



NATO Foundation
Defense College

ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2020

**THE MIDDLE EAST:
WHAT KIND OF FUTURE?**

The NDCF is a unique think-tank: international by design and based in Rome, due to its association with the NATO Defense College. Its added value lies in the objectives stated by its charter and in its international network.

The charter specifies that the NDCF works with the Member States of the Atlantic Alliance, its partners and the countries that have some form of co-operation with NATO. Through the Foundation the involvement of USA and Canada is more fluid than in other settings.

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ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2020

**The Middle East:
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THE MIDDLE EAST:
WHAT KIND OF FUTURE?

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ALESSANDRO MINUTO-RIZZO
President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

FOREWORD

Some of you may be surprised that we have chosen to hold a real event, with real persons present in the room. After months of segregation and only the use of the virtual platforms, we have been used to that on-line-mode, we thought that to go back to a normal practice would be a signal of resilience and good will to go beyond the impact of the pandemic.

We have taken the habit of holding every year an event dedicated to the Arab region and we want to continue with this tradition, even in difficult times when some countries are still under travel restrictions and the physical presence of speakers cannot be assured. This is the reason why some of our panellists will contribute virtually to the conference.

In any case we are very lucky to have been able to assemble so much expertise today in this room.

I warmly thank moderators and panellists who have accepted our invitation.

Since the beginning, the NATO Defense College Foundation has a strong focus on the Arab region and relating matters that we see as a priority to be addressed in the best possible ways.

There are very good reasons to continue focusing on the Arab region. Its strategic interest is before our eyes, but it is not only that. There is a rich humanity, full of history and close to our shores, and we all hope in a better future for them and for their children.

This topic is a complex one and can be discussed from different perspectives. Our ultimate goal is to see an arc of crisis to be transformed into an arc of opportunities and this part of the world has indeed an enormous potential.

It is also clear that we have in front of us a vast area that it is impossible to resume in simple formulas. Each country has its own history and expectations, its special position, and therefore, deserves a special attention.

Our intention in convening the conference is to look forward, beyond current crisis and turmoil, in search of possible avenues, to discuss about cooperative solu-

tions. This is not an easy matter and we need more than ever a clever analysis based on a good reading of facts. A further layer of complexity is given by the fact that national governments are no more the only actors on the international scene. We see non state entities and pressure groups being active and the Arab region is no exception. We live in a fragmented and multi-layered reality asking a special effort from us.

We are here today to provide the basis for an honest and high-level discussion, in a spirit of mutual understanding and on a scientific basis.

In conclusion, it is up to the Arabs to take their destiny in their hands, and to decide about their own future. At the same time, we wish to extend our friendly hand, in good faith, in order to offer support.

Our Foundation was established in 2011 with the ambition to connect with a larger audience on strategic issues and not only with specialists. We have produced various publications related to our events.

To organize this event in such difficult times has taken a lot of efforts from our side and I would like to thank the director and the staff for all their work.

Special thanks for all those who have encouraged and supported us in taking this decision. First of all, the NATO Political and Security Division and Philip Morris International.



KARIM EL AYNAOUI

President, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat

WELCOME REMARKS

These are indeed uncertain times. Nobody knows how the future is going to evolve, particularly in the region on which we are focussing in this specific conference. With so many uncertainties, actors with very different strategies, external influences and regional dynamics, no one can tell what will happen and I think we should congratulate ourselves here today for continuing to investigate these topics.

My first message is about the youngest generations within this context. At the Policy Center for the New South, a young institution created six years ago and that now has over one hundred staff and affiliate fellows (70% of whom are researchers), we care about two essential matters: the North-South rebalance and the inter-generational rebalance.

The North-South rebalance that I believe is very relevant in today's discussion, fundamentally transformed the way we exchange and dialogue and impacted our understanding of each other.

Africa and the Southern Mediterranean are in a situation where the need for dialogue has never been as important as today. This is the reason why the work and the efforts of the NATO Defense College Foundation are essential. I firmly believe that the North-South rebalance can only be tackled and eventually solved through dialogue and through the efforts of think tanks like the Policy Center for the New South and the NATO Defense College Foundation. It is essential in this perspective.

And so that is the North-South rebalance where, as equal partners and as people of values of tolerance and openness, we believe in the fact-based evidence space that policy making is trying to create. Our mission today is to create spaces and platforms where we can debate and dialogue beyond official channels that, as we all know, have limits.

The second rebalance we are trying to foster is an inter-generational one, in order to give more space to the next generation of young leaders and policy makers,

particularly important for any future development and solution.

The expression *Arab world* is to be qualified, since Morocco, for instance, has a specific perspective and is not only an Arab country but rather a mixture of African, Berber and of course Arab and Mediterranean people. However, I will leave semantics aside since our priority today is to tackle younger generations and the ways to be adopted to give them more space.

There are several instruments we as a think tank adopt at the Policy Center for the New South; among them dialogue and young leadership activities.

I believe the inter-generational rebalance is an essential matter we need to address as, after all, this will be their world, but mostly because it represents an essential part of any sort of solution for the turmoil of the past decade.

I come from a country that has been quite well managed and has now obtained the fruits of serious policies, enjoying political and social stability. However, we are still much concerned about our neighbourhood, and therefore, we, as a think tank, as people working in research with passion for peace tolerant-dialogue and fact-based analysis, are working in order to create platforms where we can intensify communication and dialogue to better understand each other.

This is what we can do as a think tank and I believe our goals converge with the goals of the NATO Defense College Foundation.

In the end only dialogue will find solutions. However, only when all the actors are revealed can we start establishing a dialogue.

I would conclude with speaking about Europe as a central and long-lasting partner in the region. In this specific regard we need to change the dynamics and to intensify dialogue on very important issues that are essential for domestic politics, migration, economic growth, inequality and changing the labour market.

Unfortunately, I do not have solutions, only a commitment to create platforms, to discuss, and to exchange fresh ideas to be delivered to institutions that will then have the responsibility to come up with new policies, solutions, agreements and treaties. Only institutions have the real potential to improve the future path of nations. But among think tanks like us, dialogue represents an essential instrument. We believe in dialogue to find solutions to very important matters that are challenging us and the rest of the world.



JAMES HUBER
*Military Assistant to the Dean, NATO Defense
College, Rome*

WELCOME REMARKS

It is indeed a pleasure for me to be here on behalf of the NATO Defense College and our Dean, Dr Stephen Mariano, to add a cordial welcome from the NATO Defense College.

I have been at the NDC for the past 5 years as a faculty member, Head of our curriculum planning branch and now as Military Assistant to the Dean.

The region continues to be a topic of great interest at the NDC; although recently, due to COVID 19, we had to slow down with respect to visits to College, we continue to receive requests from partner countries in the region to exchange visits and conduct academic exchanges.

A few of the more notable activities in the NDC future include the establishment of a modular short course at the NATO-Istanbul Cooperative Initiative Center (ICI) in Kuwait – a week long course in parallel with the NDC Senior Course.

The modular short course is one of our most successful initiatives at the College, in fact more course members pass through the College for the Modular Short Course than for any of the other courses.

We are also planning to conduct a Gulf Week in the future patterned after our successful Kiev Week.

The NDC has recently undergone a test of a trial structure that was very successful and includes a personnel review. The NDC currently assigned an ICI Officer and is requesting a Mediterranean Dialogue officer as well to put us more in line with the NATO HQ Strategic Partnership Framework. We have also restructured to be more inclusive the NATO Regional Cooperation Course (RCC) by developing a Partner Courses Branch that will help it to reach a similar level of focus and support as the Senior Course.

These are just a few examples to highlight the interest of the NDC in the region and why it is important to us to co-sponsor events and initiatives like this.

A final note, the NDC recently underwent a change of Commandant and said farewell to Lieutenant General Chris Whitecross who has returned to Canada with plans to retire and we welcomed Lieutenant General Olivier Rittimann, a French three-star general who currently served at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), as the new Commandant.

So, on behalf of the NDC, welcome, and we hope you all very much enjoy the conference.



GILLES KEPEL
*Scientific Director, Middle East Mediterranean
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OPENING REMARKS

On Friday the 24th of July in a NATO Country, Turkey, the former museum and former Byzantine church Aya Sofia returned into a mosque. The Turkish President, Tayyip Erdogan, attended the prayer while the imam walking up to the pulpit, recited the Khutbah while carrying a sword to emulate Mehmet Fatih, the conquer of Constantinople, in May 1453, according to what is called in Turkish *kilich haqqi*: the right of the sword. According to Islam, a place conquered by the sword cannot be given away, if not by the sword.

The mixture of religion and military is very important matter that we need to understand and, nevertheless, is part of the new “post-Covid 19” geopolitics.

However, this year started with a major military incident that did not follow the traditional ways and views of military confrontation: the termination or “vaporisation” by a US drone of Brigadier General Qassem Soleimani during his visit to Baghdad, where he was asked to be calm the Iraqi Shia insurgency against the Iranian plundering of their oil resources.

Additionally, this is also a year that saw the oil market’s crash. In the middle of the Covid 19 pandemic the oil price went to unheard lows, -\$36 per barrel, even though, it went up again and stabilised at \$40 per barrel.

Nevertheless, this means that trillions of dollars will be missing from the economic budget of exporting Gulf countries with unforeseen consequences. Will the oil exporting countries be able to manage that? What will they have to cut down in terms of financings and subsidies, not only for themselves but for the entire Mediterranean region which has functioned since 1973 war (the Yom Kippur war or Ramadan war depending on your religion) living on remittances from oil money?

This is sea-change and its effects are still very unpredictable.

I believe that we now have to reorganise our way of thinking and I am very pleased that the NATO Defense College Foundation appropriately decided to take that in to its hands because we need to rethink NATO’s role in the region.

Additionally, I believe as a European member that we also have to take the

matter of defence and security into our hands, something that we have not been able to do so far.

