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Europe : old and new neighbourhood challenges

Abstract :

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The assessment of a map of ongoing crises in Europe by someone in charge of defence might be evocative of a remark made by Alexis de Tocqueville in June 1849 on his first day in office: *"Once I was settled at the Ministry and the state of affairs explained to me I was aghast at the number and extent of the difficulties that I saw."*

We might legitimately be afraid as we stand before an exceptionally synchronous, critical state of affairs – why all of these crises at the same time? [1] – and an implacable geopolitical reality: more than 2/3 of the thirds of the crises in the world – 70% in fact – are within a 3 to 6 hour flight from Brussels. [2]

We know that the geographical proximity of these theatres of war and tension is not necessarily a guarantee of understanding, since some strategic surprises have not been anticipated : the annexation of Crimea after a stealthy intervention, the rise of Da'esh (or ISIL, Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant) and the collapse of the Libya State well before 2011, the impact of which is now becoming clear. The speed at which these hotbeds have spread is no less astounding.

All of these crises are the symptoms of profound change and the way we address them demands thought about long term scenario, beyond immediate action to prevent or contain them. We must therefore not lower our guard in terms of our national capacity for analysis of a complex, overlapping and contradictory reality, to which there is no simple answer. We do not understand everything, notably ancient power struggles.

This is why it seems inadequate to attribute the simultaneity of these crises to single factors like the so-called American withdrawal, the wait-and-see attitude of the executive and the weakening of the *Pax Americana*, the limits of which its adversaries are testing, whilst its president is in tune with a public opinion which has not been as isolationist as this in fifty years and whilst he was elected on a double mandate of withdrawal from the previous theatres of war.

However the allies' obsession with what Washington does or not do highlights the structural weakness of a security system that links our democratic European states, i.e. a soft, wanted, but excessive, dependency on the part of most of its allies. There are exceptions however (France, UK and some rare others). During the Cold War defence spending was shared 50/50; that split now lies at 75/25. This comfortable dependency, which deserves detox treatment, exonerates us from making any kind of effort. It also typifies the Middle Eastern allies of the USA who rarely dispatch the 600 fighter planes belonging to the Gulf Cooperation Council (except recently, by the Emirates, to Tripoli against the Islamist militia of Misrata and Dawn in Libya and new behaviour in Syria by Saudi Arabia). The same applies to East Asia.

But the crisis map, concentrated to the west of the Ormuz Strait; points to Europe's strategic singularity. There is nothing comparable to the open or latent dangers except in South and East Asia but according to traditional, predictable Westphalian logic.

In this critical situation indifference is not an option. And as indicated by the President of the Republic of France, *"security lies in addressing crises"* [3]. There is therefore a French view of responsibility taking. But since the challenges are shared our partners will have to concede that France will not always be able undertake missions alone. Europeans and Africans will have to shoulder their own responsibilities. The next Peace and Security Forum in Dakar in December next, one year to the day after the Elysée Summit will provide a venue for strategic African thought to find its voice.

1. Speech delivered during the XII University Defence Summer in Bordeaux on 9th September 2014 in the presence of the French Minister of Defence, the Chairs of the Defence Committees at the Senate and the National Assembly, the German Secretary of State for Defence, the Chair of the Defence Committee at the Polish Diet, former Senegalese Foreign Minister, officers in command of the armies and main executives of the defence industry.

2. See Michel Foucher's map in annex and the International Crisis Group (10 of 12 situations deemed worse on 1/9/14 and 3 out of 3 cases of danger of conflict warnings).

3. Ambassadors' Conference, 28th August 2014.

The format of the coalitions is important: diplomatic in Ukraine, military/strategic in the Middle East under the aegis of the UN and with other regional players; the same in Libya and the Sahel/Sahara region. In this period of crisis the time for Europe to re-engage has come once again.

The neighbourhood crisis map indicates the wide variety of situations, to be completed (for interpretation's sake) with structural, explanatory data (base maps) of the tectonic (long term) shifts. It also suggests some shared points.

IN THE SOUTH, IN SAHEL/SAHARAN AFRICA: DIFFERENCES IN THE KINDS OF CHALLENGE DO NOT PRECLUDE THE UNITY OF THE THEATRE.

In the background there is a vital demographic dynamic (one example: the population of Mali has grown twofold in 15 years and has tripled in Bamako).

In Mali the State is far from being a failed one – it has been put to the test in the northern part of its territory. The second stage of negotiations between central government and the Tuareg ongoing since 1st September in Alger has been promising. Serval II, a military success, has been replaced by Operation Barkhane, which is of a regional nature.

