Program in Arms Control, Disarmament and International Security

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
The Southern Flank - NATO's Neglected Front

Edward A. Kolodziej, Director
Program in Arms Control, Disarmament and International Security
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

NATO's southern flank, extending from the Iberian peninsula in the western Mediterranean to Greece and Turkey in the east, rarely receives the attention that its strategic importance deserves. The Mediterranean to which the southern flank is exposed links 300 million peoples, upwards of 1200 vessels daily ply its waters, over 50 percent of Europe's energy is supplied by countries bordering the southern Mediterranean, trade and economic exchange are critical to the economic health of regional states, and the armed force strength of the littoral states total over three million.

The significance of the southern flank and the problems it poses for the security, economic well-being, and political stability of the alliance may be viewed from three progressively larger perspectives one successively encompassing the other: the military balance between NATO and Warsaw Pact forces, the requirements of alliance cohesion as a prerequisite for NATO use and access to the strategic assets of the region, and the national conflicts, civil strife, religious and ideological clashes and socio-economic change sweeping over the peoples of the littoral states of the southern Mediterranean – conditions that invite the disruption of critical energy resources flowing to the West as well as foreign intervention and Soviet expansionism.

The East-West Balance on the Southern Flank

The geo-strategic conditions of the southern flank contrast sharply with NATO's central front. In the central region, the armies of the two alliances are directly arrayed against each other. NATO and Warsaw pact forces occupy...
established positions and are assigned similar roles. They are supported by an elaborate logistical infrastructure as well as transportation and communications networks that have been extensively developed over 35 years. The Soviet threat is clear and present. Except for France, other NATO partners are integrated into an over-all plan for the use of allied forces against a possible Warsaw pact attack.

The stability and settled expectations of the central front are absent on the southern flank. The Soviet and Warsaw Pact threat appears less imminent and dangerous to the southern NATO states beset by their own quarrels and internal divisions. The expanse and widely varied terrain of this region create discrete strategic problems for the NATO states. Three distinct theatres of operations can be identified. In the west, Spain and Portugal protect the western-most redoubt of the alliance's defense line. In the middle lies Italy. In the east, Greece and Turkey share responsibility for the eastern Mediterranean. Communications and joint planning between these theatres is fragmented and uncoordinated.

The Mediterranean imposes still other security requirements not found on NATO's central front. Lines of communications must be kept open across the broad expanse of the Mediterranean which links, as it has for over two millennia the peoples of Europe with those occupying the southern littoral. These bonds of time and circumstance throw into serious question whether the sector mentality currently dominating NATO thinking can be maintained. Threats to NATO countries arise not only from the confrontation with the Warsaw Pact but from sources deep within the political and socio-economic structure of the peoples inhabiting the southern Mediterranean.
At first glance, it would appear that the military balance of East-West forces on the southern flank is at least as favorable as on the central front. Figure 1 compares NATO and Warsaw pact land and air forces in both theatres. On the central front, 26 NATO divisions face 57 Pact divisions whereas the ratios are slightly more advantageous to the West on the southern tier where the balance is respectively 37 to 71 divisions. Brigade and regimental strength favor the central front. Tank imbalances are particularly noticeable in the center where the ratios are more than three to one in favor of Communist bloc forces. In the south, they are closer to two to one. Artillery and motor balances are again more favorable in the south than in the center. On the central front, the ratio is roughly two and a half to one against the alliance while in the south one can count on a rough parity. Gross ratios conceal serious imbalances in certain sectors in the south. While Greece and Turkey together have 4,000 tanks and 400 artillery pieces they confront Pact and Soviet forces with 11,000 tanks and 11,000 artillery pieces. The geography of northern Greece and Turkish Thrace is also suitable for armored offensive operations capable of being reinforced by amphibious forces.

Ground force ratios of southern flank 'front line' NATO members directly opposing Warsaw Pact states vary. Eight Italian divisions face 10 Soviet and Hungarian divisions. These Pact forces could be reinforced by another seven divisions which currently are not maintained at a high state of readiness. Three airborne, air mobile, and assault divisions can also be added to these elements. Against Turkish and Greek forces the Warsaw Pact deploys 34 Soviet Romanian and Bulgarian divisions. An additional 20 Soviet divisions could be committed against eastern Turkey.
Numbers do not tell the whole story. Greek and Turkish forces are particularly vulnerable. The defensive operations of Greek and Turkish forces are complicated by the narrowness between their borders (Thrace) and the Aegean (30-50 miles in width). Resupply would be difficult because of Soviet land-based aircraft and bolstered naval forces concentrated in the area. Turkey’s northern border with the Soviet Union stretches 780 miles over rugged territory favorable for defensive action. Both Greece and Turkey, however, sorely lack modern weapons and support equipment. These include anti-tank weapons, attack helicopters, radar, command, control, and communications systems, and air defense missile systems. Their M-47 and M-48 tanks, the mainstays of their armored forces, are considered antiquated. Some material dates back to World War II. Economic constraints slow modernization.

