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The strategic environment in the Mediterranean will be shaped by trends already visible, including the return of Russia and the emergence of China as regional players. But the environment may also be transformed by potential shocks or “wildcards” capable of recasting the outlook for security and insecurity across the region.

Rediscovering the Mediterranean: A Transatlantic Perspective on Security and Strategy

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New Strategies, New Actors

The American presence in the Mediterranean is longstanding, but despite 200 years of engagement in the region, the American perspective on the Mediterranean remains distinctive and diffused. The European Union and key European partners have Mediterranean strategies in place, and the French-led initiative for a Mediterranean Union points to new dynamism in Europe's policy looking south. Europe and especially southern Europe, has a well-developed notion of the Mediterranean and its hinterlands as a strategic space. By contrast, Washington continues to divide the region, intellectually and bureaucratically along rigid regional lines—Europe, including southern Europe on the one hand, the Middle East and North Africa on the other. Key sub-regions and issues, including the Balkans and Arab-Israeli disputes, are rarely if ever placed in an explicitly Mediterranean context. To the extent that security cooperation around the Mediterranean looms as a key test for the future of transatlantic cooperation, this asymmetry in approaching the region must be recognized and overcome.

Functional issues, above all counterterrorism and energy security, are central to the emerging American debate over Mediterranean strategy. Yet, the perspective from Washington is still driven largely by bilateral relationships and specific flashpoints around the Mediterranean basin, rather than a comprehensive approach. Could this change? The short answer is yes. The determinants will be the evolution of the internal security scene along the southern shore of the Mediterranean, and new approaches to Mediterranean strategy emanating from Europe. Looking ahead, the strategic environment in the Mediterranean will be shaped by trends already visible, including the return of Russia and the emergence of China as regional players. But the environment may also be transformed by potential shocks or “wildcards” capable of recasting the outlook for security and insecurity across the region.

The Primacy of Internal Security

Traditionally, security around the southern shores of the Mediterranean has been about internal security, first and foremost. Governments from the Maghreb to the

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Levant, and around the southeastern Adriatic, continue to face a series of domestic challenges to legitimacy and stability. Leaving aside political challenges, regimes must contend with a range of internal security problems, from political violence and terrorism, to separatist movements and organized crime. The post-9/11 environment has actually brought about a degree of convergence in north-south perspectives. In past decades, the southern Mediterranean preoccupation with internal security contrasted strongly with prevailing views in Europe and across the Atlantic, where security debates focused largely on state-to-state dynamics and regional crises. Today, internal security is a shared preoccupation for north and south.

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The internal security scene will be shaped by several factors. First, demographic trends fuel many of the leading concerns across the southern Mediterranean, and also strongly affect security perceptions in Europe. Societies in North Africa and the Levant face, to a greater or lesser degree, a common conundrum regarding the “youth bulge,” inadequate economic growth and political stability. In sharp contrast to Europe (but not the United States), southern Mediterranean populations are young and growing, even if the pace of population growth has slowed in recent years. With the notable exceptions of Israel—arguably not a part of the less developed south of the Mediterranean at all—and Turkey, the region suffers from a growing gap between the education and employment needs of young populations, and what societies can offer. Even states such as Morocco and Tunisia that have made notable progress in economic modernization and reform, continue to face a growing challenge of youth unemployment, alongside rising expectations—a potentially explosive combination. Under these conditions, the economic liberalization programs pressed by Europe and the United States, may actually prove destabilizing in political and security terms, at least in the absence of radical new approaches to education and investment across the region.

