

ipating the preferences of government officials rather than with carefully examining recent events and offering critical analysis in an effort to come to terms with international political realities.

Following upon this point is the absence of a sense of history evident in the report. The authors seem incapable of envisioning the long-term national interest — a fundamental prerequisite to providing a solution to the problems of underdevelopment and

world stability. Although the consequences of accepting such a proposition appear enormous, a new world order may demand a reduction in our standard of living and in our economic growth. Instead of confronting this possibility, the Economic Council has ignored it entirely. In turn, the Council has sacrificed its credibility as an organization established to consider and recommend appropriate strategies for policy-makers.

Islam and the "crescent of crisis" —exploding the myth of homogeneity

by Georges Vigny

When, in connection with the Middle East, we speak of a "crescent of crisis", do we mean that these countries, whose geographical distribution suggests the shape of a crescent, are a breeding ground for crisis?

Or do we mean, on the contrary, that these countries are the victims of crisis?

Or are both of these interpretations correct?

Could it be that we are mistaking the effect for the cause? More precisely, are these "sensitive" countries merely reacting more violently to external factors, namely world events, just as the weak parts of a structure are more liable to collapse under pressure?

This expression, which American specialists — and non-specialists — employ with a certain affectedness, as their own wonderfully incisive invention, is rather inappropriate and clumsy. How many of those who use it attach to it the same meaning and apply it in the same context? The expression makes a gross generalization, leads to misunderstanding and is, besides, sterile in that having become a sort of "buzzword", it seems to cast a negative light on all the events that take place in the area in question.

Moreover, the term is, at best, a plagiarism: what in the forties, in the excitement over the burgeoning Arab identity, was called the "fertile crescent", in reference to Hashemite federal projects, seems to

have provided a semantic basis for this ill-advised expression, which owes its popularity to that of its predecessor.

The expression, representative of a certain kind of political thinking, perpetuates through its first word, "crescent", a serious error: the crescent is the symbol of Islam, and in the expression "crescent of crisis" it has the immediate effect of homogenizing the fundamental differences which exist not only between the countries that compose it, but also within the Islamic religion itself.

Dangers

Our sole purpose in attacking this popular expression is to warn against the dangers of what is termed the "buzzword pattern", which, by giving rise to the assumption that one has understood the situation, results in serious distortions of the truth, both intentionally and unintentionally. When such a process provides the framework or basis of political thinking within a government, it generally leads to political decisions which are based on an erroneous though accepted view of reality.

In the case of the "crescent of crisis" and the homogenization mentioned above, we are led to believe that the area described contains similar, if not identical, entities. A common denominator is held up in support of this claim: Islam and everything it represents as a dynamic and a static force. And to the extent that this subject has been studied within a single country, extrapolation does the rest, resulting in a dangerous and arbitrary generalization. The

Mr Vigny is Editor-in-Chief of the monthly magazine Informag and former Associate Editor of Le Devoir. The views expressed in this article are those of the author.