

NATO AND THE ARAB SPRING-THE MEANS FOR A COMPLEX SITUATION

НАТО И АРАПСКАТА ПРОЛЕТ-СРЕДСТВОТА ЗА ЕДНА СЛОЖЕНА СИТУАЦИЈА

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Abstract: NATO hasn't disappeared with the end of the cold war. The new strategic concept of the Lisbon summit in 2010 and the military intervention in Libya in 2011 which implied it at the heart of the "Arab spring" are good evidences for this. This spring was first a source of hope, but quickly became a topic about eventual threats. Islamist victories and salafist violence's need NATO care.

The organization have means to face them, with security cooperation such Mediterranean dialogue and Istanbul cooperation initiative, and targeted operations, like Active Endeavour and Ocean shield.

Key words: NATO-Arab spring-Islamism-salafism-security cooperation

Апстракт: НАТО не исчезна со завршувањето на „Студената војна“. Самитот од Лисабон и новиот стратегиски концепт од 2010 година како и воената интервенција во Либија од 2011 година која беше носител на „Арапската пролет“ претставуваат евидентни докази за тоа. Таа пролет, на самиот почеток беше извор на надеж, но многу брзо премина во тема за евентуални закани. Исламистичките победи и салафистичкото насилство побаруваа заштита од НАТО. НАТО има начини за соочување со нив, првенствено преку безбедносната соработка како што е Медитеранскиот договор и Истанбулската иницијатива за соработка, како и операциите како што се „активни напори“ и „океански штит“.

Клучни зборови: НАТО, арапска пролет, исламизам, салафизам, безбедносна соработка.

INTRODUCTION

The end of the Cold War and the conflicts between the East and the West might have spelt the end for NATO, which was created to answer the threat of the Soviet Union. It is common knowledge that no such thing happened and that NATO not only survived but was also reinforced afterwards. At the Lisbon Summit of November 19 and 20, 2010, NATO voted its new strategic concept, renewing its commitment to mutual defense: the threat of nuclear proliferation and weapons of mass destruction with the anti-missile shield, the emphasis put on cyberdefence, energy safety, cooperative safety, smart defense, and the fight against terrorism are essential concerns, requiring action and structuring its approach (Mongrenier, 2012).

The MAY 20, 2012 Chicago Summit of the Atlantic Council reaffirmed the main three tasks of NATO, i.e. collective defense, the management of crises and cooperative security, and mentions UN-mandated operation Unified Protector, that is to say the military intervention in Libya in 2011.

The intervention is at the heart of what is referred to in Europe and the Western world as «the Arab Spring», which is presented as the uprising of the oppressed people fighting for Freedom and Democracy, more particularly the surge of young people, using the resources of internet and social networks against well-established dictatorships.

Even if the revolt started in January 2011, i.e. in Winter and not in Spring, with the immolation of a young man in Tunisia on December 17 2010, the word «Spring» is here used in reference of the European Revolutions of 1848 called «the Springtime of the Peoples», and more generally in reference to all the insurrections of oppressed people, like the «Prague Spring» of 1968.

NATO could not but feel concerned with the events that directly hit some of its member states- France, Turkey and Italy among others.

However, if the upheaval raises hopes, isn't it as well a cause for concern and potential threats? Does the Alliance have the means to face them?

IS THE ARAB SPRING A HOPE OR A THREAT?

It took less than a month for the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia to collapse (December 17, 2010- January 14 2011); in Egypt, less than three weeks for Hosni Mubarak to resign after the huge demonstrations on the Tahrir Square in Cairo (January 25-February 2 2010). In Libya (February 17- October 20 2010), the uprising of the people in Benghazi ended with the brutal death of Mouammar Kaddafi. In Syria, in March 2011, the initial peaceful demonstrations in Deraa were brutally repressed and triggered the ongoing civil war (see declaration of June 2012 of UN Chief of military peacekeeping forces). In Yemen, in 2011,

the early stages of protest against President Ali Abdallah Saleh occurred in February 2011 and ended with the resignation of the President and the election of Abd Mansour Ali on February 21 2012. Bahrain and Morocco may add up to the list but there was no violence used in the latter.

