

# The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue

PERSPECTIVES ON SECURITY, STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIP

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JUNE, 2018



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*The views expressed in GMF publications are the views of the authors alone.*



# Preface

*This report is the product of a GMF study launched in 2017 for the office of NATO's Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy. The purpose of our analysis is to assess the status and prospects for NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue — the partnership program for seven countries in North Africa and the Middle East — in light of changes in the security environment and Alliance strategy. It is based on extensive interviews with officials and experts in each of the Mediterranean Dialogue countries, as well as stakeholders inside and outside NATO. The study and its findings reflect a resurgence of Alliance interest in an initiative that has evolved steadily since its launch in 1994. It has been driven, in large measure, by perspectives and suggestions from the “south.”*

*The research for this study has been conducted on a not-for-attribution basis, and the authors are grateful to all those who contributed to our work. As a practical matter, this endeavor, including conversations in the region, would not have been possible without the active cooperation of ambassadors and representatives of the Mediterranean Dialogue countries in Brussels and colleagues in their respective capitals. We are particularly grateful for their assistance. At NATO, special thanks are due to Ambassador Alejandro Alvargonzález, Assistant Secretary General for Political Affairs and Security Policy, and to Nicola de Santis, Head of the Middle East and North Africa Section, and his staff. Finally, special thanks are due to our outstanding trainees, Kai Wilson and Amal Bourhrous, and the communications team at GMF, in particular Megan Gilliland.*

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# Executive Summary

*Our analysis of the status and prospects for NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) — the partnership program with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia — is based on extensive interviews with officials and experts in each of the Dialogue countries, as well as stakeholders inside and outside NATO.*

## THE EVOLVING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The animating idea behind NATO engagement with Mediterranean partners — the notion that transatlantic and Mediterranean security are closely linked — is more obvious today than at any point in the history of the Alliance. Terrorism, migration, and human security are driving policy debates, alongside more conventional concerns over regional stability. Under these conditions, the need to foster a shared security community in political and practical terms is evident.

The influences on Mediterranean security have become more diverse and global. The Mediterranean is not a self-contained space in security terms. To a far greater extent than was envisioned in earlier years of Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), security in the region is being shaped by developments further afield, from the Black Sea and the Horn of Africa, to the Sahel, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the wider Atlantic. The strategic environment in the Mediterranean continues to expand in terms of geography and players.

Security priorities on both sides of the Mediterranean, and across the Atlantic, have converged. Counterterrorism and human security are at the top of agendas in the north and the south. In a related fashion, border control, maritime, and cybersecurity are shaping policies around the region, and will be central concerns for security partnership in the years ahead.

## NATO LOOKS SOUTH

As NATO looks to the 2018 Brussels Summit and beyond, the Alliance will need to articulate a more explicit strategy for the south. Mediterranean security and partnerships will be at the core, but the wider concerns will also be part of the equation, including close links to security in the Atlantic. Uncertainty about Alliance strategy looking south leads to uncertainty about the future of Mediterranean partnerships. A more explicit strategy will pay dividends. Furthermore, the Mediterranean and Mediterranean security partnerships are among the most promising areas for NATO–EU cooperation.

## PARTNER PERSPECTIVES

The seven MD partners vary greatly in terms of prosperity, defense capability, and regional concerns. But they share an interest in engagement with NATO as an influential strategic actor and as a practical contributor to their security needs. Negative public and elite attitudes toward NATO remain a challenge, but a manageable one. Interest in NATO, including the multilateral political dialogue within the MD, coexists alongside a cooler approach to the Alliance in public discourse. None of this has stood in the way of active participation in the political and practical aspects of the MD. It is unlikely to prove a significant obstacle in the future.

MD partners broadly agree on the need for more regular, focused, and informed multilateral



dialogue, including more diverse and informal formats. There is little support for expanding membership in the Dialogue per se, although Libya and possibly others could be brought in over time if conditions permit. New informal mechanisms should be developed to bring a range of relevant regional organizations and actors into the Dialogue. Maghreb members of the MD are particularly keen to work with the G-5 Sahel group and to deepen attention to security challenges emanating from Africa in general.

Practical priorities for MD countries include counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training (and equipment and funding), intelligence sharing, border control, cybersecurity, civil protection, and access to NATO courses and Science for Peace and Security projects. These interests mirror the current program of activities within the MD, and are broadly convergent with NATO's own priorities in the south. Partners are keen to underscore their own contributions, and potential contributions, to NATO. These include participation in Alliance operations, intelligence on terrorism and the movement of foreign fighters, and their experience in protecting energy and other critical infrastructure. They are also key actors in countering violent extremism and regional crisis management. In these respects, the partnership with NATO is a two-way street.



# Next Steps



The July 2018 Brussels Summit is an opportunity to underscore the centrality of Mediterranean partnerships to NATO strategy south. A more explicit and detailed Alliance strategy south will help define the future of the Mediterranean Dialogue and secure solid support from partners.



Future efforts should emphasize depth over breadth, with specific emphasis on a core set of priorities, including counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training, border and cybersecurity, human security, and the “warning” aspect of intelligence cooperation.



The multilateral political dialogue can be augmented with track 1.5 discussions, closely linked to 29+7 agendas. These can be organized by NATO or outsourced to policy institutions, in the north and south. More frequent, agenda driven meetings, and a non-binding rolling calendar of events would enhance the effectiveness of the Dialogue for the Alliance and its partners.



Within NATO, the range of current and planned *national* projects with MD countries should be surveyed more systematically to avoid duplication and promote alignment. The idea of “re-branding” or conducting some national and multinational exercises in the spirit of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue is worth exploring. However, symbolic value will need to be weighed against practical benefits.



The just-launched NATO Strategic Direction South (NSD-S) Hub in Naples can be a good vehicle for engaging Mediterranean Dialogue partners. Partners should be included in the planning and a range of relevant activities. This could include permanent liaison officers based in the NSD-S Hub.



Mediterranean Dialogue programs should be funded and staffed at a higher level, consistent with the initiative’s growing contribution to NATO strategy and to projecting stability southward.

*Greater clarity about NATO’s evolving strategy toward the south is essential to solidify partner interest, and to guide priorities for political and practical cooperation. NATO’s Mediterranean partnership efforts have not received adequate attention in the wider strategic community on both sides of the Atlantic. The activities and achievements of the Mediterranean Dialogue are too little known outside specialist circles.*



# 01

## Introduction

*Building a security community among NATO and the seven Dialogue partners is important, and achievable.*

**N**ATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) was launched in 1994 in a spirit of optimism about international security and the prospects for north-south cooperation. The mid-1990s were years of progress in the Middle East peace process and great activism in Mediterranean initiatives of all kinds.<sup>1</sup> Cold War antagonisms had been left behind, and debates about NATO and European Union enlargement were well underway. Under these conditions, it was natural to consider ways in which transatlantic security cooperation could be extended southward, and multilateral dialogue encouraged.<sup>2</sup> Almost 25 years on, the regional security environment around the Mediterranean is highly unstable and uncertain, and the Alliance itself faces new strategic challenges on multiple fronts. But many of the basic ideas that informed the early years of NATO's Mediterranean partnership remain valid, above all, the notion that transatlantic security cannot be divorced from security in the Mediterranean. This is evident despite the striking resurgence of risks emanating from Russia, of intense concern



to NATO's eastern members and the Alliance as a whole. From continuing conflicts in Syria and Libya, to migration and human security concerns, to terrorism and the foreign fighter phenomenon, strategy looking south has become central to the Alliance agenda — and to the agendas of NATO partners around the Mediterranean. Indeed, these agendas are arguably closer than ever in practical, north-south terms. Security concerns are essentially shared, and this suggests that there is no real tension between Alliance interests in the south and the objectives of Mediterranean partners. Building a security community among NATO and the seven Dialogue partners is important, and achievable.

<sup>1</sup> The European Union's Euro-Mediterranean initiative, the "Barcelona Process," was launched in 1995.

<sup>2</sup> This analysis is the most recent in a series of such studies undertaken with NATO sponsorship over the history of the Mediterranean Dialogue. See F. Stephen Larrabee, Jerrold Green, Ian O. Lesser, and Michele Zanini, *NATO's Mediterranean Initiative: Policy Issues and Dilemmas*, Santa Monica: RAND, 1998; and Ian O. Lesser, Jerrold D. Green, F. Stephen Larrabee, and Michele Zanini, *The Future of NATO's Mediterranean Initiative: Evolution and Next Steps*, Santa Monica: RAND, 2000.



*There is a strong sense that NATO's Mediterranean partnerships can engage in increasingly ambitious political dialogue, possibly with new formats and themes.*



The “Arab Spring” and its subsequent travails have introduced new challenges and opportunities for the Mediterranean Dialogue. In many cases, interlocutors have changed. The demand for assistance with counterterrorism, security sector reform, and defense capacity building has grown. Much of this demand is met through bilateral security cooperation with transatlantic partners — but not all. Public acceptance remains a challenge for the Alliance around the southern Mediterranean. But this is nothing new, and on the whole is less of an obstacle than sometimes portrayed. Opportunities for true multilateral dialogue on security questions, broadly defined, have historically been hobbled by enduring political disputes, and some periodic new ones. But even here, many longstanding obstacles have been overcome, if not resolved. There is a strong sense that NATO's Mediterranean partnerships can engage in increasingly ambitious political dialogue, possibly with new formats and themes. New areas for practical cooperation are also emerging. Broadly, there is a need to think through the place of Mediterranean partnerships in an Alliance that is taking the southern dimension of its strategy more seriously, with new structures, forces, and assets for understanding the environment and acting in the south. The September 2017 launch of NATO Strategy Direction South Hub in Naples underscores the importance of this task.

The question of NATO's Mediterranean strategy has become less esoteric. The primacy of migration and terrorism, in particular in politics and public opinion, has given strategy looking south a more



central place in strategic debates. This phenomenon is not limited to the obvious geography in southern Europe, Turkey, and across the Mediterranean. Risks emanating from the Mediterranean and its hinterlands are shaping perceptions and policies in the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany, Belgium, and the Netherlands, to name just a few Alliance members outside the region. These risks are also felt indirectly in NATO's east, where the threat from Russia naturally dominates perceptions and planning. The MD partners, too, face their own southern risks, many flowing from sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel, or from conflicts in the Levant, the Gulf, and the Horn of Africa. Mediterranean risks are not just transnational. They are trans-regional and transatlantic. The benefits of a more effective Mediterranean security community are widely shared.

## SCOPE AND STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This analysis focuses on the status and future of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue, the content and potential content of these partnerships, and the broader strategic issues affecting these questions. The scope of the study is Mediterranean and transatlantic, with due attention to relevant issues further afield. The study does not specifically assess NATO's partnership program with Gulf states, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), beyond the question of NATO's evolving approach to partnerships, global and regional. The analysis is concerned, above all, with current perceptions and steps that can be taken in the near term. In discussing the strategic environment we consider developments that are likely to shape the demands on NATO and its partnerships, over the next decade.

Chapter II explores the evolving strategic environment in the Mediterranean and its effect on security, north and south. Chapter III discusses NATO's evolving strategy and the prospective role of Mediterranean partnerships. Chapter IV briefly reviews the evolution of the MD. Chapter V summarizes and assesses views from the MD partners regarding the utility and future of the initiative. What works? What does not? What can be done? What are the opportunities and constraints? Finally, Chapter VI offers overall conclusions and proposals for next steps.



# 02

## Contours of the Mediterranean Security Environment

*NATO's Mediterranean partnership does not exist in a vacuum. The risks in the current wider Mediterranean environment — in some respects sharply different from those prevailing in earlier years of the initiative — will shape what is required and what is possible in terms of security cooperation. What are the key characteristics of the Mediterranean security environment today? What are the elements that are likely to prove durable and shape this environment over the next decade? What are the implications for strategy and the content of NATO's Mediterranean partnerships?*

### SUSTAINED TURMOIL

Beginning in the mid-1990s, it became fashionable to speak of an “arc of crisis” stretching from the Maghreb to Southwest Asia. The phrase has remained popular in some quarters. It reflects the idea that flashpoints around Europe's southern periphery can challenge an otherwise stable strategic environment, and will require efforts at crisis management, and perhaps new forms of security architecture. In this conception, crises might be demanding, but they are also sporadic and limited in duration. In the years since the Arab revolutions, and specifically, in light of the ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq, the civil war in Syria, and the collapse of authority in Libya, the “arc of crisis” has come to look more like an arc of protracted chaos.