Second, demographic trends on both sides of the Mediterranean are fueling uncontrolled migration and a host of associated public policy problems, from human security to cultural anxiety. The developmental divide between north and south in the Mediterranean is among the most dramatic on a global basis, second only to the gap between north and south on the Korean peninsula. Moreover, migration dynamics across the Mediterranean are increasingly driven by pressures from a more distant south, including sub-Saharan Africa, the Middle East, and South Asia. As northern societies have adopted tougher border controls and immigration policies, the traditional circulation of migrants has been constrained. As the risks of migration have increased, those migrants already in Europe now tend to remain in the north, even as overall pressures for economic migration remain high. Tougher policy approaches have thus had the unintended result of increasing the number of “illegal” migrants in the north, a phenomenon visible in North America as well. These trends have real security consequences in terms of loss of life in failed attempts to cross the Mediterranean, and the expansion of criminal and terrorist networks accompanying uncontrolled migration. In a less tangible sense, migration of this kind fuels cultural anxieties—fears regarding security of identity—and xenophobic politics, complicating the longer-term outlook for north-south relations.

Third, political Islam remains the leading threat to regimes across the southern Mediterranean. From Morocco to the Levant, Islamist movements contend for power at the level of electoral politics, with varying success. From a Western perspective, it is not certain that movements such as the Justice and Development Party in Morocco or the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt represent a security challenge per se, but for hard-pressed governments in the south, the challenge is clear enough. More troubling has been the revival and reconfiguration of violent Islamist networks across North Africa, with echoes in Europe.² Algeria may not be on the verge of collapse under the pressure of Islamist violence as many thought in the mid 1990s. But Islamist movements are hardly a spent force as a factor in Mediterranean stability, as the bombings in Morocco and Algeria, the reality of Hamas rule in Gaza, and the power of Hezbollah in Lebanon make clear. The relatively easy movement of people across the Mediterranean, and the existence of large Maghrebi communities in Europe, makes the problem of radical Islamism and jihadist terrorism a shared problem for north and south.

² A leading example is the re-branding of Algeria’s Salafist Group for Preaching and Combat (GSPC) as Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb.

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Iraq will be a factor in this equation, as a cause celebre for violent networks active around the Mediterranean, but also as a training ground for a new generation of extremists. Significant numbers of the foreign fighters in Iraq have come from North Africa, including Egypt, and North Africans figure prominently in the emerging cadre of Al-Qaeda leaders. Over time, these jihadi tourists will return, or find their way to Europe, where they may focus their attention on the “near enemies,” the established regimes, and western targets closer to home. A similar trend was seen after the return of the Arab Afghans from the struggle against the Soviet Union. Observers in North Africa often credit these Afghan veterans with fomenting much of the violent unrest in Algeria, Egypt, and Tunisia in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The scale and significance of the Afghan factor in North Africa can be debated. But it would be unwise to assume that veterans of the Iraq insurgency will not play a role in the security environment around the Mediterranean over the next decade.

Nationalism and Regional Dynamics

By some measures, the Mediterranean is arguably more secure today than a decade ago. In the western Mediterranean, Spanish-Moroccan frictions over the enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla remain unresolved, but the risk of an outright clash is probably lower than it has been for decades. Western détente with Libya and the progressive reintegration of Tripoli into international economic and political life has removed a significant source of tension in the central Mediterranean, even if the longer-term future of Libya and its external relations remain uncertain. In the eastern Mediterranean, the détente between Athens and Ankara has been nothing short of transformative in terms of regional stability and crisis management. The new pattern of relations, bolstered by growing economic ties and bilateral diplomacy, has also removed a leading policy challenge for Washington. Aegean stability no longer places the same demands on American policymakers. There is a new sense of confidence and movement toward a solution on Cyprus, and only a few in Europe and the United States now fear a Greek-Turkish clash over the island. In key respects, Cyprus is now a political rather than a security problem from an American perspective, and the center of gravity for Cyprus diplomacy is now Brussels rather than Washington.

Palestinian-Israeli conflict and wider Arab-Israeli tensions continue to shape Mediterranean security, not least because of the affect on public opinion across the southern Mediterranean.

The failure to reach a comprehensive settlement sets limits on multilateral security dialogue and cooperation in European, NATO, and regional frames. The conflict clearly has a Mediterranean dimension, especially with regard to Lebanon and Syria. But it is arguable that here, too, the center of gravity has shifted eastward in political and security terms. Iran is an increasingly important element in the Israeli security calculus, and Tehran is, by virtue of its growing strategic “reach” and support for

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irregular forces, a significant player in the Middle East conflict. At the same time, Saudi Arabia and the smaller Gulf states have acquired a larger stake in the future of the peace process, and their participation matters, as the recent Annapolis conference demonstrated. In sum, the unresolved conflict between Israel and its neighbors now reaches eastward from the Mediterranean to the Gulf, and even Pakistan.

