the moderate Mediterranean Arab countries and Israel) and other Arab/Muslim countries.

NATO launched the "Active Endeavor" operation. In the EU, cooperation in "Justice and Home Affairs" (JHA) received a boost, leading, for example, to the institution of a European arrest warrant.

However, rather than evolving within or emanating from the alliances, cooperation mostly unfolded through bilateral channels. The divergence between the United States' strategic interests — which meanwhile had shifted further from the Gulf to the Greater Middle East — and European interests in the Mediterranean neighborhood became more evident, despite naval and other shared activities within NATO. In addition, after 9/11 and the terrorist attacks in Madrid, London, and Rabat, EU members' response had more of a national than a EU/communitarian basis.

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<sup>131</sup> *A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy*, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

Admittedly, the preference for bilateralism was not a direct consequence of terrorism nor was it related to terrorism only. It was also related to other factors: the increase in economically and politically-driven immigration after the end of the 1990s, the social anxiety and xenophobic reactions immigration stirred, and the perceived connection between terrorism and immigration. National responses were also the consequence of the Europeans' failure to deepen EU institutions with a view to balancing the impact of the enlargement to Central and Eastern Europe. This failure also caused a delay in the development of the Common Foreign and Security Policy as well as the Common Security and Defense Policy. As a result, EU members entered the 2000s with a communitarian deficit, especially notable in regard to foreign and security policy, which very soon turned into trends toward renationalization. Immigration and terrorism were perceived as such serious threats to domestic security that the EU member states preferred to retain and even strengthen their authority in and control over these matters. EU members addressed the new challenges emerging from the Southern Mediterranean shores in the post-9/11 era by strengthening their national policies rather than EU policies. They also strengthened bilateral cooperation relations not only with moderate Mediterranean regimes, but also with other allies and the United States.

Another reason can be added to explain EU members' preference for bilateralism in this period: the failure of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP, also dubbed Barcelona Process), the multilateral and multidimensional cooperative approach toward the Mediterranean initiated in

1995. While the EMP would only be dismissed in 2008 (to be replaced by the Union for the Mediterranean), at the November 2000 ministerial conference in Marseille, its failure was already unmistakable and palpable. Consequently, at the beginning of the 2000s, the European governments stopped trying to develop Mediterranean security and political cooperation on a multilateral basis in the EMP framework. While letting the EU pursue a broad agenda of cooperation, governments took most of the political and security cooperation with the Arab regimes in their own hands, in particular by strengthening bilateral collaboration on counterterrorism and bilateral understandings to contain immigration.

In the post-9/11 era, a European preference for bilateralism and a trend toward renationalization was added to the loosening of the Atlantic Alliance. The Southern European countries were among the forerunners of these new tendencies. At this stage, the broad coalitions inside the alliances featured during the post-Cold War period were largely replaced by individual action, with feeble and limited cases of cohesive Southern European inter-state action.

#### *The Arab Spring and Southern Europe*

##### Political Changes in the Middle East and Western Responses

The Arab Spring's progress toward democracy appears to be a complex and long-term trend.<sup>132</sup>

<sup>132</sup> Hannu Juusola, Moataz El Feghery, Timo Behr, "The Arab Spring," in Timo Behr (Ed.), *Hard Choices. The EU's Options in a Changing Middle East*, The Finnish Institute of Interna-

However, an optimistic reading of it may prove misleading. First of all, it is a complex trend because there are different actors involved in it: secular and modernizing elites, in keeping with Western and cosmopolitan trends; large groups striving for jobs and improved economic conditions rather than political democracy; and nationalist elites aspiring to assert their identity and national interest in the domestic and international arenas, probably more than to establish democratic institutions.

Nationalist elites seem to have taken on a significant role in Egypt, where they are apparently acting as if they wish to restore the country's regional role, which was lost with the Camp David Treaty, the ensuing emergence of the Arab moderate bloc, and the opposition in the Middle East between moderates and a variety of rejection/resistance alignments. From this perspective, the Arab Spring may materialize as an unpredictable mix of neo-nationalism and democracy with a new Egypt probably trying to alter the rules of a regional game that has existed since 1979.