The picture in Italy is better. In contrast to Greece and Turkey, its forces are closely integrated into NATO planning. Its tank forces are equipped with 920 Leopard I battle tanks and its artillery and armor are being progressively modernized. Italy has also developed a modern weapons complex and has the technical infrastructure to place its forces at a level of operational readiness on a par with the states of the central front.

The land forces of Portugal and Spain are more oriented toward central front operations. Portuguese forces suffer from equipment and support deficiencies. Spain’s military role is in doubt. Its forces are outside NATO’s integrated framework. A pending referendum is to decide whether Spain will remain within the Atlantic Alliance. Except for a Portuguese brigade earmarked for northern Italy, the Iberians are not likely to provide major reinforcements to the other southern flank states.
The air balance particularly in the eastern Mediterranean, prompts concern. The central front ratio of three-to-two in favor of Warsaw Pact air forces is closer to two and a half to one in the south. While NATO and Warsaw Pact forces deploy approximately the same numbers of attack aircraft, Soviet interceptors outnumber NATO aircraft by a five-to-one ratio (1560 to 295). Warsaw Pact forces appear to be in a strong air defense posture. They utilize Su-15s, MiG-21s, MiG-25s, and Yak-28Ps, these are supported by Tu-126 airborne warning and control systems. Perhaps up to 100 Tu-26 Backfires and additional Tu-22 Blinder bombers can also be deployed against NATO ground and naval forces. These forces are supplemented by an impressive air transport capability and over two thousand helicopters. Libyan bases may also be available to the Soviet Union in a crisis. Access to them and to Soviet combat aircraft in Libyan hands would outflank NATO naval forces and place the Sixth Fleet at risk.

Greek and Turkish air forces will be hard pressed to cope with their Pact counterparts. Much of the aircraft available to Athens and Ankara is over twenty years old. Turkey's F-100s, a Korean War vintage aircraft, is obsolete while its F-104 fleet is quickly approaching the same state. While it has approximately 168 F-4s and F-5s, these forces are far from being fully operational. As one analyst observes, 'fewer than one-half of Turkey's planes are combat ready, spare parts inventories are low or non-existent, and many planes have been cannibalized for parts, pilot training, consequently, has been limited.'10 Greece is not in much better shape. It deploys A-7s, F-104s, and F-5s as attack aircraft and F-4s, F-5s, and French Mirage F-1s as interceptors. Both seek F-16s. Turkey may have to settle for F-5s (with funds to be supplied by Saudi Arabia). Greece is negotiating for F-16 and Mirage 2000s.
Only Italy is moving toward rapid modernization with the introduction of the multi-purpose Tornado into its inventory. The Portuguese air force is very small and not consequential as a combat or air defense force. Spain has attempted to keep more abreast of modernizing trends although its forces also need upgrading. Currently its forces comprise six interceptor squadrons of F-4s and French Mirage Js and newer F-1s.

For NATO to hold the Mediterranean, there is a need for close cooperation of air and naval units through the region. A satisfactory air defense system has yet to be achieved either between national air and naval forces or between NATO-designated units. The states of the southern tier are focused on their own theatres. NATO's air forces on the southern flank have not resolved three essential problems: command and control at an all-theatre level, in time of crisis, rapid absorption of national units into NATO's command structure, and smooth and workable coordination between air, ground, and sea commands.