The outlook for Mediterranean security at the level of states and regional flashpoints will be heavily influenced by the power of nationalism as a political force in north and south. Rising nationalist sentiment could easily spur a reversal of the progress in Greek-Turkish relations. It could seriously worsen already strained relations between Morocco and Algeria over the Western Sahara and other issues. As the Kosovo experience shows only too clearly, nationalism remains the leading force for insecurity in the Balkans and around the Adriatic, and this, too, is part of the Mediterranean equation. Over the next decade, the prospects for stability in the Mediterranean will be shaped by the shifting balance between nationalism, and the attachment

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to traditional notions of national sovereignty, and more positive pressures for integration in a wider European space, and along south-south lines. With the exception of energy trade, this last dimension remains strikingly underdeveloped in the Mediterranean, with the persistence of serious structural and political impediments to trade, investment, and regional cooperation at many levels.

New Actors, New Strategies

Since the end of the Roman Empire, the Mediterranean has never really had a “unipolar moment.” Today, many regions within and on the periphery of Eurasia are highly multipolar. This is certainly true of the Black Sea, the Caspian, and Central Asia. It is also true of the Mediterranean, where a variety of old and new actors are present and playing a direct or indirect role.

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At the Euroatlantic level, the Mediterranean is an area where American and European roles are relatively well balanced. In contrast to the Gulf, European states can project military power around the Mediterranean very effectively, and are doing so in the Balkans and Lebanon. In political and economic terms, the European Union is the predominant player in the region. American economic involvement in North Africa is growing, mainly as a result of energy trade with Algeria, the reopening of relations with Libya, and a free trade agreement with Morocco. But Europe remains the critical trade and investment partner for the southern Mediterranean. The U.S. 6th Fleet will likely remain in the Mediterranean, even as the American air and ground presence in Europe declines or is oriented elsewhere. But a sustained American security engagement can no longer be taken for granted at all times, and under all conditions. In the Balkans and North Africa, in particular, the coming years might well see too little American presence for European comfort. Already, the United States no longer regularly deploys a carrier battle group in the Mediterranean, a practice that would have been unthinkable a decade ago.

At the same time, new external actors are appearing on the Mediterranean scene. Russia—an old actor—has returned to the region after almost a 20 year absence. Russia is increasingly present as an investor, primarily in the energy sector, as a trading partner, and as a supplier of defense goods and services to Algeria, Syria, and others. Russians are now a part of the Mediterranean landscape as tourists and property owners. In the fall of 2007, the Russian navy returned to the Mediterranean to exercise in strength for the first time since the break-up of the Soviet Union. This renewed Russian involvement in the political, economic, and security life of the Mediterranean could acquire very different meaning if relations between Russia and the West remain troubled. A return to Cold War-style competition, even if at far lower levels, might have a center of gravity in the south, the Black Sea, the Balkans, and the eastern Mediterranean, areas at the margins of the first Cold War.

China is emerging as an economic actor of some importance around the Mediterranean, and a potentially significant security player. The rapid expansion of Chinese investment in sub-Saharan Africa has obscured the smaller but still remarkable growth in Chinese investment in North Africa. These investments extend beyond the energy sector and include large-scale stakes in the textile industry in Tunisia, and port facilities around the Mediterranean. Historically, China has had a leading role as a defense partner for Albania, as a partner in Algeria’s nuclear program, and (with North Korea) as a supplier of ballistic missile technology to Egypt, Syria, and Libya. Looking ahead, India, already a partner in defense cooperation with Israel, could acquire a larger interest in Mediterranean commerce and security.

