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SECURITY PROBLEMS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Dr. Thanos Dokos *

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the international political system has been radically transformed by two rapid and spectacular changes: the end of the Cold War and the break-up of the Soviet Union. Today, we are witnessing the slow and painful emergence of a "new world order", which is replacing the old system of loose bipolarity, and whose precise structure and characteristics are still not clear.

At the post-Cold War international system, there is a slow but steady shift towards a North-South geostrategic axis. It is likely, although by no means inevitable, that the evolving North-South "confrontation" will escalate, with negative consequences for both sides. A glance at the map shows that the Mediterranean is perhaps the most important between those two "worlds".

As NATO is trying to define its role in the new international system, there is a general impression that it is searching for a new threat to replace the Soviet/communist threat. The most suitable candidate is, of course, Islam (Huntington theories, etc.). This is very shaky and dangerous ground, however. To use a very colorful expression, "the West not replace the Red threat with the Green threat" (green being, of course, the color of Islam).

My main arguments are the following:

- (1) In the Mediterranean we are witnessing the appearance of new sources of instability or the stirring existing ones. Those problems will be largely transnational, in the sense that they will affect the security of many states and their resolution will require the cooperation of many states.
- (2) The traditional definition of security in military terms is inadequate. Economic, social, demographic and environmental problems have a considerable impact on national security. A broader concept of security should be adopted to encompass not only the *stricto sensu* military aspects (the so-called "high politics"), but also other aspects such as economic, social, demographic, environmental, etc. ("low politics"). In this context, the Mediterranean region constitutes a "security complex" characterized by high interdependence, which makes close cooperation among Mediterranean countries absolutely necessary for the solution of various common problems.
- (3) There are two security sub-systems in the Mediterranean: the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Mediterranean.

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- (4) There is no military threat from the South towards the North, in the Mediterranean region.
- (5) Most security challenges and problems in the Mediterranean are of a non- military nature and therefore cannot be dealt with military means.

Let me elaborate on those arguments:

The Mediterranean has always been a region endowed with special significance. It has been either a familiar route of trade and culture, or a fault line between hostile states and civilizations. Its strategic importance was eclipsed twice in history, once by naval technology which shifted the traffic of sea commerce to the Atlantic and the other, during the Cold War, when the central front of the continent attracted most allied attention. In the past, NATO and the West had generally regarded the Mediterranean as a peripheral strategic theatre.

As a result of two "cataclysmic" changes, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Mediterranean, the Middle East and much of their surrounding regions are in the midst of a rapid geopolitical evolution, without, however, a clear direction. There is a huge zone of instability and crisis which extends from Russia in the North, to Japan in the Far East, India in the South and Maghreb in the South- West. Other analysts discern a smaller "arc or triangle of crisis, extending from the Balkans, to Central Asia/ Transcaucasus and the Middle East". The majority of regimes in those regions are or will soon be faced with crisis of political legitimacy. With regard to extremism and nationalism, the rapid evolution of societies and the defeat or exhaustion of traditional ideologies have produced extremist socio- political movements. Socio- economic crises form a fertile ground for these extremist ideologies. Furthermore, to return to our region of main concern, there is a long list of problems and threats to regional security and stability in the Mediterranean and the Middle East such as:

- The slow or negative economic growth;
- The demographic explosion in many countries;
- The spread of religious extremism. Of special concern is Islamic fundamentalism (different versions of fundamentalism are supported and funded by Saudi Arabia or promoted by Iran). There exists already an Islamic regime in Sudan and in Iran, an Islamic-dominated coalition government in Turkey an Islamic insurgency in Algeria and similar problems in Egypt and other states in the region –including Libya);
- The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and of sophisticated conventional weapons;
- The lack of democratization for human rights;
- The scarcity of water resources;

- The pollution of the Mediterranean as a potential threat to the economies of the Mediterranean states and to the quality of life of other people.
- The large number of regional conflicts, the most important of which are the Kurdish problem, the occupation of Cyprus, the Greek-Turkish conflict and, of course, what is left of the Arab- Israeli conflict. Furthermore, in the Middle East, a region geographically, politically, and economically overlapping with most of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, relationships are being re- cast in three important ways:
 - (a) after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the client- patron relationships that supported some of the authoritarian no longer exist.
 - (b) Relations with Israel are in principle no longer taboo.
 - (c) There is growing domestic discontent in most states region.

