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AGAINST ALL ODDS: RELATIONS BETWEEN NATO AND THE MENA REGION

Florence Gaub

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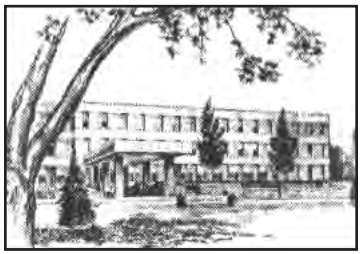

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Strategic Studies Institute Monograph

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Florence Gaub

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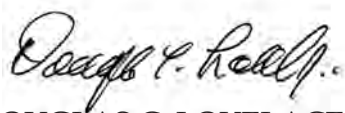
FOREWORD

The Middle East and North Africa might not be the first region that comes to mind when one contemplates the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). To many, the Alliance was founded largely to unite Europe and North America, and to counter threats emerging from the Soviet bloc. The end of the Cold War changed these assumptions—not least to be proven by NATO's Operation in Libya in 2011, sanctioned by the League of Arab States.

In this monograph, Dr. Florence Gaub describes how the region has moved from the rim of the Alliance's security perspective toward a more nuanced vision that recognizes the region's role in an ever-changing and more-complex world. NATO has understood the security implications emerging from the changes taking place among its southern neighbors and the need for dialogue and cooperation. Dr. Gaub gives not only an overview of the different frameworks of cooperation that NATO has with the Middle East and North Africa, but also explains their evolution and potential.

As the Arab world is undergoing change on an unprecedented scale, NATO's need for dialogue and exchange with this part of the world is even more important than before. Yet, there are obstacles along the way: burdened by historical precursors, NATO's strategic communication, and the use of antagonistic rhetoric tapping into the Clash of Civilizations, the Alliance faces a number of challenges in its cooperation with its southern partners.



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FLORENCE GAUB is a researcher and lecturer in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Defense College's Middle East Faculty. Her areas of interest include the Arab world, military sociology, post-conflict reconstruction, and intercultural communication. Previously, she has served as a research fellow in the German Parliament, focusing on issues of defense, internal security, and development. She has also held positions with the French Defence Ministry's Research Centre in the Social Sciences of Defence (Centre d'études en sciences sociales de la defense), the Centre for Security Studies in Sarajevo, the Centre for Applied Policy Research in Munich, as well as with the United Nations Institute for Training and Research in New York, where she coordinated courses for diplomats posted at the United Nations. She has conducted extensive field studies in Lebanon, Iraq, Nigeria, and Bosnia-Herzegovina. She has published several articles and two books on these topics, and has lectured widely with The NATO School, Oberammergau, Germany; Allied Joint Forces Command Naples; and several think tanks and universities in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. Dr. Gaub graduated from Sorbonne University in Paris, France, and the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich, Germany. She holds a Ph.D. from the Department of Political Science at Humboldt University of Berlin.

SUMMARY

While the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was founded in 1949 first and foremost to strengthen the transatlantic link in the wake of the Soviet threat, one of the immediate neighboring regions was left largely unnoticed for the Alliance's first 4 decades. Although some of the Allies had recognized the importance of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, it was dealt with largely on a bilateral basis. Events such as the Suez crisis of 1956 and the wars of 1967 and 1973 did have an impact on NATO and its cohesion, overall its focus remained on the Central Front in Germany. This was where a Soviet attack would have likely occurred, and led to an Allied bias in geographic terms.

Although the southern allies recognized the importance of the region for NATO's security, they failed to set the agenda within the Alliance to a significant extent. This was not helped by the fact that some of the southern allies (such as Greece and Turkey) had their own conflicts to deal with, or were not part of NATO's integrated command structure (such as Spain and France). The Alliance blindness to the strategic relevance of the Middle East and North Africa is thus an outcome of not only a strategic bias in favor of the Central Front, but also of issues internal to the Alliance.

These situations changed with the end of the Cold War. The invasion of Kuwait and subsequent war against Iraq, promising developments in the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, and the establishment of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program designed for European states all created circumstances conducive for the launch of a similar network with the Alliance's southern neighbors.

As the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) was born in 1994, it counted initially five member states (Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Egypt, and Israel) and had no political ambitions beyond the exchange of views and information. Yet, as the MD grew with the inclusion first of Jordan and later Algeria, it served as an important platform for the Alliance's other outreach efforts, which received further input in 2004. Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the invasion of Iraq, and the discovery of a potential nuclear program in Iran, the region received renewed attention from the Allies. While the MD was elevated to the status of partnership, a separate program was developed for the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). The invitation to the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) has been accepted by Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), but has received no official response from Saudi Arabia and Oman. Both frameworks are decidedly more ambitious than the original dialogue and aim not only for political but also military cooperation and interoperability. In addition, the Alliance initiated its first training mission in Iraq. A small endeavor of 150 people, it contributed particularly to the formation of the new Iraqi security forces' officer corps. Initial contact was also established with the League of Arab States. By the time the Arab Spring began, NATO had established relations with half of the League's member states.

Yet a few states remain outside of NATO's network with the MENA region; this fact alone reflects accurately the binary relations most Allies, particularly the United States, have with the region's governments. The fact that Libya, Lebanon, and Syria (and originally Algeria) were excluded from the MD although they are Mediterranean states is a clear indication of

political relationships in disarray. While the absence of Lebanon and Syria is clearly connected to the unresolved Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Libyan case is a result of decades of support to international terrorism.

As a result of these difficulties, NATO has attempted to work around existing conflicts within and without the region, be it the Western Sahara issue between Algeria and Morocco or the Palestinian conflict. In spite of these attempts, the Alliance's relationships are affected by low levels of political and economic integration in the region proper as a result of high- and low-intensity conflicts. In addition, the existing partnerships are hampered by NATO's rather negative image on the public level. This is in part due to a lack of distinction between the Alliance as a collective and its individual member states. A history of colonization (France, Spain, Italy, and the United Kingdom) and bilateral interventionism has created with the wider public an ambiance of distrust, which affects NATO as well, although the Alliance itself intervened in the region only in 2011, and then with a mandate from the League of Arab States. Nevertheless, NATO is frequently seen as an expansionist tool and not to be trusted. This image is particularly fueled by the Alliance's mission in Afghanistan, which is seen as an anti-Muslim operation, as well as by the lack of support for the Palestinian cause. In addition, NATO itself has struggled to adjust to the region in partnership terms: translations into Arabic as well as Arabic-speaking personnel are scarce, and within the Alliance there are divergent views of the region's relevance to Allied security.

