

**REVISTA CIDOB d'AFERS
INTERNACIONALS 38-39.**

**European Security: dialogues for the
21st Century.**

Unresolved Issues: Assignments for the North and South.

Ian Lesser

Unresolved Issues: Assignments for the North and South

*Ian Lesser

The topic of the presentation that is indicated in the program is unresolved issues on a North-South axis, and I think it is an extremely good way to describe this presentation because most of the issues that we would discuss in a North-South security context are, in fact, unresolved. Some of them may even be unresolvable.

To begin with, there's the question of dialogue. And I assume in this case you know we're simply asking the question: if we are going to be considering the North-South dimension (the Mediterranean dimension) of European security more seriously in the future, if we are going to be talking to countries on the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean about security, the question is –what are we going to talk to them about? So, what I thought I would do is simply offer you four assertions, four hypotheses about the content of the security problem and the content of the dialogue.

The first (and maybe the most uncomfortable) observation I'd make is that when we talk to southern states in the Mediterranean about security, above all we're going to be talking about their internal security. And that's not likely to be a very comfortable dialogue. The reasons for this I think are fairly plain, and many of the speakers have referred to them already. For the most part, these are states that face unresolved political futures, succession crises, and an erosion of legitimacy, which is maybe the most important point – even in places where we've come to convince ourselves that the political situation is tactically in control, like Morocco. Still, there are questions of

*Associate Director, Strategy and Doctrine Program RAND Corporation.

The views expressed in this presentation are the author's, and do not necessarily represent those of RAND or its research sponsors.

legitimacy; these societies are changing very rapidly. In fact, we like to talk sometimes about an ‘arc of crisis’ in this region. It might actually be more accurate to talk about an ‘arc of change’ in the southern Mediterranean region.

More broadly, and not just politically, we’re talking about states that simply don’t work in many cases. These states cannot provide the kinds of services, the sort of welfare, the sort of governance that their populations are coming increasingly to expect. They are, in a sense, dysfunctional states. Dysfunctional: which is, in part, a function of the demographic trends, the failure of economies to keep up, lack of reform, and so on. In the United States, Robert Kaplan has written about this very convincingly in terms of the “coming anarchy”. And while he talks about sub-Saharan Africa, a lot of what he says is also relevant to North Africa: problems regarding demography, political instability, slow growth, environmental degradation. All these phenomena taken together equal societies that simply don’t work.

There was a point made yesterday about cities around the Mediterranean, which I think is actually an extremely important point. And the point is important not just in conflict resolution terms, but because of the following: all of these problems of dysfunctional societies have their essence, are found in the most concentrated way, in the Mediterranean cities. If we look around in the future, I think you need look no further than cities along the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean to find out where the political fate of these societies is going to be determined.

I would say further (even as we are talking about internal security), perhaps an even more uncomfortable dialogue will be about personal security. I believe we can look around the Mediterranean and see that a lot of societies are changing in ways that are being driven by personal security. And this change reflects, in a way, the privatization of security. If we ask why Netanyahu was elected in Israel, I think it wasn’t a referendum on the peace process; rather it was a referendum on personal security in the face of terrorism. Looking at Algeria, I would say that as the violence there has changed over time, we now see something that has become very personal, very private, a situation which one might describe accurately as “rage”.

Another factor on the internal side is the information revolution, on which, I confess, I’m not an expert. Nevertheless, it seems to me that when you talk to southern Mediterraneans, much of what they are talking to you about in security terms is actually ‘cultural’. The talk is about ‘security of identity’, as some people are calling it. And this note is absolutely fostered by the availability of European television. Islamists in Algeria don’t talk about the *disparabolique* – they talk about *disdiabolique*. They have something in mind when they say this.