Also, the continuing isolation of Iran and Iraq and their possible re- emerge as military threats constitute factors of uncertainty and possible reasons for concern.

It should be mentioned that some of the above problems have a synergistic effect.

REGIONAL SECURITY SYSTEM

The regional security system is a combination of power politics with interdependence, in the sense that bilateral relations are conducted on realist principles, where as at a multilateral level it is becoming clear that interdependence is increasing in the region and many problems cannot be solved unilaterally.

As already mentioned, there are two security sub- systems in the Mediterranean: the Eastern Mediterranean and the Western Mediterranean, although it is difficult to examine the Mediterranean, from a security perspective, in complete isolation from the surrounding regions of Transcucusus/ Central Asia, the Balkans and the Middle East, including the Persian Gulf.

Although many of the threats and problems are common for the entire Mediterranean, the eastern Mediterranean nations will be principally concerned with the spillover of regional conflicts and the western Mediterranean states will be more concerned about domestic problems of an economic, social or political nature.

ISLAMIC FUNDAMENTALISM

In a number of Mediterranean countries, there has been an increase in popular support for Islamic fundamentalist movements. What do we really know about this development?

To adopt a monolithic view of Islam equate it with fundamentalism would lead to wrong conclusions about the future of relations between the Arab/Muslim world and the West. We must keep in mind that there are many "islams", that generalizations (which often lead to oversimplifications) should be avoided and each case should be analyzed separately.

Quite a few Western analysts and government officials view Islam as the new global monolithic enemy of the West. However, there is no easy answer to the question whether Islamic fundamentalism constitute a threat to the West or Western interests.

In this context, one must ask the question whether in view of the serious divisions between Arab countries, is it likely that an Islamic/ Arab country would unite a number of Arab states and create a military powerful coalition that would threaten Western interests and security? I do believe that the factors dividing the Arab world will prove stronger than the factors uniting them.

This increase in the support for radical Islamic movement is mainly due to economic and social hardships, especially among the young segment of the population of those countries. Economic co- operation with and the assistance from the European addition, the Christian churches could undertake an initiative for dialogue and rapprochement with Islamic religion.

PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION

With the end of Cold War, Western leaders and strategists are refocusing their concerns on security issues that, until very recently, received only peripheral attention. The acquisition of weapons of mass- destruction (nuclear, chemical, biological) and means of delivery (ballistic missiles) by many countries in the Mediterranean and the Middle East could, under circumstances, constitute a grave threat to peace and stability in the region (as demonstrated by both Persian- Gulf wars).

One of the most important geostrategic phenomena of the past decade has been the extraordinary diffusion of war- making capabilities from the developed North to the developing South. There have been many causes for this: regional military conflicts and rivalries, military aid and technological assistance from the superpowers, and a shared belief by many governments (following the example of the superpowers) that military powers lends status and political clout in the international system. The spread of advanced

weapons is viewed today by many analysts as symptomatic of the evolving multipolarity of the international system. In the post- Cold War international /system, the perception of the developing world as a group of compliant client states may have to be replaced by a system of competing regional powers with distinct ambitions with or without the sanction of the developed states.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and of delivery vehicles has accelerated in various regions of the Third World. As a result, today more than 20 countries either possess such weapons or are actively trying to acquire them.

Nowhere is the problem more acute, however, than in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, where at least six countries possess weapons of mass destruction and where chemical weapons and ballistic missiles have repeatedly been used in conflict (during the Egyptian intervention in the civil war in Yemen, the Iran- Iraq War and the War for the Liberation of Kuwait).

The lack of control of various types of weapons of mass destruction in the various ex- Soviet republics constitutes an additional cause for serious concern. The transfer of assembled weapons, materials or technology in the field of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons from those republics to other states in the region would constitute a serious threat for peace and stability in the Mediterranean.