Yet, in times of transnational challenges, such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, migration, climate change, and energy se-

curity, NATO has no other choice but to extend its understanding of security beyond traditional lines. Defense and security cannot be understood in territorial terms any longer; only in a comprehensive manner can both NATO and its partners confront the challenges of the 21st century. It is precisely for this reason that the Alliance will continue to improve the existing relationships and overcome the remaining challenges—conflict, war, and security are not matters of choice, but of necessity.

AGAINST ALL ODDS: RELATIONS BETWEEN NATO AND THE MENA REGION

An analysis of current relations linking the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) with the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) prompts the observation that the likelihood of such ties developing in the first place must have seemed at best remote. Too substantial were (and still are) the differences between the institution embodying the Transatlantic Link and the Arab world; too extensive were the mutual suspicions; and too great was the historical burden, which weighed on such relations from the outset. And yet, against all odds, a web of relationships developed from 1991 onward and continues to grow, culminating in 2011 in the first NATO operation in an Arab country—Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR (OUP) in Libya, sanctioned by the League of Arab States, and assisted by four Arab countries (Morocco, Jordan, United Arab Emirates [UAE] and Qatar). Relations between the Alliance and the Arab world have thus made an about-turn in the space of 2 decades. Yet, while profound progress has been made, a number of obstacles remain on the way to a comprehensive relationship between NATO and the vast region ranging from Mauritania to Iraq.

NEIGHBORS WITHOUT CONTACT: NATO AND THE MENA REGION BEFORE 1991

To say that the Middle East and North Africa at one time did not matter at all to NATO would be an exaggeration, and yet, it is to a certain extent true. As NATO's creation in 1949 was intended to counter the

threat of the Soviet Union to the Free World, the Mediterranean and adjacent regions occupied a secondary place among the priorities of the Alliance's founding fathers. Yet, they were not completely absent from the agenda: the question of Italian membership was closely connected to Mediterranean security, as was that of the French territories in North Africa. Although NATO felt that a Member State mostly surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea would distract from the Atlantic outlook of the Alliance, Italy was included among the founding Allies, since it was feared that its exclusion would strengthen the country's Communist party.[1] Thus, NATO had a definite Mediterranean component with French, Italian, and later Greek and Turkish membership. This ultimately resulted in the creation of Armed Forces South (AFSOUTH), a command dedicated solely to the Mediterranean region. Yet, although almost a third of NATO's members during the Cold War bordered on the Mediterranean (as compared to a fifth today, following large intakes from Eastern Europe), they failed to formulate a coherent vision and strategy for the adjacent MENA region and thus shape NATO's approach to it as a whole. France's and Spain's long-standing absence from the Alliance's integrated military structure contributed to this, as did the tensions between Greece and Turkey, mainly over Cyprus. In addition, the Allies with a strong interest in the region, such as France, Great Britain, and the United States, favored engagement with the MENA region outside the NATO context.

This attitude was fueled by the perception that NATO as a mutual defense alliance was not supposed to act outside the territory of its Member States (the so-called out-of-area debate). The MENA region, being outside the territory of NATO member states, did

not play an independent role during the Cold War, when security was envisioned in a rather classical perspective. Territoriality, and attacks on it, were the dominant theme, and thus left no room for a grasp of security going beyond this. As a consequence, the MENA region was seen first and foremost as a possible sideshow in the antagonism between communism and capitalism. After attempts to create a Middle Eastern counterpart to NATO failed, Greece and Turkey were invited to join the Alliance in 1952—as in the case of Italy, concern with potential expansion of Soviet influence overruled the Alliance's vocational concentration on Western Europe.[2] By the same token, the Eisenhower Doctrine, issued in 1957 as a reaction to the Suez War of 1956, offered military and economic support to Middle Eastern states threatened by Soviet influence.[3] This followed the example of the Truman Doctrine of 1947, which had offered the same sort of assistance to Greece and Turkey. The MENA region was thus seen, in Western eyes, only as an area where expanding Soviet influence could cause a greater threat to the West.

Indeed, within the North Atlantic Alliance, security and defense were seen solely through the prism of the Soviet threat, and major emphasis was placed on the so-called Central Front (known as the "Central Front bias") to the detriment of other regions such as the South. Structurally, this perspective could be seen in the limited attention NATO Headquarters gave to the MENA region, monitored by an Expert Working Group that later evolved into a slightly more political Ad Hoc Group. Meeting only twice a year for 2 days at the expert level,[4] "neither group proved as active, informed or forward-looking as events warranted."[5]

The Arab-Israeli wars of 1967 and 1973 slightly changed the stance on out-of-area concerns: the Soviet Union's strong support to Egypt and its breaking off of relations with Israel in 1967 enhanced the region's status as a Cold War sideshow. As a reaction to American military support to Israel, the Arab members of the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) imposed an oil embargo, highlighting European dependency on the region's energy supplies—at the time, 80 percent of Europe's oil came from Arab countries.[6] Most importantly, the conflict also brought to the forefront the rift that ran through the Alliance when it came to Middle Eastern policy: most European Allies (except for Portugal and the Netherlands) denied the United States access to their national facilities to supply Israel, whereas the United States put its global forces on nuclear alert without prior consultation in the North Atlantic Council.[7]

While neither crisis led to an active NATO role in the region, the Alliance nevertheless acknowledged the importance of world regions other than Eastern Europe, thereby reducing its strict "in-area" policy somewhat. The 1974 summit declaration included the Allies' statement of their resolve to "keep each other fully informed and to strengthen the practice of frank and timely consultations by all means which may be appropriate on matters relating to their common interests as members of the Alliance, bearing in mind that these interests can be affected by events in other areas of the world."[8] The Alliance realized that the Arab world could no longer be overlooked as a strategic region.

A NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NATO AND THE ARAB WORLD: AN OVERVIEW

The established vision of the Middle East and North Africa as a mere sideshow in the Cold War changed in the early 1990s: the collapse of the Soviet Union removed the threat of the Warsaw Pact, the Gulf War against Iraq highlighted the importance of the MENA region for Allied security (independent of any Soviet threat), and the Israeli-Palestinian peace process was thought at the time to indicate an era of stability ahead.

Thus, the Strategic Concept adopted in 1991 in Rome acknowledged the region as a whole for the first time in Alliance history: "The Allies also wish to maintain peaceful and non-adversarial relations with the countries in the southern Mediterranean and Middle East. The stability and peace of the countries on the southern periphery of Europe are important for the security of the Alliance, as the 1991 Gulf war has shown."[9] In addition, the Concept recognized the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the region as a potential threat. Forty-two years after NATO's creation, the region thus emerged in the Allied strategic vision, as stated in the North Atlantic Council Communiqué of 1993: "Security in Europe is greatly affected by security in the Mediterranean."[10] The interdependence of security had finally been acknowledged by the Alliance, and an out-of-area role for NATO was soon after confirmed with its engagement in Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1995.

The Mediterranean Dialogue.

After the Cold War came to an end, the Alliance entered a new era in which concepts of security, territoriality, and defense were rethought. Former Warsaw Pact members entered first the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, and eventually the Alliance itself. A timid engagement with the Mediterranean region emerged in the form of the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), which came into being toward the end of 1994. While some Allies, particularly Italy and Spain, were pushing for a full-blown partnership structure like the far-reaching PfP program dedicated to European states, most were concerned that NATO would be overburdened by reaching out in two different directions. This meant that the MD was at first little more than a consultative forum, its stated aims being "to contribute to security and stability in the Mediterranean as a whole, to achieve better mutual understanding and to correct any misunderstandings of the Alliance's purposes that could lead to a perception of threat."[11] In other words, the goal of the Dialogue is to deconstruct the myth of an Alliance searching for new enemies, and to dispel fears that a new European security structure might exclude—and harm—its southern neighbors. By the same token, the Dialogue seeks to improve Allied understanding of Partner Countries' security perceptions and concerns—a feature that had not existed throughout the Cold War, when the Alliance understood Middle Eastern security merely as an extension of East-West antagonism, or worse, of its own security.[12]

The original members of the MD were chosen by consensus in the Alliance. This is an important point, as it explains why the first MENA partners of NATO

were all states considered stable and friendly toward the West—Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, Mauritania, Israel and, a few months later, Jordan. The criterion has been bemoaned by MD members, who would have liked to see Syria, Lebanon, and Libya (under Gaddafi) invited as well.

The Dialogue started timidly and was designed from the outset to evolve. Originally limited to twice-yearly meetings between Brussels, Belgium, embassies, and members of NATO Headquarters' international staff, the bilateral forum developed over the years into a more substantial cooperation. First elevated into a separate Committee involving representatives of the Alliance's Member States, the MD progressively became more significant in both military and political terms. In 2000, Algeria was invited to join; in 2004, the Dialogue was elevated to the status of a full partnership. A policy document called for a more ambitious and expanded framework, including high-level political meetings, military interoperability, and defense reform.[13] The menu of practical cooperation activities was increased from just a handful of items to several hundred, offering seminars, workshops, and courses in areas such as civil emergency planning, scientific and environmental affairs, crisis management, defense policy and strategy, small arms and light weapons, and proliferation. A number of meetings have now been held at the level of Ministers of Foreign Affairs and of Defense, as well as of Chiefs of Defense. In addition, officers and civil servants from MD countries have for some years been attending seminars, workshops, and courses at NATO Headquarters, the NATO Defense College, and the NATO School Oberammergau. MD countries can observe NATO military exercises, and their participation can be funded by the Alliance.

When the Alliance drafted its new Strategic Concept in 2010, MD member states were consulted. A trust fund was created to contribute to the elimination of explosive remnants of war in Jordan, and another fund exists to destroy obsolete and unserviceable munitions, build adequate storage sites for remaining munitions, enhance specialized personnel skills, and provide training for the reintegration of military personnel returning to civilian life.[14] Most importantly, MD countries (Morocco and Jordan) have contributed to NATO operations in Kosovo, Libya, and Afghanistan. Six of the seven MD countries have concluded Individual Partnership Cooperation Programs, designed to deepen their relationship with NATO by offering tailored advice on reforms.

Overall, the MD thus seems like a successful program, especially when one considers the circumstances in which it was initiated. However, the comparison with efforts like the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) involving the 28 Allies and 22 PfP Partners makes it clear that the Dialogue is more of a confidence-building measure than a real partnership. The Alliance has failed so far to develop jointly defined challenges with its Mediterranean partners, or determine the benefits for both sides involved in the partnership. As a result, NATO's intentions in the region are not always clear; this continues to be a hindrance, particularly at the political level.

As the MD is based on an imbalance between supply and demand, NATO remains its driving force. This is partly the result of the Partners not understanding fully what the Alliance can offer, but also of the silence maintained by their security community and their total lack of a common strategic voice. In addition, though the Alliance is politico-military in nature, 90

percent of its cooperation with these countries is military, indicating difficulties in improving the political aspect of the partnership. Despite the considerable progress made between the Alliance and its Mediterranean partners, there is thus room for improvement. Possible synergies could be developed with a second partnership that NATO created in the MENA region in 2004, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

September 11, 2001 (9/11) affected the Alliance's relationship with the MENA region significantly. Where some Member States (particularly Germany, Canada, and the Scandinavian countries) had previously doubted the relevance and importance of the MD, the tragic events of that day spurred the realization that dialogue and cooperation with this region were vital for Allied security. The invasion of Iraq in 2003, its subsequent instability, the shift of the balance of power toward Iran, and Iran's likely quest for a nuclear weapon added to the perceived need for stability in the Gulf region, encouraging the hope that transatlantic engagement would foster it. As then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer declared on a visit to Qatar in 2005, "This region faces formidable security challenges. Several countries in this region have been the target of terrorist attacks. And your immediate neighborhood remains a flashpoint of unresolved regional issues, of proliferation risks, and of political and religious extremism."[15]

As a consequence, the Istanbul Summit of 2004 launched a partnership with the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), inviting all of them to join. To date only Bahrain, Qatar, the UAE, and Kuwait

have done so, while Saudi Arabia and Oman (which together account for 70 percent of the Gulf peninsula's defense spending) have so far proved reluctant.