The second assertion I would offer is that it has become very fashionable to talk about Islamic fundamentalism as a driver of security futures in the region. I don’t want to dismiss Islamic fundamentalism as a political force; however, it seems to me that we

shouldn't forget about nationalism as not only a continuing force for change, but, in fact, a force that is redoubling in strength in many areas. If we look around the region, and simply observe where it is that there are more traditional threats to borders, where nationalism is fueling threats to borders, it's quite a catalogue: in the Western Sahara; and between countries like Algeria and Morocco; Tunisia and Libya; Egypt and Sudan; Israel and Syria; Syria and Turkey; and Turkey and Greece. That's not a full list: It's just an illustrative list. So, as we're thinking about some of these more esoteric threats to stability, we shouldn't forget that there are still some very traditional, conventional threats to borders. And, I think, these threats are in the future going to require confidence building measures of a very traditional sort to deal with the defense and security of borders.

The third observation, or the third assertion, I would make is very much forward-looking: still, you can already see, I think, evidence of what I'm referring to: countries, especially in the south, are going to be looking for new geometries, new dimensions to their security relationships. These are for the most part insecure societies, with reason - both internally and in terms of their regions. As such, they are, I believe in part going to be looking to us for these dimensions, for complements to their existing security relationships.

People have talked about Mediterranean security architectures, and Middle Eastern architectures; all of these things are dependent on progress in the Middle East Peace Process. It's fair to ask then, from an Israeli perspective for example, whether at the end of the day their security interests are more bound up with their regional neighbors or with the Atlantic security community. And I think for many countries, not just Israel, the answer may well be that they want some other dimension to their security. Whether the dimension comes from relations with the European Union, or with NATO, the southern states are looking for something else. In part, NATO has already begun work on this by trying to explore this dimension in its partnership with non-member Mediterranean states (there are six now). The dialogue initiative has its problems, though, and these are mainly due to the fact that there there's a great deal of wariness in southern societies - not just in the public, but also among elites - about what NATO is about and whether any kind of a deeper relationship is a good thing.

The fourth and the last assertion I would offer you (and maybe it's the most important) is that in my view it will no longer be possible in the future to talk about European security on the one hand and Middle Eastern security on the other, or for that matter even to talk separately about European-Middle Eastern-Eurasian security. All of these regions are going to be much more interdependent. We won't be able to draw neat intellectual and policy lines anymore. And that represents quite a challenge to which I see three dimensions.

One, very briefly: Politically, clearly, things that happen on the southern shore of the Mediterranean affect perceptions in the public, in the elites in Europe, not just in southern Europe. You can see this on immigration issues, you can see the fear over

Algeria, and over what's happening in Turkey and the way in which it changes views of the Muslim world on Europe's periphery. Similarly in the South, it is impossible to go anywhere in North Africa without hearing about Bosnia and the early failure of the West in responding to that crisis.

The second dimension involves energy and geo-political issues, beginning with the Caspian Sea Basin and the pipelines, and the redoubling of links for gas and oil across the Mediterranean and in the East. This area has a major energy future. And as the energy future to a certain extent is going to be determined in the Caspian over the next decades, one question is how will all of that oil and gas come to western markets? Will it come through Turkey? Will it come through Russia? Will it come through the Black Sea? The decisions being made are going to affect geo-politics right across the region. And it won't just be a question of European or Middle Eastern or Eurasian affairs: the questions and decisions will be about all three.

And finally, and maybe most dramatically in security terms, it is quite likely that in ten years time every European capital—certainly every southern European capital—could be in range of ballistic missiles based on Europe's periphery. I don't say there will be an attempt to use them, as I think most of the incentives for proliferation are really South-South, not South-North; nonetheless, we will feel the affects of that reality. When the United States talks to its European partners about cooperation in Middle Eastern crises, this dialogue will be very very different if Europe is not a place of sanctuary anymore.

So, finally, briefly let me from an American perspective just say that when we talk about the Mediterranean and the southern dimensions of European security, we may sometimes get the sense from American policy that the U.S. is very much more engaged in what's happening in the East. And that's obviously true at the moment; however, I think if we take a longer view, you'll find that this region is going to be a much more important place of engagement for the United States and Europe, even defined in terms of European security. People sometimes forget (and I keep reminding them) that the United States has been in the Mediterranean for 200 years, which is far longer than we've been involved in security terms on the European continent. I think all of the indicators suggest that this involvement is going to continue and deepen.