In my mind, one should ask a set of fundamental questions: What will be the consequences of the proliferation of WMD for regional and global stability? As a number of states in the M. East and the Mediterranean eventually acquire WMD, will the creation of a system deterrence be possible? Or is there a high probability that such weapons will be used (during a crisis or in case of escalating hostilities)?

These are very complex questions. I will limit my answer to the following remark: the emergence of a situation in which the ability to impose mass destruction on an enemy will be in the hands of a large number of states- some of which are unstable and unpredictable- would prove to be of immense global significance.

Unfortunately, the Arms Control and Regional Security Talks (ACRS) between Israel and some Arab countries have not so far been very successful and there is no great optimism about their future.

MILITARIZATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN

So far in the history of modern warfare, the overwhelming number of casualties and material damage has been inflicted by conventional weapons.

Thus, while we focus our attention to WMD, we should not lose sight of the general context.

The Middle East and the Eastern Mediterranean are probably the most militarized regions of the world (although East Asia may in the future earn this "distinction"). To give a rough estimate, annual military expenditures are approximately \$50 billion, armed forces personnel are approximately 3 million men, and there are 24.000 main battle tanks and 3.500 combat aircraft.

The success of state-of-the-art Western-produced weapon systems in the 2nd Gulf War and the availability of comparatively low-priced, but also quite sophisticated ex-Soviet produced systems have led to the introduction of very sophisticated weapon systems in the Mediterranean and the Middle East. Fortunately, at the same time, the fall of oil-prices, economic problems and the beginning of the Arab-Israeli peace process led the majority of states in the region to reduce their military expenditures.

However, some Mediterranean countries are "arming themselves to the teeth". An example of this is Turkey, forcing Greece to follow her in an expensive and destabilizing arms race. There is a need to control conventional armaments in the region, perhaps through mutual reductions (possibly in the framework of a CSCM).

NEED FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND COOPERATION

The Mediterranean is a region where the rich North meets the impoverished South. If we sincerely wish to avoid the replacement of the military competition between East and West with an economic and social competition between North and South, the North must provide generous economic support for the South's economic development. The European Union is the only international actor that can play a major role in this context, and this makes necessary the immediate implementation of the comprehensive EU Mediterranean policy agreed in the Barcelona Conference. The creation of a Euro-Mediterranean Partnership is certainly a very good idea. One wonders, however, whether this effort may be "too little, too late".

CONFLICTS RELATED TO NATURAL RESOURCES

Special attention should be paid to potential conflicts involving natural resources (and their future scarcity), especially water. Some analysts predict that water will be the cause of future wars in the Middle East. We are already witnessing friction between Turkey, Iraq and Syria for the waters of the Euphrates and Tigris rivers, between Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian political entity for the waters of Litani, Yarmouk and Jordan rivers and between Egypt, Sudan and Ethiopia for the Nile river.

Oil and natural gas is and will continue to be a major factor in regional and international politics. The West covers a significant share of its energy needs from Middle East and North African sources, and therefore, has a strong incentive for securing the continuous supply of energy products.

The importance of Mediterranean as a major transit route for the transportation of energy products will increase even more after the construction and operation of pipelines transporting oil from Central Asia and the Transcaucasus.

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS

Another high priority should be the protection of the environment and of the fragile Mediterranean eco-systems. Environmental pollution will have negative consequences for tourism, which is a major source of income for many Mediterranean countries.

For thousands of years, people in the Mediterranean were living in harmony with nature. During the last three decades, the economic activities of the developed countries, combined with population growth in North Africa and regional or global environmental problems have caused considerable damage to the fragile Mediterranean environment. As the developing countries, following the example of the developed countries, are demanding their "deserved right" for fast economic development and as their present poor economic situation does not allow them the luxury of environmental sensitivities, environmental degradation will reach even greater dimensions, with unpredictable consequences for all countries in the region.

DEMOGRAPHIC GROWTH – MASS MIGRATION

In the global level, we are witnessing the appearance of demographic and technological faultlines in various parts of the planet, between rapidly growing, young in age, poor in terms of capital and education populations on the one side and technologically "inventive", demographically stagnant and increasingly "nervous" rich societies on the other side (to use the words of Paul Kennedy).