Compared to the MD, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) focuses less on mutual understanding and dispelling of misperceptions; instead, the emphasis is on contributing to "regional security and stability"[16] in the broader Middle East region. From the outset, the Initiative thus took a noticeably more practical approach in the security area rather than focusing on the deconstruction of mutual suspicions. In part, this was due to the previous engagement with the MD, which allowed the Alliance to build on established mechanisms and tools. In addition, the Gulf States' initial interest in NATO was rather greater than in the case of the MD: since they had already pursued a strategic internationalization of their security (e.g., by concluding bilateral agreements with France, Britain, and the United States), a relationship with the Alliance could be seen as another card in the deck to achieve this goal. Yet, there is also distrust and a lack of understanding regarding the way NATO functions, which ultimately has prevented the Initiative from reaching its full potential. The Initiative's rather prominent practical component and its bilateral rather than multilateral framework are what distinguish it from the MD.

NATO outreach in the MENA region is further complemented by its Training and Cooperation Initiative, launched in 2006 with the aim of making NATO's training expertise more widely available to its regional interlocutors.[17] This was what had been done after the end of the Cold War in offering advice and support on security sector reform to all former Warsaw Pact members seeking to join the Alliance, a rather successful contribution to transformation in the states

concerned. Niche expertise of this kind has resulted in education and training, effectively becoming a diplomatic tool in the Alliance's portfolio—the training mission in Iraq being an important example of such activity. Education and training are attractive tools, as they allow for a certain level of engagement when the time might not be ripe for political acceptance of a partnership agreement. As an example, Saudi Arabia, which has so far not accepted the invitation to join the ICI, is participating in seminars, courses and conferences, which could be seen as indicative of tentative engagement.

So far, the ICI has failed to develop the depth and strength anticipated. There is to date no framework document and no established military forum; in spite of the Initiative's strong emphasis on military cooperation, the level of participation in the activities concerned (such as seminars, workshops, mutual visits, and participation in exercises) is low. In 2008, the ICI states participated in 57 cooperation activities (25 by the UAE, 13 by Qatar, 12 by Bahrain, and 7 by Kuwait)—while this is a 72 percent increase compared to 2005, it is still only 10 percent of the total activities offered.[18] At the same time, NATO has tripled its offer on activities that are largely (85 percent) of a military nature. To date, there have been no regular meetings at the level of Defense Ministers or Foreign Ministers, and no Individual Partnership Cooperation Program has been concluded with any of the states involved.

This stands in stark contrast to active participation by three of the four ICI states in NATO's operations—Qatar and the UAE in the Libya Operation, and the UAE and Bahrain in the International Stabilization and Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. In addition, NATO has intelligence-sharing agreements with

the UAE, Kuwait, and Bahrain. This seems to indicate that the problem in deepening military cooperation is not merely political but also structural. The Gulf armed forces engaged with NATO are rather small in size, ranging from 8,200 troops in Bahrain, to 11,800 in Qatar, 15,500 in Kuwait, and 51,000 in the UAE.[19] Hence, their personnel pool is rather limited, particularly when it comes to the officer level.

More importantly, the ICI suffers from the absence of Oman and, to an even greater extent, Saudi Arabia—the Gulf giant in terms not only of size, but also of political and economic influence. The inclusion of these absentees would give the Initiative the credibility and visibility necessary for its success. For this reason, the Alliance has kept the door open to both states, and Saudi Arabia has started sending officers to attend the NATO Regional Cooperation Course at the Alliance's Defense College.

There are several reasons that explain why these countries have not joined. Oman's foreign policy traditionally seeks to maintain the fragile balance entailed in its close relations with Iran and its peninsular neighbors, while Saudi Arabia prefers bilateral ties and is generally concerned about foreign military on its territory.

Overall, the Gulf States have failed to devise a coherent strategic vision themselves: the common defense force Al-Jazeera Shield, consisting of 7,000 troops and theoretically designed as an intervention force in the event of an attack, has therefore remained weak, although it was used in 2011 to quell uprisings in Bahrain. Strategic cooperation remains limited if the parties involved have unclear ideas about the overall goal.

This explains, in part, why the MD and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative remain separate—despite the cultural and historic connections, the security concerns, the strategic vision, and therefore the approach to defense in the states concerned are not the same.

The Special Case: The Structured Security Cooperation Framework in Iraq.

Although the invasion of Iraq did not take place under the NATO flag, some might argue that it hurt the Alliance's cohesion more than anything else since its foundation, since the Allies disagreed over the justification for it. Nicholas Burns, U.S. Ambassador to NATO at the time, termed the invasion "a near-death experience."[20] Nevertheless, the Allies agreed in 2005 to respond to a request by the Iraqi government to assist with the training of its new security forces. NATO's Training Mission in Iraq (NTM-I) is not only the first of its kind, it is also the gateway to a stronger and longer-lasting relationship between the Alliance and the so-called Eastern gate of the Arab world.

NTM-I is small in size (150 troops), and not a combat mission. Folded into the American training effort (the two share a commander), its niche contribution focuses almost exclusively on the Iraqi Army's officer corps, although a substantial number of Italian Carabinieri—about two thirds of the mission overall—contribute to training the Internal Security Forces under this umbrella as well. Assistance in rebuilding the different levels of officer education, be it the Staff College, the War College, or the National Defense College; advice in the development of education programs; and the establishment of a noncommissioned officer (NCO) corps are all part of NTM-I's portfolio.

Despite its limited size, this mission works at a crucial junction in the newly emerging Iraqi security sector. Armed forces rely for their functioning on the officer corps; large numbers of enlisted personnel cannot fulfill their duties without the leadership and guidance provided by the officers commanding them. Yet, this is exactly where the Iraqi Armed Forces are currently challenged; 157 percent of its enlisted personnel requirements are filled, as opposed to only 73 percent coverage at the officer level.[21] Since the disbanding of the old Iraqi armed forces, the new security structures have had to grow at an impressive speed; 14,000 new troops were brought in every 5 weeks in 2007, and the comprehensive De-Ba'athification program, originally designed to dismiss all former Iraqi military members above the rank of colonel, had to be curtailed. Today, about 70 percent of the country's officer corps had served in the old Iraqi military.

