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The Middle East and the Pandora's Box

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Sommario

Nel seguente report, l'autore discute l'aggravarsi del contesto di crisi nel Vicino Oriente e intraprende un'analisi in 5 punti principali per definire problemi e suggerire soluzioni in tema di sicurezza e cooperazione internazionale. I punti cardine riguardano: l'inadeguatezza del sistema globale di sicurezza collettiva e la revisione della Carta delle Nazioni Unite; squilibri tra minacce effettive, obiettivi degli interventi militari e loro conseguenze; il problema dei conflitti VO e il bisogno di un nuovo sistema di sicurezza regionale nel Mediterraneo; la proliferazione nucleare nel VO e il bisogno di una sua regolamentazione; il problema critico dell'assenza di un sistema di cooperazione istituzionale dall'Atlantico al Golfo Persico e l'espansione del sistema OSCE nell'area MENA.

Abstract

In the following report, the author discusses the growing crisis in the Middle East and performs an analysis in 5 points to define problems and suggest solutions about security issues and international cooperation. Key points focus on: the inadequacy of the global collective security system and the revision of the UN Charter; mismatches between threats, goals of military interventions and their consequences; the problem of conflicts in the Middle East and the need for a new regional security system in the Mediterranean; the risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East and the need for an agreement for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East; the critical problem of the lack of an institutional framework of cooperation from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf and the expansion of the OSCE system in the MENA area.

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It is proper no doubt to assume ideal conditions, but not to go beyond all bounds of possibility. And it is said that in laying down the laws the legislator must have his attention focused on two things, the territory and the population. But also it would be well to add that he must take into account the neighbouring regions as well... (Aristotle, Politics).

Five problems and five remedies...

Yes, we opened Pandora's box in the Middle East.

If we analyse carefully the causes and rationale of the Arab rebellions, which we used to call "Arab Spring", we would reach the conclusion that they were, or seemed to be, a revolt of the "Arab masses" against the authoritarian and dictatorial Arab regimes. Young people were at the forefront. In fact, it was the most educated members of the youth who felt excluded from the future of their own countries by their ruling oligarchies, corruption, economic inequality and poverty.

It was only a matter of time, however, before their dreams and their vision for democracy and change proved to be illusions and turned into chimeras.

The European Union and the United States, notwithstanding their ambiguous stance, inertia in the case of Syria and Yemen, and evasive choices ultimately aligned in some cases their interests with the pro-democracy rebellious civil societies. We believed, or more accurately we wanted to believe, that at the end of this process the uprising would result into Western-type liberal democracies.

In his book about the evolution of the global and regional security order and systems titled *World Order (Penguin Books, 2015)*, Henry Kissinger includes a thorough account on Middle East and Syria. While the United States –let me also add the European Union–, initially were in favour of Bashar al-Assad's removal, the various conflicting interests in and around Syria quickly changed the rules of the game. Kissinger notes (p.127) that "...The Syrian and regional players saw the war as not about democracy but about prevailing. They were interested in democracy only if it installed their own groups; none favoured a system that did

not guarantee its own party's control of the political system. A war conducted solely to enforce human rights norms and without concern for the geostrategic or geo-religious outcome was inconceivable to the overwhelming majority of the contestants.".

Yet, it was exactly this trend and fact which ultimately defined the position of all key players of the international security system. More specifically, I am referring to the "5" Permanent Members of the U.N. Security Council and to a different degree to the European Union and NATO.

I will attempt to identify five problems and suggest five solutions (proposals).

1. Problem No 1: Inadequacy and dysfunction of the Global Collective Security System

The United Nations is unable to perform its role as the global collective security system due to the lack of synergy and cooperation of the Permanent Members of the Security Council (U.S.A, France, U.K., Russia and China). The Permanent Members' unilateral, uncoordinated and problematic actions cannot be better illustrated but through their involvement in the Syrian chaos. Instead of trying to reach an understanding and adopting measures which would ensure and/or enforce peace and security in Syria and the wider region, what do we see instead? Four Permanent Members militarily intervened by choosing their targets wherever and whenever they want and for whatever reason they advanced.

Their acts and interventions are justified only by their self-interest and their national interests: they also look ready to assume responsibility for their actions. Yet, they act outside the framework of the United Nations' Charter and clearly without the authorization and mandate of the Security Council.

