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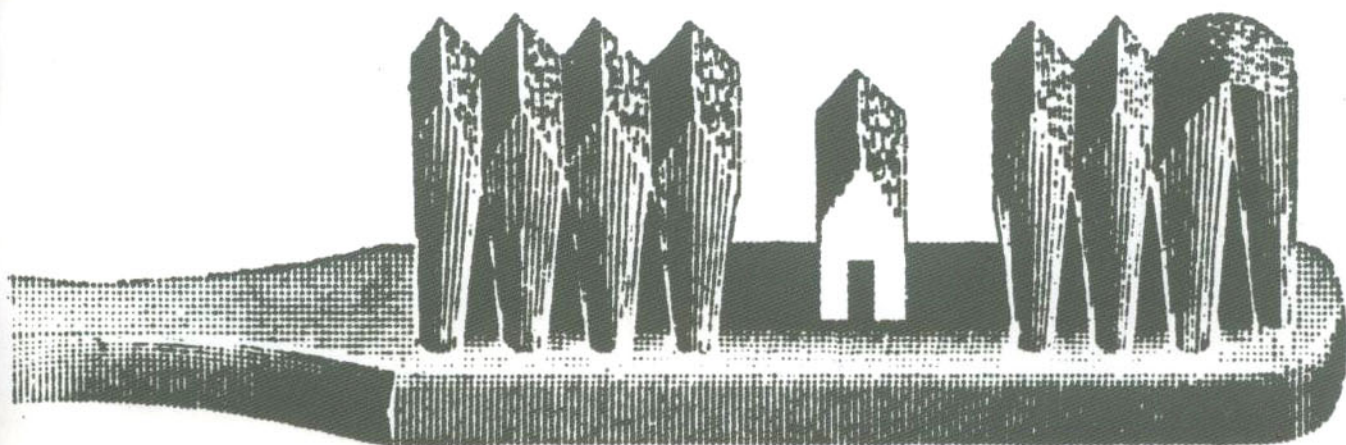
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The Mediterranean, Key to World Security

The Mediterranean must seek equally to redress the glaring imbalance that separates each rim in terms of its economic development, social cohesion, democracy, human rights, and gender equality

JAVIER VALENZUELA

Unparalleled cradle of cultures and religions, of exchanges both human and commercial, of encounters and fusion: the Mediterranean region today is also the touchstone of efforts to build a world at once more secure and more peaceful. It is there—in the Mediterranean space, taken broadly to encompass its coastal countries and their zones of influence—that the key to fighting jihadist terrorism may be found. This is where the challenge posed by Al Qaeda and associated or similar groups and cells can be countered by strategic answers as sweeping as they are profound and effective, aiming not only to quell the symptoms of this evil, but to destroy its very roots along with the fertile ground in which it flourishes. A global problem demands a global response. One that draws on every available means to that end. Means involving policework, intelligence services, and the judiciary, but so too instruments of a political, diplomatic, cultural, and economic nature. A global response requires working for the short term while never losing sight of the medium and long run.

Alas, the international agenda is currently dominated by a majority-held worldview summarized in the call to “the war on terror” which is obsessed with responses proffered exclusively by police and military forces. It is an unrealistic view, to be quite frank. The persistence of the jihadist phenomenon in the after-war in Iraq has made its shortcomings palpable. They are evidenced also, and tragically so, by the attacks perpetrated upon Madrid, London, and Sharm-el-Sheikh. This focus on the immediate near term melds with the ideological obfuscation of its ultraconservative promoters. And it grows all the more dangerous when filtered through such flawed hypotheticals as “the clash of civilizations.”

No, reason has to lie elsewhere. A realistic approach dictates that we recognize how deeply entrenched the

phenomenon is, and that it necessitates long-term, complex and costly intervention. Shock therapy is needed to treat the symptoms—involving the police; the intelligence services; the judiciary—coupled with a comprehensive plan to attack the source of the problem, so we are forever rid of the swamps which breed jihadism’s false arguments and fanatical recruits. There is another way forward. An alternative response based not on perilous warmongering in the Middle East, nor on massive restrictions of rights and freedoms in the West. A path blazed by what has been termed ‘the Spanish initiative’ which was democratically endorsed by the people of Spain when they flocked to the ballot box on March 14, 2004 to voice their views, just three days after the attack they suffered on March 11th.