In this context, training and education are the key elements in securing the new structure. NTM-I's efforts seem to pale alongside the American contribution: 2,500 officer cadets, 200 NCOs, 460 Joint Staff College officer graduates, and 1,800 individuals trained abroad at the NATO Defense College, the NATO School Oberammergau, the Joint Warfare Center Stavanger, and the Center of Excellence in the Defense against Terrorism[22] seem a rather limited contribution, considering the overall manning level of nearly 200,000 troops and about 20,000 officers. Yet, training can be effective only in units with existing structures and experienced officers, NCOs, and team members—all of which are currently understaffed by the Iraqi army. NATO's limited efforts are thus providing a contribution where it really counts. In total, NTM-I is a rather inexpensive mission, with a budget of 22.5 million euros per year. The mission's future,

both in terms of scope and finances, will depend on the situation after the U.S. withdrawal at the end of 2011.

As the mission has relied heavily on U.S. force protection and logistics, it is not clear how it will be affected by the American withdrawal from Iraq. In the context of the negotiations between the U.S. and Iraqi governments regarding the stay of American trainers on Iraqi soil beyond the withdrawal (approximately between 8,000 and 25,000 trainers), Baghdad indicated a possible extension under the NATO mission.[23] This hints at a preference for the Alliance, as its multinational character and its low level of visibility in Iraq in general have made it more acceptable to the population. Politically and legally speaking, the mission has moved from United Nations (UN) Resolution 1546 to a Structured Cooperation Framework between NATO and Iraq; this very likely serves as the first stepping stone toward a more comprehensive relationship between the two, which could ultimately result in a partnership within, or outside, the ICI framework.

The Missing Links: Libya, Syria, Lebanon, Palestine.

While it is useful to assess NATO's existing relations with the MENA region, it is equally interesting to take a closer look at the states with which it has none. Although the Alliance has now developed some kind of relationship with 11 Arab countries (which is half of the Arab League's members) plus Israel, and has extended invitations to two more (Oman and Saudi Arabia), a number of states are missing from the network. These states fall broadly into two categories: those that can be deemed as politically unreliable or

unfriendly to NATO, and those that are too weak in their statehood to forge a relationship with the Alliance.

The first category comprises Syria, Libya (before the 2011 operation), and Iraq (before 2004). Not surprisingly, these were all part of the list of "rogue states" established in the late 1990s and, as such, considered a threat to world peace.[24] The list coincided to a considerable extent with what John R. Bolton, then U.S. Ambassador to the UN, referred to in 2002 as the "Axis of Evil"[25]—states seen to be sponsors of terrorism and in pursuit of WMDs. The absence of Syria and Libya clearly reflects the bilateral relationship most Allies have, or had, with those two states outside the Allied context. While programs similar to NATO's outreach initiatives into the region, such as the Five plus Five Dialogue between five European and five Maghreb countries or the European Union's (EU) Union for the Mediterranean, do not ostracize Libya or Syria, the Alliance's approach to both of these states has been strongly influenced by two elements: continuing American reservations about them, and their own reservations toward the Alliance.

This becomes particularly evident in the case of Libya: while UN sanctions for the support of terrorism and pursuit of a program to develop WMDs made initial Libyan membership of the MD out of the question at the inception of the MD in 1994, things changed after 2003. Colonel Muammar Gaddafi had already agreed a few years earlier to hand over the suspects charged with the Lockerbie terrorist attack to a court in the Netherlands, and to compensate the families of the victims of Lockerbie and Niger. Eventually, he also agreed to destroy all chemical, nuclear, and biological weapons. The state was thus considered repentant and welcomed back into the international community.

Yet, while the suggestion that Libya be invited to join the MD circulated briefly, it never materialized because the regime was not interested; considering the very negative attitude the Libyan government expressed at the time of the Dialogue's foundation, this can hardly be considered a surprise. Gaddafi even threatened to launch a jihad in the event of NATO expansion into North Africa, warning his Maghreb neighbors of foreign interference in their affairs as a result of the MD.[26] Prospects are different under a new Libyan government, which has benefited greatly from the Alliance's support. In March 2011 NATO decided to implement the military aspects of UN Resolution 1973, adopted after an appeal to the UN Security Council by the League of Arab States, calling for a no-fly zone, a maritime arms embargo, and the protection of civilians.[27]

The position adopted by the Arab League following a violent uprising against the Gaddafi regime was the regional green light that enabled the UN Security Council to issue the resolution calling for the protection of civilians, and prepared the way for NATO to address the military needs arising as a consequence of this resolution. Politically, it seems very unlikely that the Alliance would have taken on this mission without the strong regional support shown in this case. During Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR, the Alliance was assisted by partner states from the region, namely, the UAE, Jordan, Morocco, and Qatar. It is important to point out that the mandate ruled ground troops out, and was enacted solely from the air and sea.

Gaddafi's regime finally fell after 7 months of operations, and a new provisional government has emerged that seems to have a rather positive attitude toward the Alliance—so much so that the head of the

Libyan Transitional National Council has asked the Allies to extend their mission until the end of 2011 in order to control surplus weapons and deal with possible Gaddafi loyalists who might still be active.[28] While further engagement by the Alliance will be limited (a training mission, as in Iraq, is conceivable), Libyan involvement in the MD or in a different framework of partnership is now a distinct possibility, thus closing the North African gap in the program.

The foreseeable evolution in Libya's relations with the Alliance is unlikely to repeat itself in the case of Syria. Although some Syrian opposition members called on NATO to act following the violent crackdown on the wave of protests in late 2011,[29] there is no appetite in the Alliance to engage in a situation that is very different from that in Libya in a number of respects—absence of a UN or League of Arab States mandate, an immediate, neighborhood with a NATO country (Turkey), strong relations with Iran, much more developed military capabilities, and a possible spillover effect into a region already under tension are all reasons not to engage in this case. Most importantly, in contrast to the Libyan National Transitional Council, the Syrian opposition has not made a concerted call on NATO. Regardless of the events surrounding the Arab Spring, Syria has not had any relations with the Alliance, although it did have some contacts with the EU. Syria's isolation, particularly vis-à-vis the United States, stems among other things from its belligerence toward its neighbor Israel, but also from its long-standing occupation of Lebanon and its hostility toward other Arab states (such as Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan). In this context, Syrian absence from any Allied framework is a logical continuation of its own foreign policy.