"Arab Spring, The Recovery of Arab Dignity" is the book published by the great writer Tahar ben Jelloun, which is echoed by Bernard Guetta, a former journalist at Le Monde (French daily newspaper) in AN 1 des Révolutions arabes (Year One of the Arab revolutions) and according to whom «nothing can stop the Arab people, especially the Arab youth». Bernard-Henri Lévy, France's most famous proponent of the military intervention in Libya, hence a supporter of NATO's intervention, is convinced that the democratic emancipation of the Arab countries is under way. This idea is widespread among journalists, intellectuals and politicians- it is a remote reminder of the American neo-conservative Democratic and Liberal plan for a «great Middle East» which, along with other factors, was at the origin of the Iraqi war in March 2003- with the major difference that the people act by and for themselves.

However, can't «a slight scent of ethnocentrism- or western-centrism» be noted in that approach that refers to American and European history? Professor Mathieu Guidère points that in Arabic the words «revolt» and «revolution» are synonymous (*thawra*), with negative connotation because generating *fitna* (sedition) among the *oumma*, the group of believers. It's why Arabs use the word NAHDA (awake) (Guidère, 2012). The main claim of the insurgents was dignity, i.e. social justice, and the end of corruption- not Democracy per say.

The Arab Spring is characterized by the absence of leaders and thinkers, and by the impossibility to identify specific ideologies and programmes- consequently the Islamist and Salafist groups, the only forces that are both organizationally and ideologically well-structured, is coming to the fore.

Should the renewal of political Islam in a complicated and confusing context be a ground for concern?

The hope that had risen when it was believed that the democratic -or even liberal-political forces came into power was seriously undermined by the result of the elections which were undeniably won by the islamist parties.

In the current context, by «Islamism» is meant an ideology that aims at restoring the *Daoula*, or the Islamic State, as idealized by its supporters, thus involving the conquest of political power. Modernity is used by Islamists for whom «Revelation serves the purpose of revolution» (Olivier Roy, 2002). The movement of the Muslim Brotherhood, founded in

1928 in Egypt by Hassan el Banna, an iconic figure, is the matrix of Islamist movements which has spread through the land of Islam. The Palestinian Hamas, the Libyan Party for Justice and Construction, the Egyptian party for Freedom and Justice, Tunisia Ennahda, the Moroccan party for Justice and Development are the offspring of the Brotherhood and have maintained ties to a greater or lesser extent with the Egyptian Movement. They agree to play by democratic rules even if they have sometimes resorted to violence in the past (Hamas). They have reacted the rewards of their work through their networks of operational solidarity, that go deep into Arab societies.

On November 14 2011, the Ennahda movement won 40% of the votes in the Constituent Assembly election in Tunisia and Ennahda's leader Jebali was appointed Prime Minister. In 2011 The Party for Justice and Development reached 27% of the votes in Morocco, and his leader also became Prime Minister after being appointed by King Mohamed VI. It is interesting to note that those two parties have formed a coalition with other political parties of different opinions (like the left-wing Ettakatol party in Tunisia).

Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood obtained a relative majority in the Constituent Assembly and at June 2012 her candidate for the Presidential campaign Mohammed Morsi won the election with 52% in the second round, against the army's unofficial candidate Ahmed Chafik.

However, the Muslim Brotherhood's landslide victory did not reach Libya, the Party for Justice and Construction obtaining 21.3% of the votes far behind the Alliance of National (so-called «liberal») Forces which won 48.8% of the votes, in the election for the National General Congress of July 7 2012. The events in Yemen have no link with the Arab Spring - it was a war between leaders, controlled by Saudi Arabia and the USA, forcing President Saleh to leave his seat thanks to an «election» prepared for his vice-president and friend Mansour Hadi (Picinin, 2012).

Should the Islamist victory raise concern or even skepticism among Western countries?

In Morocco, the Party for Justice and Development recognizes the power of the King and seems to coexist with the makhzen (the Royal control over the country). Its intentions have remained peaceful and conservative so far: after all, isn't the King a direct descendant of the Prophet and the Commander of the Believers?