The strategic environment across the southern Mediterranean is precariously balanced between sovereignty and disorder. The erosion of many previously strong states across the Middle East and North Africa, and the threat of collapse elsewhere, raises the possibility of long-term instability, beyond

the capacity of simple crisis management. Iraq, Syria, and Libya may never return to their pre-crisis contours, and a further breaking of states is a very real possibility. The fragmentation in Libya and moves toward Kurdish autonomy, even independence, may point the way toward a new norm, and one that will be difficult to reconcile with the interests of the remaining strong states across the region. Short of this, Egypt and the North African states with large, difficult to monitor spaces bordering the Sahel, may simply lose full control over parts of their territory. At a minimum, governments may find themselves in an open-ended, running battle with insurgents bent on maintaining a base for terrorist and anti-regime operations. In the long sweep of Mediterranean





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history, fragmentation and warlord-ism have been as much a part of the regional scene as cohesion and central control, or the existence of unitary states on the European model. Indeed, Europe itself is not immune to these centrifugal tendencies.

Under these conditions, NATO and its partners in the south will face a very different set of challenges than those associated with occasional crisis management and capacity building to meet internal and external threats. Sustained turmoil will put longstanding security relationships in jeopardy, and will introduce a shifting set of interlocutors for diplomacy and defense initiatives. This is very different from what was envisioned over roughly the first decade of the Mediterranean Dialogue's existence. In those years, the leading drivers of interest in Mediterranean initiatives were the Arab-Israeli dispute, where there was a degree of optimism about the prospects, including the outlook for multilateral security arrangements, and fear of a collapse in Algeria, then immersed in a violent decade of terrorism and civil strife. Today, concern over individual crises is accompanied by the risk of regional collapse in the Levant and North Africa. Even the notion of extending a settled and effective European security architecture southward — the 1990s were also years of NATO and EU enlargement — is less clear cut today, as Europe again faces its own external challenges and institutional uncertainties.

Beyond the threat to borders, states, and conventional security interests, Mediterranean societies will be deeply affected by persistent insecurity. Deepening sectarian divides, the internal displacement of populations, migration pressures from the south — and the south of south — and porous borders. The criminality and political violence accompanying these phenomena have meant a steady decline in personal as well as state security. This is especially evident in Mediterranean cities, where steady urbanization has produced its own social and political strains, and where extremist movements have found fertile ground. Migration across the Mediterranean may be at the top of political agendas in Europe. But the vast majority of refugees, migrants, and internally displaced persons are to be found around the southern Mediterranean, especially Jordan, Turkey, Lebanon, Libya, and Tunisia.<sup>3</sup> Many, perhaps most of these people may never return home. In North Africa, and to an extent in the Levant, migrants headed to Europe are drawn from places far from the Mediterranean itself. Nigeria and Bangladesh are among the leading contributors to this flow.

The foreign fighter phenomenon is another part of this equation. Thousands of recruits from North Africa and the Middle East, Russia, and Europe, have travelled to Iraq, Syria, and Libya, or have taken up arms with jihadist groups in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa.<sup>4</sup> As ISIS strongholds in Syria and Iraq are progressively reduced, many of the surviving fighters will make their way home or travel to new battlegrounds elsewhere. This process is likely to produce a steady mutation in the nature and capabilities of terrorist, insurgent, and criminal networks across the region, including NATO member states and Mediterranean partner countries. Russia and China will also be affected. The effects of this process have been seen before. Even relatively small numbers of returning “Arab Afghans” played a role in Algeria's decade of violence in the 1990s. The rise of Al-Qaeda offshoots in the Maghreb and West Africa accompanied the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. The next wave of this kind could well be more widespread

<sup>3</sup> Jordan hosts over 3 million migrants (roughly 700,000 from Syria); Turkey some 3 million, roughly half from Syria; Lebanon almost 2 million, perhaps half from Syria. Libya hosts some 800,000 migrants, Algeria roughly 250,000, Morocco approximately 90,000, and Tunisia around 100,000. Nigeria accounts for the largest number of migrants crossing the Mediterranean. Source: European Commission, United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, and the International Organization for Migration.

<sup>4</sup> In terms of numbers, Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Turkey, Jordan, France, and Morocco have been the largest contributors to this flow (some sources rank Russia as the largest source). Tunisia, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey have seen the largest number of returning fighters. See Niall McCarthy, “Scores of ISIS Foreign Fighters Have Returned Home,” *Forbes/Statista*, October 25, 2017; The Soufan Center, “Beyond the Caliphate: Foreign Fighters and the Threat of Returnees,” October 31, 2017; and Efraim Benmelech and Esteban F. Klor, *What Explains the Flow of Foreign Fighters to ISIS?*, Washington: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2016.



and more trans-regional in nature, with baleful consequences for security on both shores of the Mediterranean.<sup>5</sup>

The mixture of terrorist and criminal networks, weak or non-existent control over remote border regions in the southern Maghreb and the Sahel, and a vigorous illicit trade in small arms and light weapons poses an especially significant threat. In the view of many observers, this threat has increased substantially with the proliferation of weapons from Libya's extensive arsenal. But external actors play a role, too. The September 2017 discovery of light weapons apparently shipped covertly from North Korea to purchasers in Egypt offers one example.

The net effect of these trends has been to reinforce the prominence of internal security concerns around the Mediterranean in the calculus of southern Mediterranean states, but also for members of NATO and the EU. A decade ago, the capabilities and behavior of "rogue" regimes such as Libya, including the presence of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction there and in Syria, were a leading worry. Today these are secondary concerns in a Mediterranean context, notwithstanding the continued presence of such weapons in Syria, and of course, in Iran. Terrorism and insurgency are the leading risks, and internal security trumps all for most states around the region. One exception to this is the situation in the Levant, where the spread of weapons of increasing range and destructive power to Iran's proxies in Syria and Lebanon, and Iran's own capabilities, are of critical concern to Israel and Turkey.

The potential for conventional inter-state conflicts around the Mediterranean, while still quite real, is arguably a lower concern than in earlier years of the Mediterranean Dialogue. A durable Aegean détente has greatly reduced the risks facing Greece, Turkey, and Cyprus from this quarter (it remains to be seen how Turkey's early 2018 air and ground operation in Syria will affect regional balances in the Levant as a whole). Libya no longer poses a regional threat of any kind, except for the risks associated with its own collapse. In the western Mediterranean, relations between Morocco and Algeria remain tense on some but by no means all issues. These shifts, and a shared stake in internal security, have created more fertile ground for regional dialogue and cooperation, even across traditionally difficult lines.

## A changing partnership environment

### MD in 1990s

- Optimism in Middle East Peace Process
- Launch of multiple European neighborhood initiatives
- Limited threats to NATO
- Focus on political dimension
- Internal security and WMD core concerns

### MD in 2017

- Impasse in Middle East Peace Process
- European neighborhood policies in crisis
- Multiple threats to NATO
- Focus on practical cooperation
- Counterterrorism and border security core concerns

## AN EXPANDING STRATEGIC SPACE

The Mediterranean is increasingly influenced by developments beyond the sea and its immediate hinterlands. Quite apart from the global trends and events that will inevitably affect Mediterranean states and societies (discussed below), the Mediterranean security environment now embraces a set of wider regional links. To the south, conditions in sub-Saharan Africa and the Sahel are having a direct effect

<sup>5</sup> The regional effects of this and the implications for counterterrorism cooperation are discussed in Christopher S. Chivvis, "Challenges for Transatlantic Counterterrorism Cooperation in North Africa", Washington: The German Marshall Fund of the United States, June 2017.



on the stability of states in North Africa.<sup>6</sup> Migration is a leading challenge, but so are patterns of criminal trafficking in arms and smuggling more generally. The presence of terrorist networks, including Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb and Boko Haram, continues to pose a threat to local states and international interests, Asian as well as Western. Not surprisingly, border security looms large in the concerns of virtually all regional states.

Drug trafficking across the Atlantic, from Latin America and the Caribbean to West Africa, and onward to the Maghreb and Europe, underscores the extent of these trans-regional influences on security. For countries such as Cape Verde, Mauritania, and Morocco, these wider Atlantic influences are a prominent concern. Similarly, developments in the Indian Ocean and the Horn of Africa impact the security of Egypt, and via the Sahel, can also affect North Africa as a whole. NATO's evolving strategy toward the south will surely need to take these developments into account. The G5 Sahel, in particular, could be a valuable partner for certain activities of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

### **GLOBAL ACTORS, REGIONAL STAKES**

Transatlantic security debates have tended to make a sharp distinction between challenges emanating from the east and the south. Threats from both quarters have increased, but they have also become interwoven in a way not seen since the Cold War.



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Developments around the Black Sea, above all in Georgia and Crimea, have been critical in bringing Russia back into the Mediterranean equation, and in making Russian behavior and Russia-Western confrontation an increasingly important facet of the regional security environment in the south. Russia's military intervention in Syria has diverse motivations, including a longstanding commitment to the Assad regime and the desire to preserve access to naval and air bases in Latakia and elsewhere. Decades of cooperation have produced a network of ties from the military to the personal. More profoundly, preservation of the Syrian regime and a demonstration of Russia's ability to shape events in the Middle East are bound up with Moscow's sense of its role as a global actor. Taken together with more active engagement in Egypt, Algeria, and Libya, Russia's sustained presence in the Levant and a return to modest levels of naval presence in the Mediterranean, suggests that Moscow is back as a variable in the Mediterranean security equation.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> See NATO Defense College Foundation, "Deep Maghreb (In) Security and Stability: North Africa and its Sahel Dimension," Rome, 2017; and Cristina Barrios and Tobias Kopf, eds., *Re-Mapping the Sahel: Transnational Security Challenges and International Responses*, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2017.

<sup>7</sup> Russia's return to the Mediterranean has modest but growing North African dimension. See Sarah Feuer and Anna Borshcevskaia, "Russia Making Inroads in North Africa," *Policy Watch* No. 2884, Washington Institute for Near East Policy, November 2, 2017.



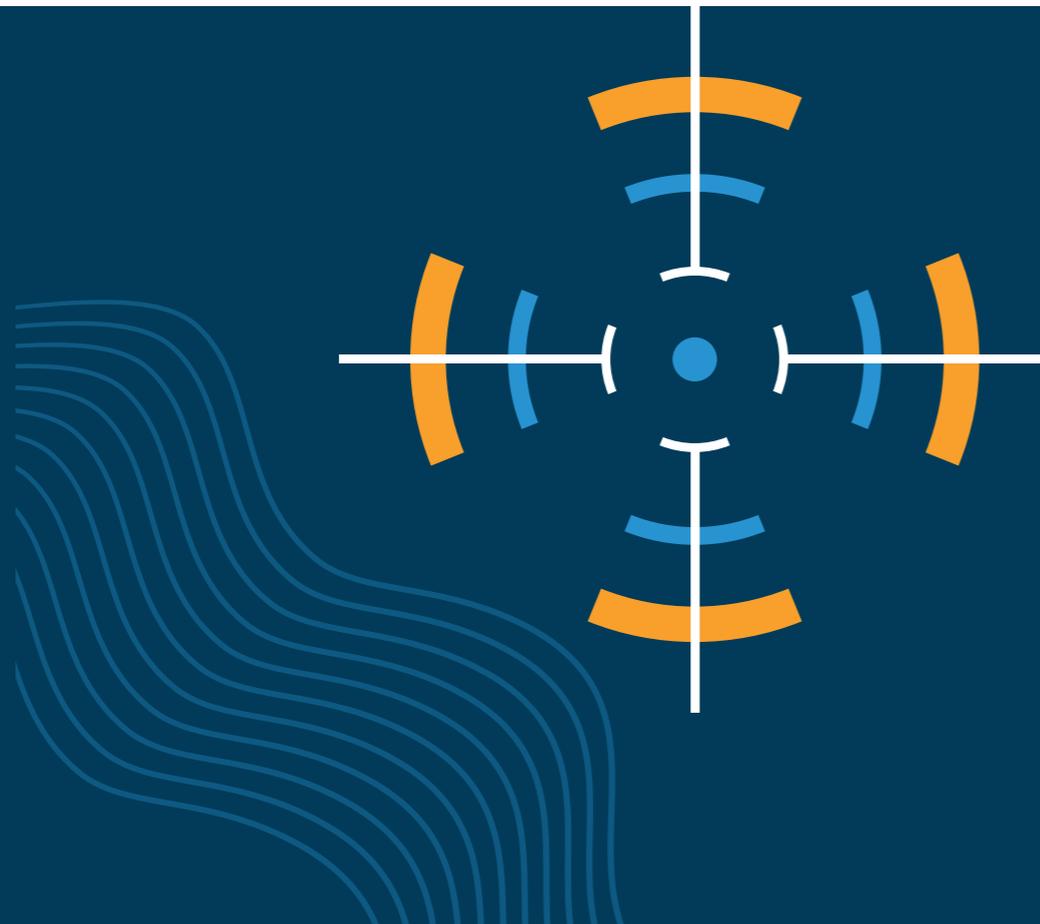
Russia is not the only returning or emerging player in Mediterranean security. The involvement of the Arab Gulf states in Mediterranean affairs is longstanding, but has become more direct in recent years. Transfers and remittances from the Arab Gulf states continue to play an important role in the economic development of countries across the southern Mediterranean. Political ties are deep and diverse. But in recent years, the Gulf has also become an increasingly prominent actor in Mediterranean security, including the direct use of force in Syria and Libya. Debate rages over the role of Saudi Arabia and Qatar, or their