Personally, I feel extremely optimistic after the meeting that took place last week in Brussels between Heads of States and Governments in order to address economic and social consequences of the pandemic but we cannot shun from implementing a resolute security and defence policy for the Union whether with NATO or complementary or supplementary to NATO. This is a matter that needs to be urgently tackled.

Another point that I would like to discuss are the dire straits, to use a marine metaphor, that we navigate today, also due to the major uncertainty about the USA policy in the region. What was called at the last Munich Security Conference “the advent of Westlessness” is something that changed many dynamics, since not only the World War II but also after the demise of the Soviet Union.

Nevertheless, if the USA have a minimal interest in the region, this means that other actors are going to pop in. Turkey’s ships started to look for natural gas ashore from the Greek island of Castellorizo, a NATO and EU member, however I have not seen a move except for the French government that did not yet have support from the others. It is not surprising the rise in eastern Mediterranean of two regional powers with strong feeling of revanchism: one being Turkey and the other one being Russia.

Turkey, that after the treaties ending the First World War, perceived the choices of Atatürk as a betrayal against the Ottoman spirit, now is implementing an Ottomanization of its foreign policy: whatever was Ottoman should be under Turkish influence whether it is located in the west, or in Northern Syria, in the Iraqi Kurdistan or in Libya, where 7.000 Syrian fighters have been transported by sea with Turkish vessels.

Russia also made exploited cleverly the diminished presence of the USA and the West. It used Syria as a tool to regain a superpower status and Vladimir Putin employed astutely his limited military means to counterbalance the western influence with a very good use of his diplomacy, thanks also to a vibrant Russia-based school of Islam and Arab world specialists. His diplomats often are on the field with their special forces and have an excellent command of local language and culture.

This is a major challenge and we are waiting for the American Presidency election due on the 3rd of November.

Everybody in the region is looking at that. Evidently Benjamin Netanyahu, Tayyip Erdogan, Vladimir Putin would like to see a re-election taking place. Many others are not on this feeling and we, as EU members of NATO, are holding our breath. However, we cannot put the future and the security of our countries or even our defence completely in the hands of American politics. We were used to a consistent American policy.

The path leading to a decreased American presence in the region, was of course based on the fact that the USA had become a net oil exporter and that in 2019

they were the first oil producer with 15.000.000 barrels a day, ahead of Russia and Saudi Arabia. This in turn entailed that Russia boosted its production reduce prices but, nevertheless, this will mean that America will not have to buy oil from the region. It was only logic for America not to send boots on the ground because there were no oil field to protect at such a budgetary and electoral cost.

These are few ideas about what we are facing in the region but now we will follow two panels that will cover many matters and will propose us solutions.

I'm very grateful that the NATO Defense College Foundation decided to discuss, in terms of geopolitics, these very important issues at this difficult and defining time for the future of the Mediterranean and the European Union.

If we look at the massive Chinese supply chains that are now a severe economic challenge, we should consider that maybe it is the time to think about the many shores of the Mediterranean.

The cost of labour in Morocco is now lower than the cost of labour in China. Instead of sending wares being made in China we should better involve the Mediterranean in the European Union. Let us not forget the capacity of Tunisia, Morocco and to some extent of Egypt. Maybe in the future we could even consider involving the Levant after the reconstruction. After all, this was the path that Turkey had taken when Erdogan was lauded by everyone a decade ago. There are plenty of opportunities for the future, but in order to take those opportunities we need to be firm on the major security issues we are facing but most of all we need NATO and the EU addressing those matters.



ALESSANDRO POLITI

Director, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

POLITICAL SUMMARY

The conference highlighted a number of concrete risks, challenges and threats affecting the Arab Region and with no doubt also the security of Europe and hence of NATO. Just three years ago some specialists promoting the paramount importance of the Russian threat to the East of the Alliance, insisted that, while that was a clear and present danger, the narrative concerning the South was hazier and more difficult to “sell”.

Today it is crystal clear that the neglect of the Southern Region has created two sets of heavy liabilities: on the one hand the partners of NATO (MD and ICI) are often fiercely divided among themselves, while division appeared even among Allies; on the other Moscow, in the meantime that no further hybrid actions were underway in Eastern Europe, has strategically outflanked the Alliance, first by winning with the Assad family the war in Syria (together with Iran), then confusing the western diplomacies by supporting at relatively low cost the ambitions of General Khalifa Belasis Haftar, leading the so called Libyan National Army.

Finger pointing is a sterile exercise and noting the effects of the US retreat from the area is a truth that will not necessary change profound political choices in Washington that were unfolding before the actual presidency. More worrying is the division among allies in Libya, creating paradoxical situations that undermine the cohesion.

Apparently, the US retreat has, at least in the eyes of seasoned Arab observers, spurred some increased and unified action by the EU, but its effects are more at a political and diplomatic level than the geostrategic one at which wars are waged and lost.

The strategic situation outlined is unfortunately fuelled by all the factors that were known in the areas of the Gulf, Levant and North Africa at least since 2001: weak statehood, contested national identities, resurging regional and subnational identities at the same time, social and political fragmentation and stagnation, economic inertia compounded by the severe repercussion of the great economic and financial crisis of 2006-2008.

The pandemic only sharpened already fragile and bad conditions, further exacerbating local populations that descended again in the streets to demand the end of corrupt, inefficient and opaque governments.

April 2020 has been a wake-up call for NATO because the Foreign Ministers called for further engagement in the Middle East and in Nord Africa to see what more can be done to contain terrorism and instability in the region. This initiative of additional measures will definitely include education and crisis prevention training, diplomacy, counter-terrorism activities and a specific focus on coordination with international organisations.

Local struggles are of course defined by a mind-boggling interweaving of local politics, shifting regional alliances and heavy foreign interference and by the explosion of non-state armed actors and security agencies on the backdrop of an evident geopolitical vacuum. The main losers are often civil society actors and unprotected populations.

Two important features were underlined during the debate. In many countries the 2011 Arab Revolts had the same effect as described in the historical movie "The Leopard": everything changed, in order to remain the same. In other words, the militaries remained the pivotal factor for regime stability or change; indeed, they have learned to remain behind the scenes in order to influence more effectively the political game, exploiting the stabilising effect of Covid 19 restrictions.

Yet in some countries, the civil society has not forgotten the 2011 experience and has staged an energetic comeback on the streets: Iraq is a vivid example, on par with Lebanon, Tunisia and Algeria. Time will tell if they will succeed in reverting a declining trend in the region, but surely, they deserve at strategic communication and political level the same support that other protest movements have received in East Europe.



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BACKGROUND POLICY PAPER

Almost ten years after the start of the uprisings against the *anciens régimes* in North Africa and the Middle East, the region is still in turmoil. Despite the considerable exception of Tunisia, in the vast majority of the cases, the old guard has been successful in neutralising the revolutionary wave of 2011. Nevertheless, in the past two years the old grievances expressed during the Arab Spring season are getting vocal again. The fall of the self-styled Caliphate contributed to the reopening of political spaces, compressed by the all-embracing counterterrorism campaigns launched by ruling élites with the support of their Western allies. However, in this still fluid framework, the external shock of the COVID-19 pandemic represents for some an unmissable opportunity to once again reverse the democratisation process. In this never-ending state of emergency, the civil-military relationship is constantly mutating, especially in decade-long crises where the fragmentation of the security sector is making the hybrid model the norm rather than the exception.

At the same time, the economic downturn resulting from COVID-19 is re-fuelling popular anger that reinforces these old grievances, especially in remote areas and for marginalised segments of the society where the lack of jobs and economic opportunities is particularly felt. Even in Tunisia, the revival of protests in Tataouine comes in a difficult moment for the country, which is negotiating emergency assistance from financial institutions.

On the contrary, this option has been explicitly ruled out by Algeria that is considering a reinforcement of its bilateral cooperation with China, sitting well with Beijing's expansionist projects. This shows how countries with a rising budget crisis (including Lebanon, Oman and Sudan), can be easily trapped into geopolitical polarisation and struggle underpinning financial aid.

Considering that financial assistance usually concurs with economic reforms imposing austerity programmes or debt restructuring, protest movements will most likely continue to be the dominant factor in shaping dynamics in the region. The

deterioration of living standards particularly frustrates the middle class highly educated youth that seeks higher living standards. This new generation demands government accountability at the backdrop of a faded social contract in which citizens tolerated a lack of political voice in exchange for subsidies and public jobs. The case of Lebanon, where a protest wave is challenging the existing system of governance, is particularly worrisome. However, even richer states would not be spared from the incoming recession that will force them to revise their strategies. The intertwining of the oil crisis and COVID-19 hit twice Arab Gulf states' economic diversification, especially in Saudi Arabia. In fact, it affected both the old 'hydrocarbon-centred world' as well as the new 'global-oriented world' made of human connectivity, mega-projects, international events and tourism, with Arab Gulf states still in the middle of the paradigm change.

The peculiar cases of Libya, Syria and Yemen, where conflicts resulted immune to UN calls for a global ceasefire to deal with COVID-19, would apparently be exempted from the popular mobilisation trend. However, in at least one case, protests movements emerged as a powerful political factor. Indeed, protests against the Syrian regime and newly vocal opposition from minority groups that largely stayed out of the conflict so far, pose a real challenge to Assad's power base and Bashar's political viability. In recent months, Syria's economy has collapsed significantly and the regime failure in stabilising former opposition areas amplified armed insurgency and the resurrection of ISIS in regime-controlled areas.

On the other hand, the multiplication of "red lines" in Libya suggest that the proxy war is on the verge of escalating to a full-fledged military conflict between regional and international powers, where Arab states struggle to carve out a space vis-à-vis the military and diplomatic activism of third parties such as Russia. Ankara's intervention in support of the Government of National Accord reversed the conflict dynamics, but also linked the geopolitical contest for Libya to the disputes in the Eastern Mediterranean. Within this complex geopolitical environment, further militarisation and the growing number of stakeholders add further instability and bear a significant potential that, within a collision-driven scenario, this crisis will erupt into a greater war.