In the Central African Republic of the Congo (CAR) there is no State at all. Destruction has been such that there are no schools, no healthcare, nor is there an operational legal system. But there are no less than 57 political parties in a country of 4 million inhabitants, vying for advantage in a country whose subsoil is one of the richest in the continent. The population is alternately hostage, victim and actor. Operation Sangaris has been effective with the support of the UN.

Challenges are the same everywhere: exercising basic sovereign duties (controlling territory, borders, peripheries, population and trade security, basic services); training African forces that are ready to act for collective security.

Libya has been torn apart by fighting between

revolutionaries. The State no longer exists, destroyed by the regime of the former "Guide" in terms of its vital components (institutions, police force, army, hinterland, mentality), which explains why it cannot bring order to bear. The Fezzan is turning into a sanctuary for AQIM.

We might also note the progress made in terms of security cooperation in Maghreb, primarily in Algeria.

MIDDLE EAST: EPICENTRE OF THE SECOND JIHADIST WAVE.

The base map shows the end of unity in the Arab world and the crisis suffered by the idea of the Nation-State; a worsening in the rivalry between Sunni and Shi'a, intra-Sunni division, simultaneous emergence of increasingly connected hotbeds (from Nigeria, Somalia, Sahel/Libya, Yemen to Syria/Iraq) in the field and also in cyberspace, which accentuates its impact (propaganda, recruitment of young, frustrated people).

In Syria the struggle between two radical elements (minority government and Da'esh) has forced half of the population to flee; the army is simply a regime militia. Bashar al-Assad has won his war: he controls the useful part of Syria and has left Da'esh to take the east. Is this a result of military non-intervention?

Iraq has been ravaged by an intercommunity civil war. Nouri al-Maliki broke up the Iraqi army: rebuilding a truly national, apolitical army will be the only way to conquer the Sunni jihadists who, according to Kenneth Pollack of the Brookings Institute, are firstly activists and then terrorists. The ISF (Iraqi Security Forces) is a Shi'a militia.

Da'esh emerged in Iraq with Iraqi activists, which then drew advantage from the chaos in Syria and the marginalisation of the Sunni. Institutions are circumnavigated. Da'esh is the central element of a large coalition, not an invasion (15,000 to 20,000 men). The phenomenon has undoubtedly grown but is not going to disrupt the West. But it is a non-state player with the means enjoyed by a State (weapons, money, information) and is acting as a lever to

mobilise unattached Sunni (25 million individuals) against sectarian regimes in Damascus and Baghdad. The coalition holds one third of the territory and expanded in December 2013 when the Nouri al-Maliki government tried to dismantle the Sunni protest camp in Ramadi. How can the Sunni be given a political and economic position in a decentralised Iraq ?

In Turkey, the new Prime Minister Ahmet Davutoglu, who was an active Foreign Minister with vision, nicknamed the Turkish "Kissinger, has promised peace with the Kurds in 2023. But by then will he have won control of the Turkish geographical "hub" which serves as a passage for terrorist groups and agents ?

In Saudi Arabia the Grand Mufti had condemned Da'esh as an impious movement that is incompatible with Islam. In a coalition Riyadh will have to try to distance itself from the Iraqi Sunni tribes of Da'esh, and not just complete the construction of a wall to separate it from Iraq.

This neo-jihadist threat calls for permanent strategic consultation between London, Paris, Berlin, Washington and also between regional actors (Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Jordan, UAE, Iran).

This will effect Iranian policy; the USA have advanced in their strategy to recover Iran and to make firm new balances of power.

Although the overlapping, multi-level conflicts of the Middle East recall those of the 30 Years' War in Europe (war of religion, interference of other powers, multiple fields of battle), should we not try to draw up – when the time is right – a new treaty based on that of Westphalia that would take the place of the Sykes-Picot Agreement, not to change borders but to establish a new balance of powers?

For the time being the connection between the different theatres of war has to be broken, notably that between Maidiguri (North East of Nigeria, held by Boko Haram, whose success in the north-east has been promoted by the lack of confidence between Nigeria and Cameroon) and Raqqa (Da'esh).

From a strategic point of view we might note the transition within the two Islamist movements from network logic over to one of territory which offers means (oil, money) but which will be more vulnerable to military intervention.