citizens, in supporting violent Islamist networks. But there is a broad consensus on the role of Wahabi and Salafist movements with Gulf ties in fostering a climate of intolerance and insecurity from the Levant to the Maghreb, and within diaspora communities on both sides of the Atlantic.

The confrontation between Saudi Arabia and Qatar has further complicated this situation, confronting key Mediterranean states — and some members of NATO — with uncomfortable political choices. Saudi and Iranian competition in Lebanon now risks open warfare between these two geopolitical rivals, with negative implications for an already conflict prone environment in the Levant and the eastern Mediterranean. Broadly, states around the Gulf and across the southern Mediterranean share a similar view of the primacy of internal security and counterterrorism, and the importance of these elements in planning and partnerships. Obviously, there are stark differences in terms of the resources available to pursue these security priorities. This reality conditions NATO's ability to connect the complementary but generally separate partnership activities pursued via the MD and ICI.

Iran continues to be a significant actor in Mediterranean security, principally via direct intervention in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon, and indirectly via proxy groups active across the Levant. NATO partners in the Maghreb are also increasingly concerned about the role of Tehran in the sectarian stability of their own societies, even in places with very modest Shia communities. Iran has made some very limited forays into the Mediterranean for naval exercises, and Israel has been watchful regarding Iran's role in smuggling weapons into Gaza. Far more troubling for regional stability has been Iran's role in supplying weapons of increasing range, able to hold Israeli and other population centers at risk.

As noted earlier, the *relative* weight of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) proliferation concerns in security perceptions on both sides of the Mediterranean has declined over the past decade. This is a function of the rise of other risks, removal of Libya's WMD capacity, and the nuclear agreement with Iran, however controversial. That said, multiple southern Mediterranean states, including Syria, possess substantial WMD stocks, and the ability to deliver these weapons at meaningful ranges. The likelihood of their use in state-to-state conflicts may have decreased,





but flashpoints remain. Uncertainty of control over these weapons in the face of domestic instability is another source of risk. The WMD threat continues to loom large, alongside terrorism, in Israeli and American perceptions. NATO's ballistic missile defense architecture, much of it sea-based, will continue to be a focus of defense investment around the Mediterranean.

China is already a leading stakeholder in Mediterranean affairs, and is set to become a more visible actor in political and security terms in the years ahead. Above all, China is vested in the stability of the Maghreb, the Sahel, and West Africa, in ways that may also give it a stake in defense capacity building in Egypt, Algeria, Mauritania, and elsewhere. China has made substantial investments in Mediterranean port facilities, and has a significant stake in the security of Mediterranean lines of communication, including the Suez Canal. Looking further ahead, even modest progress on the ambitious "belt and road" project will bring China into closer contact with the Mediterranean security scene over the next decade.

China is not the only Asian actor on the Mediterranean scene. Japan has long been a significant contributor to development projects around the region. India, too, is increasingly present in the region its strategists call "West Asia." New Delhi has developed a close political and defense-industrial relationship with Israel. North Korea has been a less benign influence as an exporter of WMD technology and light weapons. In a broader sense,



*One of the most striking developments over the past decade has been the rise of digital issues as a force on the Mediterranean scene.*

developments in Asia, including the potential for conflict on the Korean peninsula or in the South or East China Seas, could fundamentally alter the relative weight of the Mediterranean region in strategic thought and force posture, especially for the United States. A major contingency in the Asia-Pacific region would very likely leave Mediterranean security in European hands.

## THE DIGITAL DIMENSION

One of the most striking developments over the past decade has been the rise of digital issues as a force on the Mediterranean scene, both positive and negative. Social media played a visible role in the "Arab Spring," and continues to shape political debates in societies around the Mediterranean, even where access to the internet is restricted. It has reinforced the connection to diaspora communities in Europe, and has fostered the growth of transnational communities.

At the same time, the spread of digital know-how and technology has been readily exploited by terrorist networks for recruitment, planning, and strategic communications. It is also an enabler of criminal activity, not least the organized trafficking in migrants. NATO's southern partners are as concerned as those within the Alliance about the ability of external actors to shape attitudes and political outcomes via social media and other tools. There has been a parallel growth in the prominence of cybersecurity and the protection of critical infrastructure in the strategic concerns of southern Mediterranean partners. Indeed, this is now a prominent area of activity for the practical side of the Mediterranean Dialogue and a source of growing demand for cooperation with the Alliance.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See Kristina Kausch, "Cheap Havoc: How Cyber-Geopolitics Will Destabilize the Middle East," The German Marshall Fund of the United States, November 2017.



## MARITIME SECURITY

Mediterranean and European security are intimately connected. But this connection is most obvious and direct in the area of maritime security. Surveillance and control of the maritime space have become critical issues for southern Europe in the face of migration and refugee flows in the Aegean, as well as the central and western Mediterranean. Ongoing conflicts and multiple potential flashpoints suggest that crisis-driven migration will remain a key element in the regional equation. Perhaps more significant is the accumulation of structural pressures for migration from south to north. The prosperity gap across the Mediterranean is stark, rivaled only

by the differential between north and south on the Korean peninsula. Conflict and environmental degradation are further drivers of migration. The political salience of migration within NATO member states suggests that maritime security, and maritime cooperation, will be a top priority in national and multinational policy for the foreseeable future. It is already a focal point for cooperation between NATO and the EU through Operation Sea Guardian, and the partnership efforts of both institutions looking south. All states with the resources to do so will look to strengthen their ability to see what is happening in the maritime space; to make movements and risks around the Mediterranean more transparent.

The continued exploration and development of offshore energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and along the Atlantic coast of Africa can be an important contributor to the economic development of the southern Mediterranean. New finds and investments have also given international stakeholders a strong interest in regional stability and cooperation, without which it will be difficult for Mediterranean energy projects to reach their full potential.<sup>9</sup> The prospect of resource driven conflict in the eastern Mediterranean cannot be dismissed. But on balance, energy is more likely to be a side issue in relationships animated by more fundamental disputes.

Analysts have worried about the risk of maritime terrorism and even piracy in the Mediterranean. There have been some attacks and attempted attacks of this kind in recent years. None have had a significant impact on commerce or security.<sup>10</sup> To be sure, terrorists may attempt to deploy from the sea to attack soft targets ashore, ports, or even offshore energy facilities. In general, large commercial ships and offshore platforms are not easy targets, although planners will understandably continue to worry about the security of these assets, not least for environmental reasons. Other more tangible risks are associated with port security, and the challenge of maritime crime and piracy linked to chaotic conditions in Libya and elsewhere. The prominence of tourism in many Mediterranean economies makes the security of coasts and coastal waters a natural concern.

<sup>9</sup> See the series of papers by Sir Michael Leigh, Charlotte Brandsma, and others published in the context of the German Marshall Fund's multi-year project on energy in the Eastern Mediterranean.

<sup>10</sup> See Martin N. Murphy, "Contemporary Piracy and Maritime Terrorism: The Threat to International Security," *Adelphi Paper 388*, London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2007.



*The Mediterranean environment features many challenges amenable to the EU's soft power assets. Its strategy toward the southern neighborhood is broadly similar to NATO's notion of "projecting stability" but with a different mix of instruments.*



## POLITICAL TRENDS, SECURITY CONSEQUENCES

Over the next decade, the strategic environment in the Mediterranean will also be shaped by a series of larger political and institutional trends around the region and on both sides of the Atlantic. These, too, may have a bearing on the kinds of security policies and cooperative initiatives pursued around the Mediterranean.

First, the evolving balance between national and multilateral strategies in transatlantic and global security will be felt in the Mediterranean. Rising nationalism and pressures to re-nationalize defense policy can influence the evolving NATO debate, and may complicate efforts to promote a unity of purpose and commitment looking east and south. Partners in North Africa and the Middle East may also be affected by populist and xenophobic movements in the north, and this could further complicate an already challenging public acceptance environment for NATO in the south. At a minimum, a political climate of this kind can lead to a finer measurement of national interest, and a disinclination to take on security tasks where stakes are more distant or indirect. In a transatlantic context, this can also shape decisions on strategy and force posture in light of growing great power competition in Asia and elsewhere. Under these conditions, areas such as the Balkans and the Mediterranean may be left, increasingly, to European management in security terms. These pressures could also



influence the balance between bilateral and multilateral approaches to security cooperation with southern Mediterranean partners.

Second, the Mediterranean security scene will be influenced by the evolution of the EU's policy toward the southern neighborhood. The partnership process launched in 1995 as the Barcelona Process, and refashioned several times since, is likely to be increasingly central to the EU's own foreign and security policy ambitions, including permanent structured cooperation on security (PESCO). Developments across the southern neighborhood are intimately linked to the longer-term management of migration flows, perhaps the most explosive political issue on the European agenda. There will be strong pressure for the EU to devote additional resources to economic development in the south in order to offset these flows, and to strengthen the capacity for interdiction in the Mediterranean. At the same time, the EU will face continued pressure for conditionality in cooperation with chaotic or repressive governments across the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean environment features many challenges amenable to the EU's soft power assets. Its strategy toward the southern neighborhood is broadly similar to NATO's notion of "projecting stability" but with a different mix of instruments.

Finally, it is worth considering some possible "wild cards." Some have already been mentioned. A major security contingency in Asia or Eurasia would dramatically alter the strategic calculus on both sides of the Atlantic, and would almost certainly result in profound shifts in Mediterranean roles and responsibilities. Some scenarios, including a clash with Russia, might actually have a Mediterranean dimension. Conflict with Iran, a significant WMD use, the collapse of a leading state in the southern Mediterranean, or a renewed economic crisis — regional or global — all hold the potential for stark shifts in strategy and partnership. A return to mass casualty terrorism would, similarly, reinforce the primacy of counterterrorism as a strategic priority. Disruptive events of a positive nature are also worth considering, including surprise progress in the Middle East peace process — admittedly a remote possibility — a Cyprus agreement, or durable political agreements in Libya or Syria. Any of these would make an enormous contribution to Mediterranean stability, and open new avenues for security partnerships.