I recall that in February 2003 we observed an unprecedented deep political clash between France and other E.U. countries on the one hand and the U.S.A. and the "New Europe" NATO and EU countries on the other. The crisis and the schism that ensued reached its peak. There was a strong objection of a number of countries, including Greece, to the US-led "coalition of the willing" imminent intervention in Iraq without a UNSC Chapter VII

Resolution authorising the use of force. In fact, the UNSC's meeting, on 14 February 2003, constitutes a milestone in the history of military interventions without the United Nations' authorization.

It's also worth mentioning that until the appalling terrorist attacks in Paris, on November 13, 2015, and the shooting down of a Russian airplane over Sinai, France and Russia did not have efficient channels of communication at an appropriate level. In fact, President Francois Hollande was frustrated with Russia's Syrian involvement. Besides, Paris had publicly and frequently criticized Russia's active military intervention in favour of Bashar al-Assad.

A rhetorical question which I suppose is not only mine: why did we need countless innocent victims from ISIS's terrorist acts in Paris and over Sinai in order to do what was rather self-evident? Having France's President Francois Hollande talking directly to Russia's Vladimir Putin.

The antagonism and conflict of the Permanent Members of the Security Council regarding Syria does not have pure ideological motivations. It is not a conflict between two "communities of values". The motivations are mainly geopolitical and geo-economic. There are also motivations based on domestic politics and prestige, something not uncommon in modern history. There are also motivations of expanding or containing politico-military influence.

In the framework of the United Nations, international law and the Charter's provisions should prevail, in theory at least, over might, power and interests. In fact, there has always been an equilibrium between international law and interests. Nevertheless, attachment to the established principles of international law and the United Nations Charter has continuously been eroded in recent years.

Furthermore, the composition of the UNSC does not reflect the current balance of power. A typical example is the Federal Republic of Germany. Despite being a hegemonic political and economic power in Europe and a big economic power in the world it does not have the political-military position that it deserves in

the global collective security system. The same applies to Japan and India.

In addition, the European Permanent Members, France and the United Kingdom, have always ruled out their forced and automatic alignment of attitude, positions and voting to the E.U.'s rulings and decisions. In other words, their stance at the U.N.S.C. has not been dictated by the European Treaties and the EU's Common Foreign Policy. France and the UK act, propose and vote representing themselves and their interests. They do not necessarily act as representatives of the EU and its decisions.

2. Proposal No 1: Revise the Charter of the United Nations. The UNSC, as the pillar of global security system, needs to be updated

If the UN, the only global collective security system, cannot operate and act as mandated by the Charter of the United Nations, it would be impossible to achieve the required cooperation mainly for the prevention but also the suppression of threats against peace and security.

Consultations related to the revision of the UN Charter have been ongoing for decades. I am not optimistic that these talks would lead shortly to a revision of the Charter which would include a realignment in the composition of the UN Security Council.

For as long as the current arrangement remains unchanged, the interests and goals of the powerful, the strongest and those who want to behave and act as strong, will be carried out by their own national, power based interventionist policies. In other words, they would promote their interests outside the framework of the UN, solely based on their political and economic desires.

Based on the painful lessons mainly from the Syrian chaos and the proliferation of bloody terrorist attacks, it would preferable and better serve the interests of the Permanent Members of the Security Council if they decided to cooperate in order to prevent and abort situations considered to be a threat to international peace and security.

For example, the five Permanent Members could easily reach an understanding that an

“appalling, large scale terrorist attack against one Member would be considered as an attack against all.” It would be the political and operational interpretation of statements such as: “We are all Americans” (September 11, 2001), “Je suis Charlie” (7 January 2016) and “We are all French (13 November 2016) and why not “we are all Russians “etc.

The revision of the UN Charter, including the provisions related to the Security Council is a must. If not now, then when?

3. Problem No 2: Mismatch and gap between threats, goals of military interventions and their consequences

The wider Middle East and North Africa region produces war, terrorism, insecurity and conflicts which are not caused by state structures but mostly by the lack of such centralized powerful state structures. We have had successive military interventions. I will mention some of them in a chronological order:

- 1) The military intervention in Iraq in 2003 led by the US and the "coalition of the willing", including the "New Europe" and the “Vilnius Declaration” partners and allies.
- 2) The military intervention in Libya in 2011 which was mainly led by France and with the U.K., with Italy participating willingly. The US involvement gave a new gravity to this intervention.