The naval balance in the Mediterranean is paradoxically, both unsettling and reassuring. Gone is the monopoly once enjoyed by the Sixth Fleet. The Soviet Union has steadily built a formidable Baltic Sea fleet and Mediterranean squadron. They are now capable of challenging NATO control of the Mediterranean in wartime. They already project Soviet naval power beyond the coastal limits of the Soviet Union to which Moscow's naval forces were previously restricted. They underwrite Soviet diplomacy in the region and bolster Moscow's ties with its clients. Soviet vessels have important base rights in Syria at Latakia and Tarsus. They also have repair, maintenance anchorage privileges in Yugoslavia, Greece, Libya and Algeria.
Figure 2 summarizes Soviet naval capabilities in the region. The Black Sea fleet is composed of three aircraft carriers (one VTOL and 2 helicopters), 25 attack submarines, 77 combat ships (9 cruisers, 16 destroyers, and 52 frigates and corvettes), and 25 amphibious ships. It can also deploy 90 bombers and 20 fighter-attack aircraft. The Mediterranean squadron provides a Russian constant presence capable of exploiting the troubled political waters of the region.

Offsetting Soviet naval power are combined NATO forces, including the Sixth Fleet which has been stationed in the Mediterranean since the late 1940s. NATO forces are clearly stronger than their Soviet counterparts. The Sixth Fleet commands three aircraft carriers (two with 115 attack aircraft and a third for helicopters). These are complemented by 6 attack submarines, 14 combat ships (3 cruisers, five destroyers, and 6 frigates), and 4 amphibious ships. The combined forces of Greece, Turkey, Italy, and Spain count 43 submarines, 308 combatants, and two helicopter carriers. If France is added, alliance forces have access to 2 aircraft carriers, 9 submarines, 21 combat ships, and three support ships. The three principal choke points in the Mediterranean -- the Dardanelles, Suez, and Gibraltar -- are in the hands of friendly powers.

The Soviets have apparently assumed a defense posture in the region relative to NATO forces. Increases in Soviet naval power in the late 1970s have been earmarked for the Pacific and Atlantic fleets while the Fifth Eskadra in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea Fleet have remained at approximately the same size. Soviet naval power is suited to the active defense strategy designed for these forces and the diplomatic role in which they have been cast. They are a useful instrument of Soviet political penetration and, if necessary, a visible military presence. During the Yom Kippur war the Fifth Eskadra was expanded to 96 units. During the recent Lebanon crisis, Soviet naval power in the
Mediterranean was estimated at 45 units.

NAIO's naval forces sufficiently counterbalance Soviet naval power to raise questions as to whether the American profile might well be lowered in order to bolster Atlantic Fleet deployments supporting NAIO's northern defenses without reducing the diplomatic and symbolic functions of American naval presence in the Mediterranean. Several benefits might flow from a concentration of American naval forces in the Atlantic. First, elements of the Sixth Fleet could fulfill their mission of supporting the central front more efficiently than being tied to the Soviet land mass that abuts the Mediterranean through the Turkish straits. Currently, naval attention is often more focused on deploying ships and air squadrons to relieve those on duty with the Sixth Fleet than in supporting air and ground forces in the southern theatre. For the Atlantic Fleet, Sixth Fleet deployments, as one informal observer notes, has become 'employment ends in themselves, driving the entire operating cycle of ships and squadrons.

Second, the Sixth Fleet is ill-suited to address the internal political and economic problems that beset the region, which are the principal sources of NAIO's security problems. It cannot arrest change in the region. The 1958 Lebanese intervention had no lasting favorable result. More recently, while Sixth Fleet strikes against rebel forces had no impact on the Lebanese civil war, it caused needless civilian casualties and damage and provoked widespread resentment among Moslems against the United States. American forces also come dangerously close to engaging Soviet personnel assisting Syrian defense forces. The Sixth Fleet's marine contingent became more a target than a deterrent to local terrorism as some 250 Marines needlessly lost their lives in a doubtful political operation, ending in the ignominious retreat of U.S. forces.
Third, the Europeans would have a role that would match their interest and capability. They have a greater interest than the United States in keeping Middle East oil flowing to their industries. Their naval presence in the Mediterranean is established by obvious security and economic interests and honored by established historical precedent. Their knowledge of the region and access to all of the peoples inhabiting the area is as good as that of the United States. The French, British, and Italian units distinguished themselves for bravery and tact during the Lebanon crisis. An enlarged European military and political presence, to match Europe’s economic dependency on the region, might be coaxed into being and employed as a more effective instrument of western aims and interests than it has been until now. Meanwhile, if needed, detachments of the Atlantic Fleet could be quickly dispatched to the Mediterranean to bolster NATO’s posture.

Finally, a heightened European role in the Mediterranean might ease strained U.S. relations with Greece. The Papandreou government makes much of the distinction between NATO and American purposes in access to Greek bases. This distinction might well be crystallized in an agreement between NATO and Greece to preserve these rights while Athens and Washington quarrel over their differences.