# 03

## NATO's Evolving Strategy and the Mediterranean

*As the Alliance looks toward its July 2018 summit in Brussels, the issue of NATO strategy looking south should be on the agenda. The return of threats and risks emanating from multiple quarters places the question of Mediterranean strategy in sharper relief. NATO's approach to partnerships in general is also evolving, and transatlantic debates over burden-sharing could have specific consequences for Mediterranean postures. How might the "framework for the south" elaborated at the Warsaw summit be developed? What is the likely role for the new NSD-S Hub in Naples? How could deeper NATO-EU cooperation affect the Mediterranean strategy of both organizations? What are the implications for the Mediterranean Dialogue?*

**A** political-military alliance like NATO is evolutionary by nature, because it must react to changing geopolitical conditions, and alliance politics. It is hardly surprising that recent revisions of NATO's strategic concept were preceded by major developments in the strategic environment: the end of the Cold War in 1991, the Kosovo war in 1999, and during NATO's intensive engagement in Afghanistan in 2010. Each time, NATO's priorities, membership, and partnerships were redefined. With these transformations, NATO evolved from a collective defense organization to a collective defense and security organization, engaging in crisis management operations as diverse as counterinsurgency and counter-piracy.





## BALANCING STRATEGY EAST AND SOUTH

The multiple European security crises of the past decade, starting with the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008, present NATO with one of the most difficult problems of adjustment in its 68 years of history. Traditionally, the Alliance had to perform only one core task at a time, whether collective defense in Europe or crisis management beyond. Now NATO is confronted with many tangible security threats at once, both inside and outside Europe, and emanating from the east, the

south, and the north-, and from cyberspace. These challenges are characterized by their extent, but also by their speed. In this context, the 2014 crisis in Ukraine has served as a definitive wake-up call for the Allies. After years of irregular warfare in Afghanistan, it became clear that NATO had to refocus on more traditional defense tasks, but against a new mix of conventional and unconventional threats. At the 2014 Wales Summit, the Alliance started a process of transformation that would allow it to do more mission multi-tasking, and to apply a far broader spectrum of capabilities — from Cold War-style big-platform, visible deterrence and defense, to 2017-style intelligence driven, cyber-assisted, special forces and networked interventions.

But as conflicts and crises in Georgia, Ukraine, Syria, or Iraq were fueling NATO's rapid transformation, it became evident that the Alliance also had to address a number of internal political and policy aspirations, sometimes in tension. These include the U.S. demand for greater burden-sharing in a constrained financial climate; the tension between those member states who wish to push ahead with enlargement and those who prefer to consolidate; and those who emphasize NATO's classical conventional missions, versus those who want to boost NATO's role in addressing hybrid and globalized threats.

Against this backdrop, the debate over the relative weight of challenges in the east and south risks becoming more intense, despite the widely shared commitment to a “360 degree” Alliance. For many in the Alliance, Mediterranean security has become a pressing concern in light of risks emanating from North Africa and the Levant. Terrorism inspired and led by ISIS and al-Qaeda from bases in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and the Sahel remains the most immediate threat. Maritime and human security risks are also part of the equation, closely linked to the flow of refugees and migrants and smuggling across the Mediterranean. And as Russia has become actively engaged in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean, the problem of strategic stability and risk reduction with Moscow has acquired a southern dimension too. Adapting the Alliance to meet the diverse risks across a 4,000-mile land and sea flank is essential if NATO is to remain relevant. The close connection between instability across the southern periphery and Europe's own internal security is a widely shared concern, especially in light of recent terrorist attacks, and the very real prospect of new incidents.





Achieving a balance between east and south is not a new issue for the Alliance. During the Cold War, there was an active debate about the relative credibility of deterrence in NATO's so-called "southern region" versus the center and the north. Many analysts argued that, even though the threat had a common source, the fundamental security guarantee, the willingness to envision catastrophic escalation, was never truly equivalent across the NATO geography.

The current debate about strategic priorities is, fortunately, very different. Today, the question is how to balance a relatively straightforward but highly demanding problem of defense against Russian aggression in the east, versus a diffuse set of lower intensity, but arguably more likely, risks in the south. The picture is further complicated by the need to create a costly defensive infrastructure in the east, more or less from scratch. By contrast, NATO has considerable infrastructure and assets around the Mediterranean. Lacking is an overall strategy and a set of concepts to deal with the multifaceted challenges in the south. Indeed, it is unclear that a unified strategy of this kind is possible given the sheer diversity of risks. Nor, in reality, is this a straightforward geographic question. The Atlantic security dimension has become more important in its own right, as Russia becomes more assertive in the North Atlantic, and as many "southern" risks also have a significant Atlantic dimension (e.g., trafficking via West Africa).

The 2014 Wales Summit provided an initial military response to some of the challenges in the



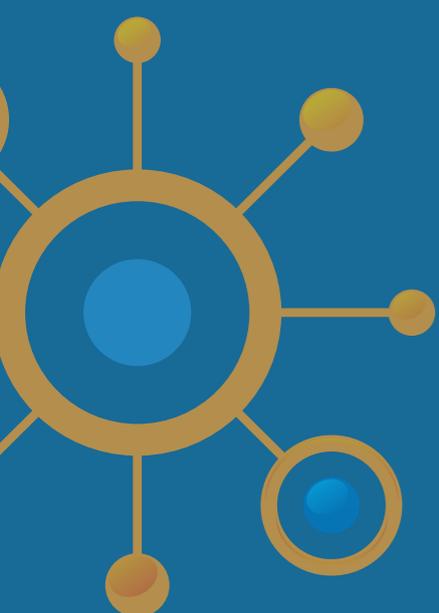
*NATO lacks an overall strategy and a set of concepts to deal with the multifaceted challenges in the south.*

east, and the Alliance has continued to adapt its deterrent posture in light of ongoing pressures in Ukraine, in the ongoing pressures in Ukraine, the Baltic region, and around the Black Sea. Since that time, sustained migration flows, terrorist attacks, and the foreign fighter challenge, have all raised the prominence of Mediterranean challenges within NATO member states. Attention to these issues is hardly limited to southern European members of the Alliance. Southern risks are at the top of security agendas across Western Europe, and on both sides of the Atlantic. Interest in strategy south is broadly shared across NATO, even if there are varying perspectives on NATO's role in this sphere.

The debate is further complicated by the blend of external and domestic security risks in a Mediterranean context. These "intermestic" challenges cut across the traditional competencies of national intelligence and security establishments. They also cut across traditional national and multinational mandates, a challenge for the EU as well as NATO. Alliance leaders gave the southern dimension of NATO strategy additional prominence on the 2016 Warsaw Summit agenda. NATO adopted



*The NATO Strategic Direction South Hub can be a valuable asset in providing advance warning about emerging risks and an additional vehicle for building a common security culture and network along north-south lines.*



a Framework for the South, a first step toward strengthening training, exercises, and operations in the Mediterranean region, including the possibility to deploy the NATO Response Force if needed. The force was clearly created with eastern contingencies in mind, and these are surely the most demanding and potentially “existential” cases. But many would argue that the more likely, if less demanding contingencies are actually in the south. The Framework for the South also aims at improving joint intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities, including the use of NATO Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) and Global Hawk remotely piloted aircraft based in Sicily. The data collected from these platforms can contribute to making the wider Mediterranean security environment more transparent for defense decision-makers — an area where Mediterranean partners also have a growing stake.

### **DEVELOPING THE NATO STRATEGIC DIRECTION SOUTH HUB**

Six months after the Warsaw Summit, Defense Ministers agreed in February 2017 to create a new Strategic Direction South (NSD-S) Hub, based at Allied Joint Forces Command in Naples. The NSD-S Hub’s mission is to increase NATO’s understanding of the challenges stemming from the Mediterranean and adjacent areas, and the ability to address them. Broadly, the NSD-S Hub is meant to contribute to NATO’s situational

awareness regarding a vast region, from the Gulf to Africa. The precise contours of the NSD-S Hub’s geographical and substantive mandate remain unclear. Levels of funding and staffing, largely dependent on national contributions, are also uncertain. If given the capacity, among other functions, the NSD-S Hub can serve as a center for liaison with Mediterranean Dialogue partners and others, including diverse international and nongovernmental organizations. It can be a valuable asset in terms of advance warning about emerging risks in the security environment, and an additional vehicle for building a common security culture and network along north-south lines.

### **WORKING WITH THE EUROPEAN UNION AND OTHERS**

To the extent that NATO - EU cooperation deepens, as both institutions now favor, this is likely to have particular consequences for Mediterranean security and NATO strategy south. With the EU-NATO Joint Declaration of July 2016, both institutions agreed to strengthen their operational cooperation, including on maritime security and on migration, through increased sharing of information and closer coordination of their activities in the Mediterranean. The Joint Declaration creates a framework for NATO and the EU to work together to build defense and security capacity, and to enhance the security of their partners in the region, through specific projects in a variety of areas for individual countries.<sup>11</sup> Practical steps have already been taken along these lines. Since February 2016, NATO vessels have been supporting the EU in addressing illegal migration in the Aegean. In July 2016, NATO also launched a new maritime operation, Sea Guardian, which supports the EU’s Operation Sophia in the central Mediterranean.

Both institutions have a shared stake in capacity building and security sector reform, and the list of priority issues is essentially shared. As the EU and NATO seek to strengthen their coordination and collaboration, the Mediterranean will continue to offer key test cases. The blend of hard and soft, conventional and unconventional security challenges in the Mediterranean offers fertile ground for cooperation. If NATO and the EU are able to do more together in practical terms, the benefits are likely to be felt first and foremost in the south. To the extent that the EU moves

<sup>11</sup> Joint Declaration, By the President of the European Council, The President of the European Council, President of the European Commission, and Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, “[EU-NATO Joint Declaration](#),” July 8, 2016.



ahead with its new initiative for permanent and structured security cooperation (PESCO), this too is likely to be felt in the south. It is striking that the European debate on this front offers a mirror image of the NATO debate over strategy south and east, with EU members in Central and Eastern Europe keen to remind their European counterparts that PESCO should be a “360 degree” initiative — i.e., not just designed for contingencies on the southern periphery.

Other regional initiatives have the potential to contribute to Mediterranean security, and could become more significant interlocutors for NATO in the years ahead. The OSCE has a longstanding Mediterranean initiative, and could play a role in confidence building and risk reduction, including those areas where Russian and other forces operate in close proximity. The Union for the Mediterranean has had a checkered history, but could emerge as a vehicle for investment in projects relevant to security, and certainly to the development and stability of the region. Given the prominence of counterterrorism in the perceptions and plans of virtually every state on both sides of the Mediterranean, the G-5 Sahel grouping is set to gain additional attention and resources. Far from competing with EU and NATO partnership programs, regional initiatives of this kind may actually give new political and practical weight to actors in the south, and offer new avenues for north-south security cooperation. Similarly, it is possible to envision

more active NATO engagement with a range of other organizations, such as the African Union, the Organization of the Islamic Conference, the 5+5 initiative in the Western Mediterranean, various UN agencies, and nongovernmental organizations and civil society organizations where cooperation is already established at expert level. Again, the complex nature of security in the wider Mediterranean argues for a NATO strategy that makes use of diverse capabilities and instruments.

### THINKING THROUGH NATO STRATEGY FOR THE SOUTH

Looking toward the 2018 Brussels Summit and beyond, it is worth considering some basic elements of an approach to NATO strategy for the Mediterranean. This will also be essential for future interactions with Mediterranean partners, all of whom are keen to understand how the Alliance will posture itself to meet shared risks in the future. The following is not a strategy per se, but rather a discussion of possible elements.<sup>12</sup> It also underscores the role of the Mediterranean Dialogue in key respects.

First, the Alliance needs to consider its core aims looking south. In reality, these are no different than elsewhere across the NATO area of responsibility: deterring and defending against Article 5 contingencies, and the defense of common security interests. In practice, most but not necessarily all of the Article 5 type risks emanating from the south are on Turkey’s borders, from conventional threats to territorial integrity, to missile and terrorist attacks. To date, NATO’s only Article 5 contingency has been the 9/11 terrorist attack, and it is possible to imagine future mass casualty attacks that might trigger such a response, potentially with a connection of some kind to developments around the southern Mediterranean. Libya no longer poses a WMD threat to Europe. But Syria and Iran possess substantial WMD and missile arsenals, and are capable of reaching European targets. Territorial threats are more obvious in NATO’s east, but contingencies of this kind can also be imagined in the south.