Furthermore, it is a long-term trend, not only because it brings about an irreversible, historical empowerment of Arab individuals with respect to political power as stressed by pro-democracy Arab

commentators,<sup>133</sup> but also because it is evident that political conditions in the region are quite different from one country to another and vested interests are, more often than not, very strong and hardly surmountable. So, there will be successes and failures, even repeated ones, before the region manages to complete its transformation. The winds of change that started with the turmoil in Tehran and are now blowing in the Arab world, look much like the winds that blew in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when a strong nationalist and democratic movement experienced successes and defeats before definitively changing the status quo, which had been restored at the beginning of the century by the Congress of Vienna. Peoples rising up today in the various countries of the Middle East seem engaged in a long trial, like the Germans, the Italians, the Poles, and the Magyars at that time.

However, while this long-term movement has now started and is on the march, Western powers cannot just sit and wait for the long-term results before they respond. Responses have to be provided soon. The big change begun by the Arab Spring offers an equally big opportunity to alter and improve the shattered relationship between the West and the Middle East. It is high time for the West to promote policies that would, at last, allow nations to get over

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tional Affairs, FIIA Report 28, 2011, Ch. IV; Khalil Al Anani *et alii*, *The Future of the Mediterranean. Which way for Europe and North Africa?*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, Europe in Dialogue 2011/01; Michael Bauer, Christian-Peter Hanelt, *The Arab World in Transition: Prospects and Challenges for a Revitalized Relationship between Europe and North Africa*, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 13th Kronberg Talks, Rabat, May 16-18, 2011.

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<sup>133</sup> Riad Kahwaji, *Arab Revolt Will Empower the Masses, Produce New Realities*, INEGMA, April 25, 2011; Ramy Khoury, "Why the Arab Spring confuses non-Arabs," *Daily Star*, May 11, 2011 (<http://www.dailystar.com.lb/ArticlePrint.aspx?id=138341&mcode=print>); Marwan Muasher, "Arab Spring: Eternal Season of Flux," *Politico*, June 28, 2011 (<http://topics.politico.com/index.cfm/topic/Opinions>).

the tensions nested in Western-Middle Eastern relations since colonization, decolonization — and even before that.

Instead, for the time being, emerging Western responses seem to be uneven and sometimes downright unsatisfactory. While a long-term interpretation and a related strategy have apparently been set up by the U.S. administration — as controversial and weak as it may be — the European countries' responses are far from coherent and cohesive and do not display any strategic vision at all.

In a context of painfully overstretched resources, the Obama administration has been looking for a fresh overall strategic approach toward the Middle East and the Muslim world since its outset. Apparently, the administration's top priority is to replace Arab-Muslim mistrust and anti-Americanism with mutual confidence so as to allow the United States to achieve its foreign policy objectives through diplomacy and cooperation rather than intervention and interference.

While this was already clear in the 2009 Cairo speech, in his second, pivotal speech on the Middle East on May 25, 2011, President Obama stated, "If you take the risks that reform entails, you will have the full support of the U.S." This is not only a promise to assist if necessary, but also a new sequence in initiatives.<sup>134</sup> The two speeches

configure a long-term strategic objective of mutual confidence to be achieved by assisting rather than leading. However, if this is the strategy, its implementation in the short to medium term raises problems and may look less like a conscious effort than a kind of bet. In fact, exactly what this strategy means in terms of policy is not clear as yet (nor do the first two years of the administration's Middle Eastern policy provide a better record), and there is no firm consensus on that strategy in the U.S. political arena.

The Europeans, who are committed to their long-standing EU Mediterranean policy, have planned improvements in the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP) to implement cooperation with both Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean.<sup>135</sup> However, this improved policy does not seem to leverage any fresh strategy to shape relations with the Mediterranean and the Middle East. In 2008, the EU initiated a Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) intended to provide a framework for political multilateral cooperation alongside the ENP.

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must tell Assad to go," *The Washington Post*, June 20, 2011. A benevolent interpretation of the U.S. administration's policy could refer to Prof. Wolfers' conceptual framework, as one could say that Obama's emerging strategy is privileging "milieu" over "possession goals," namely it is trying, first of all, to shape relations rather than lead developments (Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics*, Baltimore, Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962); however, especially in the United States, most interpretations are less benevolent.

<sup>135</sup> Nathalie Tocci e Jean-Pierre Cassarino, *Rethinking the EU's Mediterranean Policies Post-1/11*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, IAI Working Paper, 11/06, March 2011.