Yet, for the last five years, the EU, NATO, UN and the US have followed an unstable, fickle policy which lacks continuity and does not have a clear strategic goal regarding Syria. In order to avoid any misunderstandings, I would happily include Russia. The latter's policy in Libya (2011) and now in Syria was neither monolithic nor straight.

If we want to make an overall assessment of the consequences of Russia's interventionist policy in its immediate neighbourhood, we need to take into account the "fait accompli" policies in Ukraine and Crimea as well as in Georgia in 2008, following the questionable actions of Mikheil Saakashvili.

One more word on Russia; in fact, it is Moscow which carefully applied the so-called "Colin Powell Doctrine" during its military intervention in Syria. Russia is the only country which could argue that it has met all its political objectives, by engaging committing appropriate military resources coupled with diplomatic initiatives.

Yet, even at this stage, we haven't seen the end of the tunnel anywhere in the Middle East. Let me rephrase it. If we assume that this is the end, are we gratified with the results of our actions and initiatives? For example, does the current situation offer greater security to Europe in comparison to the previous situation?

It is hard to believe that a brilliant European leader purposefully created the current chaos in Libya, in Syria, in Yemen and in Iraq in order to destabilize not only the foundations and the institutions of the European Union, but also of his own country.

The results are clear and visible. The consequences are painful; the unprecedented spread of asymmetrical threats. The threats have a common denominator. An amalgam of anti-Western and anti-European actions. Bloodshed, degrading of human life, terrorism and inhuman behaviour.

Migrant and refugee flows unfortunately brought to the surface the European Union's hidden side. Core values were put aside.

European Treaties and Conventions succumbed to domestic political and partisan interests of member-states and were replaced by the policies of national walls, fences and flags. There is a growing number of voices, including from the U.N., criticizing the EU for not respecting international provisions for the protection of refugees' rights.

Finally, I am afraid that the E.U.'s opponents, including neo-fascist and nationalist movements, have already won the first battle. They have won here in Europe, in the battlefield of “our Europe of values.”

As I see things developing, the so-called "Arab Spring" is not just a lost historic opportunity for the Arabs but also a very great, albeit lost, chance mostly for Europe and the United States as well. At its outbreak, it was

clearly a challenge against Arab dictatorships, tyrants and regimes originating from the Arabs themselves. The "religious connotation" of the rebellions was the mainspring but also the link inside and outside of the borders.

This was the first time since the rise of "Arab nationalism" in the 1950s that the rebellions and revolutions were not aimed against Europe, the United States and Israel. What happened next is known. We can feel it. It is touching us. It is affecting us.

The unprecedented large-scale population flows of refugees and economic migrants to Europe's coasts, to Greece and to Italy mostly, is not the root cause. It is the consequence. It is a product, although not entirely, mainly of the inadequacy of European policies.

It has become evident that the E.U. was inadequate, divided and slow to assess the dangers, threats, and their impact. It also proved to be equally inadequate to take the appropriate and right decisions: last but not least, the majority of member-states proved to be unable and indeed unwilling to work in concert and implement the appropriate decisions.

In reality, what we have observed is a continuous game of changing goals, moving the goalposts and giving inadequate responses dictated mainly by domestic politics in the most powerful member-states.

The lack of a common and integrated foreign policy based on a high common denominator and not in the lowest, as it is currently the case has become more than evident.

4. Proposal No 2: At the centre of every decision for military intervention should be the avoidance/prevention of population movements

Lessons learnt? A first and indeed the key lesson especially when it comes to the European Union's member states and NATO, should be that the following conditions need to apply before granting the political "go ahead" and engaging into any military intervention:

- 1) Defining the threat. In other words, we need to define the problem. What

threat indeed did Libya's dictator Muammar Gaddafi pose to Europe's own security?

- 2) A clear political goal. In other words, what do we want to achieve? What would constitute a success?
- 3) Draw a clear line between the desirable and wishful and the possible and feasible.
- 4) The political objectives should be matched by engaging and appropriating the necessary economic, political and military means.
- 5) Ensuring, instead of guessing or wishing, the Day After.

Finally, policies of the EU and NATO member states should converge and comply to the above rationale.