Second, in support of this core objective, NATO will continue to be engaged in what might broadly be described as *environment shaping* around the Mediterranean

<sup>12</sup> This typology — core, environment shaping, and hedging — draws on an approach featured in numerous RAND studies, and employed in an earlier assessment of NATO’s Mediterranean initiatives by the author. See, Lesser et al, *The Future of NATO’s Mediterranean Initiative*.



and beyond, “projecting stability” in Alliance parlance. These tasks are also the center of gravity for partnership within the MD. Security sector reform, defense capacity building, promoting human security, regional confidence building, and fostering habits of cooperation and a shared strategic outlook all contribute to shaping the Mediterranean security environment in ways that encourage stability and reduce risks. They do not guarantee security, but they improve the odds. This is also a leading sphere for NATO cooperation with a range of institutions, from the EU to civil society. These elements are broadly relevant across the Mediterranean, with some regional nuances. The prominence of open conflicts and state-to-state rivalries in the Eastern Mediterranean, with conventional forces operating in close proximity, underscores the importance of confidence building and risk reduction. By contrast, in the western Mediterranean and the Sahel, border security and cooperation on trafficking will be higher on the agenda.

The third key element of an effective southern strategy will be *hedging*. This implies maintaining and strengthening NATO’s capacity for warning, surveillance, and interdiction or intervention when threats arise across the Mediterranean space. The relevant capabilities and responses may also be in partner countries, of course. So, the practical cooperation aspects of the MD are relevant here, too. The capacity for civil emergency response to natural and environmental disasters, or health emergencies, is part of this equation.

Developing a credible strategy south will be critical for the future of NATO’s partnerships,

## Key Elements of NATO Strategy South



formally through the MD, and in less formal settings and the Mediterranean Dialogue remains a valuable instrument for security alongside the ICI with the Arab Gulf states. Despite tremendous political change across the region in recent years, and an impasse in the Middle East peace process, no partners have pulled out of these frameworks. There remains a critical mass of interest in cooperation with the Alliance. Nevertheless, without a clear strategic agenda, it may be increasingly difficult to pursue effective political dialogue and to set priorities for practical cooperation. It is also an opportunity to give partners a sense that their interests and perspectives are being taken into account as NATO becomes more engaged in the south. At the same time, NATO will want to assure that it is not seen merely as a vehicle for financial and technical assistance, but rather as a set of nations and societies with common interests and norms. Clarity on strategy will help on all these fronts.

While there have been modest steps since the Warsaw Summit to raise the level of attention to the south inside NATO, it is clear that this dimension of Alliance strategy remains underdeveloped. Member states like Spain, Italy, and Greece put a premium on Mediterranean security. Portugal looks south too, but tends to view the Atlantic as the center of gravity for a transatlantic alliance. Poland, the Baltic states, Bulgaria, and Romania understandably put the Russian challenge first. France has an



NATO's  
Mediterranean  
Dialogue partners  
do very well  
relative to the

2%  
spending target

enormous stake in security in the Mediterranean and south to the Sahel and sub-Saharan Africa, but remains ambivalent about a leading role for NATO there. Turkey is a leading stakeholder in a credible NATO approach to security on its Middle Eastern borders, but Ankara also has a stake in countering Russia in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and in the Levant. Ultimately, NATO's "swing states" — the United States, Canada, the U.K., Germany, and France — may be decisive in managing this balance. The growth of the Russia factor in the south is an additional source of risk, including the risk of an accidental clash, but may also prove a unifying element across NATO's geography.

### EVOLVING REQUIREMENTS

NATO and its Mediterranean partners have to confront new forms of warfare based on hybrid operations that combine aggressive information and propaganda campaigns, social media exploitation, cyber-attacks, infiltration of terrorist or insurgent forces, militias and weapons, economic embargoes and sabotage, political and business networks of influence, and the exploitation of national, ethnic, or sectarian grievances. The experience of ISIS online recruitment and mobilization of foreign fighters makes clear that the hybrid warfare phenomenon is not limited to challenges in the east. Conventional defense platforms are clearly

not sufficient to address these hybrid risks. Cyber-defense, for instance, requires more systematic interaction with national intelligence services and partnerships with the private sector. Counterterrorism requires stronger links between the military, police, finance, and border authorities.

In this context, NATO Allies can do more to coordinate and place within an Alliance framework the wide range of bilateral assistance efforts underway in the south. Cooperative frameworks in the south can also be useful for mobilizing regional contributions to potential NATO operations in the Middle East and North Africa, and elsewhere. The utility of these links was demonstrated clearly in Bosnia and Kosovo. Joint exercises are a straightforward way for NATO and partner nations to better understand each other's processes and practices, to foster interoperability, and to build trust.

Decades of declining defense budgets in Europe have left NATO forces severely overstretched in meeting deterrence and defense needs vis-à-vis Russia in Eastern Europe while also addressing pressing counterterrorism requirements. The Wales Summit Defense Investment Pledge and pressure from successive U.S. administrations on burden-sharing have spurred an increase in some defense budgets and arrested the decline in others. According to NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, there has been a 4.3 percent real increase in defense spending across European allies and Canada in 2016-2017, equivalent to about \$12 billion.<sup>13</sup> It is notable that NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue partners do very well relative to the 2 percent spending target.

As member states spend again on defense, the question for NATO is how to balance a fair redistribution of these newly available funds, between the need, on the one hand, to build more logistical and military infrastructure on the Eastern Flank, and on the other hand, to modernize and expand existing capabilities to deal with challenges around the Mediterranean. The equipment and capabilities needed to perform missions and operations in the east and in the south differ to a substantial degree. But there are also common requirements. Assets for reconnaissance, surveillance, and intelligence on land, at sea, in the air, and cyberspace can serve objectives in both spheres.

<sup>13</sup> Martin Banks, "Defense Spending Increased 'Significantly' Among NATO Allies," Defense News, June 30, 2017.



## **SOME PERSPECTIVES ON PARTNERSHIP**

As with the Mediterranean partners, whose perspectives are surveyed in Chapter V of this report, NATO members have their own views on the character and effectiveness of the Mediterranean Dialogue. In discussing the evolution and future of the initiative, some key points emerge. First, there is general agreement that the flux in Alliance strategy toward the south complicates the question of next steps for the MD. A more explicit and detailed strategy for the south — at a minimum, a more active debate on the proper contours of such a strategy — would facilitate setting priorities for the political and practical dimensions of the partnership. The Alliance is engaged in a range of partnership programs on the European periphery and globally. These are not undertaken in a vacuum, but reflect the needs of NATO strategy in an evolving security environment. Greater strategic clarity will help to link the MD more directly to Alliance interests. It will also help allies to answer pressing questions from Mediterranean partners regarding NATO intentions in their neighborhood.

Second, member country observers knowledgeable about the MD and its evolution note that the NAC+7 format for political dialogue is too formal and predictable, and that it would be worth bringing senior MD officials and experts to the NAC on a regular basis. Some also noted the utility of linking NAC+7 meetings to substantive questions, perhaps with additional background analyses to inform the debate. With regard to areas for practical cooperation, there is broad convergence between member and

partner interests, with counterterrorism and counterinsurgency capacity building as shared priorities. There is a widely shared interest in more frequent, agenda driven dialogue, with a rolling calendar of MD-related events.

Third, there is a lack of clarity about NATO's comparative advantage in engaging Mediterranean partners against a backdrop of active political and military engagement undertaken by member states on a national and multilateral basis. There is an impression that current efforts to survey and reconcile national and NATO efforts are inadequate to avoid overlap and identify critical gaps. Given the scale of cooperation across North Africa and the Middle East undertaken by the United States, France, the U.K., Spain, and Italy, to name just a few member states, this is a daunting task. It would require considerable resources, and would depend on the willingness of member states to share fully the details of their defense cooperation. An ongoing, truly comprehensive assessment may not be feasible. But short of this, a more systematic approach may still be possible.

Fourth, there is a related question of whether some portion of these national projects with MD partners might be “re-branded” as NATO efforts. This could include some of the more prominent multilateral exercises conducted around the region. It might follow naturally from a more developed NATO strategy for the south, and could pay practical as well as symbolic dividends. Critics of this approach note that it can divert attention and resources from partnership projects developed inside NATO, and tailored specifically to Alliance needs.

Finally, there is little consensus on the extent to which NATO suffers from an image problem around the southern Mediterranean, and if it does, whether this is amenable to public diplomacy efforts. Discussions on both sides of the Mediterranean suggest that, while significant obstacles exist in public (and some elite) perception, these have not been much of an impediment to practical partnership or security dialogue. Indeed, there may be more concern on this score among NATO members than in the perception of MD partners.



# 04 Evolution of the Mediterranean Dialogue

*NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue has evolved significantly over more than two decades, with a steady increase in the frequency and sophistication of practical cooperation. This cooperation has also become more individualized. Political dialogue within the MD has weathered striking changes in the strategic environment. It is arguably even more relevant under current conditions, to encourage the development of a common security community linking Mediterranean and Atlantic actors.*

## FROM INITIATIVE TO DIALOGUE, AND PRACTICAL COOPERATION

Since 1994, NATO has been engaged in political dialogue and practical cooperation with Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, and Algeria (since 2000)<sup>14</sup>. NATO's Mediterranean initiative, as it was called at the outset, was launched in a period of optimism about the transatlantic security environment and the prospects for north-south relations in the Mediterranean. This was a time of rapid shifts away from Cold War patterns of strategy and engagement. NATO and the EU were engaged in vigorous debates about enlargement in Central and



Eastern Europe, and partnership in the wider European neighborhood. Looking south, the Middle East peace process was enjoying progress on the bilateral and multilateral tracks. Much thought was being given to ways of extending security architecture from a stable Europe southward to the Mediterranean. Ideas such as a CSCM (Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean), dating from the late 1980s, might have been a step too far, but other Mediterranean initiatives developed rapidly. The EU launched its Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (the "Barcelona Process") in 1995. The OSCE developed its own Mediterranean initiative, and regional efforts such as the 5+5 in the Western Mediterranean, and the Arab Maghreb Union were, and remain, part of the cooperative security scene.

Today, the Barcelona process has given way to the EU's neighborhood policy in the south, and faces a range of political and economic obstacles after the Arab revolutions. In the wake of wars in Georgia and Ukraine, Europe is no longer a settled space in security terms, a reality compounded by multiple acts of terrorism with links to the

<sup>14</sup> For a valuable analysis and personal reflection on the experience of NATO's engagement with countries in the Mediterranean and the Gulf, see Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, *NATO and the Middle East: The Making of a Partnership* (Washington: New Academia Publishing, 2018).



*The Mediterranean Dialogue partnership provides one of the very few settings in which Arab and Israeli officials and experts can meet to discuss regional concerns.*

from  
**600** in 2011  
 to ↓  
**1,000**  
 available activities in  
 the PCM in 2015

Middle East and North Africa. Few now speak of “borrowing” security architecture from a stable north, as both sides of the Mediterranean face a range of common threats.

In the early years of the MD, the emphasis was on fostering political dialogue, ideally in a multilateral frame. This was a natural outgrowth of the prevailing geopolitical environment, in which multilateral security dialogue, including Israel and Arab states, was already underway in various forms.<sup>15</sup> Over time, and particularly since the 2004 Istanbul Summit, the practical dimension of the partnership has been given greater emphasis. This has necessarily involved a greater degree of individual engagement, with partners able to go at their own speed, even if the menu of potential cooperation activities is common.

Although the ambition and intensity of cooperation with NATO varies across the seven MD partners, the initiative has made substantial progress toward all three of its basic goals: to achieve better mutual understanding (the political dimension); to contribute to regional security and stability (the practical dimension); and to dispel misconceptions about NATO (the public diplomacy dimension). Arguably, the last of these objectives is the most difficult, if only because the drivers of southern Mediterranean perceptions regarding the Alliance are so diverse, and MD activities are simply one variable in a complex public acceptance equation.