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<sup>134</sup> See Chuck Freilich, "Much ado about very little," *Bitterlemons-international.org*, Edition 16 Vol. 9, June 09, 2011. P.J. Crowley reports that a White House official described the administration's low-profile strategy in the Middle East as "leading from behind" and himself describes the approach as "leading from the shadows." See "Obama

Because of worsening Arab-Israeli relations in the aftermath of the 2008-09 war in Gaza, however, the UfM was never able to take off. Today, its credibility is also tarnished by Hosni Mubarak having acted as Arab co-president.<sup>136</sup>

Meanwhile, EU national governments are following diverse policy paths, especially on immigration, which fall into the overall renationalization pattern mentioned in the previous section.

While the U.S. strategy smacks of decline, no strategy is in sight on the European side at all. All one has today is a fluid and somehow controversial strategy in the United States and no strategy in the EU.

In this framework of uncertain and shaky Western responses, Arab Spring developments have to a large extent concentrated, somehow ironically, on the strategically long-neglected Mediterranean. In fact, today this area appears especially relevant in the framework of the Arab Spring and European and transatlantic responses to it: changes have just been initiated in North Africa and the chances for political reform look more likely in this area. In this context, what about Southern Europe?

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<sup>136</sup> Roberto Aliboni, *The State of Play of the Union for the Mediterranean in the Euro-Med Context*, Istituto Affari Internazionali, Documenti IAI 10/17, September 2010; Roberto Aliboni, Fouad Ammor, *Under the Shadow of 'Barcelona': From the EMP to the Union for the Mediterranean*, EuroMeSCo, Paper No. 77, January 2009; Rosa Balfour and Dorothee Schmid, *Union for the Mediterranean, disunity for the EU?*, European Policy Centre Policy Brief, Brussels, February 2008; Michael Emerson, *Making Sense of Sarkozy's Union for the Mediterranean*, CEPS Policy Brief No. 155, March 2008.

### Changes in the Mediterranean and Southern Europe

The usual post-Cold War reaction of the Southern European countries to come together in the face of Mediterranean challenges, with a view to involving allied resources and participation, has failed to materialize this time. This can be explained by a number of factors. The Arab Springs' significance goes well beyond the Mediterranean and North Africa and is not specifically a Southern European concern. Furthermore, the loosening of NATO ties is also limiting the impulse to coalesce in order to influence the Alliance's policies and resources. In the present operations in Libya the initiative is in the hands of France and the U.K. and the only Southern European country providing a significant contribution to operations is Italy. Even the Italian initiative, at the outset of the crisis, to make the coalition of the willing that was launched by Paris and London flow into NATO did not see any significant Southern European contribution.

If no coalition-driven Southern Europe emerges in NATO, one would expect it to emerge in the EU. Apart from the case of Libya, crises in North Africa demand, above all, economic and civilian resources and, at the same time, threaten to send out masses of refugees and immigrants. These issues clearly affect the EU and its resources. As a result, Southern European countries would have good reason to band together in the EU with a view to attracting resources southward. However, there was no firm Southern European demand for more funds to the Mediterranean nor any real debate in the EU, for that matter, about either reallocating resources or increasing and reapportioning them between Southern and Eastern neighbors. Indeed, because of



the current Western economic crisis, EU members overall are hardly able to boost their financial aid, much less Southern European members, whose economies are generally more fragile. In any case, although no significant increase in EU aid is in sight, no EU southern front seems to be forming with a view to asking for (or providing) more resources or a shift in the allocation pattern of resources.

Another important issue significantly affecting Southern Europe as a consequence of the Arab Spring regards refugees and immigrants crossing the Mediterranean area, more specifically the Central Mediterranean Sea (the Channel of Sicily and the Ionian Sea) and the Turkish-Greek territories. One has to note that no Southern coalition has emerged in this regard either; quite the contrary, divisions have prevailed, with impressive rifts arising between Italy and France.

This inertia depends on the basically national (as opposed to communitarian) character that immigration policies — regulated by the Treaty of Schengen and subsequent accords — have retained in the European integration process. Some more details, though, are worth considering. The Schengen states have agreed to liberalize their citizens' circulation in the treaty area. Those entering from outside either have a visa, are refugees, or are clandestine immigrants. The rule of thumb is that both of the latter must be managed and retained by the state in which they enter. Nevertheless, Southern European countries often have to deal with people for whom their territory is merely a stop on the way to Central or Northern Europe (including France). For this reason, there have been Southern European attempts to cooperate on

obtaining compensations and other forms of aid and support — which have only been provided occasionally and marginally so far — from their Schengen partners. To solve the problem more comprehensively, they should ask for more freedom of circulation and, more broadly speaking, for some degree of denationalization of European immigration policies rather than compensations. Italy, in fact, argued for more freedom in the course of the recent crisis with Paris over post-Tunisian revolution immigrants. However, if some EU member were to propose such increased freedom more seriously, in the context of a broad denationalization of policies (and reciprocity), the Southern European countries, starting with Italy, would be the first to reject such a proposal. Freedom of circulation would contradict their top priority of retaining control over immigration policies.