The recent disputes over Operation Sea Guardian are just an example of how NATO is forced to operate in an increasingly challenging environment. A fracture in the North Atlantic Alliance should be avoided. It could prevent it from playing a relevant role in Libya, both in terms of security sector reform (SSR) and in reinforcing the arms embargo, undermining any effort to give teeth to the newly established Operation Irini. Many other rifts are further resulting into a fragmented picture of the Middle East, in which the strategic and ideological rivalry between countries has become the leading fault-line in many geopolitical arenas, from Somalia to Libya, passing through Syria and even Cyprus.

Suffering from a lack of unity and diverging views with an increasingly inward-looking USA, a dysfunctional EU seems unable to resist Russia's asser-

tiveness in the region. Turkey has already emerged as an increasingly significant player. As power politics are rapidly rising as a substitute for a faltering multilateralism, the approaching presidential elections in the USA will give a sense of what the post-COVID-19 Arab world would look like. The Gulf in particular, tries to grasp the future American posture vis-à-vis Iran: a sanctions-driven policy again or some room for incremental diplomacy. Anyway, Arab Gulf capitals acknowledge that Washington is - and will be - a special ally but no more a full security provider, as testified by the absence of US reaction after the attacks against the Saudi oil production company Aramco. For Riyadh and Abu Dhabi, this lack of proactive stance has acquired a strategic dimension, strengthening their rather fragile “autonomy-first” choice in the security-military domain.

Despite maintaining considerable sway over the geopolitics of the region, during the current administration Washington has apparently gradually lost interest, favouring inroads by third parties such as Beijing and Moscow and increasing regional powers’ self-reliance. The declining US attention to the region may pave the way for a deregulated and multi-polar Middle East, in which rising power rivalries, the oil plunge and the pandemic are expected to further diminish the capacity of states already facing a new season of discontent.

Session I

AN UNSETTLED MIDDLE EAST



Pump jack and drill tower in the desert, Oman





GIOVANNI ROMANI
*Head, Middle East and North Africa Section,
Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO
HQ, Brussels (Virtual)*

NATO IN AN UNSETTLED MIDDLE EAST

On this occasion I would like to focus on our current NATO framework, as well as our ongoing activities and some key challenges we have been facing within our engagement in the Middle East and North Africa.

The region is indeed central for NATO strategic future and it has a key role in the global security. One of the three NATO core tasks is actually cooperative security and it has been first established with NATO's partners in MENA that not only share geographical proximity but similar security challenges.

Most of you know that the two primary icons of NATO's engagement are the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) that involves Israel and six Arab countries and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) with four Gulf countries: United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain.

Last year we celebrated the 25th anniversary of the Mediterranean Dialogue together with the 15th anniversary of ICI. Let me underline how, despite the tremendous political changes that occurred across the region in the recent years, which fragmented and destabilised MENA, the NATO partnerships framework has proven to be fairly resilient.

Beyond the engagement with individual partners, they also have provided an invaluable forum through which we will be able to discuss, assess and to jointly address these global challenges together.

We offer an umbrella under which we can bring together diverging positions for example by hosting Israel together with six Arab countries also in very difficult times. For instance, at the time of the Gulf Cooperation Countries (GCC) crisis, the Gulf countries continued to meet within the NATO framework. The NATO partnership trusts, indeed, in concrete cooperation.

The NATO Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Regional Centre in Kuwait was created in 2017 in this perspective. Close to 1.000 participants from all the GCC countries have benefitted from the training activities, mostly between 2018 and 2019 in the midst of the GCC crisis.

We have also the NATO Hub for the South that was established in Naples to focus on strategic anticipation of challenges through open information sharing. The Hub is becoming more and more a key tool to better understand the region and facilitate NATO engagement in the region.

Military education and training are the core of NATO's original policy and Middle East partners participate in various programs, military exercises, operational strategies. In this regard I would like to also mention the NATO School in Germany and also the NATO Defense College, delivering a regional cooperation course that has trained over 600 officers from NATO and MENA partners today.

The allies also collaborate on counter-terrorism, in capacity building, by learning from partners' experience. A valuable example is the NATO Training Mission in Iraq in support of the Iraqi forces to prevent the re-emergence of ISIS and other terrorist groups.

It is worth to mention that Qatar is providing essential airlifting in coordination with the NATO Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) to support UN efforts to fight the Covid 19 pandemic and to transfer American equipment to several African countries (like, for instance, Somalia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Angola and Rwanda).

In Mauritania, over the last few years NATO has also established a Crisis Management Centre and four Regional Coordination Operations Center under NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme.

Moreover, NATO's Science for Peace and Security Programme new project "Promedeus" (Protection Civile et Médecine d'Urgence Sanitaire en Mauritanie) has been launched in coordination between the Mauritanian civil protection and health emergency systems to further enhance the country's crisis management system. This project will surely have a strong impact on the Sahel region.

Additionally, in Jordan, together with the United Nations, NATO has supported the Jordanian National Center for Security and Crises Management in achieving full operational capacity. The centre was, indeed, a key tool to monitor and address the Jordanian response to the pandemic.

But now what are our future initiatives?

In April 2020, NATO's Foreign Minister called for further engagement by NATO in the Middle East and in Nord Africa to see what more can be done to contain terrorism and instability in the region. This initiative of additional measures will definitely include education and crisis prevention training, diplomacy, counter-terrorism activities and a specific focus on coordination with international organisations.

We work hard to translate these guidelines into concrete measures.

What are the key challenges that we are facing?

Except for Iraq, where we have a NATO mission, we are far from having an effective direct role in the dramatic crises that are affecting in several different

ways and with different dynamics the allies in the region impacting of course also NATO's relations with its regional partners.

The first challenge is addressing these complexities in order to bring added value while preserving the cohesion of the allies and maintaining fully functioning partnerships.

Second, NATO needs to intensify its political engagement and cooperation with the countries in the region through an approach agreed by all the allies. This has been so far a concrete challenge.

Third, there is an urgent need of improving coherence on the various activities offered by NATO and also by the allies. In this regard, it will be necessary to strengthen the coordination with international organisations like the United Nations and the European Union.

The fourth challenge is of course the increased presence of Russia and China in the region, with Moscow playing a key role in some theatres and regions that are suffering acute conflicts. Russia's growing power in the region needs to be tackled as well as China's economic ambitions need to be fully managed since they are shaping the area.

The fifth challenge is: how can we better communicate with international organisations? How can we improve our diplomatic interactions, to have an effective impact on NATO's coordination with international organizations?

Lastly, I would like to underline our big efforts on outreaching and establishing consultations with our partners, with whom we have common challenges affecting them more than they touch us.

For instance, we have a lot to learn about terrorism from our partners' experiences and for this reason we need to build constructive consultations and intensity our relationship.



YOUSSEF CHERIF

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LIBYA: A FRIGHTENED NEIGHBOURHOOD

The Libyan conflict affected Libyans in the first place, but it is also sending shock waves in its neighbourhood, especially those countries sharing land borders with Libya. It should be reminded however that Libya did not “become” an issue in recent years, as it was already a headache for its neighbours during the Gaddafi era,¹ due to the mercurial nature of the now-toppled leader and the hegemonic tendencies of his Jamahiriyya regime. Yet the problems emanating from Libya today are of a different nature, and have multiple sources (rather than only one source, which was in the past the Gaddafi regime).

We can identify three main problems. One is illegal trade (human trafficking, weapons, drugs...), which is controlled by criminal organizations whose reach will be hard to dismantle in the future, plus they are little addressed internationally. Terrorism is another one. It is a recurrent threat in North Africa and the Sahel, and Libya offered a fertile ground for the development of terrorist organizations, even though the issue is less acute than feared (compare to the dire predictions of five years ago when ISIS was said to be moving from Syria to Libya).

And on top of all this, there is geopolitics, the third issue. Libya became a global geopolitical arena, not unlike Syria, pushing the neighbours to rethink their alliances or act according to them. And from what we see, the future is not of international cooperation among these foreign belligerents, but of balance of power competition.²

Actually, five years ago, solving the Libyan conflict would have required putting the Emiratis and the Qataris (by then the main foreign protagonists in the country) on the same table and then organizing Libyan-Libyan discussions. But no one was able to do it.

Today, though, there is a metastasis, and several layers of conflict do exist in

1 <https://www.thecaireview.com/q-a/strategic-actors-in-libya/>

2 <https://online.ucpress.edu/caa/article/13/1/23/109261/Egyptian-National-Security-and-the-Perils-of>

Libya. In addition to the ever-growing Gulf proxy war, there is a superpower struggle between the USA and Russia; an intra-NATO French/Greek-Turkish dispute; an intra-European French-Italian disagreement; Egypt is fully involved and the Turkish-Egyptian tensions are growing; there are armed fighters from Libya's southern neighbours (Sudan, Chad...) dispersed around several Libyan towns; etc. This is exacerbating fears in the surrounding states.

The regime in Egypt is perhaps the most vocal about the threat coming from Libya, even if it has its own issues to deal with. The country has demographic and economic priorities. It is absorbed in a contest with Ethiopia over the control of water resources, related to the Nile river, vital for its survival. Egypt is also engaged in fighting an ISIS insurgency in its eastern Sinai province. It is also one of the countries most affected by Covid-19 in the MENA region. Yet amid all this, it ends up drawn in the moving sands of Libya. Cairo would like to secure the 1.115 km border with its western neighbour, tame Turkey and Qatar, and consolidate its ties with Saudi Arabia and the UAE who have also heavily invested in the Libyan conflict.

Tunisia, on the other side of the Libyan borders, is more directly affected by the conflict. It has a border of around 460 km with Libya, but differently from Egypt or Algeria, Tunisia borders the most populated part of Libya (Tripolitania). Yet so far, the effects of the Libyan conflict on Tunisia are more on the political than on the security level (the latter is rather well managed).