5. Problem No 3: Conflicts and the diverging interests of the Middle East region states

The vital interests of regional players (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, Persian Gulf countries, Egypt, Israel) diverge when it comes to the conflicts and on what needs to be done in the Middle East. The problem is only aggravated by the lack of cooperation between the U.N.S.C. Permanent Members; offering thus more space to the Middle East states, which are both part of the problem as well as of the solution, to act unchecked and to openly intervene.

6. Proposal No 3: Establish a new regional security system covering the Middle East and the Mediterranean

This system would include Iran as well as all the states of the wider Middle East region, the five Permanent Members of the UNSC and the EU. This idea has been floating in UN Security Council Resolutions (Iran-Iraq cease fire) in the late 80's:

Allow me to elaborate. Without the cooperation or at least a common understanding between Iran and, even more so, Saudi Arabia, there are not any serious chances to restore some kind of balance in the wider region of the Middle East and North Africa.

Saudi Arabia, with its new King Salman bin Abdulaziz, is distancing itself from the behaviour pattern that we were used at least up until a few years ago. Saudi Arabia is assertive, politically aggressive, interventionist and simply against the readjustment of Washington's (I refer to the Obama Administration) big-picture regional goals, especially when it comes to Iran. The "Sunni Alliance", led by Riyadh, has already taken shape. It has vital interests at stake, a strategy to promote them, a significant economic and financial potential as well as important military firepower.

It is noteworthy that the American intervention in Iraq in 2003 led to the destruction of the unitary state structure of this once mighty and secular state of Mesopotamia. The intervention was orchestrated, decided and planned by the Bush Administration. It is precisely this US-led intervention that facilitated and allowed today the biggest part of Iraq to fall under the Iranian sphere of influence, a development unthinkable a decade ago. I will be bold. No Iranian leader or Iranian Government could better serve the regional interests of Iran than the Bush-Cheney Administration: one of the friendliest and closest both to Saudi Arabia and to Israel.

Let's also not forget what is happening in Yemen where, according to U.N. sources, civilians and non-military targets are being bombed indiscriminately. There are some voices stressing that the distance between some military operations and bombings and war-crimes is small, if there is one. Yemen is a chaos and a drama. A tragedy without the "catharsis". We opted to pursue a "blind eyes" policy. Europe should now be prepared to harvest the bitter fruits of this policy.

How prophetic reflection of today's situation in the Middle East were the writings of T.E. Lawrence, also known as the Lawrence of Arabia. I quote the last paragraph of the epilogue of his epic book titled "Seven Pillars of Wisdom - A triumph" It was written 100 years ago; it looks as if it was just written today: "...Mecca was to lead to Damascus; Damascus to Anatolia; and afterwards to Baghdad; and then there was Yemen."

The time is ripe to take stock and put into action some provisions from past U.N.S.C. Resolutions for establishing a regional security system. It should not be restricted to Iran, to Saudi Arabia and to the rest of the Gulf and Near East region. It should also be related to and connected with the European security and cooperation arrangements.

The bigger the conflict and the antagonism between Iran and Saudi Arabia are, the bigger is the necessity for the implementation of a comprehensive policy of equal distance between Tehran and Riyadh. Equal distance does not mean disengagement. On the contrary, it means impartiality in relation to the two pillars of antagonism and regional conflicts coupled by the willingness for persistent diplomatic and political engagement.

The latter is even more needed regarding Saudi Arabia. Riyadh's perception, which has been transformed into a conviction, that Washington (under the Obama – Biden Administration) shifted its policy in a way which favours Iran and Shia Islam does not necessarily and automatically serve EU's interests. The prevailing perception in Israel and Saudi Arabia is that the new readjustment of US priorities (under the Obama Administration) is accompanied by the rise of Shia Iran. However, a more sophisticated and balanced explanation is needed.

Those who are familiar with the Kingdom's Royal Family, think highly of the pro-reform and pro-modernization policies of Prince Mohammad bin Salman, the Interior and Defence Minister, who is currently second in line to the Saudi throne. Reforms and modernization are currently necessary preconditions for the stability, security and prosperity of Saudi Arabia and the prevention of proliferation into the Kingdom of disorderly "Arab Spring" style phenomena. At the same time, however, a potentially risky behaviour by Iran during the implementation of Saudi Arabia's anticipated, and welcomed reforms, needs to be prevented.