The case of the three other states that have no relationship with NATO—Lebanon, the Palestinian Authority, and Yemen—is slightly different; their absence can be understood as a result of their weak statehood rather than a definite stance toward the Alliance. Lebanon, a multi-religious state that brought 15 years of civil war to an end in 1990, only to remain occupied by Syrian forces and various militia groups, was—and still is—considered a Syrian vassal state in spite of the Syrian withdrawal in 2005. The presence of the Shia militia organization Hezbollah, an ally of Syria and Iran, was not only the reason for Israel's invasion in 2006, but it has also undermined Lebanon's credibility as a strong state that acts independently from Syria. Lebanon's opposition toward a UN resolution condemning the violence in Syria in 2011 continues a long tradition of aligning its politics with those of its neighbor. It thus comes as no surprise that neither NATO nor Lebanon are really at all interested in a partnership with each other. In addition, Lebanon—like Syria—is still officially at war with Israel and, while all three states are members of the Union for the Mediterranean, relevant business within the Union has been largely blocked because of the ongoing conflict.

Nevertheless, a possible role for NATO was voiced in the media in 2006 for a Lebanon peacekeeping force after the war between Israel and Hezbollah.[30] Actually, nothing came of the proposal as a result of budgetary restrictions, NATO's engagement in Afghanistan and, most importantly, the absence of regional support for such an option. Instead, the existing UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) was expanded, with 15,000 troops from 36 nations (of which 14 happen to be NATO Allies).[31]

Another case in point is the Palestinian Authority, also absent from formal relations with NATO. While Palestine has been recognized by eight NATO Allies,[32] there is no unified position in the Alliance on the conflict, or, rather, on its resolution. Though all Allies support the two-state solution, there is no unanimous consensus on how to achieve it. Nevertheless, NATO opened exploratory information contacts with the Palestinian Authority in 2005, as the Istanbul Summit declaration had clearly stated that it would not exclude its future participation in any of the Alliance's partnership frameworks.[33] Yet, this never materialized, because the Israeli war with Lebanon in 2006 and the hostilities on the Gaza strip in 2008 and 2009 brought the peace process to a complete halt after it had been kept on hold for some time.

However, a role for NATO in the resolution of the conflict has been mentioned several times, more outside than inside the Alliance. For example, the option of an international peacekeeping force for Palestine after a peace agreement featured in the 2000 Clinton parameters, and *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman suggested that such a role would be perfect for NATO. The idea has been pushed several times by, among others, former National Security Advisor to President Barack Obama and former Supreme Allied Commander Europe James Jones; however, it remains unpopular with a number of NATO Allies, who fear the political danger of such a mission.[34] As a consequence, then NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer declared in January 2009 that three preconditions would have to be fulfilled before one could even think about a role for NATO in Palestine. These are a comprehensive peace agreement, the consent of the parties, and a UN mandate—not to mention NATO

consensus.[35] Considering the high political visibility of such a mission, and its difficulties in terms of military feasibility, the time is not ripe for the Alliance to take on a mission in Palestine, or on the Golan Heights for that matter.[36]

The last state missing from the web of relations is Yemen, alone among the Arabian Peninsula states in not being invited to join the ICI in 2004. The reason that Yemen was left out is that it is not a member of the GCC, despite its repeated attempts to join. From the perspective of both the GCC and the ICI, prospects for stabilization are grim in a state as close to collapse as Yemen. Half of its population lives below the poverty line, its petroleum resources are declining, and its security sector is in disarray. Yemen is thus hardly in a position to become a viable partner, particularly since the uprisings of 2011 that brought it close to another civil war.

In addition to these missing states, NATO has no formal relations with the League of Arab States, an organization that represents 22 Arab countries and was founded in 1945. Yet, in 2008, the League's then Secretary General, Amr Moussa, visited NATO Headquarters; visits to the League Secretariat by NATO delegations of different levels have taken place, and the League has been sending course members to the NATO Regional Cooperation Course at the Alliance's Defense College in Rome since 2010. While the relationship is timid at this stage, the League's call for a no-fly zone over Libya was seen as the regional green light for NATO to take action there. Therefore, the League's political support cannot be overestimated.

OBSTACLES ON THE WAY AHEAD

Formally, NATO has achieved a lot in the space of 17 years: it has increased its relations with the MENA region from 0 to 11, has regional partners participating in a number of its operations and, in 2011, even started hosting permanent missions of these partners in its Headquarters—the UAE was the first to open one.[37] Yet, while all looks good on paper, relations are not as profound as they could be, especially in comparison with the Alliance's PfP program. To date, there is no founding document between NATO and its southern partners; there is no standing multilateral consultation forum like the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, which brings the Alliance and its PfP partners together on a monthly basis at the ambassadorial level, and annually at the level of Foreign or Defense Ministers and Chiefs of Defense. There is no military forum with the partners of the ICI, and no high-level meetings. In other words, there is room for improvement.

Three main reasons have obstructed the deepening of existing relations: the Alliance's negative image in the region; a limited understanding of it within NATO; and the low- (and high-) intensity conflicts and diverging security interests that characterize the region.

Addressing the Problems of a Negative Image.

The Alliance was well aware of its own image in the region when it created its first timid outreach activities there in the form of the MD, as its stated goal included the correction of misunderstandings.[38] Early on, NATO Headquarters had realized that diplomatic

or military cooperation with these states would be very difficult, given the many negative connotations associated with the Alliance in the region. A number of root causes were, and still are, responsible for this: the historically burdened relationship with a number of NATO Allies, the lack of differentiation between the Alliance as a collective and its individual member states, the impact of the Cold War, inadequate strategic communication by NATO, and a general perception in the Arab world that the Alliance had identified Islam as the next enemy now that the Soviet Union has fallen.