In summer 2020, for instance, the Tunisian government resigned. Several internal dynamics led to this situation, even though the government dealt very well with Covid-19 (the country was almost Covid-free between June and July 2020). But we can track the development of the current crisis starting with the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan's visit to the country, in December 2019. Erdogan reportedly asked for an authorization to use Tunisian land and air space. The Tunisian president, Kais Saied, refused. Leaders of the Islamist-inspired Ennahdha party, considered close to Ankara, attempted to intercede with the Tunisian president, some say to influence his decision; they failed nonetheless. Since then, several events happened in the country, including tumultuous parliamentary and media debates about the Turkish role in Libya and the region. They deepened the political polarization in the country, reawakening memories of the 2013 crisis, and contributed in the autumn of the government in July 2020.

Algeria, a western neighbour of Tunisia and Libya, is also worried, both for security reasons (almost 1.000 km of border with Libya, and the memory of the terrorist attack of Ain Amenas in 16th of January 2013 is still alive) and geopolitical ones (Algiers is uneasy with the involvement of Egypt, the UAE, Turkey, Qatar, France and the USA, to name a few, in its regional security complex).

Sudan, on Libya's eastern south, is impacted too. There are Sudanese mercenaries in Libya, and they are a potential destabilizing force in their countries. In December, the Guardian reported that 3.000 Sudanese were fighting in the army of

Khalifa Haftar (the self-styled Libyan National Army).³ Some of the interviewees said that their ultimate goal is to return home and fight against the authorities in Sudan, a reminder of the 2012 scenario in Mali.

And in fact, all the Sahel region feels the heat of the Libyan conflict. There is the growth of illegal trade and terrorism, but there is more. In January, the United Nations' Secretary General said that the situation in Libya may impact the Sahel and Lake Chad countries, as far as the Ivory Coast and Ghana.⁴ This is not an exaggeration: in 2012, armed groups staged a putsch in Mali, and the event was directly linked to the transfer of arms and fighters from Libya. Mali, it should be reminded, does not share borders with Libya, which gives a perspective of how far things can go. More recently, in February 2019, France targeted a convoy heading from Libya to Chad. It was concluded that it was an attempt to overthrow president Idris Deby, and that the convoy belonged to the Military Command Council for the Salvation of the Republic, a rebel Chadian group operating from southern Libya.

In conclusion, here are a few recommendations. First of all, Libya's immediate neighbours need to sit together. So far, Algeria and Egypt occasionally host high level discussions with officials from Chad, Niger, Sudan, Tunisia, and Mali, to advance security cooperation. Yet their efforts remain limited in ambitions. Furthermore, their multiple foreign alliances complicate such work. Then, NATO needs to host a special meeting on Libya. There are currently geopolitical rivalries between three NATO members: France, Greece, and Turkey, and that requires to be addressed separately. And finally, the European Union has to confront all the belligerent in the Libyan conflict and show more impartiality. Operation Irini, for instance, is seen by many observers as an anti-Turkish operation that benefits the UAE and Egypt (and France).⁵

3 <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/24/mercenaries-flock-to-libya-raising-fears-of-prolonged-war>

4 <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/01/gutteres-warns-impact-sahel-region-libya-war-200123160921373.html>

5 <https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/world/2020/06/19/Turkey-criticizes-EU-Operation-Irini-to-contain-arms-shipments-to-Libya>



YOUNES ABOUYOUB

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A REGION STRUGGLING WITH ITSELF THROUGH PROXY

The conflicts in the Middle East and North Africa have been multiplying and increasingly cross-cutting, which further complicates efforts to resolve them. The question is: could the region eventually recover for what has been going on for at least a decade? And if so, in what shape will this region be in the foreseeable future?

The Middle East and North Africa will face severe challenges for years to come. Regional countries have a high degree of risk when it comes to political, and socio-economic instability. These risks are becoming more immediate than before with their exacerbation by the COVID-19 pandemic, for they are all linked to chronic structural problems. National identities are more and more shaken in these uncertain times and there are some forms of local organization that are appearing where the state has receded. Little by little we are facing this situation in Yemen, Libya, Syria and Iraq. Some of those local governments constitute experiments that might prevent a return of the Leviathan state or even the return of the state *tout court*. We also see attempts by the society to reconstruct the social fabric that have been severely damaged during these years.

The conflicts continue unabated throughout the MENA region. Worse, they have become more and more intersecting now. They started on a national level but now they are definitely not a national issue anymore, due to the competing international and regional interferences. In fact, there is a transregional element that is more and more increasing, involving in this way international geopolitical competitions in the region that are taking the form of a direct external intervention to find solutions to what is intrinsically a political matter emanated, originally from social economic issues, poor governance and developments failures in most countries of this region. This will further polarize already divided polities and undermine local efforts or international efforts to re-establish or re-negotiate social contract to rebuild polity.

All told, a number of medium- to long-term trends are likely to influence the

evolution of the Arab region's vulnerability to conflict and political instability. And, of course the chronic state of crisis is now even worse with the global pandemic. Dissatisfaction with governments' economic performance, made worse by the pandemic, will most likely play an important role in the onset of demonstrations and more socio-political instability. That said, reducing youth unemployment, inequality, and inflation while implementing serious governance reforms are all tasks that require long-term commitment, sound macro-economic policies, and necessary reforms based on a sound vision; all of which are less likely to happen in today's negative global economic climate.

So, to attenuate the effects of what seems to be an inevitable negative trend, we should be looking to develop more policies which at least do no harm if they cannot contribute to a more stable future for the region. Since 2011 the Arab world has been severely shaken, as the region is facing a lot of complex and compounded challenges. The 2011 turmoil that, as mentioned before, was originally a domestic and national issue, has developed into more complex regional and global confrontations. Unfortunately, the domestic policies focus has been moving from a social economic development challenge towards more stark security conflict that is rapidly leading the region to implosion.

The domestic politics have therefore moved from what was supposed to be a reform at a governmental and a socio-economic level to a largely security-centred agenda; this shift is dangerously ignoring the fact that the socio-economic problems were the driving factors of existing chronic instability and actual escalating conflicts. In fact, countries of the MENA region find themselves in the middle of a chicken and egg dilemma!

What is more, security forces are overstretched, everywhere defence budgets are rising across the region and the economic gap in most of these countries is expanding dangerously. Illegal networks have developed to full scale non-state organisations while terrorist organisations are rising across the region. Sometimes those organisations cooperate, sometimes they do not and yet sometimes they compete but they are expanding more and more across the Middle East, North Africa and also in the Sahel.

There has been an alarming rise of terrorism across the region, often combated by armed forces rather than internal security forces reinforcing in this way the political role of the army. On top of that, structural reforms that have been the focus from the beginning are now further postponed and this is another transregional challenge for the region.

On a social-economic level, the region will remain challenged by the economic trends. The Arab GDP, a decade ago, was already very low compared to the world average, not to mention disparities and inequalities across the region. We clearly face those severe difficulties in wealth creation and distribution that were at the origin of this crisis. Along with the proliferation of wars, parallel economic systems and institutions have established themselves and they will fuel and intensify even

more the conflicts in the region.

Yemen and Syria have evolved from states hit by economic problems to war economies. In terms of human development, Syria went back to four decades ago and it will take up approximately 40 years to return, if ever, to the GDP level of a decade ago. The economic crisis has only exacerbated problems that were already existing in the region. The struggling economies of the region are the outcome of decades of wrong development policies and severe governance deficits. The conflict has exacerbated structural issues related to institutional matters, corruption, delay in implementing reforms, investment mismanagement and sometimes lack of resources. Some countries have been trying to carry out reforms but perhaps not in a correct way; evidently with the global pandemic and the ramification of the conflict, things are becoming even more complex for years to come.

Arab states are struggling today with their national identities. Ideologies are now more regional than national, and some are calling for the abolishment of the nation-state as such. Many different forms of Islamism are now rejecting the original states that we have known for almost a century now. We can already see this trend in the increasing geopolitical influence of non-Arab regional powers, such as Turkey with the Ottomanisation of the Turkish foreign policy, and in the rising regional influence of Iran.

Lastly, another challenge that these conflicts have created at regional level is the proliferation of weapons. Although the Arab region has been militarized since World War II, the last decades have seen an increase of arms circulation. In some countries we can see a proliferation during or in post conflict settings as it happened in Libya, Iraq, Syria and Yemen. While in some other countries there have been arms transfers from Arab non-state actors and external actors. the invasion of Iraq in 2003 led to the transfer of arms to non-state actors and to the wider civilian population, arms that ended up being used by terrorist groups and the Islamic State.

In Libya, more than 15 million of weapons went not only to the civilian population but have been spread across at least 14 countries in the region. The proliferation of arms is of course a worsening factor, especially in a region that is critically unstable, facilitating cycles of violence and instability. There are certainly ways to mitigate this but, unfortunately, at the early stage of these uprisings, there were no genuine national dialogues, with the exception of Tunisia and Yemen, and no meaningful reforms have been implemented. Last but not least, the region remains the world's least peaceful, despite recent advancements against violent groups and a drop in terrorist incidents. Both radicalization and violent extremism have risen dangerously in the last decade; for political and geopolitical reasons, these have increased in scope and reach. While the phenomenon grew with the invasion of Iraq, and has particularly affected countries that experienced profound changes in 2011, it is also a broader phenomenon that has hit the wider MENA region.

Conflict and political unrest have halted or reversed the development progress

made in previous decades in the MENA region. These factors will continue to impact all aspects of development; resulting in increasing poverty, social ills, limiting access to education and other essential social services; and increasing social discrimination and exclusion. These already pervasive effects are being exacerbated by the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic, and will have severe long-term consequences for human development and the stability of the region in the years ahead.