The process for the stabilization of the wider Middle East is impossible without Iran. My earnest wish is that Washington, under the new Administration, would work in order to

create the necessary conditions which would allow the inclusion of Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel - no matter how ambitious or even impossible mission it may sound today - in a functioning and balancing system of regional security. Already, Israel and Saudi Arabia have, at least since 2006, have set up discrete channels of communication and a good degree of mutual understanding. Their shared interests and in fact their Iran-related common concerns and fears exceed their differences (e.g. on the sidelined Palestinian issue).

President Donald Trump could eventually play in an unpredictable and innovative way.

His Administration could either cement the present status quo, siding unconditionally with Israel and Saudi Arabia or try to move forward.

At the early stage of his mandate:

- 1) Anticipate that he would slow down, if not stop, Iran's come-back.
- 2) He would renew his support, as he has already stated, to the US's "traditional friends" in the region. Israel, Saudi Arabia and Egypt traditionally fall under this category. Yet, I am not certain how this could apply to Saudi Arabia without the latter giving something in exchange and making some commitment in relation to Wahhabism.
- 3) If indeed President Donald Trump reaches a new equilibrium in U.S.'s relations with Russia's Putin, on a much higher and stronger interest based common denominator, then there is no doubt that the wider Middle East region would be part of this new equilibrium.

Furthermore, if logic prevails in the medium-term, both Iran and Saudi Arabia will realize that they would both benefit from an internationally monitored balanced and mutual reduction of their armaments. Logic and rational analysis, however, do not always prevail in international relations.

I am not also certain whether a reduction of the arms race would be beneficial to global arms industries and military equipment suppliers.

The ongoing arms race of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf Arab States are of crucial significance for the global, American and European in particular, arms industries. Saudi Arabia's armaments, despite its decreased defence budget due to the fall of oil prices, remain disproportionately high.

7. Problem No 4: The risk of nuclear proliferation in the Middle East

Why? How exactly? Iran's full come-back in the international community and the rapid upgrading of its importance and role in the eyes of Washington and the European Union have had some collateral side effects. Saudi Arabia, some Gulf countries but also Israel have expressed their objection to this development.

If anyone wants to connect all the pieces of the puzzle in the Middle East (from Pakistan to Iran and from the Persian Gulf all the way to the Mediterranean and Turkey), it would not be hard to notice the below the radar, frequently unrevealed, developments. To some they would appear to be banal conspiracy theories. Unfortunately, however, they are not conspiracy theories, but real realignments of alliances, holy or unholy, in order to deter Iran's nuclear power.

I am concerned that Saudi Arabia, Turkey and possibly Egypt are accelerating with different motivations, incentives and perspectives, their own nuclear programs. As things stand now, these countries might be seeking, if it is not in the pipeline already, a "safe haven" or a security umbrella to nuclear weapons know-how.

In Saudi Arabia and Israel as well, there is a common understanding, if not belief, that Washington, under the Obama Administration, has clearly changed its priorities and interests "without taking into account their impact to the interests of its traditional and longstanding friends and allies".

The failure of the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (N.P.T.) (New York in April-May 2015), combined with the Treaty's weakness to be fully applied and the non-participation of Israel to it, are the source of serious concerns.

A participating state in the NPT has the right to develop a nuclear program for peaceful purposes. Its nuclear program would be subject to monitoring/inspection from the Nuclear Safeguards system supervised by the International Atomic Energy Agency through a Safeguards Agreement and, in many instances, an Additional Protocol. Taking into consideration the above checks and balances, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for a state to successfully create a nuclear weapon which would remain unnoticed from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Under the current international legal framework, however, we cannot rule out two possibilities:

- 1) The diversion of some enriched uranium or plutonium from the nuclear program for peaceful purposes in order to create a nuclear weapon. It is unlikely that this kind of attempt will remain unnoticed from the IAEA. Equally difficult or impossible would be for a state to produce this material by creating and operating secret nuclear facilities (sneaking out), as Iran has allegedly tried to do. Five N.P.T. participating states have been accused by the IAEA that they kept their nuclear activities secret and away from international inspection: Iraq (1991), Romania (1992), North Korea (1993), Libya (2004) and Iran (2006).
- 2) A second scenario is for an N.P.T. participating state and under the monitoring of the IAEA, which has a highly advanced nuclear program for peaceful purposes, to unilaterally decide to "break-out" from N.P.T.'s systems of monitoring and inspection. By deciding to do so, the state would obviously violate international treaties and would alarm the international community, the IAEA and the United Nations Security Council. This is what happened in the case of D.P.R.K. (North Korea) in 2003.