The political dimension of the partnership has two parallel tracks: a bilateral dialogue, between NATO and each MD partner country, and a multilateral dialogue, in the form of 29+1 meetings at different levels. Both tracks have developed in regularity and substance, fostering a channel of communication for the exchange of views on regional security concerns, and contributing to the development of a security community along north-south and south-south lines. Particularly during the past three years, contacts between NATO and MD countries have intensified, with a growing number of meetings at bilateral and multilateral levels, as well as visits of MD partner representatives to NATO and vice versa. In 2016, both Jordan’s and Israel’s embassies in Brussels were accredited as missions to NATO. Egypt and Mauritania followed suit in 2017. The concerns animating the political dialogue have shifted substantially over time. In the 1990s, the Algerian crisis (and its energy security implications) and WMD proliferation were key drivers of debate. In recent years, counterterrorism and the security consequences of uncontrolled migration have come to the fore. The multilateral political dialogue has continued to operate in a meaningful way, despite the vagaries in Arab-Israeli relations. The MD remains one of the very few settings in which Arab and Israeli officials and experts can meet to discuss regional concerns.

On the practical track, the MD has experienced a steady increase in bilateral cooperation. All partner countries have signed Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program (IPCP) agreements with NATO. These are renewed regularly to adapt to changing needs and priorities. A Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM) of more than 30 agreed areas of cooperation is available to the Dialogue countries. The menu of available activities increased from 600 in 2011 to some 1,000 in 2015, with roughly the same number today. Security sector reform, capacity building, interoperability, and the promotion of habits of cooperation are key facets of this practical cooperation. Ongoing activities include specialized courses at NATO colleges, in-country training on counterterrorism and counterinsurgency, counter-IED training, assistance with mine detection and the management of munitions stores, the control of trafficking in small arms and light weapons, cybersecurity, CBRN, maritime and port security, assistance with civil emergency and crisis management, and participation in NATO exercises.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> Notably, in the Arms Control and Regional Security (ACRS) negotiations, on the multilateral track of the Middle East peace process.

<sup>16</sup> CBRN – Chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear.



Reflecting on observations from interlocutors in the MD countries and elsewhere, it is worth mentioning several widely recognized “success stories,” illustrative of what has been done on the practical side of the Dialogue. Since 2015, NATO and Egypt have worked together through the Science for Peace and Security (SPS) program on mine detection, addressing an enduring threat to human security in the Western desert. In a similar fashion, a NATO — Mauritania trust fund has supported the relocation of munitions stockpiles away from populated areas, and the destruction of obsolete munitions.

With Tunisia, NATO has launched a pilot project to train Tunisian special forces in Mons, Belgium. The program enhances the ability of the Tunisian armed forces to meet counterterrorism and counter-insurgency challenges. The project, launched in 2016, should also contribute to the interoperability of Tunisian and NATO forces in future contingencies, and could be extended to other MD countries. NATO mobile training teams are assisting multiple MD partners to identify and counter-IEDs (improvised explosive devices), skills critical to counterinsurgency operations.

In a different vein, in 2014, NATO launched a project to support the recruitment, training, and retention of women in the Jordanian armed forces. The activity strengthens and modernizes the links between society and the military capacity of the country, in an environment where gender issues are an integral part of the security scene at a local level. In other settings, NATO has assisted in the

reintegration of redundant military personnel — a tangible contribution to stability in light of the very real problems of training for employment in Mauritania and elsewhere. MD partners have contributed directly to NATO operations. Egypt contributed to Implementation Force/Stabilization Force between 1995 and 1998. Morocco contributed to both IFOR/SFOR and Kosovo Force operations in the Balkans, and provided support to NATO’s operations in Libya. Jordan contributed forces to International Security Assistance Force, KFOR, and Operation Unified Protector . Morocco participates in Operation Active Endeavour in the Mediterranean. In addition, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia are part of the Partnership Interoperability Initiative (PII). Launched at the Wales Summit, the initiative aims to ensure that the connections built up between NATO and partner forces through operations in the Balkans and elsewhere will be maintained and deepened. Through the Interoperability Platform, partners can contribute to future crisis management, including NATO-led operations and, where applicable, to the NATO Response Force.<sup>17</sup>

Public diplomacy activities related to the Mediterranean Dialogue, including specialized conferences, seminars, and study visits have created a better understanding of NATO’s mission and activities among the partners. Efforts such as the SPS program and the various courses and meetings open to MD partners at the NATO Defense College in Rome also help to strengthen ties between the security community on both sides of the Mediterranean, linking opinion shapers and emerging leaders to a wider transatlantic network.

Over more than two decades, NATO’s Mediterranean partnership program has expanded in scope and pace of activity, particularly in its practical dimension. To a considerable extent, this has been driven by partner demand. But these evolving activities also contribute directly to NATO’s interest in projecting stability southward. To the extent that NATO articulates a more deliberate strategy for the south, the existing body of cooperation activities can make a significant contribution. As discussed in the following chapter, there is also strong demand for enhanced political or “strategic” dialogue in the face of a rapidly changing security environment. In the view of many observers, this dimension of the Mediterranean partnership has not kept pace with developments on the practical cooperation front. In considering next steps, the political dimension of the MD is a prime area for innovation.

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<sup>17</sup> [NATO Partnership Interoperability Initiative.](#)



# MD Milestones

## EVOLUTION AND ACHIEVEMENTS

**1997**

**MADRID SUMMIT**

Launch of the Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG)

**2002**

**PRAGUE SUMMIT**

Commitment to strengthen cooperation after 9/11

**2006**

**RIGA SUMMIT**

Establishment of the Middle East Faculty at the NATO Defense College

**FIRST INDIVIDUAL COOPERATION PROGRAM (ICP)**

Israel

**FIRST HIGH LEVEL MEETING IN A PARTNER COUNTRY**

MD Ambassadors meeting in Morocco

**2009**

**FIRST ICP**

Jordan

**2011**

**LISBON SUMMIT**

New Strategic Concept - Cooperative Security becomes one of three key priorities for NATO

**FIRST MD POLICY ADVISORY GROUP MEETING**

**2016**

**WARSAW SUMMIT**

- Enhance partnerships for protecting stability  
- Jordan is identified as an Enhanced Opportunity Partner

**OPENING OF MISSIONS TO NATO**

Israel, Jordan

**2018**

**BRUSSELS SUMMIT**

What Next for the MD?

**1994**

**LAUNCH OF THE MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE PARTNERSHIP (MD)**

Six partner countries: Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia

**2001**

**ALGERIA JOINS THE MD**

**2004**

**FIRST MD'S FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING**

**ISTANBUL SUMMIT**

More ambitious and expanded framework for the MD

**2007**

**FIRST ICP**

Egypt

**2010**

**FIRST ICP**

Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia

**2013**

**FIRST ICP**

Algeria

**2017**

**OPENING OF MISSIONS TO NATO**

Egypt, Mauritania

**LAUNCH OF NATO STRATEGIC DIRECTION SOUTH**



# 05 Partner Perspectives

*The effectiveness of the Mediterranean Dialogue has been and will continue to be shaped by the degree to which it addresses the security concerns of partner countries. How have attitudes toward NATO evolved, and what are the drivers of partner perceptions, positive and negative? How are the political and practical dimensions of the MD perceived? What are the priorities for dialogue and cooperation? What can be reinforced or changed?*

Over the past two decades, MD partners have become increasingly engaged with NATO in political dialogue and practical activities. Obviously, the partner countries are not a monolithic group. Each country has its own historic concerns, international aspirations, and place in broader regional dynamics. The level and nature of bilateral security cooperation outside NATO also varies greatly. Defense capability and the ability to work alongside NATO vary greatly across the seven countries, from Israel to Mauritania. Nevertheless, there are many points of common interest and priorities for future cooperation are broadly shared.

To be sure, partner attitudes toward NATO are not uniformly positive. But this is nothing new and discussions across the region suggest that this is far less of a constraint than sometimes assumed. As the practical dimension of the partnership has deepened, ambivalence has generally been overshadowed by security interest. This trend has also been driven by pervasive insecurity spanning state-to-state and internal challenges. Looking ahead, partners seek more frequent and focused

political dialogue, structured around a functional agenda, alongside practical assistance. For most, resource needs are both a constraint and a driver of interest in cooperation with the Alliance. Above all, at a time of great geopolitical flux, partner countries seek greater clarity about the future course of NATO strategy and engagement around the Mediterranean.

## AMBIVALENCE AND INTEREST

To a considerable extent, perceptions of NATO in the south are derivative of modern historical experience and associations with specific Alliance members. For some, notably in North Africa, the experience of colonialism and decolonization





looms large. Perceptions of regional identity also play a role. Mauritania's perceptions have been formed in an African context, with an eye toward the country's role as a bridge between the African and Mediterranean worlds. Morocco looks to Africa and the Mediterranean, but is a stakeholder in Atlantic geopolitics, too. Algeria and Tunisia are keenly aware of their connections with Africa, but have a clear Mediterranean identity. Jordan and Israel are deeply imbedded in the political realities of the Levant and are directly affected by developments in the Gulf. By virtue of its history and strategic orientation, Israel is part of the transatlantic community. But even here, there is an active debate about the implications of closer security alignment with Western partners. Egypt's geopolitical outlook spans Mediterranean and African interests, and is heavily shaped by its historic role in Arab politics. Each partner brings its historical "baggage" to the relationship with NATO. But this is also true of the engagement of individual NATO members across the Mediterranean. Indeed, these historical legacies can be drivers of cooperation as well as ambivalence. Ties of language and longstanding habits of bilateral cooperation along north-south lines continue to shape the outlook of defense and military establishments in MD partner countries. Looking across the seven partners, sovereignty concerns are a common denominator — the security of borders and the prominence of national interest in an environment where both are under pressure.

There are few, if any systematic analyses of public opinion toward NATO across the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East.

## Perspectives on Partnership from the South



### Key Drivers of Perception

- Colonial and post-colonial past
- Cold War legacy
- Recent NATO interventions
- United States leadership
- Lack of clarity on NATO strategy South
- Shared security challenges
- Benefits of practical cooperation
- Opportunities Science for Peace and Security projects

### Key Expectations

- Greater clarity on NATO strategic aims in the south
- Structured and regular political dialogue
- Continued practical cooperation in key areas
- Greater involvement in future MD development
- To be seen as security providers — not only security recipients

But our discussions suggest that several elements have shaped perceptions. First, the question of national historical experience, noted earlier, above all the colonial and post-colonial experience. In some intellectual and political circles, this remains a source of diffidence regarding closer defense ties with Europe.

Second, and more significant, is the residue of Cold War perceptions about the Alliance. This is especially pronounced in those MD countries where the non-aligned movement has been an animating force in international policy. Some elites remain wary of becoming too dependent on Euro-Atlantic partners, even if regional realities argue for stronger ties. The return of Russia to the Mediterranean — Moscow has expanded its commercial and security ties with several MD countries — may further complicate national debates on this question.

Third, and connected to the durability of Cold War images, NATO is often closely associated with the United States. To this extent, attitudes toward NATO are linked in a substantial way to varying perceptions of American leadership. It is an open



*MD partners perceive themselves as stakeholders in NATO's Mediterranean strategy and presence. Partners are keen to see how these issues are treated at the 2018 NATO Brussels Summit, and after.*



question whether this reality will be affected by shifts in Alliance burden-sharing and a more active EU role in Mediterranean security. This is essentially an independent variable in the context of MD efforts in the region.

Fourth, and perhaps most important, attitudes toward NATO continue to be shaped by the experience of recent interventions. The NATO role in the Balkans, where intervention was seen, in substantial measure, as the defense of Muslim communities, is recalled very positively across the region. By contrast, the intervention in Libya, while viewed as justified in many quarters, tends to be seen as an exercise in unfinished business. Publics and elites in neighboring states are troubled by the chaos and security spillovers from a post-Qaddafi Libya, and these conditions are frequently blamed on NATO, rightly or wrongly. Similar views are common regarding Western intervention in Afghanistan and Iraq, and perceived inaction in Syria.

Political elites and experts in the MD countries are aware of these influences on public opinion, and share many of these perceptions. But, in general, elite ambivalence is tempered by a growing awareness of the practical benefits of cooperation. This is true even where other bilateral security relationships are far more developed and important. When asked directly about public acceptance constraints in partnership with NATO, the answer in virtually every case is the same: There may be some public ambivalence,

and even some elite ambivalence, toward an initiative in which Israel is present, but this is simply not a significant obstacle to cooperation with NATO. Perhaps inevitably, there is a contrast between the views of southern Mediterranean policymakers in interactions with NATO and some of the rhetoric about the Alliance members in public settings. But this is nothing new and the phenomenon is not limited to MD partners. Partners are generally unenthusiastic about establishing permanent NATO representation offices in their countries, but welcome the opportunity to be present at NATO headquarters and commands.

