

IAI8401

STICK TO THE REAGAN PLAN

by

Giacomo Luciani, Director of Studies

The Reagan Administration is still officially pursuing the comprehensive plan for peace in the Middle East that was first announced in September 1982. However its overt diplomacy and politico-military initiatives seem to indicate that the plan has been quietly shelved, and with it the hope to achieve a comprehensive settlement in the region. This attitude must come as no surprise to the numerous experts and commentators that always believed the plan to be a still-born. Yet, this article will argue, the plan is far from dead: it is rather an abandoned child that was sent out in the wilderness, and may very well resurface from it.

It will be argued that political conditions, both domestically in the United States and internationally are not unfavourable to a forceful resumption of diplomatic efforts in favour of the Reagan Plan, and indeed such efforts are needed, if for no other reason, in order to preserve the joint commitment of the four countries composing the Multi-national Peace Force in the Lebanon.

The latter point directly follows from the conviction that no arrangement with a sufficiently broad political base is possible in Lebanon except within the context of a comprehensive regional settlement. We will not deal directly with domestic Lebanese politics, but it seems fairly obvious that the individuals that are involved in the national reconciliation conference have no reason to agree today on things on which they failed to agree for many years now. As long as the Middle East conflict remains open, conditions will persist whereby each individual faction in Lebanon may hope to take advantage of events and changes in the broader region. The incentive to work for national unity and independence was no less clear in the Summer of 1983 than it can possibly be today or tomorrow. Yet some of the factions opted in favour of alliance with the Syrians and revolt against the government of Amin Gemayel. It is hardly exaggerated to say that every actor in the Lebanese political and military scene counts on external support, and hopes that events and forces outside of Lebanon will strengthen his position. It is only when faced with a process clearly leading to ending the Arab-Israeli conflict that the various "historical" leaders will recognize that no fundamental change in relative equilibria is possible, and will accept to compromise

On the contrary, the Reagan Administration seems to believe that some success is possible in the Lebanon even if no progress is made in the surrounding region. It appears that the US government has given up on the possibility of achieving some significant success along the lines set out in the Reagan Plan before November, 1984; and is concentrating on reaching some, albeit limited, result in Lebanon. The minimum goal is to create conditions that will permit to bring the marines home before the coming presidential election. In order to do so, the Administration has chosen a course which is deeply embarrassing for some of the participants to the Multinational Force, notably Italy. In adopting this policy, the US government runs a double risk: on one hand failing to achieve

any result and being increasingly trapped in the Lebanese quicksands; and at the same time witness an open rift with key allies and dismemberment of the Multinational Force.

The narrowing down of potential outcomes

Conditions are favourable to pursuing the Reagan plan because time is rapidly foreclosing many potential alternative outcomes of the Middle East conflict. In particular, it is increasingly clear that, in the absence of any peace initiative, Israeli annexation of the West Bank will in fact soon become irreversible, although it will never be internationally recognized. Indeed, some observers believe that it already is irreversible: this is a difficult point to judge, but of course our argument rests on the assumption that the issue still is open.

Against the frequently held impression that the Arab-Israeli conflict is an endless maze - each breakthrough leading to a new stalemate, with no end in sight - events in the last year seem to prove that substantial progress has been made. Peace between Israel and Egypt has survived the death of Sadat and Israeli policies that were profoundly embarrassing to the Egyptians. A more difficult test could hardly be conceived, yet there has never been a question of renegeing on bilateral peace.

But once war between Israel and Egypt is excluded, the military dimension of the conflict is already substantially reduced. The front on the Sinai always was the crucial one in determining the outcome of war in the past.

Open war between Israel and Jordan is also practically excluded, at least as long as the Hashemite monarchy maintains control. Although it has not signed a peace treaty with Israel, it is an open secret that Jordan will never resort to war, but will strictly stick to a policy of no peace and no war, including curbing the military presence and activities of the PLO. The same applies - a point which is often forgotten - to open military confrontation between Syria and Israel on the Golan. For many years now, the two sides have clearly shown that they will fight each other with arms but only on Lebanese territory, and even there avoiding direct confrontation as much as possible.

But if the only active front is in the North, no military option is capable anymore of substantially changing the essential parameters of the question. The latter might well be the most important lesson of the Israeli invasion of 1982 and of subsequent events up to the present stalemate. Notwithstanding an overwhelming military victory, Israel was unable to attain its political goals, i.e. the total destruction of the PLO, the expulsion of the Syrian Army from Lebanon, and the advent in Lebanon of a pro-Israeli Maronite regime. Instead Israel finds itself involved in a military occupation of southern Lebanon which is economically and politically costly, as well as sterile.