MITCHELL BELFER
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MENA'S SHIFTING ALLIANCES AND THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

It is very important for us today to remember where we come from and what the conditions were in Europe a hundred years ago, when we went through these tremendous conflicts. Not to mention that after the Big War people in Europe were walking around with masks just as we are doing now and had a terrible pandemic that paralysed our European economies.

On the 24th of July we witnessed the reconversion of Aya Sophia into a mosque, with the imam walking up the pulpit carrying a sword from a hundred year ago, from the Ottoman empire. It is easy for us, as European, to look back to our history and think that we can reconcile ourselves with history, however not everybody can do that. Furthermore, I think what we are experiencing now is not a renewed conflict but a continuing conflict. The major difference in the area we are focusing on is the way that power has been distributed, the ways alliances have been formed and the ways anarchy is interacting with this two.

We need to go back to traditional international relations theory, the same theory that we have developed when going through the Cold War in Europe and globally, in order to try to give a sense to what is occurring now in the Middle East, using the same parameters as once.

There has been a time (we can call it Pax Americana), that started with the end of the Soviet Union and carried out until September 11th, 2001. However, after September 11th, the USA got reactions that led to the invasion of Iraq with the consequences that we all know, but also to the pivoting out of the Middle East. All these mixed messaging and actions have produced a kind of vacuum on top, that is not being exploited necessarily by international actors but rather it is being exploited by local actors as these actors come to terms with where their power ends and their neighbours' power begins.

It is very important for us to try to anticipate what kind of region we are heading to. Are we heading into a region of parity and balance of power or are we heading into a region of hegemony and preponderance of power? Because in either case

the international community will have to adjust itself to how the outcomes of this long-term struggle looks like.

Additionally, what we are facing in the region today, since there is no agreement on the balance of power, is an increased anarchy that is going to reinforce the vacuum and most importantly it is eroding the institutions that have been slowly building in the region to create mechanisms of dialogue and communication between the various actors.

Institutions, like the League of the Arab States, have become more a talk-shop instead of fulfilling what was its original mandate to consolidate the policy behaviours among the Arab countries. We have not seen a major institutionalisation, with the exception of the Gulf Cooperation Council, that is an important organisation providing not only dialogue but also security, and intending to provide an economic space so that the countries could benefit. The GCC is the only organisation that is actually preventing the complete anarchy in the region.

Finally, with regard to alliances, we have seen tremendous shifts over the past decades. For instance, ten years ago, we would have rather been referring to Israel, Turkey, Egypt and Jordan if not as allies as grouping countries, with Israel and Turkey cooperating on almost every security related issue. Now we are talking about the Turkey, Cyprus, Greece triangle and referring to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, GCC Countries, as converging countries, including also the Morocco-Cooperation Council alignment.

In conclusion, we have seen these major shifts in alliances with the risk of anarchy on the top of this vacuum.

The core issues that are unfolding the Middle East today are the very same that were left over from the First World War. So, if we want to deal with this crisis and create proper solutions, we have to go to the root cause of these issues: how decolonisation has decided which groups were in power and which were not; which territories have been artificially divided and how do we reconcile that now. Mechanisms have to be put in place to deal with this the last century of turmoil in the region. This is especially clear now, due to the removal of the Cold War system and since the temporary United States total hegemony in the region has been reduced in part by its own internal situation, but also in part due to a changing world.

The future of the Middle East is indeed the future of Europe or the presence itself of Europe in the region.

Special intervention

THE TURMOIL OF THE REGION
AND A RETREATING USA



Beirut, Lebanon - Martyr's square during the 2019 uprising against the government and against corruption





MAGED ABDELAZIZ

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THE TURMOIL OF THE REGION AND A RETREATING USA

I believe this conference is of paramount importance at this particular political and strategic juncture, and in view of the close connection between Europe and the Middle East on many issues that would have an impact on our world at large.

I believe it was not just coincidence that “The Mediterranean Dialogues” held their fifth edition here in Rome in late 2019, shortly before the Center for the New South held its “The Atlantic Dialogue” conference. Both conferences had in their leading theme the warning signs that “The World is in Turmoil”. The US retreat from many multilateral and bilateral commitments, including major withdrawals from the application of international legitimacy rules on our Arab issues, is a very serious matter. Most important is America’s disengagement from its role as an honest broker between Israel and the State of Palestine; replacing it with a peace plan of its own that has provoked international opposition.

Changes in the dynamics of relations between the United States and its traditional allies in NATO and the European Union happened in a manner that created doubts and uncertainty. Not to mention the changes introduced in the relations between the major powers, in particular between the United States on one side with the Russian Federation and China on the other.

As the Arab World is just a small part of this evolving world with all its surrounding environment, I would assume you all would expect me to say that “the Middle East is in Turmoil”. And it is really so.

The analysis I will provide of the current situation, globally, regionally and sub regionally, does not reflect any official position of the League of Arab States, whom I have the honour of representing at the United Nations now, neither my own country, Egypt, that I had the privilege of representing as ambassador to the UN, nor it represents the UN itself which I was honoured to work for five years and to deal exclusively with the African side of the work of the organization. What I am going to talk about, stems from the accumulated experience nationally, re-

gionally and globally over almost forty years of diplomatic and political experience, with a forward-looking vision that takes into account the inherent relations that connect Europe in general, and NATO in particular, with the Middle East region from a geopolitical angle.

To start let us all agree that multilateralism and regionalism are in real crisis.

The failure of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to deal with critical issues relating to maintenance of international peace and security is quite evident. In the last two weeks alone, veto power has been used to prevent the adoption of resolution after resolution merely deciding to extend the opening of crossing points that are needed to deliver humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the Syrian people. The power struggle in dealing with this issue between different powers was obvious, but this time it was using the suffering of innocent civilians by both sides to score political gains.

In the meantime, the Security Council was debating the Iranian nuclear file without any conclusive results, particularly with regard to the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), while Iran continues its interference in the internal affairs of the Arab States, in the Gulf, in Palestine, Syria, Lebanon, Iraq, and continue as well its support to the Houthis in their attacks on Saudi Arabia and on the coalition forces supporting legitimacy in Yemen, in complete defiance of UNSC resolutions.

Tensions are also rapidly building up in Libya, where the fight against terrorist groups and jihadis is turning into foreign interference, but upon requests of both warring sides, and the victim will only be the Libyan people, who will have to pay the price for the settling of scores between European partners, and between some of them and their Arab partners, depending on who they support.

Even worse, we now see one member of NATO claiming a share of the wealth of Libya and a share in the southern Mediterranean economic revenues of Arabs and other NATO fellow members, all this within paralysis in the SC as a result of different alliances for different reasons. Moreover, since the resignation of Ghasan Salameh, the SC has been unable to agree on the nomination of a new leader for the UN mission in Libya, putting the peaceful settlement efforts in jeopardy.

Turning to the League of Arab State, the oldest regional organization that has just celebrated its seventy fifth anniversary on 22th of March this year, way before the UN celebration of its seventy fifth birthday next October. LAS is willing, ready, but “not able”, to play its desired role in dealing with the current turmoil in global affairs and its implications on its regional affairs. Here, I would like to stress again that my views are only mine and neither that of the Secretary-General nor the League itself.

This inability could be attributed to several factors. Some of them are institutional, emanating from its charter rules and regulations, that prevents resorting to vote in settling any issue, and relieves member states expressing reservations on any of its resolutions or statements from the responsibility of its implementation.

This is in a classical application of the national sovereignty principle by each member state of the League, that is, and continues to be, the basic principle for our operating scheme due to different factors.

Those factors include primarily changes in the dynamics of Arab leadership after the disappearance of many Arab leaders as a result of the so called “Arab Spring”, that changed the classical leadership set up in the Arab world.

As you all know, until 2010, Arab affairs were usually conducted through informal High-Level contacts, under the joint supervision and leadership of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Syria, reflecting the diversity of our Arab world between North Africans (or Maghreb) and the Sham region (or Mashreq) and the Gulf states (known as the GCC).

But the 2011 uprising, with its different motivations and dynamics in different countries, came with serious ramifications that shattered most Arab societies, increased the appetite of some Arab countries towards playing a bigger leadership role that does not correspond to their capabilities and against the will of other Arab countries. This in itself created a rift between groups and individual states in our region, that had its negative impacts on the ability of LAS to reach Arab collective actions and decisions, particularly on issues pertaining to maintaining Regional Peace and Security.

This problem was exacerbated by the lack of formal structures in the League to handle effectively the peace and security issues, as well as the weak financial structure of the League, which limits its ability to undertake those responsibilities, and, I would venture to say, the lack of a unified political will to allow the League to play this role.

All that, coupled with the feeling of insecurity, resulting from lack of effectiveness on the multilateral track of the UN in dealing with Arab security concerns, provided the reasoning for an unprecedented military build-up in the past few years in our region. It resulted also in an increase in the number of foreign bases on our lands as well as the strengthening of others in place already.

This build up was not necessarily directed against neighbouring Arab countries, rather than building increasing deterrence against foreign interventions from both Iran, Turkey and others on one hand, as outlined in many summit and ministerial resolutions by LAS, as well as interventions from other powers and actors bumping into each other on the Arab lands as well. What must be noted here is that most of those build ups are coming from NATO countries within their alliances and excellent relations with Arab countries, and that many of those parties fighting on the Arab lands are also NATO countries, either confronting each other, or confronting those who has been considered as rivals in the past. What also has an impact on those developments is the lack of a clear regional integration strategy, whether at the sub-regional or the regional levels.

Now I turn shortly to how does the Arab world view its strategic relations with Europe and with NATO. The current turmoil and the sudden American with-

drawal from many activities allowed the European Union to step in to fill the vacuum. We have seen this in the much more unified positions taken by our European partners in dealing: with critical issues of the Arab world within the UN Security Council; with the American recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel; in supporting the Israeli sovereignty over the occupied Arab Golan Heights, and in opposing the Peace for Prosperity US deal and in opposing the plans of the new Israeli Governments towards the annexation of Palestinian territories.