Rediscovering the Mediterranean

Over a decade after the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP)—the “Barcelona Process”—partners on both sides of the Mediterranean are reconsidering the tenets of a policy widely seen as troubled and dysfunctional. Among southern Mediterranean states, there is a continued desire for a more balanced partnership, with a greater voice for the south in political, economic, and security agendas. The lack of an integrated partner in the south, and the persistence of a “hub and spoke” relationship with Europe, is widely seen as part of the problem. Barcelona was launched at a time of relative optimism on the bilateral and multilateral tracks of the Middle East peace process. Over the years, the persistence of conflict with Israel has proved a central impediment to multilateral cooperation with

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southern Mediterranean partners on political and security matters. Moreover, European aid and investment in the southern Mediterranean has become more conditional over time, tied to political and economic reform and the development of suitable projects for EU funding—an ongoing challenge.

For Europe, the Barcelona experience has been equally frustrating. The EMP suffers from an enduring lack of consensus among EU members as requirements on Europe's southern periphery compete with continuing enlargement and cohesion priorities in the east. The elaboration of the European Neighborhood Policy has further complicated this picture as EU members consider the place of Mediterranean initiatives in the overall approach to wider Europe, both east and south. Will the Barcelona Process continue as a stand-alone initiative, or will it be subsumed within a broader neighborhood strategy? Southern European states will likely see continued merit in a distinctive and well-funded European strategy toward the Mediterranean, built around the notion of Mediterranean identity, but this approach may not be sustainable. The absence of a transatlantic dimension also imposes certain limitations on the EMP, especially in the security context.

The United States has been active through NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, launched in 1994 and subsequently expanded and enhanced. But even here, the United States has never been in the vanguard of an initiative promoted largely by southern European members of the alliance. To the extent that the Mediterranean Dialogue continues to evolve in the direction of tangible, practical defense cooperation with the six Mediterranean partners—Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, and Jordan—American interest will be sustained, and could grow. Already, there is informal talk of bringing Libya into the Dialogue, a step Washington could well support.

Some of the most important new thinking and action related to Mediterranean cooperation is now coming from France, with important transatlantic implications. President Sarkozy's 2007 proposal for a Mediterranean Union has been greeted with some skepticism in Europe, partly from fear that it might undermine already troubled EU initiatives toward the region. In some quarters, the proposal was also seen as a way of sidelining Turkey's EU candidacy. The Merkel government has been openly critical of the Sarkozy proposal as a unilateral French initiative, developed without adequate consultation, and potentially competitive

with German priorities in the east. Yet, the concept has gathered way, and there is now a tentative agreement within the European Council to give the Mediterranean Union status as an EU project, with European funding and EU-wide participation. Security would be only one dimension of the proposed Union, the thrust of which will be a series of specific functional projects in such areas as energy security and migration.

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Despite the mixed reaction in Europe, the Mediterranean Union idea has attracted considerable, and largely positive attention in the United States. The “Sarkozy factor” is part of the explanation. The possible opening for cooperation with Washington is another. If France does indeed return to NATO's integrated military command as the Sarkozy administration has suggested, transatlantic security cooperation in the Mediterranean will be directly and positively affected. For all of these reasons, Franco-American policy dialogue on the Mediterranean is likely to loom large in the strategic future of the region over the next few years.

Apart from questions of internal stability, development and counterterrorism, energy and maritime security issues are likely to be at the top of the agenda in new approaches to the Mediterranean. The development of an increasingly dense network of oil and gas pipelines in the western, central, and eastern Mediterranean, and across the Adriatic, is linking the Mediterranean ever more closely to distant energy sources and markets. A Mediterranean energy market is already emerging, and energy transit issues are occupying much foreign policy energy for Turkey, Greece, Italy, and others around the region. A proposed pipeline from West Africa to Algeria would add a new southern dimension to this system. Energy concerns are also driving renewed attention to maritime security in the Mediterranean, including the security of sea lanes, ports, key choke points such as Suez, Gibraltar and the Bosphorus, and diverse environmental risks.

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In the maritime arena, the United States and Europe will continue to press for greater transparency and surveillance, sometimes at the expense of national sovereignty as seen by southern Mediterranean states.