At the same time, until the Israeli invasion there was at least one actor who believed, or pretended, that it could substantially change the terms of the equation through military action: the PLO. However, in 1983 it has become clear that this is not the case. While the rebellion against Arafat and the latter's misfortunes should not be taken to mean the end of the PLO, they certainly seem to indicate that the PLO has lost its military option, if it ever had one. All signs indicate that the rebels led by Abu Mussa, while stronger in the field,

are very far from being recognised as rightful leaders by the Palestinians in the West Bank and in the diaspora, and by the representative bodies of the PLO. Thus, unless a compromise between the two factions is reached - a far fetched hypothesis - in the future the Syrians, not the PLO, will control the instrument of the Palestinian military option. While this instrument may still be marginally active, the PLO will need to adopt a credible strategy that does not involve military action. If it fails to do so, it risks to be perceived as irreversibly marginalised, and lose the allegiance of the Palestinian people.

The key role of Jordan

The present circumstances and predicament which the PLO must face point to the increasing importance of Jordan. The Hashemite kingdom must also face a critical situation, fraught with dangers to its domestic stability, but is nevertheless in a position to play a crucial positive role. Jordan and the PLO may help each other out of their respective problems, or may be mutually paralyzed and ruined.

The best possible scenario for the Jordanians is that Arafat goes back to Amman and resumes his talks with King Hussein from where he left them in the Spring of 1983. This would give to Hussein a clear mandate to negotiate on behalf of the Palestinians, and ensure the widest possible Arab consensus and solidarity. With all likelihood, Syria would equally try its best to block the road, and might succeed: still Hussein would be in the best position that he can hope for.

However, it is entirely possible that the PLO, having lost control of its military arm, will accept a greater degree of subservience from Damascus. Or that, being unable to make any decision, as so many times in the past, it will fall in a state of paralysis leading soon to political irrelevance. In both cases, Hussein will face growing requests from the Palestinians in the West Bank to act and open negotiations even without a formal PLO mandate. This would be an extremely dangerous course, because many Arab countries would not solidarize with the King, and Syria might resort to open violence.

Yet, what is the alternative to Hussein? If the process of Judaization of the West Bank continues unabated, his policy of no peace and no war will be increasingly eroded. The number of Palestinians leaving the West Bank and crossing the Jordan may easily be expected to grow. If Israeli annexation of the West Bank indeed becomes an irreversible reality, while at the same time it will not be recognized by the international community and even less by Arab public opinion, the King will be sitting on top of the largest potential concentration of Palestinian discontent. Given that neither Syria nor Israel may be expected to be supportive of the King - the contrary is true - one can easily see that prospects for Jordan are less than rosy.

This alternative is clearly understood in Amman, where the demand for a determined resumption of the Reagan initiative is explicit, and the desire to start negotiations on behalf of the Palestinians very evident. Yet, as long as there is a credible PLO, and Arafat is its leader, the King would be utterly foolish to move without a PLO mandate. This means that a credible effort in favour of the Reagan Plan must be aimed at strengthening Hussein, not at coercing him even more than he already is. In other words, conditions must be created whereby the PLO will either go to Amman or lose political credibility.

This objective requires a combination of 'push' and 'pull' tactics. While there has been a lot of 'pushing' the PLO, little effort was made to 'pull' it, i.e. create conditions that will strengthen the moderates within it. The US do not have a policy towards the PLO, and stick to the rejectionist attitude that may please Israel but has the net effect of reducing American flexibility with no substantial advantage at all.

The objectives of Syria

Another weak point in the American presence in the Middle East is the attitude towards Syria. A clear analysis of the objectives and value system of the Assad government seems to be lacking. The consequence is a wavering policy which is unable to reach the objectives that are set for it.

In the latter months of 1983 the US position seems to have evolved to a point where there is now a clear confrontational attitude towards Syria. While this certainly seems the correct attitude to take in view of pursuing peace, it appears that the reasoning behind it is incorrect.

Syria is presently seen as the major instrument of Soviet presence in the Middle East, and the assumption seems to be that it can be driven out of Lebanon by a gradual step-up of military pressure. At the same time, there seems to be some readiness to recognize the Syrian 'strategic interests' in Lebanon, and accept a Syrian right to some degree of interference in domestic Lebanese affairs. This assumes that the Syrians are seriously worried of the cost of their military presence in Lebanon, and that they would be willing to pull out if offered some reasonable compromise.