**NATO Access to the Strategic Assets of the Southern Flank**

Whether NATO will have access to the strategic assets of the Mediterranean may well depend more on resolving disputes within its own camp than on the cooperation of the Soviet Union. The major problem is Turkish-Greek enmity, rooted in centuries of strife, sustained by mutual suspicions and bitter
recriminations. Today differences center principally on the future of Cyprus as well as sea and air rights in the Aegean. Neither NATO nor the United States has been able to resolve these disputes. Only a stern warning from President Lyndon Johnson of dire consequences restrained Turkey in 1964 from invading Cyprus to protect the rights of the Turkish settlement which makes up twenty percent of the island’s population. In 1974 Turkey ignored warnings from Washington and invaded Cyprus in response to a coup d’état engineered by the Greek junta to overthrow the Makarios government. Turkish forces gradually extended their control over 30 percent of the island. They have remained on the island ever since despite efforts by NATO and the United States to reach a political settlement on a new Cyprus government and a withdrawal of Turkish forces. The dispute took another bad turn in November 1983 when Rauf Denktash, leader of the Turkish minority, declared the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus as an independent state. The action violated U.N. resolutions calling for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Cyprus. What began as a temporary invasion to protect Turkish Cypriots risks being transformed into a permanent division of the island and Greek-Turkish hostility would be further institutionalized.

American handling of the events before and after the Turkish invasion have prompted both Greece and Turkey to blame the United States for the imbroglio and the slow movement toward a settlement. Its credibility as a mediator has been seriously compromised in both camps. The arms embargo passed by Congress in 1975 to punish Ankara for violating American domestic law and accords with Turkey designed to preclude the use of U.S. equipment for invasion purposes, inflamed rather than calmed the Turkish government. Washington appeared to side with Athens. The resumption of arms assistance in 1978 and the U.S. Turkish
Defense Agreement of 1980 helped somewhat to improve relations, but resentments over bruised national feelings still run deep within Turkish ruling circles and public opinion. The self-imposed 7-to-10 ratio of arms assistance, respectively, to Greece and Turkey grates on the Turks, who believe their critical geographic position and material contribution to NATO defenses warrant greater understanding and more generous assistance. In a reversal Ankara now warns Washington against another resort to an arms embargo to discipline Turkey. Turkish Defense Minister Haluk Bayulken put the United States on notice that the "Turkish people will not tolerate another set of pressures like the arms embargo."

The Greek government and people have been no less disenchanted with Washington. The Karamanlis government which replaced the Greek colonels withdrew Greece from NATO within hours after the Turkish invasion. Failure to stop Turkey was laid at Washington's door for having ignored the island's problems while implicitly siding with Turkey on the issue. Whatever the merit of Karamanlis' change, it responded to popular feeling in Greece across the political spectrum. Nationalistic sentiments of the Right and Left were united on the Cyprus issue. The Left further accused the United States not only of supporting the army dictatorship but of instigating the coup attempt of Makarios. NATO, the United States, and the Greek colonels were identified as acting in collusion by Leftist partisans. When Greece returned to the NATO military organization in 1980, it placed several conditions on its reintegration into the alliance. Prominent among them is its insistence on the prior recognition of the status quo ante before the Turkish invasion before it would consent to the full establishment of the Greek NATO headquarters in Larissa.
Both Athens and Ankara have attempted to widen their diplomatic stances and reduce their dependency on Washington. Since both view the other as its immediate security threat, the Soviet Union appears less forbidding. Over the past decade, Turkey has steadily increased its trade with the Soviet Union. It is today one of the Soviet Union's major trading partners. A 1982 accord envisions a one-third expansion of trade levels. Soviet aid to Turkey also compares favorably with what is given other Third World states.

Greece, too, has multiplied its ties with the Soviet Union. Like Turkey, efforts to increase trade with the Soviet Union and Warsaw bloc were launched, resulting in greater Greek imports of oil from the East. In 1979, Soviet commercial and auxiliary combat ships were granted access to repair facilities on the Island of Syros. These contacts were further strengthened in 1983 by the visit of Soviet Prime Minister Nikolay Tikhonov to Athens and the signature of long-term agreements in economic, industrial, scientific and technical areas.