We can understand that the nuclear capability of a certain state is directly intertwined with the state's potential plans to develop a nuclear weapon. The fact that NPT allows the enrichment of uranium and/or plutonium for peaceful purposes constitutes the biggest weakness of the international legal framework for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. This is because a state having this capability could suddenly break-out and use it illegally for the creation of nuclear weapons, with whatever consequences this means entails.

The risk for the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Eastern Mediterranean and Middle East is real.

8. Proposal No 4: Agreement for the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons in the Middle East

Egypt's proposal for the creation of a Nuclear-Free Zone in the Middle East should ultimately be the perfect solution. Greece has supported and adopted this proposal which is also included in recent trilateral high level declarations signed by Egypt, Cyprus and Greece.

However, Israel for its own reasons, is not going to accept this proposal. Israel's position can be summarized by the phrase "Israel would not be the first country to use nuclear weapons in the Middle East". So, is there a workable solution? I would propose a two-stage solution which could be adopted and put into implementation.

First stage. The elaboration and adoption of a multilateral, legally binding, Treaty for the no - use of nuclear weapons in the Middle East, which should also include Iran.

Second stage. The Treaty would include provisions for its transformation, within a reasonable but well-defined framework, into a Treaty banning – nuclear weapons in the wider Middle East and defining it as a nuclear-free zone. This would be in line with a recent, of a more general nature and scope, United Nations General Assembly Resolution. The Permanent Members of the U.N.S.C. and the European Union could also be contracting parties.

But, this is not the happy end of the story.

The existence of the Iranian long-range missiles is, or at least is perceived to be, a real threat also to Israel's security. Iran indeed possesses long-range missiles capable of carrying conventional heads. For sure, the expected improvements in their accuracy and delivery capacity will increase what Israel already assesses as a direct threat to its own security.

While addressing the specifics of the Middle East problematic, we should also devise a set of provisions leading to the proportional and simultaneous reduction of Conventional Armaments; this is a necessary condition for the reduction of the root causes and pretexts for a military conflict (let's call it the Middle East Conventional Forces Reduction Treaty).

For example it could take the shape of an open-ended multilateral process and legally binding instrument similar to the Helsinki Process (or the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe as it is currently known), and the Conventional Forces in Europe Treaty.

In this context, I could imagine an intermediate stage/set of legally binding Confidence Building Measures involving "arms inspections and observing military exercises".

9. Problem No 5: Lack of an institutional framework of cooperation from the Atlantic to the Persian Gulf

The signing of the Helsinki Final Act on 1 August 1975 was rightly considered a historic moment since it signaled the end of the Cold War. The negotiations were launched two years earlier, in July 1973, in Helsinki. In a nutshell, it took two entire years for the Act to be agreed upon and signed. Should there be a connection between this milestone and legally-binding text, which was signed 41 years ago and focused on the relations between NATO and the Warsaw Pact states with the situation in the wider Middle East?

In 1972, very few among the key players/negotiators of the Helsinki Final Act were optimistic that the negotiations would lead to a commonly-accepted and binding text. Despite their initial pessimism, the Act was signed by 35 member-states. In fact, the (then)

Security and Cooperation Conference in Europe was meeting the expectations of NATO and the Warsaw Treaty countries at this period.

What is dramatically missing today is an arrangement/structure of Cooperation and Security which would strongly link the M.E.N.A (Middle East North Africa) region, which should also include the Persian Gulf, with Europe.

What is urgently needed is a framework, a binding process of conditions, pre-requisites and parameters which would constitute a new framework for political, cultural, economic and security cooperation. This framework would include a number of commitments and obligations such as "all for all" instead of "all against all", "all for one" and "one for all". In due course, there could be a mixture of a Westphalian balance combined with the U.N. Charter Principles.

In fact, the Helsinki Final Act included the provision that "The participating states are convinced that security in Europe is to be considered in the broader context of world security and is closely linked with security in the Mediterranean area as a whole, and that accordingly the process of improving security should not be confined to Europe but should extend to other parts of the world, and in particular in the Mediterranean area."