In the Mediterranean, in the period 1990-2025, the total population increase in the 5 EU member states will be five million, whereas the population of other Mediterranean countries will increase on the one hand and social instability and economic under-development on the other.

Demographic factors and economic hardship force the migration of large numbers of young people from the Maghreb to European Union countries. This has already resulted to an increase of xenophobia and racism in the countries of reception and might further develop into a source of friction.

Since the reaction of a "Fortress Europe" is not a realistic option, the economic development of countries of origin to curb mass migration is probably the only solution.

SLOW PROGRESS OF THE DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS AND LACK OF RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The lack of respect for human rights might lead to social explosions and domestic instability. Under certain circumstances, this might lead to terrorism, which constitutes a significant threat for the region.

Due to the nature of Arab societies and the complexity of their political systems, I will limit my remarks to this: the democratization process is essentially an Arab affair. To be effective, the role of the West should be one of strong support without any direct intervention. We should not attempt to impose our values and political systems to other regions, which have their own culture and values.

Europeans should be more consistent-avoid double standards-increase their credibility.

DRUG TRADE AND TRANSNATIONAL ORGANIZED CRIME

Drugs are a direct and very serious threat to the social foundations of developed states, but also affect developing states. The Middle East and surrounding areas are major-producing regions. The Mediterranean and the Balkans constitute a major transit route for drug-trafficking to Western European countries. There is a great potential for increased cooperation among Mediterranean countries in order to limit the traffic of drugs.

Furthermore, the tremendous increase in the activities of transnational organized crime constitutes, in the minds of many analysts, a challenge to sovereignty and the national security of many states. There are several criminal organizations based in Mediterranean or neighboring countries, such as Italy, Russia, Albania, and Turkey.

TERRORISM-LOW INTENSITY CONFLICT

Lately, there has been an upsurge of revolutionary terrorism associated with political Islam. The greatest threat of low level violence today comes from the politicized Sunni Islamist movements now widespread throughout the M. East and North Africa.

A potential terrorist threat to the south Mediterranean rim states may come from three sources: the spillover of the domestic power struggle in Iran; The

failure of the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians under occupation; And the struggle between regimes and Sunni Islamist oppositions in countries such as Egypt and Algeria.

LACK OF A REGIONAL SECURITY ORGANIZATION (CSCM)

Whereas there exists a number of regional organizations that include some Mediterranean states (WEU, NATO, OSCE, EU, Arab Maghreb Union, GCC, etc.), there is no organization covering all Mediterranean states.

What is needed is a forum of consultation and co-operation that would include all Mediterranean countries, the so-called Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM). All CSCM members would endorse the fundamental principle that the change of frontiers with the use of force would be unacceptable. The CSCM proposal has the advantage of constituting a forum for dialogue in which the full range of problems of co-operation and security would be posed and confronted. In addition, it would permit from the outset a properly structured participation by both Mediterranean and interested extra-regional states in the process of building up a Mediterranean dialogue.

CONCLUSION:

The Mediterranean region today faces a multitude of complex challenges and problems, ranging from the escalation of extremism and nationalism in all its manifestations to pollution of the environment, the constraints of economic and social development, the arms trade, and the disregard for international law and human rights.

The post-Cold War environment is likely to widen political-economic cleavages in the Mediterranean basin rather than narrow them.

An additional factor of uncertainty is the possibility of an Islamic takeover or a protracted civil conflict in key states in the region. This is the famous by now argument of Paul Kennedy about pivotal states.

The EU (especially if it becomes more closely integrated) can play a very important stabilizing role in those regions. It should be stressed, however, that the EU's relations with countries in the southern rim of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, the CIS Republics and Central Asia should continue to address essential political, economic, societal and development issues rather than being treated in alarmist military-security terms.

Finally, there is an urgent need for cultural co-operation among Mediterranean people, in order to facilitate a better understanding between them. Perhaps the single most difficult problem between the two rims of the

Mediterranean is at the level of perceptions and prejudices. We must fight against ignorance, which often leads to fear and hate. Educational activities, like the Halki seminars, with participants from so many different countries, contribute significantly to a better understanding between people.