Potential “Shocks” and Transforming Events

Beyond longer-term trends, the prudent strategist will also consider the possibility of unexpected transforming events—shocks or wildcards capable of producing sudden shifts in the security environment. The Mediterranean is a place of old cultures, status quo powers, and durable geopolitics. With multiple influences and multiple actors, the region is nonetheless exposed to a range of possible shocks and non-linear futures.

- The emergence of one or more new nuclear-armed powers in the Middle East would be transforming for the strategic environment. A nuclear or near-nuclear Iran could have a series of cascading effects on military balances and strategic perceptions across a wide region, from the Caspian to the Aegean, and from Europe and the Maghreb. The continued proliferation of ballistic missiles of trans-Mediterranean range underscores the exposure of north and south to proliferation dynamics around and beyond the Mediterranean Sea.
- A collapse in Pakistan might seem a distant event when seen from the Mediterranean. But the ensuing political chaos, effects on terrorist networks, and the possible loss of control over the country’s nuclear arsenal, could have dramatic implications for Europe and the southern Mediterranean as Pakistan becomes a central issue in relations between the Muslim world and the West.
- Further deterioration in relations between an increasingly nationalistic and assertive Russia, and an increasingly insecure West, would raise the specter of more severe competition over energy and security issues, some of which would be played out within the larger Mediterranean space. Under these conditions, states in the Maghreb and the Levant, including Turkey, could once again be forced into uncomfortable choices in their defense and economic relations between east and west.
- The current global financial instability makes clear that the potential for a severe economic crisis is all too real. The possible consequences of a prolonged crisis for the Mediterranean environment are wide-ranging. High-growth but fragile economies Turkey is the leading case, but there are others—could face new economic crises of their own.

Developing economies in the Maghreb might find aid and investment dramatically curtailed. Leading energy exporters such as Libya and Algeria could see an end to high demand and high prices, with serious implications for domestic cohesion and stability. Xenophobic and nationalistic political movements in Europe could benefit from these conditions, and could be expected to press a tougher stance on migration from the south. Economic stringency might also severely complicate transatlantic relations, limiting the prospects for a more concerted policy in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. Finally, a prolonged recession could spur a far more parsimonious approach to American power and presence, leaving Europe to cover more of the security burden on the periphery of the continent. In the worst case, a deterioration of security relations between states could follow a deterioration of economic relations, with a heightened propensity for regional conflict—the interwar model.

- New acts of super-terrorism on the pattern of 9/11, or a campaign of attacks on the pattern of Madrid, Istanbul or Casablanca, could prove highly destabilizing in the Mediterranean context. The next major attack could well be in Europe, and as the Madrid bombings and more recent foiled plots in Italy and Spain demonstrate, southern Europe is not immune. There is a significant chance that North African networks will be involved in future attacks of this kind. The result could be a further “securitization” of north-south relations in the Mediterranean, and a redoubling of internal security concerns.
- A break-up of Iraq and the emergence of an independent Kurdish state in the north would pose enormous problems for Turkey and its international partners. Ankara already faces serious security challenges as a result of the renewed PKK insurgency and urban terrorism. The nature of the Turkish reaction would have significant long-term implications for Turkey’s strategic orientation, and Ankara’s ability to act in other spheres, including the eastern Mediterranean.

To this catalogue of highly undesirable contingencies, we should add some potential events of a positive and equally transforming nature:

- Unquestionably, a comprehensive Palestinian-Israeli settlement and the emergence of a durable two-state solution, would have a transforming effect on the Mediterranean security environment. Other regional rivalries would remain, of course, and internal challenges would persist. But a leading flashpoint would be removed, even if rejectionists continued to challenge the agreement. A major new commitment to

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stability and development in a Palestinian state might well be imbedded in a wider strategy of aid and investment for the southern Mediterranean. Consolidating and securing a comprehensive settlement would, by its nature, require closer transatlantic coordination in the eastern Mediterranean.