The same Chapter included provisions for the importance of good neighbourly relations with the Mediterranean states according to the principles of the Charter of the United Nations. During the preparatory meetings of the Helsinki Final Act a number of Mediterranean countries were invited and participated i.e. Algeria, Morocco, Tunis, Egypt, Israel and Jordan submitting specific proposals.

At present, the list of the above mentioned states is not complete. So which states are missing? There are 17 independent countries and members of the U.N. plus, of course, the Palestinian Authority. The 18 states are: Iran, Iraq, Syria, Libya, Lebanon, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, Sudan – the states are 18 if South Sudan would participate-Eritrea, Djibouti, Ethiopia and Somalia.

10. Proposal Number 5: Expansion/Enlargement of O.S.C.E. to the MENA region

It is an ambitious and far-reaching proposal which is easier said than done. It is, however, useful and necessary. In due course it would become unavoidable.

We must build on the aforementioned wise and prophetic position of the Helsinki Final Act regarding the linkage of Europe's security with the Mediterranean. Now we must also include the wider Middle East.

The proposal could be framed accordingly:

First, we need to start a Process initially including the O.S.C.E. member-states, the previously-mentioned 18 states and the Palestinian Authority.

Second, the participating states would have to commit to provisions similar to those adopted within the O.S.C.E. process. Besides the general principles, which are also included in the Charter of the United Nations, there is a need to have a legally-binding Treaty for the balanced control and reduction of the Conventional Armed Forces in the Middle East. Something similar to the known Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, which was signed from the Heads of States and/or Governments of NATO's and Warsaw Pact's former member-states in Paris in November 1990. Needless to say that tough negotiations should be expected.

Third, during the completion of the negotiations for this new Process, which will include all states of the wider MENA region, O.S.C.E. could be replaced by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa.

The core difficulties of this initiative, in comparison to the original Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, are the following:

- 1) In contrast to the prevailing situation in the early 1970's, we do not have today two clearly-defined political-military blocks of states (NATO and Warsaw

Pact) which were then led by the world's two superpowers. From Atlantic (Morocco) all the way to the Persian Gulf, there are several states whose interests sometimes converge and other times diverge. The multi-polarity of the current system of interests should be reflected in the new system of regional stability.

- 2) Religion, or what is called as political Islam, is more powerful from the narrowly-defined state interests. This applies to both the Sunni and Shia versions of Islam. Europe, and what we more broadly call the West, does not have a recipe to address this phenomenon. It is for example difficult to see Saudi Arabia's Royal Family taking measures in order to control Wahhabism and reduce its influence. Despite some indications of restraint or containment, the same applies to Iran's relations with Shia Islam. In this framework, it would be very interesting to see how the states which are the pillars and holy shrines of Islam would react to the ongoing participation in the O.S.C.E. process of the Holy See (Vatican), which is also a member of the United Nations.
- 3) The "Arab Spring" puts also the final (?) seal to the end of an era that lasted for approximately 60 years, the era of Arab Nationalism, at least in the way that it was led by Egypt's emblematic Nasser.

The multi-polarity of the problems of and the challenges to the emerging situation can hardly be defined as a new system. It is not confined to the five key regional players. It is extended through its geo-religious dimension to almost all the countries. Last but not least I advocate for a special role and stake for China.

 I propose that the participation of the People's Republic of China is necessary for conducting and eventually completing this process.

The latter is a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and is being seen as a honest broker by all states-involved in the Middle East and Gulf wars and conflicts. China, with its policy of equal distance and equal balance is possibly the only global power which has the ability to discuss and interact with all states which are part of the problem.

Beijing is not the “Good Samaritan”. Its stance is dictated by China’s global economic interests. The latter, however, significantly coincide with the economic, energy and financial interests of almost all states of the wider Middle East region.

Therefore, the participation of the P.R. China to the proposed structure of “Cooperative Security” including Europe and the Middle East, through the adjustment and amendments of the conditions and scope of implementation of the Helsinki Final Act, is of fundamental importance.

This piece is adapted from the recent book-of Alexandros Mallias (in Greek) titled:

Vision and Chimera: Libya, Balkans, Turkey, Washington, Cyprus: A Diplomat’s Journey (I. SIDERIS Ed., p. 410, Athens, November 2016).