What is being misunderstood is the very nature of the Syrian State. The government of Hafez el Assad is possibly the least popular and the most brutally repressive in the entire Middle East. Its power rests entirely on the control of a strong army, and on the possibility of playing internationally in such a way that the cost of the army and repressive apparatus will continue to be borne partly by the Soviet Union and partly by the large oil-exporters of the Gulf.

The latter possibility will be open to the Syrians only as long as there is war in the Middle East. Thus the Syrian regime has a deep rooted interest in the continuation of war. However, the Syrians are in no position, not even with Soviet support, to fight Israel across the border on the Golan heights: their only option is to do so in Lebanon. The Syrians are in Lebanon because this is the precondition for avoiding a de-facto abandonment of military instruments in the Middle East conflict, and a precondition to exert influence over the Palestinian movement. Influence, or outright control, over the Palestinians is prized as an instrument for exerting pressure over the Gulf countries and Jordan. That the latter is an important priority for Syria is also shown by the Syrian policy with respect to the Iran-Iraq war, which is calculated to inspire awe to the Gulf countries. The Saudi unwillingness to face open disagreement with Syria shows that the Syrian posture is, in this respect, greatly successful.

If our analysis is correct, it is inappropriate to expect that the Syrians might be willing to move out of Lebanon if faced with a combination of military pressure and political incentives. The Syrians will absorb the military pressure easily as long as they are not driven out by an infantry attack, and the latter does not seem to be in the cards. At the same time, there is hardly any degree of permitted interference in Lebanese politics that will compensate Syria for the loss of the great asset which war in Lebanon is to them. The record, after all, speaks by itself: the Syrians might have pacified Lebanon a long time ago!

The Syrians will try to perpetuate the present partitioning of Lebanon because everybody, including the Americans, are telling them that withdrawal of foreign forces from Lebanon is a precondition for resumption of the Reagan initiative. Why this should be the case is not entirely clear, except for the fact that the US, having placed their credibility at stake in the Lebanon, would lose it if they proved unable to obtain their stated goal. By now, however, this is an old argument, because the US had promised to obtain a restoration of Lebanese independence and sovereignty in a few months, and with the passing of time US credibility has already been lost.

At the same time, we may ask what is it that the Syrians could do to hinder the Reagan initiative if it were forcefully resumed. They could certainly increase tension in Lebanon on one hand, and on the other they might attempt at domestic stability in Jordan. In both respects, the Syrians cannot be simply discounted, but their hostility could be contained.

Indeed the paradox is that the Syrian position is vulnerable to research for overall peace in the region. Because the Syrians do not have today, and will never have in the future, a credible option to fight Israel militarily across their common border and in isolation from other Arab countries, they know that they run a serious risk of being marginalized within the Arab World if peace is concluded against their objections. In a sense, they cannot afford to be left out of a comprehensive peace agreement, because this would leave Assad with territorial losses, political isolation and an empty coffer. Whatever the attitude of the Syrians today, it may be expected to sharply change the day that substantial progress is made towards peace between Israel and a Jordan credibly representing the Palestimians. The Syrian anthagonism to a determined American peace initiative will therefore be as short lived as it is unreserved.

The position of Israel

The factor which most drastically undermines the credibility of the Reagan Plan, and leads many to conclude that it is dead or it never was alive, is the total hostility to it that was consistently manifested by the Israeli government.

If Syria has a Hafez el Assad, there are individuals and forces in Israel that have a similar interest in the continuation of war per se. Indeed, there is always somebody, individual or group, that has something to gain from any war, and Israel is no exception. While some would even contend that such structurally war-prone forces are part of the present government coalition, it seems clear that Israel is not fully under their control.

In a sense, Israel has irreversibly won the Middle East conflict: its existence as a sovereign state is recognized at least unofficially by all other states in the region, and could not be challenged militarily anyhow. At the same time, the position of Israel seems to have weakened in many respects, making it more vulnerable to outside influence.

From a military point of view, Israel finds itself unable to withdraw from Lebanon, and occupying a region that is potentially a source of very considerable trouble. At the same time, Israel has accepted the presence of a Multinational Peace Force in the Sinai as well as in Beirut, and has a strong interest in the continuation of the mission of the two forces. One may add that Israel accepted the notion of a 'strategic alliance' with the United States: the combination of these elements shows that the policy of total self-reliance for security is inevitably being abandoned. Israel always was dependent on the United States for arms supplies, but it is now more immediately dependent, and not just on the United States.

