Six months ago in Porto, in “Reinventing the West” 1, a report written at the request of the European Trilateral Commission, I emphasized, the centrality of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the search for a new and stable order in the Region, and its key emotional importance in the evolution of transatlantic relations. And as a form of serious provocation, I had suggested, that within the framework of a global peace-process, NATO forces could be present on the ground, i.e. from Jerusalem to Gaza, to contribute through peace-keeping, to the stability and therefore success of a peace accord.

Today, as the Iraqi quagmire deepens, as the cycle of violence escalates further between Israeli and Palestinians, and as hyper-terrorism is striking in Europe, in Madrid, after the United States, the only good news come from the bad news. The situation has changed so much for the worse, that it would be absurd for Americans and Europeans to keep quarrelling with each other. We are on the same boat, and the sea is so rough, that the ship is in danger if not of sinking, at least of heading in the worst direction. With the brief seizure of Japanese as hostages in Iraq, the situation has even symbolically taken a clear Trilateral dimension.

WHAT WENT WRONG?

One would be tempted to say that we are witnessing the combination of a “not so noble failure” of the American strategy in Iraq, and the “suicidal tactical success” of a Sharon-Bush strategy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The declared “Grand Strategy” of the Bush administration, that shaped the decision to go to war in Iraq, was based on the ambition to impose democracy in the Middle East starting with Baghdad. A democratization of the region was deemed to be a pre-condition for the start of serious negotiation between Israel and the Arab world, including a reshaped Palestinian Authority. This ambition was noble, and did not lack “vision.” There was only one problem. It failed on the ground for reasons that go beyond sheer failures in its implementation.

For most Europeans, including deep down perhaps even the British government—in spite of its official support to Washington, the American plan had three flaws. Excessive ambition: one cannot dream of imposing democracy by force upon others. Wrong priorities and calendar: one could not wait to stabilize the Middle East region as a whole, before involving oneself in the core Israeli-Palestinian issue. And ultimately, wrong means, with an excessive confidence in the ability to use military superiority to achieve political results. This was particularly true if through military power, you totally alienated the hearts and minds of the people of the region, with the shocking misbehavior of your army. Victims of their inability

1 Posted on the Trilateral Commission’s web site at www.trilateral.org under « European meetings/Porto 2003 »
to understand and integrate the nationalism of others, the United States and their allies those that were for
the war, as well as those who were against it—are now confronted with what can only be described at
best, and in the most generous terms, as a “noble failure.” “Noble,” for Saddam Hussein is out of power,
waiting for his trial in a jail somewhere in Iraq. “Failure,” for it is difficult to see a happy ending to the
cycle of violence and chaos that has engulfed a country that went from too much authority to too much
disorder.

In the meantime, surfing on the priority given by the Bush administration, to the war in Iraq, the Israeli
government of Prime Minister Sharon has embarked on a policy of unilateral disengagement from Gaza,
based on the unmitigated use of military superiority. This policy has led to an escalation of the cycle of
violence and the disappearance of what very little was left of trust and confidence, even amongst the most
moderate and open elements of Israeli and Palestinian societies. This policy received a humiliating blow
after Sharon’s plan was rejected by his own Party, in what retrospectively could only appear as a strategic
blunder.

As a result of the present diplomatic stalemate, anti-Americanism and anti-Zionism if not blatant anti-
Semitism are growing in the world. In the process both Israel and America are suffering from their overtly
and overly close relations with each other.

To complete this gloomy picture, one must, of course, conclude with the fact that since March Eleven,
and the terrorist attack in Madrid, Europe like the United States before her, is now equally at war with
Fundamentalist Islam, even if that realization has not yet deeply penetrated the majority of European
public opinion.

In an environment characterized by the spread of chaos and violence in the region, and the lack of serious
political alternatives of dialogue, what should Europeans do or even say, to express their concerns and
formulate their visions?

Silence will not do, though it would of course constitute an attractive alternative on the eve of Presidential
elections in the United States. America has contributed decisively to the mess she is in, even if her mess is
also our mess. The sheer formulation of criticisms such as “we warned you, you refused to listen to us”
will not do either, for it will simply contribute to the deterioration of transatlantic relations and will not
improve the situation on the ground. It will also represent a further illustration of Europe’s international
inexistence, even in a region that concerns her most, and is so close to her in historical, geographical not
to mention in economic and emotional terms. Europe cannot be equated with the chorus of Cassandras in
an ancient Greek tragedy.