In Tunisia, Ennahda claims to be a follower of the Turkish AKP Islamist Party which has been in power for years without questioning the fundamental principles of the secular State, while «Islamizing» the legislation whenever it has the opportunity to do so. In February 2012, however, the Ennahda Parliamentary leader suggested that the system of Islamic principles become one of the key references of the future constitution, which could

not include provisions conflicting with the Koran. A bill has been submitted to the Parliament to punish infringements upon «Sacred» values. Prime Minister Jebali himself went as far as bringing up the possibility of a sixth caliphate...

A similar ambiguity is to be noted with the Egyptian Party for Freedom and Justice. The younger members of the party claim that democracy is essential, that Coptic Christians should be considered as brothers and that woman should be equal to men. President Morsi stated that he would not put into question the peace treaty with Israel and reacted very firmly against the commando attacks in Sinai on August 5, 2012. However, a substantial number of «Brothers» do not identify with the modernism of young executives often educated in Western countries, but in the famous quote: «Allah is our objective, Prophet Muhammad is our leader, and the Koran is our constitution».

Similarly Western decision-makers worry about the key part played by the Syrian Brothers at the heart of the revolt, even when the leaders of the Syrian army affirm their determination that Syria respects all confessions.

The problem comes mostly from the violent Salafist groups for which the Arab Spring is an unexpected opportunity to be back under the spotlight.

Salafism advocates a return to the idealized Islam of pious ancestors or salafs that give priority to the Sunna and the practice of the Prophet (Rougier, 2008). Ibn Taimiyya in the Twelfth Century and Ibn Abd El Wahhab, the founder of Saudi Wahabism, in the Eighteenth Century are key references of Salafism, having promoted and in stored a rigorist if not puritan Islam.

Salafism often appears in a quietist, unpolitical way, mostly bent on having the believer follow the precepts of the Koran literally. But it is only a short step between the latter approach and Jihadism, or the use of violence in the name of Jihad, sometimes called «the Holy War» -a Christian word- be it local Jihad, as in Chechnya or Afghanistan, or global Jihad (Al Qaida). «All Jihadists are Salafists, by definition, but all Salafists may not necessarily be Jihadists» (Malek Chebel).

It's in Egypt that Salafists have achieved a significant political breakthrough with 25% of the votes in the Constituent Assembly election going to the Al Nour Party (the Light). This party advocates a society where Charia law would apply relentlessly, particularly to women's status, thus challenging the Muslim Brothers who look undeniably keen on modernism and reforms in comparison.

The situation is fairly similar in Tunisia where Salafists are quite powerful. The movement did not run for the 2011 election. A mere Tunisian Party for Prosperity was set up in 2012, a Salafist party, which called for the return of bigamy- Salafists prefer to use street demonstrations as a weapon, be it **sometimes violent**.

Such was the case in Tunisia where riots occurred recurrently. In June 2012 the pretext was an exhibition of paintings that were found anti-Islamic, In October 2011, the premises of a TV Channel were destroyed after a «blasphemous» film had been broadcasted. In April 2012, Salafist students caused violent incidents at the Department of Humanities in the Manouba to demand that female students wear the niqab, unsuccessfully. The pressure being put on Ennahda is quite obvious and some of the most conservative members of the party are quite convinced by it.

President Moncef Marzouki, who comes from the Secular Congress for the Republic, considers that «this is a loud and dangerous phenomenon....which eventually turns out to be not that threatening for society because it is massively rejected. The rejection is shared by the State authorities, including Ennahda» (Marzouki, 2012). Let's believe in his optimism...

If Egypt has become familiar with partisan Salafism in the elections, it also faces Jihadist Salafism. After all, isn't Ayman al Zawahiri, the new leader of Al Qaida, also from Egypt? E. In 2011, even if Jamma Islamaya, an important terrorist group, was dismantled after the frightful attack in Luxor in 1997, terrorist attacks have nevertheless carried on. Between 2004 and 2006, 130 persons died during a series of attacks on seaside resorts in Sinai, where eight Israelis were also killed in 2011. Al Tawhid wal Djihad claimed responsibility for that attack.

Last August 5, 16 Egyptian soldiers were shot by another commando unit who tried in vain to enter Israel, which triggered an immediate reaction from President Morsi, who ordered air strikes, with the agreement of his neighboring state. Sinai has for some time become a home for Jihadists, and Al Qaida has started operating there, fearing a union with Jund Ansar Allah, an important Palestinian group from the Gaza strip (Boltanski, 2012).