Although the North Atlantic Alliance as such was of course not a colonial enterprise, a number of Member States—France, Great Britain, and Italy as founder Allies, later joined by Spain—had colonized parts of North Africa and the Middle East. Almost all the Arab states, except for Saudi Arabia, had been occupied at some point in the 19th and 20th centuries by one or several European powers; many of them had previously been part of the Ottoman Empire—in a sense the forerunner of modern Turkey, also a NATO nation. It goes without saying that experiences with colonialism have not been positive. Algeria, at the time of the Alliance's creation still a part of France and specifically mentioned in the North Atlantic Treaty, fought a bloody and protracted war for independence; Britain oversaw Jewish migration into Palestine and sanctioned the creation of a Jewish state with the Balfour Declaration of 1917; Italy fought a long war of suppression in Libya.

American influence on the Alliance meant that, as a collective, it took a clear stand toward colonialism early on. Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty specifies that the Allies' collective defense agreement ap-

plies in the event of armed attack "on the territory of any of the Parties in Europe or North America, on the Algerian Departments of France [this section became inapplicable as of June 1962], on the territory of or on the Islands under the jurisdiction of any of the Parties in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer."[39] While the Tropic of Cancer lies just south of Algeria, Egypt, and Libya, the explicit reference to the North Atlantic area makes it clear that mutual defense in practice excludes territories such as Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, or Egypt—although Allied forces at the time of the Treaty were posted in them (British forces on the Suez Canal), controlled them in part or completely (France in Tunisia and parts of Morocco), or claimed ownership over them (as in the case of Italy, which accepted the end of its Libyan territories only in 1949, when the Bevin Sforza Plan failed).[40] This exclusion from the treaty area did not take into account the strong interest of the European colonial powers, particularly France, in including the territories concerned.[41] Nevertheless, the Alliance should not be seen as an anti-colonial club either; while the Algerian war was not actively supported by NATO, NATO's silent acquiescence is seen by Algerians today as a form of support—regardless of the fact that the war frustrated France's relations with the other Allies and eventually led to its withdrawal from NATO's integrated military structure in 1966.[42] When decolonization became imminent, France and Britain agreed at a NATO Council meeting to secure control of strategic installations in the MENA region—for the Alliance's security, not just their own.[43] While the era of colonialism came to an end (except in the case of Portugal) rather early in the Alliance's history, its heritage nevertheless affected, and continues to affect, the Alliance's relations with the former colonies of individual Allies.

This is exacerbated by the fact that there is significant conflation of "the West" and NATO, as well as by action within the MENA region by individual Member States and by the Alliance as a whole. In 1956, Great Britain and France conspired with Israel against Egypt, which had just nationalized the Suez Canal; in 1967, the United States supported Israel logistically during the war against Egypt, Jordan, and Syria; in 1986, the United States bombed Libya as a reaction to Libyan-supported terrorist attacks in Berlin; in 1991, an international coalition including almost all NATO Allies at the time (except for Germany and Turkey) liberated Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. Likewise, Operation ENDURING FREEDOM in Afghanistan and Operation IRAQI FREEDOM in Iraq are conducted by a number of states that are also members of NATO. It was not NATO, the collective Alliance, that undertook these actions, but in the general Arab public eye this makes no difference. These actions are seen as part of a larger paradigm in which the West conspires against the East, seeking to control its trade routes and access to oil.[44]

The sense of grievance that has permeated the region since the end of World War I and the double standards applied to international law (be it for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the pursuit of WMD) have resulted in a difficult relationship marked by distrust on the Arab side. The sense of victimization has been further exacerbated by the sensation that 9/11 has been exploited to initiate a crusade (as former President George W. Bush named the War on Terror)[45] against Muslims. The death of over 10,000 civilians in Afghanistan,[46] where NATO has led the ISAF since 2002, combined with the statement of then NATO Secretary General Willy Claes that Islamic fundamentalism had emerged as perhaps the greatest threat to

Western security since the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe,[47] did much to strengthen the impression that the Alliance was hunting Muslims.

This impression disregards several facts. To begin with, Claes's comment caused a strong reaction among the Allies (particularly Turkey, a largely Muslim country), forcing him to retract his statement immediately and declare that Islamic fundamentalism would "not even be on the agenda when we talk to these countries [the countries of the Mediterranean Dialogue],"[48] since as religious fundamentalism of any kind was not a concern for NATO. Second, the Alliance has in Albania (since 2009) and Turkey two Member States that are largely Muslim. Third, NATO intervened in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1995, and in Kosovo in 1999, to save Muslim lives. However, the current perception, built on decades of mutual distrust, is that NATO is an imperialist, militarist bloc seeking the domination of Arab states. NATO's image is thus the victim of a more widespread antagonism between the "Western" and the Arab worlds.[49]

Improving Understanding of the Region.

It is not just the population of Arab states that has misperceptions about NATO. There is an equally incomplete—and to a certain extent mistaken—comprehension of the region in general by NATO, or rather, by the various Allies. While the Alliance's headquarters has built up a dedicated (albeit small) division for its MD and ICI partners, and an equally small faculty in its Defense College in Rome, there is difficulty in focusing on a region so diverse and yet so homogenous—a challenge that Edward Said has famously termed as Orientalism, the difficulty of Western schol-

ars and thinkers in understanding and analyzing the region for what it is rather than for what one wants it to be.[50] While such a perspective has been criticized, misunderstandings between East and West do exist.

The difficulty of understanding the combination of similarities and differences characterizing the region as a whole emerges in a number of respects. Apart from Iran, Turkey, and Israel, the region includes a large number of Arab states. These share a range of linguistic, social, and cultural traits, as well as a common history, but at the same time differ vastly with regard to such parameters as size, economy, political systems, ethnic and religious makeup, international relations, geography, and educational standards. In other words, while looking similar on the surface, these states differ markedly along crucial points. As a result, approaches to the region have to strike a difficult balance between adopting too broad or too narrow a perspective. This is particularly visible in NATO's partnership programs, which divide the region along geographic lines according to whether the states concerned border on the Mediterranean or the Arabian Gulf. While critics see this division as a refusal to deal with the region as a whole in a comprehensive manner, some Arab states actually show a preference for this separation.