From an economic point of view, the domestic scene in Israel has been deteriorating for a long period now. While on one hand this may be an incentive to maintain conditions of war - to distract public attention from economic difficulties and attract economic support from abroad - on the other hand it is clearly showing that butter and cannons cannot indefinitely go together. The present day economic difficulties are different from those of the past because they cannot simply be attributed to a specific military crisis, but rather seem to stem from a structural crisis of the Israeli economy and of its position in the international division of labour. Internationally, the economic tables have been turned against Israel in the last decade, and the consequences are surfacing.

In order to overcome its economic problems, Israel may either seek compromise to achieve peace or try to increase its strategic value to the United States in order to make sure that the needed amount of economic support will be available. The latter alternative clearly points to the transformation of Israel into a military society acting as the outpost to defend American interests in an essentially hostile region. This seems to be the kind of Israel which Sharon has in mind.

A point which must be underlined is that Israel's economic problems are such that what is needed is not just a continuation of American aid with modest increases on present levels. Israel needs a substantial increase on an already very high level of US economic and military aid, and this does increase the bargaining power of the United States. The well known argument to the extent that the US cannot pressure Israel in a direction which is not to the latter's liking is today even less credible than it was in the past. While overt pressure might not be the best tactics, one cannot escape the conclusion that the United States have substantial influence over Israeli behaviour.

That Israel has reached an important turning point in its history is widely felt within Israeli society itself. The invasion of Lebanon opened a deep rift which is far from being healed. In conjunction with a growing realization of the fact that the existence of Israel cannot be questioned anymore, generating a growing feeling of security; and with the consequences of economic problems, this is leading to growing fragmentation and conflicts within Israeli society.

Israel has pretty much lost its attraction for Jewish immigration, and inevitably faces a period of turbulent domestic politics. Under present conditions, Israel cannot be assumed to be a constant in the equation.

A further important consequence of the economic and political problems that Israel is facing is that the Arabs appear decreasingly afraid of peace with it. In the past, most Arab intellectuals and political leaders believed that normalization of relations with Israel would lead to an Israeli economic domination over the entire region. The argument was raised against Camp David, and more recently during negotiations of the May 17 agreement with Lebanon. The Israeli themselves had high hopes of economic benefits in both cases. However perceptions are now changing, and the Arab intellectuals seem more ready to accept that peaceful relations can be managed in a way that will not necessarily put them in a condition of dependence.

In short, there is now a combination of strenght and weaknesses in Israel which may be favourable to an active search for compromise. This should not be interpreted in a simplistic way, e.g. as a call to favour the Labour opposition against the present government. At the same time one must recall that the present conditions may not last for long: the settlements in the West Bank are inevitably leading Israel in a direction that may change the nature of Israeli society and polity, and make compromise impossible.

The domestic environment in the USA

A widely held belief has it that no US government will embark in a major foreign policy initiative in an election year; thus the Reagan Plan as well should be expected to stay in the freezer at least until the end of 1984. However, an analysis of objective data regarding developments in the US suggests that this conventional wisdom may not apply under present circumstances. It is ironical that a President who is insisting on consistency and "staying the course", to a point where he is almost daily shown to be at odds with close aids within the Administration, should abandon a major foreign policy initiative just when the tide is turning in his favour.

By all standards Ronald Reagan has alienated most of the powerful lobbies that are commonly believed to dominate American politics. His political strategy seems to have been based on the belief that although lobbies are organized and vocal, they still are minorities, and on some issues it pays to adopt policies that will favour unorganized majorities rather than organized minorities. A similar political trend is visible in Europe as well, where, to formulate but one example, governments - and including the ones led by Socialists - are paying increased attention to fighting inflation (which does not please any specific organized group) rather than unemployment (an issue on which trade unions insist loudly). The record in Europe seems to be that domestic economic developments are not anymore overwhelmingly important in determining election results, and the commonly held belief that unemployment will electorally favour the left does not always prove right. Mrs. Thatcher was reconfirmed on the face of appalling domestic economic conditions, while in West Germany a continuing recession led to a swing to the right. In Italy the first government with a Socialist Prime Minister is concentrating on foreign policy, and in France relations between a Socialist government and the unions are far from rosy. The common denominator of these widely different situations is that governments

seem to be increasingly ready to go against the wishes of their expressed public opinion or organized lobbies, in the belief that there are deeper and unexpressed opinions which one may successfully appeal to.

