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A REGIONAL THIRD PARTY FORCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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I would like to raise an issue that comes directly from my experience in the Middle East, more than in the Mediterranean. I hope that this still be a value to a larger framework.

With a regional perspective on Cairo, Beirut, Jerusalem, Gaza, I would like to focus on this area and, specifically, I would like to discuss an issue that I do consider an important one for transatlantic dialogue: it is the possible future presence of a regional third party force in the Middle East. I am not talking about a force that is due towards fighting terror, but a force that is for stabilisation.

Why to talk about such a force?

Basically, because of the level of distrust established between the parties over decades. Secondly, the fact that some States in the Middle East are weak, in my view means that this is an invaluable scenario and unavoidable one. Some may say that we already have forces such as UNDOF or UNIFIL.

To this, my response is:

- These, although they are often quite effective, are the result of past political conditions;
- We may see ourselves in new political conditions, before which I think in fact that we already are;
- Most importantly, as we have seen in the last few years, force security and defence in the Mediterranean and in the Middle East, maybe is not enough good to be in a reactive mode; meaning that a sudden conflict flares up and Europe will have to appear on the scene.

Let me just say what such a regional presence should not be:

- It should not be in my view something like the EU border system mission in Rafah or the Northern temporary international presence in Hebron. They are too small, they are too de-contextualised from a larger circumstance to be effective, unfortunately;

An important issue for transatlantic dialogue is the possible future presence of a regional third party force in the Middle East. Not a force that is due towards fighting terror, but a force that is for stabilisation

The third force should be agreed by the parties, its main role should be monitoring, it should be customised to place and it should be under a political framework

- Secondly, I do not think that it should be NATO. There are too many perception problems with NATO being the umbrella for such an entity;
- It should not be under the service of a trusteeship, like in the West Bank and in Gaza. It is a very problematic notion because of the weak of the territories in terms of governance.

Then, what should it be?

- First of all, it should be agreed by the parties. In the Middle East this is *sine qua non*. Without the agreement of the parties, it would be a disaster. Moreover, it could even have to be agreed by parties who are not State actors;
- Secondly, it should be a third force whose main role is monitoring, as well as on the ground conflict resolution;
- Thirdly, it should be customised to place, meaning that if there is something in the Golan does not necessarily have to look like something in Gaza;
- Fourth and most importantly, it should be under a political framework.

There is a living example – many living examples – to point to. Maybe a vague indication is the UNIFIL presence under resolution 1701. It is a problematic mission. UNIFIL presence with 1701 is a very early precursor of the kind of things we might look forward to, whether we like it or not.

As far as scenarios are concerned, this is a crucial issue to look at. There are three possible scenarios in which such a force would appear:

1. The situation in which we are now: the situation of trustees (implicit or explicit trustees between Israel and all its neighbours, including with Palestine). The trustees' situation is problematic. It is suggested that trustees is the only way to get the best reflection of a balance of power in the region;
2. Reaction to conflict. During the last three of four years we have been in a very deluded form of war in the Middle East, which arose in Lebanon in 2006, in Gaza in 2009 and, in every point, there is either an international intervention or the consideration of an international intervention;
3. I would like to look at, not at the imminent moment, but at the end of the conflict scenario; my personally preferred one.

Let's imagine an end of conflict scenario, even if it is not imminent. My own view is that the tools are there. What would be required for peace is a regional security annex, longer than it exists and, within that annex, a definition of an international or third party presence and specifics of its role. This is the useful framework. It would have to have effective multilateralism. Moreover, such a force would have a variant of participation. For example, more American participation in the Golan, as it was discussed even in the negotiations in the 1990s, and more European participation in the West Bank in Gaza.

Some other features that must be included it is the role of Turkey. Turkey has a very important role because of its presence, its weight, its current diplomatic activity.

Furthermore, including the idea of human security is pretty important to the proper functioning of such a force, even if it is not fully implemented, as well as heavy levels of cultural training, often ignored.

Why all this is important for transatlantic dialogue?

There is no political framework without the US and there is no political implementation without the EU. They need to talk together. I like President Obama very much. I am very hopeful and happy with his speeches. I still hope that he will act, but I must say (since I have talked to a lot of Arabs) that, at the moment at least, and it is not irrevocable, people are very worried about the situation in the region; especially in Egypt, but also in many places.

Although I think that American intentions are good, the nature and character of diplomacy need to be reviewed. Here, it is important a more intensifying role of Europe. Europe may have an important role in the upcoming time, as a conscience, to remind the Americans that they should stick to the core issues and conflict resolution and not revert to conflict management, whose threat already exists.

As a last note, and it relates to the whole notion that I have sort of presented. If we look to the situation on the ground right now, despite the American intentions, Jerusalem is boiling – we all see it in the news – Hamas and Fatah are breaking up again, because of the elections call, and I do not need to discuss the larger region situation with Iran. I am not suggesting there is an imminent conflict, but I do think that there is a huge room for error and miscalculation and some of the moves come back to Europe.

In this sense, in the transatlantic dialogue, in such a future possible force, Europe has a responsibility here to: a) have the force aid that will probably end providing the third party forces on the ground; b) this scenario will need a political framework; c) there is a need for Europe to shape that political framework for long-term stability and in order to avoid being simply in a reactive mode once again.

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