- Détente between Tehran and Washington may seem a remote prospect from the perspective of 2008. Over the next decade, however, the potential for a revolutionary break in the pattern of relations between Iran and the West is quite real. Unlike the recent détente with Libya, the reintegration of Iran would go beyond the merely stabilizing, and would be transformative for nonproliferation, energy security and relations between Israel and its neighbors. These effects would be felt in the Mediterranean as well as the Gulf.

Toward a Mediterranean Strategy

The Mediterranean security environment is evolving rapidly, driven by internal pressures on both sides of the sea, changing regional dynamics—positive as well as negative—and the emergence of new actors and new strategies. Questions of religion and identity, traditionally important elements in Mediterranean affairs, are once again central.

Strategic shocks, many emanating from beyond the Mediterranean, are likely to play a critical role in the evolution of the region at many levels. Again, not all of these transforming contingencies are negative, but many could have strongly destabilizing consequences.

Looking ahead, this analysis suggests that Mediterranean and Atlantic partners will face some critical open questions. Mediterranean states, and above all the Mediterranean states of Europe, will need to consider the merits of ever wider strategies toward the European periphery, the extended neighborhood, versus a reinvigorated strategy toward the Mediterranean, Europe's near abroad. Does Mediterranean identity matter as an organizing principle for strategy and policy, or is it an anachronism? The French-led initiative for a Mediterranean Union, and the revival of the "5+5" dialogue between southern Europe and the Arab Maghreb Union suggest that the notion of a unifying Mediterranean identity is hardly a spent force. It could even be a necessary corollary and complement to Germany's drive for a new *ostpolitik* if Europe is to be a more assertive and effective security actor on the periphery.

What role can the United States play in emerging Mediterranean strategies? Much will depend on competing priorities in American foreign policy. If the next decade is defined by a looming strategic competition between the United States and China, it is unlikely that American security engagement in the Mediterranean will expand. If stability along Europe's southern periphery is increasingly seen as critical to transatlantic security in an era of shared risks, greater American engagement if not necessarily greater presence, will be a priority. Under any conditions, the primacy of internal security in the region argues for much closer coordination in European and American approaches to aid, investment and reform across the southern Mediterranean.

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Partners on both sides of the Mediterranean will be affected by the globalization of regional security, in particular, the burgeoning links between security in Africa and Eurasia and the strategic environment in the Mediterranean. If North African networks become more prominent on the terrorism scene, as many officials and analysts expect, these links will be underscored in stark terms. New transit routes and wider migration patterns are also part of this equation, alongside the growing reach of ballistic missiles and the increasing capacity of non-Mediterranean actors to project power—hard and soft—into the sea and its hinterlands. The traditional question of the interdependence of the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Asia-Pacific worlds remains relevant for today's strategists and policymakers.

This analysis suggests several policy implications. First, the new debate about Mediterranean strategy in Europe and the prospective reassessment of foreign policy priorities in Washington opens the way for a more explicit discussion of

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transatlantic approaches to the Mediterranean. France will be the critical interlocutor here, and the key to a concerted strategy toward the region. Alongside unavoidable issues such as Iraq and Iran, the next American administration will have an opportunity to make Mediterranean policy a feature of a more balanced transatlantic agenda. Europe, for its part, should be open to a role for the US in a more active Mediterranean policy, even if the idea of American participation in the Mediterranean Union is a non-starter for most European leaderships.

Second, regional integration should be a priority for diplomacy and development assistance around the southern Mediterranean. In a region where the leading security priorities are internal but the risks are transnational and trans-regional, challenges of development and stability are increasingly difficult to address on a national basis. Removing the political obstacles to south-south cooperation can pay dividends for north and south. The transformation in the security and economic climate in the eastern Mediterranean as a result of Greek-Turkish détente is an example of what can be achieved, and a possible model for relations in the Maghreb where key borders remain closed and regional integration is minimal.

Finally, practical initiatives matter. Beyond north-south dialogue and existing counterterrorism and maritime security cooperation, Europe, the United States, and NATO need to focus on the neglected substance of Mediterranean security, including de-mining in North Africa, civil emergency planning, and environmental preparedness—all challenges high on the agenda of southern Mediterranean partners.

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