Playing the role of Romania within the Western camp also suits the popular Socialist government of Andreas Papandreou whose PASOK party was re-elected to office in 1985. The Papandreou government has adapted what its leader calls a more independent and multi-directional policy. Greece is "striving for friendly relations and the development of cooperation with all countries, irrespective of their bloc membership." This stance had led Athens to distance itself from its western allies on the Polish, Afghan, and the Korean airlines crises. During Tikhonov's 1983 visit, the Greek government signed a joint communiqué underlying the importance of nuclear-free zones as a disarmament measure. The Papandreou government also criticized the deployment of Pershing II and cruise missiles. Greece has refused, on at least one occasion, to sign the usual joint communiqué after a NATO ministerial meeting to draw
attention to Greece's demand for a security guarantee against possible Turkish aggression. More recently, tempers have flared between Athens and Washington over the Pentagon's charge that anti-American sentiment aroused by the Papandreou government was partially responsible for the February 2 terrorist bombing of the U.S. Air Force installation at Hellenikon near Athens in which 57 Americans were injured at a bar. The Reagan administration also looks askance at the Papandreou regime's pursuit of agreements with Communist Albania, Bulgaria, and Yugoslavia and its alignment with the Libyan leader Muammar Qaddafi.

A long, festering dispute between Athens and Ankara over sea and air rights in the Aegean Sea further deepen the fissures opened by the Cyprus question within the alliance and between Washington and its east Mediterranean allies. Greece claims rights to continental shelf exploration for hundreds of its islands in the Aegean Sea, many of which are near the Turkish mainland. Turkey maintains that the Aegean Sea presents unique problems which cannot be resolved by strict application of international law precedents, including the 1958 Geneva Convention on the Continental Shelf ratified by Greece in 1972 but not by Turkey. The Turkish line is a median strip through the Aegean seabed between the mainlands of the two countries. The Turkish position would place much of the eastern Aegean and the Dodecanese islands within the Asia Minor continental shelf and thereby restrict Greek prospecting rights. All these claims would be moot were it not for the discovery of oil in the northern Aegean and natural gas off the west coast of Thasos.

Both countries have bolstered their military installations to counter each other. In the wake of the Turkish invasion of Cyprus, Greece fortified several islands near the Turkish coast. The Turks countered by establishing a military headquarters at Izmir for its Fourth Army. On several occasions over the past
decade the two countries have come close to armed blows over Turkish exploration ships sent to the area. The Greeks fear that acceptance of the Turkish line would isolate the 330,000 Greek inhabitants of the Greek archipelago and legitimate the installation of Turkish economic and security zones in the seas around these islands. Turkey is also concerned about the possibility that Greece might extend its territorial waters from six to twelve miles, turning the Aegean into a Greek sea.

The discord over sea and resource rights is joined to still another over air rights. Until the Turkish invasion, Greece was responsible for civilian and military air traffic control over almost all of the Aegean. After the Cyprus takeover, Turkey unilaterally pushed the reporting line westward to widen its intelligence network to warn of an impending Greek attack. After 1975, Turkey also refused to respect the 10 nautical mile airspace zone previously fixed and acknowledged by the Greek government.

Unless the Cyprus and air-sea rights disputes are resolved, Greece and Turkey perceive each other as greater threats to their security than the Soviet Union. The strategic assets of these two states are focused elsewhere than on the Warsaw Pact. Moreover, NATO and American access to Greek and Turkish bases is jeopardized. Major installations used by U.S. forces include Hellenikon air force base, Nea Makri communications station near Marathon Bay, Iraklion air station and the Souda Bay complex on Crete and communications and air defense sites spread through Greece.

Turkey also affords an array of critically important military bases, intelligence sites, and command and communications centers. These include the Incirlik and Cigli air bases, Iskenderun and Yumurtalik supply depots, the Kargabarun LORAN installation that assists U.S. military air and sea craft to
fix their positions, and air force support bases at Ankara and Izmir on the west-central Aegean coast of Turkey. With the loss of Iranian bases, Turkish intelligence sites are especially important for collecting data on Soviet space, missile, and systems development related to the SALT agreement and START talks.

Both countries have renewed base agreements in the 1980s. The Papandreou government threatens, however, to end all base access by 1988, a move that has wide popular appeal. Both countries are dissatisfied with what they believe is the inadequate compensation that they have received for their bases and the level of annual military assistance that they have been granted. Comparisons with aid to Israel and Egypt, neither of whom are NATO members, are invidious. Military officials from both countries as well as Italy and Portugal complained to a House panel that while NATO states on the southern tier were accorded $772 million in FY 1983 of which $67 million was on a grant basis, Israel and Egypt received $3.8 billion of which $2.3 billion was on indirect grants.