Reagan's 'staying the course' is a political gamble in the same direction. By traditional standards, he would appear to be condemned, having alienated blacks as well as Portoricans, women as well as Catholics, environmentalists as well as unions, and even some conservative groups. The President seems undeterred and sticks to his ideas even on such matters as domestic taxation, on which both logic and his own advisers are against him.

In this context, some people reason that President Reagan, having alienated just about everybody else, cannot afford to alienate the pro-Israeli lobby as well. Having decided to stay the course on other issues, he will allow his peace plan for the Middle East to quietly fade away.

But one may just as well reason to the contrary: the Administration, while avoiding to antagonise unnecessarily the pro-Israeli lobby, should not be constrained by it any more than it has been constrained by other interest groups. One may further argue that Ronald Reagan stands little chance of gaining the support of the Jewish vote anyhow. And, if he intends to base his support on the consistent exercise of authority, then the Middle East is an issue on which 'staying the course' will pay even better than on others.

The fact that the domestic US economy is now recovering full steam, and that the unemployment figures are coming down while inflation is being kept under control indicates that the Administration does not need to abandon the international arena in an election year in order to concentrate on domestic problems. Quite to the contrary, because the Administration has achieved much better results on the domestic front than it has internationally, the coming election appears likely to be fought around foreign policy issues.

Reagan has no great success to show in support of his emphasis on military instruments and tough dealings. Military expenditure looms very large on the Federal deficit, and is the main determinant of the high level of interest rates: the Administration will have to show that it serves some purpose. In this sense, Reagan may be said to have scored a success in Grenada, but - assuming that indeed it is a success - it is only a very minor one. On the most important issues, the US have not greatly advanced. In particular, the collapse of all negotiations with the Soviet Union may damage the Administration: what if Moscow, against the current confident American predictions, does not come back to the negotiating table before the end of 1984?

Reagan committed his political initiative and military forces to two different regions: Central America and the Middle East. While initially the emphasis was on the former, the high level of casualties and the employment of very visible military instruments such as the New Jersey battleship inevitably brought US commitment in the Middle East to the fore. Furthermore, nobody seems to expect a striking success in Central America within the next few months. Nobody expects one in the Middle East either, but we have tried to argue that a positive turn is entirely possible.

These considerations should prompt the Administration to pursue the Reagan Plan forcefully, without overly worrying about the opposition that might come from the pro-Israeli lobby.

Atlantic cooperation and the Middle East

A further aspect which is often missed by Middle Eastern observers is that the climate in Atlantic relations has greatly changed relative to the beginning of the present decade, in a way which may be of great help in pursuing the Reagan initiative.

For a variety of reasons, Europe is today ready to work in close connection with the United States in order to achieve peace in the Middle East, while two or three years ago there was a clear split between the two sides of the Atlantic. This depends on factors connected to the region and factors of a more global nature. Among the former, the fact that relative abundance of oil has deflected attention from the more divisive issue of security in the Gulf, and eliminated an incentive for European countries to differentiate themselves from the US in order to please this or that Arab government; and the fact that the Reagan Plan implicitly recognizes the insufficiency of the Camp David agreements and the need to envisage a solution to the political demands of the Palestinian people. That the solution envisaged by Reagan is different from what had been called for in the Venice declaration is less important.

The more global, and no less important, factors are connected with Reagan's management of East-West relations and economic policy. Both have pushed the Europeans on the defensive, exposing their division and contradictions. Europe needs a credible US nuclear umbrella - thus accepts the installation of Pershings and Cruises. All that is left to her is to plead for greater flexibility, but the hard line approach of the Soviet Union renders European appeals practically irrelevant. On economic policy, the Europeans have now been complaining about an overvalued dollar and excessive interest rates in the US for two years or more, but have no bargaining chips to sustain their complaints.

In terms of Middle East politics, the climate in Atlantic relations means that the US government may count on readily available and committed help from Europe if the Reagan Plan is forcefully pursued. However, if the plan is abandoned, and the US government reverts to a policy of unilaterally backing Israel and assigning priority to opposing a Soviet threat in the region which Europeans believe not to exist, the possibility for joint action may be utterly ruined.

The vicissitudes of the MNF in Lebanon are a clear indicator of this state of affairs. The fact that a MNF was formed and stationed in Beirut shows that the relevant European countries are today ready to cooperate with the United States in a way which one could never think of a few years ago. No serious disagreement arose between the countries involved until the Fall of 1983, and as long as a clear political perspective was present, i.e. the one indicated by the Reagan Plan. Italy, for example, not only unilaterally raised its contingent in Beirut from the 1,100 men which were called for by the agreement to form the MNF, to 2,100, but expressed readiness to patrol the Chouf region after the Israeli withdrawal. At the same time, as time went by with no serious indication that the US were serious about pursuing the Reagan Plan, and as they fell back on a position of merely supporting the Gemayel government, and exerting military pressure on Syria, basic agreement disappeared.