Alternatively, one could imagine a Southern European coalition intent on achieving some degree of territorial reallocation of refugees and clandestine immigrants within its own area by combining more freedom of circulation with common control. But even this solution would not be accepted because the issue is too sensitive domestically to make any loosening of national control possible. So, for many complex reasons, but basically because of the strong role national and domestic interests play in the issue, the immigration alliance the Europeans have achieved with Schengen is an example of an alliance in which there is neither room nor incentive for reallocating resources among its members. No renewed Southern European (or European) cooperation regarding North Africa can be started with immigration.



The rise of the Arab Spring throws a strong light on the weakening of Western alliances. The two alliances and their member nations clearly have difficulties in providing responses suited to this challenge. The alliances' weakening has modified Southern Europe's geopolitical predicament: while Mediterranean proximity has not ceased to work, the alliances — the voluntary element of post-World War II Southern European geopolitics — are fading. Southern Europe is less cohesive and is experiencing as much difficulty as the alliances in responding to the Arab Spring and, more generally, to challenges coming from the Mediterranean and the Middle East.



# 3 MAKING SENSE OF SOUTHERN EUROPE

To discuss Southern Europe's role in the Mediterranean in the current context, we can start out by considering North Africa's potential for crystallizing a regional democratic continuum of sorts. This democratic platform would prevent steps backward and, on the contrary, stimulate change in the future in the more impervious eastern areas of the Middle East. In fact, change in North Africa emerges as a strategy priority in the long-term process that might bring about political change in the whole region.

The significance of setting up an initial democratic platform in North Africa is suggested by developments. Prospects for reform are good in Tunisia, and somehow more ambiguous yet underway in Egypt. The Moroccan monarchy has proceeded with reforms that, while not enough to install a full democracy, can be considered a significant step forward. The Transitional National Council in Libya, for all its weakness and ambiguities, is looking for genuine democracy in Libya. All this is exactly the reverse of what is happening in the Levant and the Gulf, where the Hashemite dynasty is toying with no more than governmental reshuffles, the Shi'a majority in Bahrain has been overwhelmed by a Saudi Arabian military intervention, and Syria is steadily going ahead with a ferocious repression. So, the potential for ensuring a first bloc of democratic countries in North Africa, even if not strong, is there. Admittedly, events are not heading spontaneously toward this objective. In order to reach it, both political will and action are needed, in particular by the Western countries. This is particularly true for Libya.

There are several reasons why Southern Europe's proximity is significant for consolidation of

democracy in North Africa. A first reason is the importance of bilateral relations — on historical, political, and economic grounds — between Southern European and North African countries: for example, France with the Maghreb countries and Egypt, Italy with Libya and Egypt, and Spain with Morocco. Proximity in the Mediterranean is an actual working factor. In terms of Western and European interests, the network of bilateral relations across the Mediterranean Sea is certainly less effective than any form of more organized collective relations would be, yet it remains a very important background that cannot but reflect on broad Western interests.

A second factor making proximity significant is the movement of peoples. Southern Europe is inevitably the point of arrival for journeys initiated somewhere on the other side of the Mediterranean Sea. When it comes to international migration and mobility, the Mediterranean area is a channel between more and less developed areas between, receiving and sending areas in the area and farther afield. This is not only true for the Southern European countries, which — as we know — more often than not work as channels toward northward destinations, but also for North Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean countries (such as Turkey and Lebanon), which are channels toward Southern Europe for people coming from distant countries. The whole Mediterranean area, while to a minor extent a final destination in itself, is a channel for long-distance migration, a feature on which the countries of the basin could try to build.

Third, proximity makes Southern Europe act as an energy-receiving platform (today hydrocarbons and tomorrow perhaps electricity produced by solar

power plants), via pipelines or ships (or tomorrow via grids and cables). Today, the Eastern and Western networks of supplies to Europe are distinct. While the Eastern networks reach Central and Northern Europe via Turkey, the Black Sea, the Balkans, and Italy, the Western networks mostly affect Southern Europe and Central Europe to only a marginal extent. Ongoing political developments may bring about a preference of sorts for and an increase in supplies to Central Europe from the Western network. This would boost North Africa's role as a supplier and the Southern European role in channeling supplies.