Barring another mishap or crisis, like the 1974 Turkish invasion, there is still time to find ways to relax if not resolve Greek-Turkish differences. This will require a more active diplomacy than that which has characterized either NATO or American efforts. Drift is likely to be the enemy of stability. For the moment both the Papandreou government and the Ankara regimes have incentives to stay within the alliance. Leaving an integrated NATO or the western alliance would weaken Greece's diplomatic moves on the Cyprus or sea-air rights issues. Denying Greek bases and facilities would also hurt Papandreou's program to pull Greece out of its economic doldrums. As a fillip, there are electoral benefits to be gained by attacking American imperialism and by blaming Washington for Greece's economic plight. Many of these same incentives to keep within NATO but
to distance Ankara from Washington impact on the Turkish Government. There is
the added consideration that Turkey shares a long border with the Soviet Union
and would be in the first-line of attack if hostilities should erupt. How to
innoculate Turkey from the religious Islamic fervor sweeping the Persian Gulf
and the Middle East is also a concern. The Turkish government has reason to
preserve its ties to the West as a buttress for Turkey's secular regime but its
problems in dealing with its Islamic neighbors and extremists at home will have
to be better understood in Western circles than they are now if Ankara is to
walk a careful line between its external Western orientation and its domestic
Islamic predisposition.

A word might also be said about the special problems attending Spanish
entry into the Atlantic Alliance. Its membership is threatened by a promised
referendum on the question, raising the prospect of serious damage being done to
Western cohesion and defenses as a consequence of its possible withdrawal.
Spanish entry into the Atlantic Alliance was pressed through parliament by the
Central Democratic Union which was subsequently defeated by the Socialists and a
left-of-center coalition vocally opposed to joining the Western alliance in the
absence of a national referendum. The Socialists have still not followed up
their call for a referendum which, if it had been called upon their entry into
office, would almost certainly have produced a "no" vote on Spanish
participation.

Those favoring NATO participation argue that Spain should join the open
societies of the alliance as part of a larger strategy, including membership in
the European Community, to reinforce Spain's fragile democratic institutions
through association with the Western states. The armed forces would be focused
on the Soviet threat abroad rather than self-styled concern for leftist security.
threats at home. Many would like to push Spain toward a European defense framework within NATO and away from the bilateral arrangements reached with the United States over base rights.

Those opposed to NATO entry are still suspicious of NATO and, specifically, perceived American collusion with the Franco government. The base accords with the Franco regime lent legitimacy to an otherwise isolated government. These past resentments are linked to present concerns about Spanish assumption of strategic and political commitments that are not in Spain's interest. There is also the risk that it will have to spend more for defense although its unemployment rates are among the highest in Europe.

NATO countries worry, too, about the problems Spain brings to the organization. Domestic instability and retarded economic growth are potential burdens for alliance members. Integrating Spain into NATO's structure poses problems of sharing command responsibilities, particularly between a wary Lisbon and a suspicious Madrid, long-time Iberian competitors. The Gibraltar issue will inevitably be drawn into NATO discussion. The Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Mellila in North Africa can bring NATO into an unwanted dispute with Morocco. Differences between NATO and Spain over the alliance's air defense network have already arisen. Spain wants NATO to include Ceuta and Mellila in its coverage, Brussels is reluctant to include these Spanish outposts from a concern over the possibility of an incident with Morocco or other North African states. In sum, while Spanish withdrawal would be an embarrassment for the West and a plus for Soviet diplomacy bought at almost no cost, Spanish entry and integration is not an unmixed benefit. 26
The Southern Flank and the Southern Mediterranean

The southern flank, threatened with division between its members and domestic disarray, is exposed on the southern Mediterranean to the armed conflicts, political turmoil, ideological struggles and socio-economic change convulsing the region. Certain strategic facts appear evident first as Curt Gasteyger reminds us, there is a "growing predominance of domestic problems over external ones." The warring peoples of the region see their neighbors as greater threats than the Soviet Union. Iraq, Syria, the PLO, and Libya actually view Moscow more as a help than a hindrance in achieving their security goals.