While the fundamental climate in Atlantic relations is conducive to joint action for peace, mistaken action will bring negative consequences. Considerable mistakes have been made in the management of the US contingent in Beirut, and of US foreign policy in the region. While it may not be too late to redress errors, if errors are not redressed Atlantic relations are bound to suffer badly as a consequence.

While Egypt is not a member of the Atlantic Alliance, a very similar reasoning might apply to it as to the Western European countries. Egypt has maintained a policy of close cooperation with the US, and withstood deeply embarrassing situations without resorting to actions that would damage the American position. Yet the US must attribute greater weight to Egyptian opinions, and fully appreciate that presently Egypt may play a very important role to bring an end to the Middle East conflict. On the other hand, a policy of unilateral support to Israel and disregard for the Egyptian position will in the long run inevitably weaken the close ties between Washington and Cairo.

The role of the Soviet Union

The US belief that there is a Soviet offensive in the Middle East is somehow sustained by the predominant Arab indication to the extent that no peace can be reached unless the Soviet Union is brought into the picture. In both instances the expectation that the Soviet Union may play a substantially important role is ill founded.

The only important asset that the Soviet Union has in the region is Syria. As it will be clear from the analysis of Syria that was proposed in the preceding pages, we do not believe the alliance between Syria and the Soviets to be anything more than tactical. It is true that there is a growing direct Soviet military presence in Syria, but that is certainly not sufficient to dominate militarily the entire region. In fact it seems barely sufficient to guarantee Syria's own defence, and would be short of allowing the Syrians a winning engagement with Israel. The American perception of a Soviet threat seems entirely linked to the Syrian refusal to withdraw from Lebanon, and the immediate confrontation with US forces that derives from it. However any comparison with the situation preceding the Israeli invasion of Lebanon will show that the Syrians have lost ground, and the Soviet Union certainly has not gained. The open rift between the PLO and Syria has further put Moscow face to an impossible dilemma between its two closest allies in the region. Siding with any of the two sides would be disastrous for the Soviet position, and the result is an attitude very close to total paralysis.

The Arab opinion that the Soviet Union must be brought into the picture is also substantially incorrect. The USSR has little to offer, because it does not control either Syria or the PLO. And indeed has little direct interest in developments in the region apart from that of creating embarrassment to the USA. The Soviets probably perceive their problem as being one of containing an increasing American influence over the region. In short, there is little that the Soviet Union can do, and it is not clear why it should do it.

The danger from the East

Opportunities should not be missed, because they may never again come back. For achieving peace in the Middle East conditions may only worsen relative to what they are today. One should not forget that achieving peace in the Middle East will be a tremendously difficult task even under the most favourable conditions.

The danger of a rapid worsening of the situation is there, although it is frequently kept outside of the picture. It lies in the Iraq-Iran conflict and in the possibility that a military defeat of Iraq may allow a wave of Islamic fundamentalism to sweep across the entire region. A string of violent activities tells us that the seeds are there.

There undoubtedly is some concern in the West, and France has made a clear cut decision to support Iraq and prevent its collapse. Sadly, this decision having been made in isolation, France is now more exposed to terrorist attacks. It is time that the Western countries develop a common strategy to stop this war or at least contain its potential consequences.

Promoting the Reagan Plan is a step in the right direction in this respect as well. While the support of the West in favour of the territorial integrity of Iraq should be - and is - clear, it would be inappropriate to take sides in favour of the stability of Saddam Hussein in power as well. It is the latter which the Iranians question. Thus the right way to deal with the problem is strengthening those forces and countries within the Arab world which resist the fundamentalist wave. Continuation of the war with Israel and frequent shows of the powerlessness of the 'moderates' gives a very important contribution to alimending the fundamentalist currents.

* * *

A subtle and sophisticated Arab historian was privately saying, already a few months ago, that he believes that the war will be over in two years. Asked for the evidence, he acknowledged that he has almost none: but this is what his professional instinct suggests to him. Could he be right?

iai ISTITUTO AFFARI
INTERNAZIONALI - ROMA

n° Inv. 10482
19 GIU. 1991

BIBLIOTECA