The joint European presidency of the SC represented by Estonia in May, France in June and Germany in July 2020 represented the re-emergence of Europe as a leading factor in dealing with our issues in the Middle East. We trust that this will continue with the departure of Germany and Belgium and the beginning of the membership of Norway and Ireland in Early 2021. But the question here also remains, what can the EU, and may be NATO do to help the Arab world achieve its objectives.

Let me now turn to the question addressed to me by the organizers: whether the Arab Region is in a state of strategic nuisance or strategic irrelevance? In my view, neither.

The Arab Region has for long resisted reform for different reasons, but all attempts to reform the Arab region from the outside have failed. We all still remember the greater Middle East initiative, and the Middle East Partnership Initiative and many other initiatives that meant, across the years, to impose certain American or European reform standards and objectives on our region, particularly after the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and the paradigm shift it caused in dealing with us.

But in the absence of a unified reform agenda and common Arab objectives that are home grown, every country in our region went ahead with its own reforms individually. Reforms that would fit the characteristics of its society, its governing structures, whether republican, kingdom, emirate, sultanate or other and what exactly it aims to achieve in the final analysis. But despite the major advances each of our countries have achieved, there is no common thread that connects all those reforms in our countries together, in a way that would allow us to form the effective block that is capable, on its own, of providing regional security without foreign intervention.

The inner differences among countries of the Arab World about who is in the lead and who is not, unfortunately resulted in a situation where each country has to choose its alliances inside and outside the Arab World, even if those allies are harming or even attacking a fellow Arab Country.

The 2011 popular uprising magnified those realities. Some Arab leaders were joining other American and European leaders in calling for their fellow Arab leaders to go, while some others did not want to recognize the will of the people and called the popular uprising a coup d'état. This, along with the new dynamics surrounding the deteriorating economic situation in many countries that witnessed

those uprisings, created new momentum that some in the Arab World are trying to utilize to maximize their authority and leadership possibilities in our region. All this, coupled with the spread of terrorists, non-state actors, mercenaries, paramilitaries and militias that are recruited, transported and financed from inside and outside the Arab Region to serve those and other objectives makes us wonder what would it take for the Arab Region to regain its relevance as a block and to become an effective and influential actor like the European Union for instance.

Even though I represent the LAS to the UN, I believe that the Arab Region needs a new collective agenda, similar to the “United Nations 2030 Agenda” and the “African Union 2063 Agenda”. An overarching agenda, that should be implemented by its members in close cooperation with the outside world and with the strong backing of their regional organization. An Agenda that is home grown and built on a strong collective security system and strong economic and social development, along with strong governing structures that takes into account the specificities of each of us, their capabilities and their ambitions. There are many success stories in this regard and we can take the best lessons learned and find our own way to a brighter future.

Session II

THE CIVIL SOCIETY. AN OPEN ISSUE



US President Donald Trump and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan pictured during the opening ceremony of the summit of the NATO military alliance on July 11, 2018, in Brussels, Belgium





ROBERT WATKINS

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ALL CHANGES, NOTHING CHANGES: THE LEOPARD RULE

Despite the diversity of the region there have been a number of common threats across the area and I believe the most important change we have seen in the last twenty years is the proliferation of the number of people, organizations and groups involved in security.

The first point that I would like to underline is that we are no longer dealing just with military and security services, intelligence services and so on. There has been a rapid increase in the number of power brokers, whether they are sectarian based or ethnic based, whether they are transnational jihadist groups, transnational criminal groups or non-state armed groups.

The multiplicity of the actors has complicated the relationship between the military and the civil society hugely. It has never been an easy relationship in this region but now it developed in an extremely complicated one.

The second point I would like to address is that these new actors complicating the situation is not a new phenomenon. There have been parallel security organizations created by powers in the Middle East and North African for century. But this is happening very quickly now and the rate of multiplications has changed since the beginning of the century.

Leaders in many countries created new security agencies to spy on other security agencies. They kept a multiplicity of security poles to ensure that one does not become more important than the other as a way of maintaining power and protect themselves from any kind of overthrows of their governments. What we used to see was these state leaders were creating security organizations but now we are seeing the reverse. The growth of these organizations is created from the bottom up rather than the top down.

The third point that I would like to highlight is that the military in the MENA region has always been at the centre of politics and that this is not a new phenomenon. It has changed over time and it is constantly in evolution. Military was behind the rise of independence movements. Military was involved in the post-co-

lonial period movements and after the colonial power removal.

The kinds of armies that exist in the MENA region are very diverse: some are professional armies, some are based on merit, some on ethnicity some others are former rebel groups that were opposing either a colonial power or an installed regime and then took power.

The fourth point that I would like to address is that as the political response to the political movement has been taking place in 2011 throughout the MENA region with very different outcomes so too are the military responses different from one country to the other.

What we are seeing now is that militaries are either in power or behind power, but they remain central in most Middle Eastern and North African countries. Military played a decisive role, forcing some dictatorship to end in some countries like it happened in Egypt, Sudan, Algeria and Tunisia, but in many cases what we saw was not a real change but a change in leadership or the military backing a different leader. So, while there were apparent changes military remained in real control but, as mentioned, sometimes is from behind the scene. In other countries, particularly in the Gulf, military remained very loyal to the leadership.

The fifth point that I would like to discuss is the balance between military and civil society.

The balance between military and civil society, despite all these changes, remains essentially the same. This happens because civilians who are seeking power in the region will have to find a way to accommodate with the military power, either for strategic purposes or because they have just been realistic: they will not succeed and stay in power without the support of the military.

Nevertheless, military serves the democratic transitions while making pacts with those civilians that they may have in many cases pre-selected, giving, by doing so, the appearance of democratic transition.

Military still present themselves in some countries as defender of the nation and as preservers of national identity. Most new informal security actors, (transnational jihadist groups, transnational criminal groups, the non-aligned state groups) are very different from the military and they do not even try to provide the kind of service that the military provides.

The sixth and last point I would like to address is that Covid 19 pandemic may provide a very important opportunity to quietly quell popular protest movements without turning them into violent. We have seen that not only in the MENA region but around the globe with authoritarian powers. Covid 19 has been for the military an opportunity to re-impose their will without an advert to support one leader or to overthrow one regime or another.

In conclusion, Covid 19 provides at first instance an optimistic view of the opportunities for the relationship between the military and the civil society.

We have seen in many countries that the pandemic provided the opportunity to improve civil military relations by allowing the military to carry out tasks that are

not usually associated with their mandate, roles and responsibilities. It provided the opportunity to the military to present themselves not only as enforcers of the ruler but also as protectors of the populations, additionally they can ensure stability when political leaders are, maybe, coming under attack by the population with an increasing instability in the country, as it happened in Lebanon for instance. With the severe instability, military provided a reassurance to the population that stability will be maintained.

During the Covid 19 pandemic the military provided counter-disinformation, they provided analysis of the infection in rates or provided technologies to allow social distancing or to facilitate the testing process and so on.

Other than the optimistic scenario brought by Covid 19 in this specific context and the positive side of what the military can do and offer during the pandemic, there are unfortunately, more pessimistic views.

The proliferation of the number of security actors is most like going to stay for the near future, the 2011 and 2019 events and protests have definitely reconfigured military structures but the principles remain the same, the military retains the inescapable power. The way the military power exercises it, is however more settled, and they prefer to stay in the background. Professional armies under civilian control have been attempted and have had mixed results. But most importantly, in most of the MENA region as long as there is a continuous weakness in political and government institutions, civilian control over the military will be difficult to achieve.



BRAHIM OUMANSOUR

Associate Fellow, Center for Studies and Research on the Arab and Mediterranean World, Geneva; and Associate Research Fellow, Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, Paris

NON-GOVERNMENTAL PLAYERS IN THE REGION: IS THEIR IMPORTANCE GROWING AND HOW?

The MENA region has experienced various troubles and crises that span from revolts and protest movements, failed or fragmenting states, intra- and inter-state violent conflicts, terrorism and economic stagnation whose fragility has been worsened by the pandemic Covid-19.

This turmoil has triggered the proliferation of non-state players with a significantly growing influence, whose national and regional weight has been reinforced by the rise of soft power and foreign military intervention, amid a declining multilateralism and the increase in hegemonic competition between states to extend their influence or secure access to raw materials.

By “non-state players” I include a wide range of actors that could be divided into violent or armed non-state players and non-violent or peaceful non-state players. I shall start by the first that constitute a serious issue and later move to non-violent non-state actors as a positive phenomenon.

1. INCREASING STRENGTH OF ARMED NON-STATE ACTORS

The growing influence and weight of armed non-state players threatens the stability of the whole region and beyond. The reasons for such development are multiple: political, economic, strategic and environmental drivers have led to intra- and inter-state conflicts that are exacerbated by foreign players and arms transfer to battlefields.

Violent non-state actors include armed rebel groups, civilian militias, civil defence forces, terrorist groups and criminal organizations, but also private military or security companies.

The use of military force by foreign powers (direct intervention or proxy) has resulted in four failed or failing states (Iraq, Libya, Syria and Yemen) that have experienced the rise of a variety of armed non-state actors (rebel groups, militias, private military and security companies), such as Ahrar al Sham in Syria, and pro-

vide a sanctuary to organized crime and international terrorism (IS); while long standing armed militant groups (Houthis and Hezbollah) and Al-Qaeda have gained significant influence. All have played or still play significant role in their respective countries.

Military interventions and proxy wars have resulted in several issues worth mentioning:

a) Arms transfer to non-state actors:

As part of their hegemonic competition, international and regional powers sponsor violent groups leading to a wide range of arms transfer from state to non-state players in the Middle East and North Africa which generate serious security challenges in the region; in addition to the leakage from state stockpiles in Iraq and Libya that resulted respectively from the fall of Saddam's and Khadhafi's regimes. A large number of arms are flowing into the hands of non-state armed groups - assault rifles, mortars, rockets - including more sophisticated arms and equipment (tanks, drones, etc.).

