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“The Geo-Strategic Dimension of the Recent Developments in the Maghrebi Neighborhood”

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The Maghreb, per se, initially covers the three North African states (Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia), which were all former French colonies, and to which conjectural necessities have imparted the integration of both Libya and Mauritania within the 1989 UMA group of nations. Geographically speaking, what's then at stake in the present analyses (pertaining to the Maghreb “Neighboring Countries”) is a much larger region covering not only the twenty Mediterranean coastal nations that surround the “Mare Nostrum”, including such insular states as Cyprus and Malta, but also their surrounding countries in the Middle East, the Gulf and the Sahel, which, deeper beyond the front line coastal states represent gigantic human communities both in Europe, the Middle East and Africa, and which are extremely attentive to the multiple flow of opportunities of goods, wealth, ideas, science, technology and mostly human migratory movements. But, beyond this huge potential of opportunities for mutual growth that may lay beneath a possible and still unreachable cooperation between these nations, most of them have to various degrees recently been looked at more as risk bearing sources of threat than as real potential partners of progress. On both sides of the “Mare” have, during recent decades, progressively been growing trends of fear and mistrust.

Globally speaking, the block of North African countries immediately facing Southern Europe covers (including Egypt) a territory of more than 7 million square kilometers (a little larger than Australia, twice the size of India and almost the size of Canada) on which is scattered a population of about 157 million inhabitants. Its economic underdevelopment, its visibly high birth rate, its low employment opportunities, its passive and low performance educational systems represent a source of real concern. Furthermore, the ailing cooperation patterns within its borders offer a real nurturing opportunity to the multiple facets of the growing terrorist threat linked to Islamist claims and obscurantist pretensions in the region.

Thus, beyond a geographic style vision, a topic focused analysis, to be submitted for debate and consideration of **the upcoming Tunis workshop**, may allow the identification of multiple present day and near future regional concerns, i.e.: increasing and diversified sources of terror threats, a growing number of failed states, multifaceted deployments of illicit markets (free flow of weapons, multiple traffic roads of drug smuggling, human trafficking and commerce of counterfeited goods), new ideological terror postulates built on sectarian interpretations of the religion(s), free flow of manipulative propaganda policies via internet based instruments, a discourse of open rupture with established orders, etc... These may well be apprehended through a dual vision [**within a 20 minutes presentation**] that confronts the “External” factors which impact recent geostrategic evolutions in and around the region with more authentically “endogen” factors that genuinely characterize the countries of the region and nurture their vulnerability.

- I. **The External Factors**: Within the context of global developments that characterize the modern world, economic, social, political as well as military phenomena tend to reduce the historic notion of borders to a growingly meaningless speck. Multiple visible (and often non perceivable) factors tend

to play determining roles on the ongoing events worldwide. North Africa per se currently finds itself therefore confronted not only with realms that may well be germinating in its immediate geographic neighborhood, as it certainly is also impacted by games whose strings are pulled by geographically distant leading world powers and newly emerging influential entities and/or organizations. With this reality kept in mind, along with the growing number of zones of military confrontation in the region, five notions may however allow a tentative analyses of a few impacting factors on the “geo-strategic regional developments in the Maghrebi neighborhood”. These are:

1. **The Colonial Legacy**: From territorial occupation to continued economic exploitation.
2. **A Favorable Arena for Resurgent Conflicts**: The impacting effect of the legal notion of “*uti possideti juris*”.
3. **The Flow of Massive Trafficking**: An area of transit as well as of circulation of weapons, counterfeit goods and human beings.
4. **The Effects of Mass Communication**: The free flow of manipulative propaganda policies via internet based instruments.
5. **The Multifaceted Terror Threat**: The terrorist ideological deployments through New Strategic Penetration Mechanisms.

II. The Endogen Factors: Yet, the regional challenges do not only stem from outside influence. Deficient domestic management of issues has also massively contributed to the decaying situation. Multiple aspects may be brought up in this context. Among them are:

1. **The National Institutional Deficiencies**: Autocracy vs democracy.
2. **The Ailing Regional Cooperation**: The moribund dream of the “UMA”.
3. **Social Injustice within domestic boundaries**: Increasingly poverty stricken societies.
4. **The Decay of Societal values**: Between “School” and “Family”.
5. **The Growing Challenges to Established Orders**: The aftermaths of the “Arab Spring”.

=====> **Conclusion**: with an open debate pertaining to the “*Awkward Position of the Arab League*”:
What appropriate stand should it take from the ongoing events in the MENA region?

Casablanca, May 2015,
Dr. Hassan Rahmouni.