In Spain, barbaric terrorism was not followed by pogroms against Arabs and Muslims. Nor was there a rush to enact restrictive legislation. Quite the opposite occurred. The country moved to strengthen the capacity of its police and intelligence services whose action in the fight against jihadism prior to the attacks had been weak. Efforts were also made to bolster international coordination with countries like France, Morocco, and the United States. In the process, Spain opted to enhance the rights and freedoms of its people. Among other measures, the administration of José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero made history by selecting Spain’s first gender-neutral cabinet, boasting a female vice president and an equal number of male and female ministers. A new law granted homosexuals the right to marry. Another regularized the immigration status of hundreds of thousands of undocumented aliens, thereby promoting their integration into

Spanish society based on the principle of equal rights and obligations. In the international sphere, Zapatero

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not only withdrew Spanish troops from Iraq. He undertook the active promotion of a policy of peace, respect for international law, and multilateralism. He proposed a platform advocating increased foreign aid to support economic and social development in the most backward countries, and an alliance of civilizations embracing all cultures and creeds mobilized against fundamentalist bigotry and terrorism of every stripe.

The answer to terrorism is not less democracy, but rather more democracy. The debate on freedom and security is byzantine: without security there can be no freedom and without freedom there can be no security. This truth was axiomatic for all who fought successfully against the totalitarian dictatorships of the 20th century that gripped the West, whether Fascist or Stalinist. And so must it be understood in the present struggle. This is no amorphous terror. Let us frankly admit that we are up against a new brand of totalitarianism, one that emerges from a false, skewed, and highly dangerous interpretation of Islam. No, the answer to global terror cannot be fear, isolation and unilateralism. It can only be courage, solidarity, and cooperation among the democrats of the world. And this Tenth Anniversary of "The Barcelona Process," as it is known, has served to reaffirm that the Mediterranean is the primordial forum from which to promote a vision that empowers by its realism and pragmatism. Indeed, it is the only vision likely to bring us victory and ensure that our children, and our children's children, will inhabit a world rendered more secure through greater freedom and justice.

It is imperative that the Mediterranean come up with a just settlement to the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, a major cancer that has now morphed into a spreading and vigorous political Islam whose latest and worst abomination is jihadist terrorism. Resolution must rest perforce on coexistence between these two States of the Holy Land. The State of Israel, whose ancient and well-earned right to exist in peace entitles it to secure borders recognized by all. And the State of Palestine, whose statehood must be both genuine and viable. Likewise, the Mediterranean must redress the glaring imbalances that separate its northern and southern rims in terms of economic development, social cohesion, democracy, human rights, and gender equality. The Mediterranean must foster legal and orderly human migration flows through progressive and proactive policies agreed to by the developed countries of the north in order to secure the effective integration of

southern immigrants as members of a democratic society premised on equal rights and obligations. Rights, yes, but duties too. We dare not countenance a Europe riddled with urban ghettos that preach violence, spawn terrorism, discriminate against women, and advocate the supremacy of this or that creed over democracy and the rule of law.

The governments of France, Spain, Italy, Greece, and other nations affiliated within the European Union rightly insist that the EU pay greater attention to the Mediterranean. In calling for greater involvement in the region they invoke not only time-honored historical and geopolitical reasons, but compelling new ones as well: the national security of each member state; the collective security of Europe; world security itself.

The answer to global terror cannot be fear, isolation and unilateralism. It can only be courage, solidarity, and cooperation among the democrats of the world. And this Tenth Anniversary of "The Barcelona Process," as it is known, has served to reaffirm that the Mediterranean is the primordial forum from which to promote a vision that empowers by its realism and pragmatism.

The Euro-Mediterranean Summit constituted a strong step forward on the road to more effective cooperation in the area. Nonetheless, the European Union must do more. To advance a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that engages the EU not merely in its traditional bankrolling capacity, but as an active political agent of the peace process. To offer material assistance to countries on the Mediterranean's southern rim in exchange for concrete and sustained progress in building democracy and in protecting human rights. To support the forces of civil society throughout the Arab and Muslim world which yearn for freedom, uphold equality for women, and strive for the separation of faith and state as they stand before us and struggle on, mostly under dire conditions, constant threat, and utterly defenseless. ■