On Monday September 17, Imam Fouad Ashoush declared a fatwa sentencing to death the film crew of the Innocence of Muslims on Jihadist internet websites.

In post-Khadafi Libya no significant Salafist victory has been registered in the polls. Salafists have shown their influence by using arms. Over the last few months, attacks have been committed against Foreigners and British and American- which climaxed with the commando attack on Ambassador Stevens in Benghazi. The Libyan authorities have blamed Ansar al Charia, a Salafist group, which has however denied the accusation (Zelin, 2012). A group named Shield of Jihad is also suspected.

Finally, Syria's armed opposition includes Jihadist fighters from a variety of movements, among which Abdallah Azzam's Brigades, the Al Nusrah Front or Martyr Al Baraa Ibn Malik's Brigade, and Al Qaida itself. However, the relationship between those groups and the Syrian Free Army, which has far more members, are tense and even hostile.

NATO, along with the EU, has the authority to tackle this major issue. What means does it have to do so? Two types: security cooperation and targeted actions.

Security cooperation is provided within the framework of the Mediterranean dialogue and the Istanbul cooperation initiative. They cover the strategic area of the «great Mediterranean region» (Mongrenier, 2012) which goes as far as the Atlantic border regions of the Mediterranean Sea, the Persian Gulf and the Middle East up to the Indus and the Black Sea.

NATO's Mediterranean dialogue, instituted in 1994, is based upon the principle that security in Europe is closely linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean area (Mongrenier, 2011). Its general objective is:

to contribute to security and stability in the area

to instore better mutual understanding

to do away with misconceptions about NATO in the countries that takes part in the Dialogue.

The work programme also includes military elements, with port visits by NATO's standing Naval Forces, on-site train-the-trainer sessions by mobile training teams and visits by NATO experts.

The Dialogue involves 7 non-NATO member States- Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative which was launched at the summit organized in the Turkish capital in June 2004 aims at contributing to long-term global and regional security by offering countries of the broader Middle East practical bilateral security. UAE, Bahrein, and Qatar are part of the agreement which covers number of security issues- terrorism, NBC weapons, trafficking.

The need for NATO to combine security cooperation and targeted actions with bilateral agreements with the countries of the broader Middle East was emphasized during the Marseille NATO Parliamentary Assembly summit on April 11-13, 2012, in front of Member States representatives.

These general frameworks are combined with targeted actions. In the first place, UN-sanctioned, NATO-led intervention (**UN Security Council Resolution 1973**) was the major intervention in the «Arab Spring». With the support of the US, France and Great Britain started a joined operation, similarly to the war in Afghanistan.

No intervention in Syria is planned, even if some NATO member states have become involved individually- France, Germany, Turkey and the USA.

Active Endeavour, a maritime initiative was launched right after 9/11, 2001, on October 26, 2001 (Opération Active Endeavour, 2011). It was the only Article 5 NATO anti-

terrorist operation that was launched that early. Its target was to detect and dissuade terrorist activities in the Mediterranean region.

In March 2003, Active Endeavour was expanded to include providing escorts to non-military ships from Alliance member states requesting them.

Thus 10,000 merchant ships were hailed and 155 ships being identified as suspicious were subsequently inspected, thanks to a naval task force. The whole Mediterranean region therefore benefits from enhanced security- all the more so since members of the Mediterranean Dialogue also cooperate to Active Endeavour.

Another example is **Operation Ocean Shield**, launched in August 2009 and aiming at deterring piracy in the Gulf of Aden and off the Horn of Africa (Opérations de lutte contre la piraterie, 2011). Yet that example is only distantly related to our topic. The common point is the NATO intervention off Yemen and Somalia, two countries that have been undermined by Jihadists movements- the Shebab in Somalia and Al Qaida in the Arabian Peninsula in Yemen. The purpose of the operation is not to watch Salafist activists though.

CONCLUSION

Strategically, NATO goes well beyond a security coalition of its own members. The Alliance is also a community of Euro-Atlantic states and a hub for cooperation with other states, among which those who experienced the «Arab Spring». Such, NATO is a major security factor for all of these countries.

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