A POLICY FOR EUROPE

In the context of an open critical and supportive dialogue on the Middle East with the United States,
Europe’s policy should be based on the four following principles and reaffirmations.

• The first prerequisite is an understanding of the nature of the war we are waging.

This is not a war between Islam and the West. It is a war which pits Fundamentalist Islam against the
West and the rest of the Moslem world. The “fundamental challenge” consists in containing successfully
the fundamentalists without losing and alienating the majority of the Moslem world. It is an ideological
war for the hearts and minds of the “less and less moderate majority”
• In this context, the second prerequisite is not to lose track of the emotional centrality of the core Israeli-Palestinian issue.

There will be no stability in the region, no long-term solution to the conflict between Islamic Fundamentalism and the West, no harmony between Europe and the United States if this issue is allowed to continue to poison the climate of the international system. It is, of course, not a sufficient but a necessary condition.

• The third principle, a direct consequence of the two first ones, is that of a two-states solution.

What is most perverse and diabolical in the present evolution, is that somewhere, the most radical parties both in Israel and Palestine, seem to have prevailed in their opposition, to a two-states system, each side negating the legitimacy of the existence of the other as a separate national entity and hiding its ambition of conquest under generous pretenses—“one state, two nations” for the Palestinian side or the sheer geographic impracticality of two states for the Israeli side, which seems of late to have convinced the Bush administration of the logic of this vision.

Four years ago, Palestinians leaders made a strategic mistake, by saying “no” to Camp David and Taba. By their lack of confidence in the diplomatic road, they paved the way to the coming of Sharon to power in Israel. Today, Israeli leaders are committing the same strategic mistake in relying on the sheer use of military force to disengage from Gaza. They may have fatally weakened the Hamas, but they have for sure radicalized the majority of Palestinians, and have further endangered the long term security of Israel which ultimately rests on the international legitimacy of the Jewish State at least as much, if not more than on its military strength. Today’s Israel runs the risk of becoming increasingly isolated and ostracized along the lines of apartheid South Africa.

In this context, it is all the more vital for the European Union and the Quartet at large to re-emphasize the “quasi-sanctity” of a two-states solution, which is, like the democratic system according to Winston Churchill, the worst but also the only acceptable solution.

• The fourth principle rests on the fact that, in order to be able to carry this message with authority and credibility, the European Union must be seen as an impartial and united voice, and above all as an honest broker.

This presupposes a very significant effort towards Israel and an attempt to change the perception of Europe, in a country where Europe— to use Amos Oz’s words— is at the same time a “lost dream” and a continent of betrayal if not prejudices. As much as America should appeal to Muslims, Europe must undo its image of being at best a hopeless case, and at worst a perverse and negative force, compared with the United States. The timing for such a reinvention of Europe in Israeli eyes may not be badly chosen for there are many in Israel, not to mention the United States, who are seeing the increasingly close relationships between the Israeli and American administrations as a source of short-term strength, but also as a cause of serious concern in the longer run. Israel needs an alternative. The reciprocal dependence between two leaders and two administrations encouraging each other sometimes in the worst directions should be resisted. The mitigating and moderating influence of a less powerful but more reasonable Europe could therefore be welcomed by all participants if such a Europe would manage to combine unity, resolution and firmness. The author of these lines is well aware that such a Europe is closer to the world of Corneille, than to the world of Racine, i.e. to Europe as she should be and not to the reality of the Union as she is.
BUILDING a “EUROPEAN IDENTITY”

But Europeans should be aware that if they want to start to build their international identity and if they want to be taken seriously in the world, by Americans, Asians and others, they have to start with their closest, gravest and most immediate challenges in the Middle East: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Such a responsibly engaged Europe would be welcomed in Japan, where the country is attempting to redefine its international identity in a more active way, starting with the Middle East. It will also be welcomed by all those in the United States who wish for some “responsibility sharing” with the European Union. And their numbers may be growing after Bush's Iraq “adventure.”

A Europe of “Twenty Five” cannot successfully enter her future without at least contributing to the resolution of a problem that is the direct legacy of her dual past: colonialism and anti-Semitism. The continent of reconciliation cannot watch with a resigned indifference the fall into barbarism of a region so close to her history and geography.

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