Second, the United States cannot count on its NATO allies to support its unilateral initiatives in the region. The Lebanese multilateral force was an exception and it collapsed under stress. The temporizing of the European states over Afghanistan, the Iranian hostage crisis, the Yom Kippur War and the associated objection and downright denial of American access by the Europeans to their bases and military supply depots suggest that American planning should not be based on the expectation of European solidarity with the United States in responding to Persian Gulf and Middle East crises.

Finally, the direct use of American military power in the area, now focused in the organization of the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM), appears unrelated to most of the security threats facing the region and in potential conflict with strategies calculated to preserve and expand American and western interests.
The Soviet Union preys on the divisions of the region. It cannot be held primarily responsible for them, however tempting that rationalization might be. The Iranian Islamic revolution grew out of deep opposition to the rule of the Shah, to his alliance with the United States and, more profoundly, to secular, modernizing trends challenging Islamic fundamentalism and the mullahs directing its political expression. The Persian Gulf war is heir to the religious fanaticism inflamed by the Khomeiny regime in Iran and the misguided territorial appetite, and personal aggrandizement of the Hussein government in Iraq. The Iraq-Syrian conflict arises out of competition between rival factions of the Ba'ath party for dominance in each nation and the search for an ascendent position in the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. We need no instruction about the local roots of the Arab-Israeli war, nor about the sources of communal rivalries wracking Lebanon nor about home-based urges driving Syria's imperialistic ambitions in the region. The Qaddafi regime's support for terrorism is long-standing. Its interventions into Egyptian, Sudanese, North African, and Chadian politics are more easily explained as a consequence of the pretentions of the Libyan leader than as responses to Soviet direction. Similarly, the Moroccan claim to the western Sahara precedes by centuries the formation of the Soviet regime, the continued fighting by Polisario rebels is sustained more by the determination of Algiers and Tripoli than by Moscow.

It should also be recognized that the Soviet Union is not viewed with the same suspicion as the United States or former European imperial powers. Iraq and Syria, however much they differ, depend critically on Soviet military assistance. Libya's armed forces are equally dependent on Soviet arms as are those of Algeria and South Yemen. It is also interesting to note that the largest commercial arrangement between the Soviet Union and a Third World state
is with Morocco, a project principally keyed to the exploitation of its phosphate reserves. Arab states and the PLO count on Soviet diplomatic support to sustain their claims in their conflicts with Israel, with each other, and with the western allies, particularly the United States.

No less should it be overlooked that after over thirty years of superpower tests of will in the region, one can discern the slow crystallization of established patterns of superpower behavior and even of common interests in the region. Moscow cannot be locked out of the Mediterranean basin. It has established itself as a major player, a fact of life that Washington has gradually, if reluctantly, had to accept. Second, both have learned to act with caution and reserve to prevent a major military confrontation. Third, each in its own way has an interest in controlling its clients and in implicitly assisting its superpower opponent in controlling its respective clients. Neither has an interest in an Iranian victory in the Persian Gulf. For different but parallel reasons, Islamic fundamentalism must be contained. For the Soviets, it raises domestic problems and poses a threat to the expansion of its influence in the Moslem world. For the United States, the Iranian virus poses a threat to the unvexed flow of oil and gas from the region and a danger to moderate Arab regimes and Israeli security. So unlikely a state as Iraq has the tacit backing of Moscow and Washington in its war with Iran. In Lebanon, the U.S. counts on Syria to put a damper on the civil war and to limit terrorism. In North Africa, both superpowers compete for favor with Algeria, which buys arms from the Soviets but trades its gas and oil to the United States. Both superpowers also are props for the Hassan II regime in Morocco. Moscow through economic concessions, Washington through economic and military aid.
This sketch is not meant to suggest that a U.S.-Soviet condominium is imminent in the Mediterranean. It accents more the complexities of Mediterranean politics and the importance of diplomacy, economic aid, and political compromise in pursuing Western aims over the application of American military force as a substitute for subtle maneuvering and flexibility. In this connection, the Arab tilt of the southern NATO states may be a potential asset in maintaining the dialogue with the Arab states and in containing Soviet influence while, paradoxically, attempting to tame and temper Soviet behavior as a cooperating competitor in the area. The American contribution is to underwrite Israeli security and to support moderate regimes, particularly the oil-producing states and Egypt. The latter's recognition of the Israeli regime and abandonment of belligerency in the Camp David accords opened the way for peaceful management of Arab-Israeli differences. This approach serves as a model for possible relaxation, if not resolution, of the long-festering Palestinian issue.