Overall, partner states have complained that their security needs and their strategic cultures have not been sufficiently understood by NATO; this is particularly the case in relation to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, which most regional states view as a platform for other security issues, such as terrorism, political fundamentalism, migration, and nonstate security actors. The fact that the Alliance prefers to work around the issue rather than solve it is seen as a failure to understand how much is at stake.

A Region of Crisis.

Finally, the relationship between NATO and its Arab partners is marred by the same factors that have impeded the region's development in the past: the presence of a number of ongoing or recent conflicts (be it the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the Western Sahara, Iraq-Iran, or Iraq-Kuwait) and protracted instability (best seen during the Arab Spring in Egypt, Tunisia, Syria, and Yemen) make cooperation with the states concerned difficult. Conflict and instability not only engender political issues such as lack of legitimacy and human rights abuses, but also impede economic development by discouraging investors, prompting a brain drain, and slowing infrastructure development. In the Arab world, this has led to the world's lowest rates of political and economic integration (less than 2 percent of the North African countries' trade is inter-Maghreb[51]). Conflict also affects cooperation with NATO in a number of ways.

For a start, the limited finances of a number of the MD countries impede participation at seminars and workshops. The self-funding principle of the Alliance has been curtailed as a result, with NATO occasionally funding between 80 percent and 100 percent of participation for countries below a certain Gross Domestic Income. Another issue is an educational concern, a direct outcome of the generally underperforming educational sector in the Arab world. English at a working level is not widespread in the Arab partner countries; in North Africa, French is widely spoken to a reasonably good level,[52] but the same is not true of NATO Member States (although French is one of the Alliance's two official languages). In small frameworks, such as the NATO Defense College's dedicated

Middle East faculty, continuous interpretation into English, Arabic, and French is provided at a considerable cost; the same is not always possible during operations and exercises, with obvious effects on communication and, ultimately, on the effectiveness of the Alliance's outreach efforts.

NATO has (albeit still to a very limited degree) started to feature translation into Arabic of some items it posts on the Internet, reflecting the Alliance's awareness that language remains an issue when communicating with this region. This was particularly visible during the Alliance's Operation UNIFIED PROTECTOR in Libya: while the Arabic content of the NATO website itself remained minimal, as the Alliance does not have a standing team of Arabic interpreters and translators, videos in Arabic were posted on a separate YouTube Channel named "Natoarabic."[53] That access to the channel remained relatively infrequent—3,300 visits after the beginning of the operation, as compared to almost 1 million in English—and can be partly explained by the low level of Internet access in the region (estimated at 10 percent in North Africa and 57 percent in the Gulf, compared to about 80 percent in the Western world[54]), but also by the absence of direct links to this channel on NATO's main website.

The final section of this monograph will briefly examine the reasons for which, notwithstanding the challenges to be addressed in the MENA region, its relationship with NATO is one that will continue to develop.

AGAINST ALL ODDS: RELATIONS BETWEEN NATO AND THE MENA REGION

In spite of the obstacles listed above, the relationship between NATO and the MENA region is expected to deepen. To begin with, geographic proximity is not a matter of choice: Syria and Iraq both border on a NATO country; it is no more than 468 miles from Algiers to Marseille, 375 miles from Rome to Tunis, and 477 miles from Ankara to Damascus. In addition, the region boasts 65.4 percent of the world's oil reserves and is one of the most important trade routes linking the Western to the Eastern Hemisphere. Not only oil but also goods from Asia find their way to Europe along this route—one that is quite vulnerable, since it harbors seven chokepoints between the Strait of Hormuz and Gibraltar, making it very easy to shut the whole route down, as Egypt did in 1967.

These are not the only reasons for which the region is important. Political turmoil in the form of wars (both civil and interstate), *coups d'état*, insurgencies, and terrorism shook the region to the core in the last century, accelerating transformation and resulting in an unstable construct that is of strategic concern to NATO. Allies are concerned about the proliferation of WMDs in the region, about new interstate wars, failed states, immigration, civil war, and, of course, terrorism spilling over from this region into NATO Member States. All of this is taking place in NATO's immediate neighborhood, along its southern flank. The Alliance thus has more strategic interest in this region than in any other—as recognized by the Americans in particular, though they are geographically far removed from it.[55] In other words, the Southern Front is now the Central Front of the Alliance's strategic interest.

This explains why the Alliance has, in the past 15 years, shown great adaptability to circumstances in its two partnership programs. NATO realized early on that further cooperation with the region was hampered by a range of misunderstandings, giving the Alliance a rather negative image. The aim of the MD was thus, from the outset, the deconstruction of mutual misperceptions rather than military cooperation—as the latter could not be achieved without the former. The correct identification of the problem was the first step toward closer cooperation, and eventually partnership.

Most importantly, both NATO and the states in the region have a long list of common security interests; partnership can create a win-win situation that aims at a cooperative rather than an antagonistic security scenario. Security across the globe is now interlinked; in the complexity of the modern world, it is no longer divisible but needs to be tackled collectively. In spite of historical and cultural obstacles, the Alliance and its immediate southern neighborhood will thus come together out of strategic necessity for their mutual benefit.

In order to achieve this, NATO will have to negotiate the hurdles detailed above. Improving Strategic Communication with this region of the world would be a first step toward overcoming the rather negative image of the Alliance; as the Internet is not widespread in the region (with the exception of the Gulf), public diplomacy should focus on television as the primary means for communication. In addition, the Allies should develop a coherent vision—and thus a strategy—for the Middle East and North Africa. What has hampered NATO's engagement in the past was in part a result of the Allies' divergent visions of the re-

gion, or the preference for bilateral engagement. The Alliance's operation in Libya could be an indication that there is readiness now to manage relations with the MENA region within NATO. Furthermore, Allies should invest in subject matter expertise within Alliance structures and draw on this in times of crisis.

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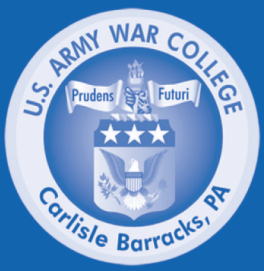

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