Much practical business is being done with NATO and there is partner interest in doing more, regardless of the vagaries of public opinion. There is awareness that the nature and content of NATO's cooperation with partner countries can have an effect on public acceptance. It is widely believed that projects with a visible effect on human security, from assistance with removing mines and controlling dangerous ordnance, to the reintegration of military personnel into the civilian economy and help with civil emergency planning, can bolster public support for partnership with the Alliance.

On the elite level, both civilian and military, there is a clear sense that NATO is an "organization that matters" for regional security. MD partners engage with NATO, in part, because they believe it is important to have a seat at the table. To the extent that NATO takes on a greater role in security looking south, these stakes will increase. But this driver of cooperation depends critically on the perception in MD capitals that their national interests and perspectives are being taken into account. Without exception, partners express an understandable desire for greater involvement in the development of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue partnership in its next phases. They appreciate the opportunity to be consulted, and to have their preferences regarding both political dialogue and practical cooperation known.

There is a widespread understanding that risks emanating from the Mediterranean have become more critical in European and transatlantic security concerns. There is also a belief among many policymakers and experts that NATO will become more engaged in the south, even as Russia poses direct challenges in the east. But what are the contours of this strategy looking south, and how will it be implemented?





Several interlocutors mentioned that the ritualistic references to Mediterranean security at the end of communiqués are insufficient to capture the nature of the shared challenges, or to describe the future contours of NATO plans for the region. Southern observers are well aware of debates within the Alliance along these lines, and acknowledge the complexities, but are left guessing about NATO’s strategy and intentions. This perceived lack of clarity gives rise to some concern that NATO will either fail to engage adequately with security challenges in the region, or that NATO has something in mind but has not shared it with partners. Both perceptions are corrosive of trust at a time of pervasive insecurity in the Middle East and North Africa. The fundamental point is that MD partners perceive themselves as stakeholders in NATO’s Mediterranean strategy and presence. Partners are keen to see how these issues are treated at the 2018 NATO Brussels Summit, and after.<sup>18</sup>

Previous analyses undertaken in the early years of the MD noted the evident confusion among partners about the aims and compatibility of multiple Mediterranean initiatives, many aiming at similar forms of north-south dialogue and cooperation. This confusion persists, and is reinforced by the proliferation of bilateral efforts launched in the wake of the Arab revolutions. Partners in the south are trying to make their own judgements about the relative merits of various vehicles for cooperation — EU, NATO,

OSCE, and a host of regional groupings — and the comparative advantage of each. In the security realm, these judgements are often driven by what is on offer, not least funding and equipment.

MD partners are attuned to the question of NATO–EU collaboration, especially in the context of Europe’s growing commitment to security engagement and, potentially, greater “strategic autonomy.” There is some expectation that these efforts will be felt as much, if not more, in the south than in the east. In general, partners are supportive of closer NATO–EU collaboration, and see advantages in terms of their interests in larger scale projects and capacity building.<sup>19</sup>

## SECURITY PARTNERSHIP IS A TWO-WAY STREET

The idea that the MD is a “two-way street,” is another consistent theme from conversations around the region. In the early years of the initiative, it was common to see NATO as a “producer” of security for troubled security “consumers” in the south. To be sure, the disparity in defence capabilities is large and persistent. But the transnational, really *trans-regional* nature of challenges around the Mediterranean increasingly makes this a story of interdependence in security terms. Uncontrolled migration is a phenomenon affecting societies on both sides of the Mediterranean, and NATO’s southern partners face an unstable south, too. Diasporas from the Middle East and North Africa have been involved in terrorism in Europe and North America. But radicalized individuals from diaspora communities also threaten security in MD partner countries. From border security to the protection of critical energy and other infrastructure, security around the wider Mediterranean space is widely seen as indivisible.

In this context, partners are keen to underscore their own contributions and potential contributions. The participation of many MD partner forces in NATO military operations has already been noted, and further opportunities for partnership in regional crisis management are sure to arise. Partners in the south can be a leading source of intelligence on trans-regional threats, including the recruitment,

<sup>18</sup> Several interviewees noted the need for a more formal legal framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue, perhaps a founding document of some kind to which partners could adhere beyond the current individual partnership agreements. The point here would be to enshrine the principle of “co-ownership.”

<sup>19</sup> NATO and the EU are currently partnering on a pilot project aimed at regional security cooperation, focusing on border security and monitoring drug trafficking. The project is funded through the European Neighborhood Instrument, and implemented in large part by NATO, working with local security authorities.



movements and plans of foreign fighters. Partners can also contribute to understanding emerging trends and flashpoints — the “warning” task. Several MD partners, most notably Morocco, have been leaders in efforts to counter violent extremism on both sides of the Mediterranean. Algerian officials point to their decades-long experience in protecting critical energy infrastructure. In this, as in many other areas, Israel is a case apart, with substantial expertise in areas as diverse as missile defense, cybersecurity, and military medicine. The list of areas where partners have something to bring to the table at political and practical levels, beyond their strategic location, is long.

## POLITICAL DIALOGUE

All partners value the opportunity of bilateral (29+1) and multilateral (29+7) political dialogue to exchange views, cultivate a common understanding, and develop a common language toward current and emerging security challenges. Transparency and confidence building are important elements in the dialogue equation. At the same time, there are questions and concerns to be addressed if the dialogue is to achieve its full potential in a rapidly changing strategic environment. If a key aim of the MD is to foster a security community in a transatlantic-Mediterranean setting, the political dialogue is the top tier activity for this purpose.

As noted earlier in this analysis, the various multilateral formats of the MD are one of the few vehicles for multi-stakeholder dialogue among Arab



states and Israel. The expectations associated with this dialogue are necessarily limited, and it is easily disrupted by adverse events in the region. But its value is recognized, even where it complicates the public acceptance equation for partners.

Many interlocutors perceive a lack of process and purpose on the multilateral track. They point out that countries would be more engaged if meetings at ambassadorial level (or other level considered appropriate by NATO and MD countries) would take place on a more regular basis and would be structured around a specific agenda with action points jointly developed by NATO and MD countries. These meetings could be organized by NATO, partner countries, or third nongovernmental organizations as “track 1.5” discussions. The purpose of these meetings would be to exchange views on regional security matters of common concern, and would inform and augment, rather than replace, meetings at Ministerial level.<sup>20</sup> These meetings would take place in parallel with the expert level meetings at 29+1 that focus on practical cooperation and the preparation and evaluation of the annual Mediterranean Dialogue Work

<sup>20</sup> As proposed at the NATO Prague Summit, 2002. Section 2, point 4.



*Counterterrorism is at the top of the cooperation agenda for all MD partners. There is broad satisfaction with the extent to which the MD has focused on building capacity in this area, from training to enhancing the ability of partners to address CBRN, IED, and other dimensions of the challenge.*



Program (MDWP). The entire series would be captured in a rolling calendar of events for NATO members and partners.

In addition, some partners express interest in a more flexible approach to the political dimension of the Dialogue and see benefits in meeting in “29 + n” format, to discuss security matters that are of interest only to a limited set of partner countries, or to involve a wider set of interlocutors beyond the current membership of the Mediterranean Dialogue. Discussion on many of the most pressing issues on the Mediterranean security agenda, from terrorism and proliferation to human security, could benefit from this more flexible approach.

Some dialogue partners, especially the Arab members, stress the limited geographical scope of the MD and the difficulty of addressing critical regional security challenges without including other stakeholders, including Libya, Syria, Palestine, and Lebanon. The challenges associated with formally extending the dialogue to places where governance is unclear or unstable are clear. But as political conditions evolve, some form of engagement with the MD may be possible. More obvious, is the need to bring in perspectives from Africa, most notably from the Sahel, but potentially West Africa and the Horn of Africa, too. North African partners are increasingly concerned about the hard and soft security challenges flowing from these regions. This set of regional issues, hardly on the agenda in earlier years of the Dialogue, will demand attention from NATO and its partners.



Initiatives such as the G-5 Sahel, and organizations such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), the African Union, and the League of Arab States can be brought into the political dialogue on an informal basis as appropriate. This is already being done in modest fashion, and NATO links to these institutions can be further institutionalized with a view to their importance in projecting stability southward.

Partners tend to believe that the current composition of the MD is correct in light of prevailing political and security conditions, but there is interest in new formats and new geometries to address emerging issues and actors. Most are open to the addition of new members (e.g., Libya) if and when conditions permit. There is essentially no interest in merging the MD with ICI in the Gulf, or subsuming it within some larger, global partnership framework within NATO. But there may be instances where it makes good sense to bring in perspectives from ICI, and vice versa, in the interest of informed debate and the inclusion of relevant actors.

## **PRACTICAL COOPERATION**

Building a security community in support of shared NATO and partner interests has practical as well as political dimensions. This has been a hallmark of the evolution of the MD in recent years. This facet of the MD is about tangible cooperation and the network of individuals engaged in it — interoperability in its technical and human dimensions. On substance, there is a striking degree of consensus with regard to priorities for practical cooperation, and these are broadly in line with the Mediterranean security interests of NATO members. The tailored approach via the Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program is generally seen as a success. But the expanding range of partnership programs on offer has increased the need for liaison and prioritization (the NSD-S Hub could play a role in this context). There is also some degree of concern that the complexity of managing these programs is growing, and partners do not wish to bear these costs alone. There may be a need to focus practical partnership efforts on a more limited set of better resourced projects.

Without question, counterterrorism is at the top of the cooperation agenda for all MD partners. There is broad satisfaction with the extent to which the MD has focused on building capacity in this area, from training to enhancing the ability of partners to address CBRN, IED, and other dimensions of the challenge.



Beyond counterterrorism per se, counterinsurgency training and enhancing the capability of military establishments to engage in irregular warfare is also important. While training is valuable, many interlocutors stressed the need for equipment and funding to bolster these capabilities.

Border control and the general challenge of surveillance across a complex maritime and land environment is another, related priority for partners. The MD has been active in these areas, and these have also been prominent in bilateral security cooperation with Europe and North America. The expense associated with surveillance systems, especially for vast, thinly populated spaces, puts a premium on information sharing. This is not always easy to reconcile with national sovereignty concerns. Nonetheless, this is clearly an area that will remain at or near the top of the agenda for practical cooperation in the future. It is an area at the nexus of migration and people smuggling, the illicit trade in small arms and light weapons, drug trafficking, terrorism, and insurgency.

Civil protection and human security are also areas of interest for practical cooperation. This spans a range of activities; from the creation of crisis management centers to risk reduction for civil populations (mine removal, secure munitions storage, etc.). The wider Mediterranean space is increasingly exposed to the environmental and human security consequences of climate change and desertification. The development of offshore energy resources, especially in the eastern Mediterranean, will bring additional environmental security risks where specialized equipment and skills will be useful. A number of observers saw this as a growth area for partnership in the future.



*There is a widely shared desire to enhance cooperation with NATO in the field of intelligence sharing. At the level of warning and broad gauge assessments, this may not pose great difficulty.*

There is strong interest in further developing cooperation on cybersecurity in all its dimensions. Partners are well aware that this is an increasingly prominent concern for NATO, and wish to benefit from Alliance assessments and knowhow. Some partners, most notably Israel, can make very significant contributions of their own in this area. This is closely linked to a longstanding partner interest in the protection of critical infrastructure. Among those partners who have been engaged in NATO exercises and operations, there is a generalized desire to expand this collaboration to more sophisticated defense capabilities such as electronic warfare.

Perhaps most complicated, there is a widely shared desire to enhance cooperation with NATO in the field of intelligence sharing. At the level of warning and broad gauge assessments, this may not pose great difficulty. As noted earlier, it is an ideal area for collaboration at the NSD-S Hub in Naples as it develops. The regular exchange of actionable intelligence is obviously a more difficult issue, largely driven by national concerns over sources and methods. These can be as significant in and with partner countries as they are in a NATO context. Nonetheless, the need for greater cooperation in this field figured in virtually every conversation with MD partner observers.