American experience in using military power to advance Western interests has been sobering. The recent Lebanese intervention was a disaster and the withdrawal a humiliation. The credibility of American arms and political support were hardly bolstered by the quick reversal of position, first supporting an independent Lebanon and then abandoning it to civil war. Stationing troops in the region provokes local resentment and undermines friendly regimes, like Oman and Saudi Arabia, that the U.S. is ostensibly attempting to protect. The search for bases drives strategy rather than the reverse. To protect advanced positions, political commitments will have to be made with shaky regimes whose reliability is doubtful. Witness the reversal of alliances in the Horn of Africa. Ethiopia is now a client of the Soviet Union,
Somalia whose port at Berbera is part of the U S Central Command's base structure, is in the American camp. The U S Central Command (CENTCOM), is ill-suited to meet even those contingencies that may have a military dimension. It faces three uncertainties: troop limits, transportation and invitations from beleaguered allies. Exposed to an inhospitable political climate and far from sustaining logistical support, it is difficult to see how CENTCOM could prevent a determined Soviet armed attack. A Soviet-American military clash would be tantamount to the Fashoda incident between England and France at the turn of the century. Containing the war to the Middle East, an exposed Western salient, is not likely to succeed and, if contained, American military forces would be poorly positioned, with little likelihood of local support, particularly from the Arab states.

Working with the conflicting groups and political cross-currents cutting through the southern Mediterranean would appear to be a better course to follow than seemingly simple but potentially mischievous military solutions to the region's rivalries. The United States (and for that matter the Soviet Union) has neither the military resources nor political will to impose its rule on the region. To an appreciable degree Western security interests, economic needs, and Israeli independence depend on skillful management -- and manipulation -- of the divisions animating the politics of the southern Mediterranean. Similarly, active American and European cooperation, principally within the Atlantic Alliance and the European Community, are indispensable for the end of the Greek-Turkish Cold War. A political cohesive southern flank is a precondition for a solid central front and stability in the East-West competition.
Notes

1 This argument is forcefully advanced by Geoffrey Kemp, 'Last-West Strategy and the Middle-East-Persian Gulf,' in NATO-The Next Thirty Years, ed Kenneth A Myers (Boulder, Colorado Westview Press, 1980), pp 207-222


3 NATO, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, p 23

4 Ibid, pp 21-23

5 See, for example, Bruce R Kuniholm, 'Turkey and NATO,' in NATO and the Mediterranean eds, Lawrence S Kaplan, et al (Wilmington Delaware Scholarly Resources, 1985), pp 232-33


7 For background information about Italy's military forces, see Jane's Defence Weekly, July 13 1985, pp 61-63, Military Balance p 42 and Raimondo Luraglio The Italian Role in NATO, ' in Kaplan, et al, pp 157-165

8 NATO, NATO and the Warsaw Pact, pp 21-23

9 Antonio Pellicio, "NATO's Southern Flank Air Forces," in Ibid, pp 53-54
10 Kuniholm, p 232 See Military Balance, 1984-85, p 49 for Turkish air force strength

11 Antonio Pellicio, "NATO's Southern Flank Air Forces," in Kaplan, p 55

12 Collins, p 146

13 Le Monde, July 28-29, 1985, III

14 Mariano Gabriele, Mediterranean Naval Forces " in Kaplan, et al, p 69
15 In an expansion of this argument see commander P T Deutermann 'Requiem for the Sixth Fleet' Proceedings of the U S Naval Institute, CVIII (September, 1982), p 47

16 Quoted in Brown, p 68

17 Ibid, pp 70-71

18 Quoted in Brown, p 71

19 For an overview of Greek policy, see the article by Keith Legg in this issue and S Victor Papacosma, "Greece and NATO," in Kaplan et al, pp 189-213

20 Washington Post, February 15 1980, p A14

21 Papacosma pp 192-203

22 See, for example Philadelphia Inquirer, January 9, 1985, p 9


25 U S, Congress, House of Representatives, Senate, Committee on foreign Relations U S Security Assistance to NATO's Southern Flank, Committee Print 98th Cong, 1st Sess (Washington, D C GPO, 1983), pp 1-8

26 For problems associated with Spanish entry, see the essay by and Victor Alba, 'Spain's Entry into NATO,' in Kaplan et al, pp 97-113

27 Curt Gasteyger, "The Southern Flank New Dimensions for the Alliance," in Myers, pp 177-187

28 For a brief evaluation of the U S Central Command, see Collins pp 133-138