Finally Raqqa, Da'esh's HQ (established in the governorate's HQ but never bombed by Bashar al-Assad's forces) was the second of the Abbasid caliphate's capitals after a decision taken by Harun al-Rashid of a transfer from Baghdad which faced Persia to a site that faced Byzantium. We might find inspiration in our analyses to study in detail the historic references used by the leaders of Da'esh (who are using the black flag of the Abbasid caliphate and the practice of beheadings) because we cannot ignore the hypothesis of their structuring nature. Understanding the interpretation of the genesis of Islam (exile of Mohammed to Medina and return) adopted by Ben Laden and his acolytes was useful in understanding his strategic vision (close enemy, distant enemy).

EASTERN EUROPE IS IN TURMOIL DUE TO THE RETURN OF A TRADITIONAL GEOPOLITICAL SITUATION

The base map: as indicated by Vaclav Havel "*in history, Russia has expanded and contracted. Most of the conflicts originate in border disputes and in the conquest or loss of territory. The day we calmly agree where the European Union ends and where the Russian Federation begins half of the tension between the two will disappear.*" Calm evaporated when a geopolitical doctrine of exclusive spheres of influence emerged.

Bronislaw Geremek, a Polish historian and politician outlined the dimension of the dream in political action, allied to historic realism under test. "*There is no reason to be afraid. Dreams play an extremely important role in politics because they order the imagination and provide action with sense. In the European dream there is economic integration but also an opening to the East, including to the European republics of the former Soviet Union. The eastern border of Europe has been traced neither by history, nor geography nor culture:*

it is an American-style frontier, one which shifts and it always has done. Russia must accept this: a border is not a wall, a hermetic barrier between two civilisations. We too have to be realistic: Russia is something else. Russia is an empire.” [4]

For the time being at least we note the following :

- Russian military intervention is now proven because the Donbass is more difficult to absorb than Crimea,
- A logic of revenge is at work: making us pay for the collapse of the USSR,
- Attention must be paid to the tactical challenges of stealth war (in Crimea),
- It seems that economic sanctions have limited political effect.

The Grand Russian project for nationalism (nationalist regression) will continue to spread in Ukraine, Moldova and then, at the right time, on the occasion of the succession of Nursultan Nazarbayev, in Kazakhstan; the job of undermining the northern party of the state has already begun – Putin was surprised by Nazarbayev’s ability to create a State where none had existed previously.

One last point: seen from Moscow, the area extending from the Black Sea to the Caspian and the Eastern Mediterranean to the Arabian/Persian Gulf is the same strategic theatre, under threat from radical Sunni Islam. Yevgeny Primakov is quoted again as a reference.

CONCLUSION

We should cultivate the principle of prudence: the urgency associated to the proximity of the crises described here must not mask events to the east of the Ormuz Strait (Chinese revisionism regarding maritime law, a new interpretation of article 9 of the Japanese

Constitution (July 2014). Europeans have growing economic interests there; it is their responsibility to develop strategic dialogue. A collective approach would be the right one.

The Henry Kissinger’s most recent book, *World Order* [5], a distinction is made between those who accept the international system and the others. Is the quest for a “new world order” on the right scale? The challenge lies in working towards the completion of stable, regional orders, of regional structures for collective security both in West Africa and in the Near East. An integrated approach to global crisis management would be one way of doing it.

The European continent is the only one with experience in successful, long term regional experiences (European Union) or partial successes (the CSCE then the OSCE). The feature common to other regional geopolitical bodies in the world is the lack of collective security. There is therefore a European geopolitical model, a “concert of nations”, Member-States of the EU, which can serve as a reference on the right level. In their external projection Europeans should leave their theological and theoretical disagreements behind and address practical tasks once they decide to shoulder their responsibilities. The right approach would be to pool the EU’s capabilities, not to side-track history but to work on a complementary approach towards existing competences (strategic and diplomatic, technological and industrial). After a decade of interventionism by the UN and of some European players it is clear that thought about how to end crises is still lacking.

After all, in spite of the evident nature of security issues and our adversaries’ intentions, the uncertainty of finding a political solution to these crises and the haze surrounding any future regional orders, might be called, in a distorted quote from Carl von Clausewitz, the “fog of stability and peace”.

4. *L’Historien et le Politique, Interviews collated by Juan Carlos Vidal, Les Editions noir sur blanc, 1999. Read also the dialogue between Bronislaw Geremek and Michel Foucher on « Les frontières de l’Europe » held in Warsaw on 5th February 1992 (published in Questions et entretiens d’Europe, Fondation Robert Schuman, July 2008*
<http://www.robert-schuman.eu/fr/entretiens-d-europe/0027-les-frontieres-de-l-europe-dialogue-entre-michel-foucher-et-bronislaw-geremek>).

5. <http://www.penguin.com/book/world-order-by-henry-kissinger/9781594206146>

ANNEXE



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