Finally, proximity is important in implementing maritime security from both a national and an allied point of view. At present, security spillovers remain and may even increase, with more democratic regimes having to fight against radical oppositions and terrorism. In this framework, the maritime Mediterranean space may need even more surveillance and cooperation than today.

While the current state of the alliances does not encourage traditional Southern European coalitions inside them, there are Mediterranean coalitions that are not part of the alliances, such as the "5 + 5" group of Western Mediterranean countries (Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, and Malta and Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) and the Mediterranean Forum for Dialogue and Cooperation (Algeria, Egypt, France, Greece, Italy, Malta, Morocco, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey). These coalitions, respectively set up in 1989 and 1994, were superseded by the EMP and have therefore adopted a low profile. However, the 5 + 5 group has developed important cooperation in maritime security, with the peculiarity of involving

Libya. In the current context, these minor Mediterranean alliances could be reinforced and revived. Participation by the United States, which would in principle be possible thanks to the change brought about in French Mediterranean and Arab policy by President Sarkozy, could be feasible and desirable.

It is worth noting that these forms of Southern European cooperation are directed at North Africa and are consistent with the strategic importance of the area with respect to the long-term outcome of the political changes in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. The existing sub-regional groupings, in fact, if revamped and strengthened, could contribute to consolidating the new democracy and inter-state cooperation in North Africa.

Finally, with France back in the Atlantic Alliance's military organization, bilateral relations between the Southern European states and the United States have a chance to be more balanced and harmonious and probably conducive to more effective transatlantic cooperation in the Mediterranean, in particular North Africa.<sup>137</sup> This cooperation could help provide a satisfactory response to the Arab Spring and its possible first stage of materialization in North Africa.

In this picture, change in Libya appears extremely important for consolidating the North African democratic platform. The U.S. perception of Libya's strategic irrelevance in the framework of the Arab Spring, so vivid until Tripoli's fall into the hands of the TNC, seems mistaken. If in the short to medium

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<sup>137</sup> See in this Report Jean-François Daguzan's paper on France in Section 1, p. 7.

term, the chances for the Arab Spring to consolidate may be higher in North Africa than in the Levant and the Gulf, one condition for achieving consolidation is that Libya adopts democracy. On the other hand, Western relations with Libya are not constrained by security factors or strategic difficulties, as in Syria at present or in Bahrain earlier. They do not risk jeopardizing Western-Arab relations. Quite the contrary, they look like an opportunity for cooperation. However, there can be no doubt that the Western countries, engaged in their own controversies, have neglected the opportunities for Western-Arab cooperation offered by the Libyan crisis.

When the Libyan issue is considered outside of the cyclical anti-European fads now “tsunami-ing”<sup>138</sup> in the United States, the intervention seems to be in line with, rather than opposed to, the administration’s Arab Spring strategy. In fact, it is backed by Arab consensus and could therefore be a potential building-block in constructing the Arab-Muslim cooperation the administration is seeking. Finally, it is feasible without paying any significant price in terms of anti-Americanism or Western-Arab distrust.

Admittedly, the post-revolutionary situation in Libya is far from clear. While the National Transitional Council certainly represents the Libyan democratic middle class, there are many unknowns that make it difficult to predict whether Libya would actually become a democratic factor in the North African context or whether, in contrast, it would become a further factor of turmoil and


conflict. Would the Committee actually be able to lead? What would the weight and role of the Islamist groups associated with them today be? What kind of compromise with the current regime could emerge in the next weeks or months? The assassination of General Abdel Fattah Younes in disturbing circumstances and developments in Tripoli after the fall of the city show that these problems are now emerging. However, these developments cannot override the good reasons for intervening in Libya and continuing to support this country’s revolution. It is not too late to take Libya more seriously and make sense of the intervention in this country. If Libya is deemed a significant objective strategically, efforts can undoubtedly be sharpened and multiplied.

In any case, regardless of what Western countries and NATO will choose to do with Libya, concentrating on North Africa remains a priority from the point of view of Western strategic interest. What role would Southern Europe be expected to play?

There is no doubt that ensuring forms of democracy in North Africa would definitely be an important strategic achievement for Southern Europe. Ensuring the presence of a democratic Libya would be particularly significant for Southern Europe, especially for France and Italy.