- **Iraq:** according to the Small Arms Survey (of the SIPRI Swedish institute), the 2003 Iraq war resulted in the transfer of at least 4,2 million Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) from the military to armed non-state players. Some came from the Iraqi regime's pre-invasion arming of militias, others from neighbouring states.
- **Libya:** the situation is even more worrying in Libya as arms transfer has taken a new stage with the increasing quantity of more sophisticated arms and heavy military equipment: drones, fighting vehicles, tanks, etc. UN reports accuse several countries of being involved in the arms sales to Libyan actors, especially Haftar.

b) Mercenaries

Syrian mercenaries in Libya are estimated to some 5.000 joining both pro-GNA and pro-Haftar militias, they are in addition to other mercenaries from Sudan, Tchad, Wagner group, etc. Arms transfer and the flow of mercenaries to Libya raises question about the potential diversion of weapons and combatants to terrorist groups which has become a very real concern. Several studies have shown that part of the weapons originally intended for anti-government forces in Iraq, Syria, Libya and Yemen were diverted to Al-Qaeda or IS.

This paves the way to the last point which concerns hybrid actors.

c) Hybridization: a new challenge

Hybridization concerns both the notion of "stateness" as well as the motives and means of violence. Firstly, as a result of proxy wars and foreign support, some

non-state actors like Haftar, are raised to the rank of “stateness”, legitimizing him as a Libyan leader at the expense of the internationally recognized GNA. Secondly, the close ties between militant groups, organized crime and transnational terrorism have led to mergers both in terms of methods and motives blurring the line between international terrorism – and organized crime – and militant groups; stressed by terrorist groups exploiting of the local population’s legitimate demands rendering fight against terrorist more complicated.

Consequently, the rise in power of violent non-state actors obstruct inclusive political solutions and threatens state building in the region.

2. NON-VIOLENT/PEACEFUL NON-STATE ACTORS:

Civil society grassroots movements:

The rise of widespread long-lasting peaceful protest movements from civil society grassroots with demands for political change and fight against corruption has created new dynamics from which have emerged a plethora of militant groups (NGOs, political parties) and strengthened existing ones (Muslim Brothers, opposition political parties) exercising more pressure on authorities than before.

Many factors led to the increase of non-violent non-state actors from civil society: the rise of a new generation mostly young and more educated frustrated by political stagnation within public institutions dominated by older elite. This combines with widespread new technology (107% of smartphones presence in Maghreb States – 25 million Facebook accounts in Algeria) accompanied by the rising consciousness about different issues: equality – environment – corruption, etc.

In the business sector: growing influence of businessmen/women

The example of Algerian Issaad Rebrab, is worth mentioning: founder and CEO of the Cevital Industrial Group, has grown from a national private company in Algeria into international business. with a net worth of \$4,4 billion. Specializing in a diversified line of business from food to metallurgy and steel, Cevital Group has recently bought some European companies, including the Italian steelmaker Lucchini, the French home appliance group Brandt.

This offers material for reflection on new forms of regional cooperation (Med zone) in a context of debate over the relocation of European businesses into the MENA region instead of China.

Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, non-state players from business sector and civil society in general have played a significant role in supplying hospitals with materials or helping the poor through charity activities, in a region where states face tough financial crisis.

CONCLUSION: PROSPECTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The NATO and other international institutions should consider more seriously the growing importance of violent non-state actors whose influence undermines state's legitimacy and obstructs the management of the crises in Libya, Syria, etc.

The IS experiences a leadership crisis and failed its aim for a territorial Caliphate. However, it will continue to threaten peace in different areas, to perpetrate acts of terrorism and on the internet and social media through which it can recruit.

Support multilateral decisions in crisis management and UN endorsed road maps. Otherwise, proxy wars will noticeably worsen and extend chaos across the region.

Effective arms embargoes should be enhanced to coerce states and non-state players to comply with international rules, through tougher sanctions.

Foster a global strategy in the fight against terrorism and violent groups in general by including programmes on economic development, education, inclusive political transition, etc.



SOFIA BARBARANI
Freelance Journalist

IRAQI YOUTH AND THEIR ROLE IN THE 2011-2019 PROTESTS

When we talk about civil society in the Arab World, we have to think about a civil society that was already existing under very difficult circumstances, whether it be sanctions, war or dictatorship.

A question that comes up very often is: can a healthy civil society in these tremendous circumstances indeed exist?

Looking back over the past decade, I would argue that the Arab civil societies have grown and thrived under these circumstances despite the tremendous challenges that they faced. Perhaps they have not been as loud as the rest of the more pessimistic, angry civil society.

I also believe that the kind of civil society groups that we have seen coming together over the past decade are not necessarily those that are defined by western standards. So often they are not viewed as we would define as a civil society group.

To quote a professor from the Temple University, Shonen Yump: *"The so-called Arab Spring came from informality, from every day citizens, that, linked by technologies, united by common norms, managed to challenge their dictatorial status quo"*. I believe Iraq is a primary example of what professor Yump meant: an Arab country that has informal and, sometimes confused, but functional civil society organizations. If we go back to 2011, when the Arab Spring was spreading to the rest of the region, in Iraq it came and left without leaving long-lasting tangible consequences.

There were many questions if an Arab Spring or a revolution would happen in Iraq. In 2019 tens of thousands of Iraqis organized themselves from online to real life, as protesters said, and demonstrated against the unfair dismissal of a loved army general, a key figure in retaking Mosul [Lieutenant General Abdulwahab al-Saadi, who had served as the deputy head of the elite Counter-Terrorism Service, a force considered hostile by sectarian militias, Note of the Editor]. Of course, the dismissal of the general was just the tip of the iceberg and demonstrations went on to July 2020 and demonstrators had more and more demands.

By November 2019, the civil society groups organized online, came out to the

streets and gathered in Tahrir square, that became the epicentre of the demonstrations or, I would say, the epicentre of the Iraqi civil society. Protesters called for the dismantling of the country's political system.

Soon, surprisingly, the Prime Minister had resigned. But, of course, there was criticism. Much of the criticism underlined that protests were leaderless and confused in their aims. All of this was suggesting that Iraq did not have in fact a functioning civil society, but rather a lot of anger.

In November 2019, looking at Tahrir Square, I found a well-organized civil society that was vibrant and healthy. Civilians coming from different areas of the country, from various factions, from all sides gathered under a single banner, it was largely leaderless and there were a coherent list of demands including the end of what they see as a corrupt political system that led to government mismanage, unemployment and lack of basic services.

Civilians were organizing themselves in a country where an inefficient government has been unable to provide services for them. This was particularly clear in Tahrir square, where civilians organized medical tents, food distribution, cleaners, prayer rooms open air libraries, art workshop and even hair dressers!

It seemed a functional state within a dysfunctional state. This was the result of a civic society organization that had come together under a single banner and a single aim.

Of course, what started to happen was systematic kidnapping, torturing and murdering of hundreds of activists and demonstrators, which proves the momentum that they gained and underlines that they have now become a threat to the political establishment and non-state actors. In July 2020 the killing of a well-known analyst [Hisham al-Hashimi] and the kidnapping of a German artist [Hella Mewis] happened, they both supported the protests. More recently the activist Omar Mohammad tweeted "*It is obvious and we have been seeing this for years, the militias have started a systematic campaign to oppress the civil society in Iraq by killing and kidnapping the civil activists.*"

The continuous need to targeting the civil society activists proves indeed that it is functioning and empowering through these challenges. Overall, I see an Iraq that has used its civil society organizations to forward political change, a civil society that is not tired to fight and continues to change and improve, rather than be silent.

Going forward, it would make a huge change and it would be incredibly important for the government to start engaging with those organizations and including them in the dialogue. It is also important for the international community, when dealing with Baghdad and Iraq, to remind them of the importance of the civil society organizations for the country to go forward.



MOHAMMED LOULICHKI
*Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South,
Rabat*

MOROCCO: A CRISIS MANAGEMENT CASE STUDY

My presentation will focus on how the Moroccan government and Moroccan society managed the Covid 19 crises as well as on the prospects of their future relations within a post Covid 19 environment.

To tackle these dynamics, we will need to recall the main features of the post Arabs Springs in Morocco.

In the middle of the Arab Spring, his Majesty took the initiative to amend a new Constitution by holding a referendum and calling to immediate elections that brought to power a coalition government led by the first party that emerged in these elections, the Party for Justice and Development (PJD). This initiative contributed to the strengthening of reforms that have been adopted since 2000, in terms of consolidation of human rights, social justice, empowerment of women and better economic and social policies. This reform facilitated the unfolding of a very dynamic civil society whose activity covered the main topics on the international agenda: promotion of human rights, sustainable development and empowerment of women and youth.

Despite the efforts to build infrastructures attracting investments to modernise the country, the local private sector did not develop a sufficient rate to create jobs for young graduates from schools, universities and training centres.

One should remind that, and I think this prevented the local crisis of Covid 19, the King decided to create a commission to address and focus on a new economic and social model for Moroccan society already in October 2017. In this context of slow recovery from 2018's crises and the region's instability due to the conflict in the Sahel as well as in Libya, that Morocco was hit like many other countries by the Covid 19 pandemic.

To address how the Moroccan government and society managed the Covid 19 crises, I will focus on three essential points:

1. How did the State and society in Morocco react?

2. What was the impact of Covid 19 pandemic?
3. What were the gains and the shortcomings?

How did the government manage the crisis? I will respond to this question by a proverb that I believe illustrates well the specific context: “When you don’t have the means of your politics you adopt the politics of your means”. The government was mindful of at least three of four elements that determined the choices, the nature and the scope of the decisions taken.

First of all, the insufficient healthcare system in Morocco with 25.580 doctors, which means 7 doctors every 10.000 Moroccan, while the optimal average according to WHO is 1 doctor for 1.000.