Finally, MD partners place considerable value on access to NATO courses for uniformed and civilian defense officials. These courses are useful for training purposes, but perhaps as important, they contribute to the development of a network of individuals with some exposure to NATO and other MD partners. This can make an important contribution to fostering a security community along north-south and south-south lines, and can pay operational dividends in future crises. At more senior levels, these relationships can play a role in leadership development and the political dimension of the Dialogue.



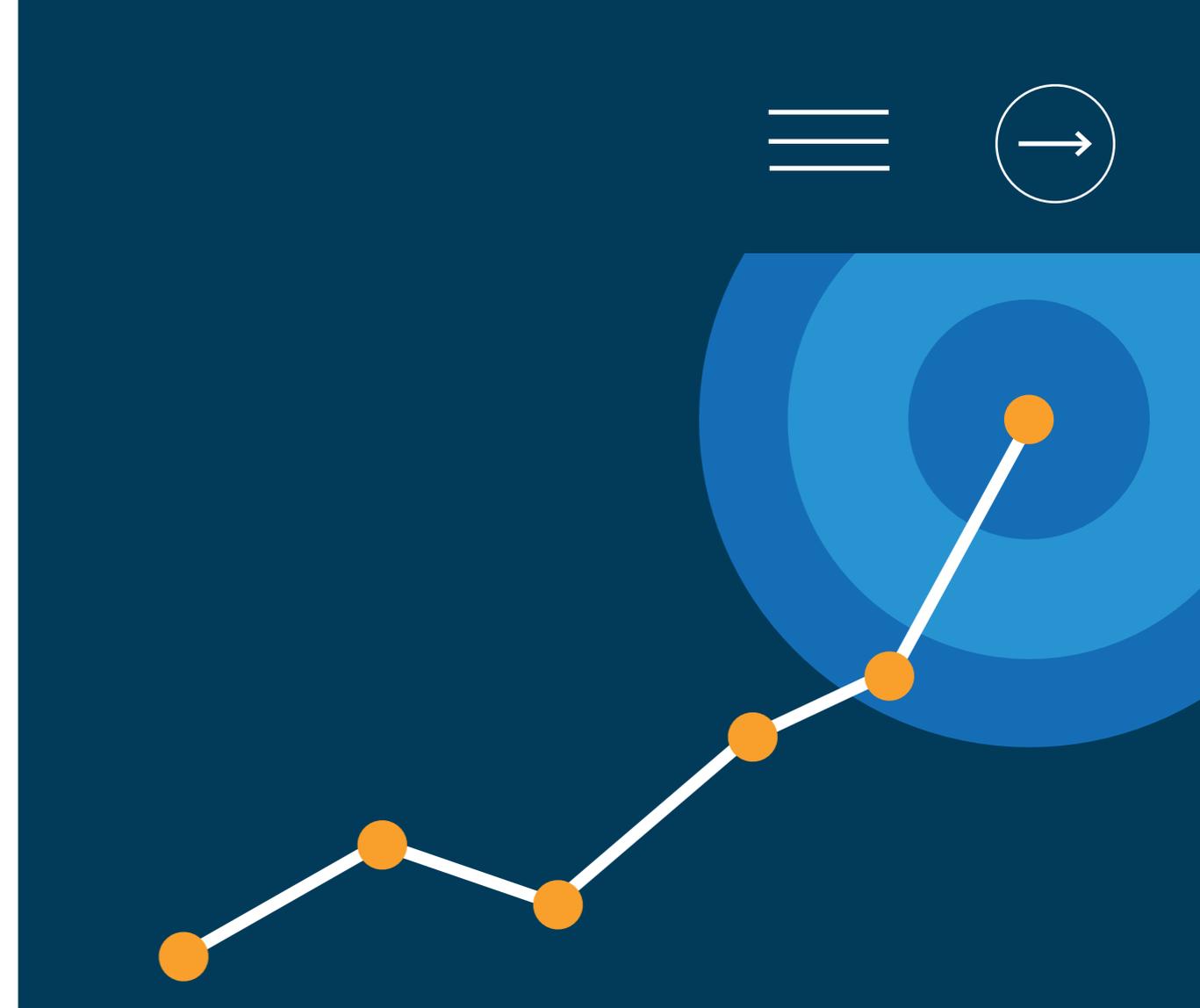
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## Conclusions and Next Steps

**N**ATO's Mediterranean Dialogue has evolved significantly in response to changes in the security environment, NATO strategy, and partner interests. The initiative has become more balanced in north-south terms, more closely tailored to individual partner requirements, and more diverse in scope. Our analysis suggests that both tracks of the MD — political dialogue and practical cooperation — remain essential. The MD is poised to acquire new importance as NATO focuses more intensively on strategy looking south. There is now an opportunity to align the MD more closely with NATO strategy and to reinforce cooperation with partners at a time of broad alignment of interests and priorities.

### THE EVOLVING SECURITY ENVIRONMENT

The animating idea behind NATO engagement with Mediterranean partners — the notion that transatlantic and Mediterranean security are closely linked — is more obvious today than at any point in the history of the Alliance. Terrorism, migration, and human security are driving policy debates, alongside more conventional concerns over regional stability. The Mediterranean is a



center of flashpoints for crisis and conflict, but contemporary challenges emanating from the south go well beyond crisis management. From the Levant to the Maghreb, there is a very real prospect of protracted chaos and instability, sustained insecurity at the level of societies, and states that will pose dilemmas for transatlantic strategy for years to come. This will have implications for NATO's partnerships in the south, as states face structural challenges to their stability and sovereignty, and new demands on their capacity for security and defense.

The influences on Mediterranean security have become more diverse, and global. The Mediterranean is not a self-contained space in security terms. To a far greater extent than was envisioned in earlier years of the MD, Mediterranean security is being shaped by developments further afield, from the Black Sea and the Horn of Africa, to the Sahel, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the wider Atlantic. Conversations with policymakers in the MD partner countries underscore the significance of risks



*Mediterranean risks are not simply a concern for southern Europe. They affect transatlantic security as whole, even if national debates inevitably display varying priorities for strategy and investment.*



flowing from their own “south.” At the same time, old actors have returned to the region, and new actors are emerging. Russia is once again playing an active role in the Eastern Mediterranean, and has re-invigorated ties in the central and western Mediterranean. Indeed, there is a growing nexus between security in the east and the south. Iran and the Arab Gulf states have become more direct participants in the conflicts underway in the Levant and in Libya. China, too, is emerging as a stakeholder in Mediterranean affairs, and is poised to become a more important security actor. In sum, the strategic environment in the Mediterranean continues to expand in terms of geography and players. It is also becoming more fluid in political terms. NATO’s MD is a valuable exercise in building a security community in north-south and south-south terms. It is also one of the very few vehicles for Arab-Israeli dialogue in a multilateral setting.

Security priorities on both sides of the Mediterranean, and across the Atlantic, have converged. Counterterrorism and human security are at the top of agendas in the north and the south. In a related fashion, border control, maritime, and cybersecurity are shaping policies around the region, and will be central concerns for security partnership in the years ahead.



## NATO LOOKS SOUTH

As NATO looks to the 2018 Brussels Summit, and beyond, the Alliance will need to articulate a more explicit strategy for the south. Mediterranean security and partnerships will be at the core, but the wider influences noted above will also be part of the equation, including close links to security in the Atlantic. Observers in NATO member states and in the MD countries note that uncertainty over Alliance strategy looking south complicates thinking about the future of regional partnerships. That said, NATO possesses substantial command assets and forces in and around the Mediterranean. The Alliance capacity for surveillance — making Mediterranean threats transparent — is growing, and the region is a focal point for missile defense and other essential tasks.

NATO strategy in the Mediterranean can be framed in terms of core objectives, environment shaping, and hedging. Core tasks include deterrence against Article 5 risks, largely concentrated in Turkey’s neighborhood, and the defense of common security interests on Europe’s southern periphery. Environment shaping implies projecting stability in and around the Mediterranean, and is the central contribution of the political and practical activities of the MD. Hedging is about the capacity for crisis management and response when conventional and unconventional threats cannot be contained. Mediterranean security partnerships can also contribute to the potential for joint action in this context.

Mediterranean risks are not simply a concern for southern Europe. They affect transatlantic security as whole, even if national debates inevitably display varying priorities for strategy and investment. The prominence of migration and terrorism in public perception plays a role here. Our research conversations underscore this shared interest in Mediterranean security and southern partnerships.

As NATO and the EU deepen their cooperation, this is likely to have specific implications for Mediterranean strategy and partnerships. As the EU continues to reshape its neighborhood policies looking south, there will be new opportunities for coordination and alignment in practical terms, notably on security sector reform and capacity building. The diverse mix of hard and soft security challenges in the Mediterranean, and the fact that many European states have the capacity to reach flashpoints in Europe’s “near abroad,” suggest that closer NATO–EU cooperation may be felt first and foremost in the south.



## **PARTNER PERSPECTIVES**

The seven MD partners share an interest in engagement with NATO as an influential strategic actor, and as a practical contributor to their security needs. Arguably, this interest has grown stronger in recent years as partnership activities have gathered pace and have been more closely aligned with individual partner interests. Public and elite attitudes toward NATO remain a challenge, but a manageable one. There are several dimensions to this ambivalence, including a general uncertainty about Alliance aims in the South, and a broad sensitivity to questions of national sovereignty. Some partners retain images of NATO based in Cold War perceptions. Others remain concerned about the aftermath of the intervention in Libya. In some cases, views of NATO are closely tied to perceptions of specific allies, above all the United States. Interest in NATO, including the multilateral political dialogue within the MD, coexists alongside a cooler approach to the Alliance in public discourse. None of this has stood in the way of active participation in the political and practical aspects of the MD. It is unlikely to prove a significant obstacle in the future.

Cooperation with NATO unfolds against a backdrop of multiple Mediterranean initiatives, including the EU's Neighborhood Policy, the OSCE's Mediterranean dialogue, the Union for the Mediterranean, and regional initiatives such as the 5+5. There is an understandable degree of confusion about the proliferation of these north-south frameworks. In this context, MD partners are strongly supportive of efforts to enhance NATO-EU cooperation.

MD partners broadly agree on the need for more regular, focused, and informed multilateral dialogue, including more diverse and informal formats. There is little support for expanding membership in the Dialogue per se, although Libya and possibly others could be brought in over time if conditions permit. Similarly, there is no support for merging the MD with the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. But informal mechanisms for including Gulf participants or others in MD activities may be useful in some cases. Maghreb members of the MD are particularly keen to work with the G-5 Sahel group, and to deepen attention to security challenges emanating from Africa in general.

The practical priorities for MD countries include counterterrorism and counterinsurgency training (and equipment, and funding), intelligence sharing, border control, cybersecurity, civil protection, and access to NATO courses and SPS projects. These interests mirror the current program of activities within the MD, and are broadly convergent with NATO's own priorities in the south. Partners are keen to underscore their own contributions, and potential contributions, to NATO. These include participation in Alliance operations, intelligence on terrorism and the movement of foreign fighters, and their experience in protecting energy and other critical infrastructure. They are also key actors in countering violent extremism and regional crisis management. In these respects, the partnership with NATO is a two-way street.

## **OVERALL OBSERVATIONS AND NEXT STEPS**

This analysis suggests that partner ambivalence is a reality, but is outweighed by practical interest in cooperation and desire to engage with a strategically important actor. Greater clarity about NATO's evolving strategy toward the south is essential to solidify this interest. Bilateral dialogue is the center of gravity for the political dimension of the MD, but the multilateral aspect is valued and can be strengthened.

The practical dimension of the partnership is widely seen as a success. But it is under-resourced relative to its contribution to NATO interests in projecting stability in the Mediterranean. Future efforts should focus on areas of shared interest and comparative advantage. Overall, NATO's Mediterranean partnership efforts have not received adequate attention in the wider strategic community on both sides of the Atlantic. The activities and achievements of the MD are too little known outside specialist circles.





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