France and Italy should urgently engage the EU and the other Southern European countries to coordinate bilateral and existing multilateral policies, and also engage the United States and NATO to help define a transatlantic convergence on Libya and to detail their contributions more precisely. In particular, they should make a demarche toward Spain in order to involve a

<sup>138</sup> See Richard N. Haass, “Why Europe no longer matters,” *The Washington Post*, June 19, 2011.



decisive Southern European country, which has remained on the sidelines.

All these opportunities for a renewed Southern European role are far from automatic. They require political will and initiative in order to be turned into facts. This paper can only hope to have raised some issues and drawn the attention of decision-makers to them.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two trends that have progressively reduced the role of Southern Europe after the end of the Cold War are a) the loosening of NATO and the consequent divergence in the strategic focus of the United States — more toward the Middle East — and the EU — toward the Mediterranean and its neighborhood; and b) the fragmentation of the EU member states as a consequence of the weakening of the Union and renationalization in members' foreign and security policies. These trends have modified and decreased post-World War II Southern Europe's geopolitical predicament. Southern Europe's ability to respond to challenges and threats coming from the Mediterranean has increasingly weakened as has its ability or willingness to come together inside the alliances in order to increase the resources that can be allocated to Mediterranean security.

The Arab Spring came at a time when the Western allies were facing the world economic crisis, and when the United States was facing difficulties in exiting their overstretched military engagements. It has also revealed that the allies' Middle East and Mediterranean policy was fundamentally mistaken as it supported, at the same time, both the rise of democracy and regimes denying such a rise. Now that people have risen up against their regimes with the aim of implementing democracy, Western countries must overturn their policies and support the Arab Spring. While Europe is hesitating to express any kind of strategy, the U.S. administration is developing a strategy based on full support without leadership — with support following rather than preceding developments — and with the primary objective of shaping trust and cooperation between the Western and the Arab-Muslim world. This has bewildered NATO and, in fact, its

management of the Libyan crisis is manifesting rifts, resentment, and divisions.

The paper suggests that, in order to set a Western strategy to deal with the Arab Spring in motion, the countries of North Africa must be supported as the most probable candidates for democratization. Libya's success in attaining democracy may therefore be significant. It also suggests that Libya provides an opportunity for Arab-Western cooperation, which should not be lost. In this sense, the United States would have had more reasons for strengthening and even leading the NATO intervention in Libya than for abstaining from it.

Southern Europe could play a dual role. Bilaterally, its proximity remains a factor of interest for the United States with respect to energy, maritime security, counterterrorism, and so forth. Multilaterally, Southern Europe has developed a number of sub-regional Mediterranean organizations (e.g., the "5 + 5" group and the Forum), which could be upgraded and even opened up to the United States. Within the Atlantic Alliance, France and Italy could take the initiative to turn the transatlantic crisis on Libya into an opportunity for cooperation.

The following recommendations can be drawn from this analytical framework:

1. The Southern European countries must acknowledge both their proximity to North Africa and the need to respond to this proximity's implications as well as to what the enfeebled Western alliances are doing. Southern European countries need to take initiatives in this regard, at both the

bilateral and multilateral levels, with particular attention to the alliances.

2. The Southern European countries must realize that in the wider framework of the Arab Spring, North Africa has serious possibilities of consolidating an initial platform of democratizing countries. This would in turn stimulate political change in the Levant and the Gulf, making it a strategic priority for the West. In this framework, because of its proximity, Southern Europe has a special responsibility to pursue this Western strategic priority and must devise and initiate bilateral and multilateral policies to bear that responsibility.
3. As Libya plays a delicate role in allowing the North African democratic platform to arise, Southern Europe should undertake more policy initiatives in this respect, in both NATO and the Contact Group. A more significant role for Spain would also be desirable.
4. Similarly, Southern Europe and its countries should use their important bilateral relations with North Africa and the Arab countries in general to pursue a diplomatic initiative intended to reinforce convergence between Western and Arab initiatives in North Africa in the framework of the Arab Spring.
5. The United States should be attentive to the role Southern Europe can play in stimulating and consolidating political change in North Africa and work out an appropriate diplomatic approach towards this area and its countries.
6. The Southern European countries involved in the 5 + 5 group in the Western Mediterranean and the Mediterranean Forum for Dialogue and Co-operation should act quickly to revive and reinforce these two groupings in the broader context of consolidating the Northern African democratic platform.



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