Secondly, the necessity to prevent an overwhelming figure of infection that could challenge the capabilities available in Morocco.

Third, the responsibility of the government to protect citizens, but at the same time to avoid a breach of public order.

Finally, the adoption of an approach with a view to gain the minds and the hearts of the population.

Taking to the accounts all these parameters, the governments engaged in the battle like all the governments in terms of measures adopted and I would like to highlight a few of them:

- the decision to provide and ensure 12 million masks and to buy medicines to deal with the Covid 19;
- an early control of the borders and early establishment of a fund with \$3,2 billion to enable the Ministry of Health to equip hospitals and to give financial assistance to the most vulnerable citizens as well as to support the private sector and companies that were hit by the pandemic;
- the distribution of salaries to 2,8 million of families and the implementation of science-based strategies in handling the societal aspects.

These measures of protection were also extended to migrants and refugees who are residents in Morocco.

What was the impact of this policy?

First of all, the pandemic has definitely, like in all the countries, reinforced the power of the state.

Second, the crisis highlighted the necessity for the Moroccan government to prioritise the health and the education for the most vulnerable citizens and to create jobs particularly for the youth in addition to empowering women.

What are the gains?

First in terms of gains, there was this show of solidarity and consensus that had

never been experienced since 1975, when we had the march for the return of the Sahara province to Morocco.

Secondly, an active role of civil society organizations in discussing domestic violence, e-learning, combatting illegal markets of goods, distribution of financial assistance to the needy among the population.

Fourth, attention paid to the most vulnerable social strata that benefitted from financial aid.

Fifth, the ability of Moroccan state and society to come up with solutions, in terms of ventilators, masks and industries' conversion to allow Morocco to deal with the pandemic and finally the deep awareness of both the government and the society to work towards a new social contract taking into account the lessons learned during this Covid 19 crisis

In conclusion one cannot isolate the assessment of the impact of Covid 19 and the future perspective in isolation from the Euro African dynamics or in the immediate neighbours of Morocco.

And I will not but emphasize the need for the member states of the Maghreb to revisit the merit of integration and economic complementarity that, if it was achieved, I am sure it could have avoided the intervention of extra regional powers.

We need to rebalance the relations of the Mediterranean. In the Mediterranean there is complementarity between Europe and North Africa and there is a need of this new Europe that is emerging to rebuild a renovated partnership between Europe and Africa.

SPEAKERS BIOGRAPHIES

WELCOME REMARKS

Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo

President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

After having served at the Italian Embassy in Washington, D.C. and as Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Italy in Prague, Amb. Minuto-Rizzo worked as Head of the External Relations Office of the EEC from 1981 to 1986. In the next years, his career focussed on Europe and Space Policy. In 1997 he was appointed Diplomatic Counsellor of the Minister of Defence Nino Andreatta, then of his successors Carlo Scognamiglio and Sergio Mattarella. In 2000, Minuto-Rizzo held the position of Italian Ambassador to the Western European Union and to the Political and Security Committee of the EU, of which he was among the founding members. He was Deputy Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance, between 2001 and 2007. His mandate was mostly carried out in the strategic-political industrial area, in the relations with sensitive countries such as those in the Gulf and the Southern Mediterranean. He is the author of the books: “The road to Kabul” (Il Mulino-Arel, 2009); “A political journey without maps, diversity and future in the Greater Middle East” (Rubbettino, 2013), and “NATO and the Middle East: The Making of a Partnership” (New Academia Publishing, 2018).

Karim El Aynaoui

President, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat

He is President of the Policy Center for the New South and Dean of the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences at the Mohammed VI Polytechnic University. He also serves as advisor to the CEO and Chairman of the OCP Group. From 2005 to 2012, he worked at the Central Bank of Morocco, as Director of Economics and International Relations. Prior to this, he served as an economist at the World Bank. Dr El Aynaoui is a board member of the OCP Foundation, a global

member of the Trilateral Commission, and member of IFRI Strategic Advisory Board, the Malabo Montpellier Panel and the Scientific Council of the Moroccan Capital Market Authority. He holds a PhD in Economics from the University of Bordeaux.

James Huber

Military Assistant to the Dean, NATO Defense College, Rome

Colonel Huber is a US Army Aviation Officer and graduate of the US Army War College in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. He commanded the 222nd Aviation Battalion and the 28th Aviation Brigade in Ft Eustis, Virginia, and was Deputy Brigade Commander of the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade in Regional Command South, Afghanistan. He has served over the last five years at the NATO Defense College as the US Senior National Representative, Faculty Advisor, Head of the Curriculum Planning Branch and currently is the Military Assistant to the Dean.

OPENINGS REMARKS

Gilles Kepel

Scientific Director, Middle East Mediterranean Freethinking Platform, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano

Dr Kepel is a French political scientist and Arabist, specialised in contemporary Middle East and the study of Muslim communities in the West. He is Adjunct Professor and Scientific Director of the Middle East Mediterranean Freethinking Platform. He is also Professor at the Université Paris Sciences et Lettres, where he is also Director of the Middle East and Mediterranean Chair. Originally trained as a classicist, he started to study Arabic after a journey to the Levant in 1974. He first graduated in Philosophy and English, then completed his Arabic language studies at the French Institute in Damascus (1977-78), and received his degree from SciencesPo in 1980. His research interests focus on the current geopolitical configurations and conflicts in the Middle East, the Mediterranean region, and the impact of Jihadi terror in the wake of the severe attacks on French and European soil. He investigated the developments of Islam as a social and political phenomenon in France, with an innovative approach in Islamic studies in the West. He researched on the 2005 French riots in the Clichy-Montfermeil area, in the north of Paris, whence the events sparked. He also carried out comparative studies of political-religious movements in Islam, Judaism and Christianity. His newest book is “Sortir du Chaos: Les crises en Méditerranée et au Moyen-Orient” (Éditions Gallimard, 2018).

POLITICAL SUMMARY

Alessandro Politi

Director, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

Alessandro Politi is the director of the NATO Defense College Foundation, the only NATO-affiliated NGO think tank. A political and strategic analyst with 30 years of experience, he was political advisor of two KFOR Commanders. He was senior researcher for the Italian MoD (CeMiSS-Centre for Military and Strategic Studies) responsible for the strategic monitoring of Latin America. He also created and has led the Global Outlook project within CeMiSS, published in Italian and English (third edition, 2015). He has contributed to the Italian Defence White Paper. He has directed the CEMRES research on CBMs in the framework of the 5+5 Defence Initiative, presenting the conclusions to the Ministers in Granada. He teaches geopolitics and intelligence at the SIOI. He teaches conflict management, Crisis, peace-making and analysis at different governmental centres. He has been acting director of the School of Intelligence Analysis at a private establishment in Rome. He has been advisor in Italy and abroad to four Defence ministers (among which the actual President of the Italian Republic, Hon. Mattarella), one National Armaments Director, one Intelligence Co-ordinator, one Chairman of the Oversight Intelligence Committee, one Head of the Italian delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (actually EU HR, on. Federica Mogherini). Born in Germany, lives in Rome. He has published as author or co-author 39 books on strategic and security matters. His most recent publications are on the Belt and Road Initiative. His most recent book is the NDCF Shaping Security Horizons - Strategic Trends 2012-2019 volume, a global predictive analysis tailored to the needs of decision shapers.

GROUND POLICY PAPER

Eleonora Ardemagni

NDCF Gulf Analyst

Dr Ardemagni is associate Research Fellow at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), Teaching Assistant at the Catholic University (Milan) and Adjunct Professor at ASERI (Graduate School of Economics and International Relations).

Nuray Atmaca

NDCF Levant & Eastern Mediterranean Analyst

Political scientist and consultant at BwConsulting, the in-house consultancy of the German Armed Forces. She is a Major (res.) at the German Armed Forces Centre for Operational Communication.

Umberto Profazio

NDCF Maghreb Analyst (Scientific Coordinator)

Dr Profazio holds a PhD in History of International Relations from the University of Rome Sapienza. He is Senior Research Fellow at the Centre for Geopolitics and Security in Realism Studies (CGSRS) in London and a Security Analyst for a consultancy firm based in the United Kingdom.

SESSION I**Claire Spencer**

Visiting Senior Research Fellow, King's College, London

She is currently an independent consultant with the British Council working on the Hammamet series of conferences that fosters greater links between the UK and North Africa. Prior to this, Dr Spencer was Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Middle East and North Africa Programme at Chatham House, before serving as Head of Policy for the Middle East and Central Asia for the development agency Christian Aid. Until 2001, she was Deputy Director of the Centre for Defence Studies at King's College, where she set up and led the Mediterranean Security programme. Dr Spencer is a member of a number of advisory boards and associations related to the MENA region. She is a Fellow of the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce. Dr Spencer received her BSc in politics from Bristol University and her PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

Giovanni Romani

Head, Middle East and North Africa Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

He is a former Italian Navy officer. He has been on active duty from 1985 to 2006. He served as a combat operations electronic warfare and intelligence officer on several Italian and US ships, taking also part in the "Sharp Fence" and "Sharp Guard" operations in waters adjoining the Former Republic of Yugoslavia. In March 2006, he was appointed Head of NATO's Naval Armament Unit. From April 2012 to December 2017, he led the Land and Maritime Capabilities Section within the NATO Defence Investment Division. Mr Romani is currently Head of NATO Middle East and North Africa Section.

Youssef Cherif

Deputy Director, Columbia Global Centers, Tunis

Dr Cherif runs the Columbia Global Centers in Tunis. He is a Tunis-based political analyst, specialising in North African affairs, a member of Carnegie's Civic Activism Network, and a regular contributor to a number of think-tanks and media outlets. He consulted previously for IWPR, IACE (Institut Arabe des Chefs

d'Entreprise), the United Nations, The Carter Center, etc. He is a former expert at the Tunisian Institute for Strategic Studies. He holds a Chevening Master of Arts in International Relations from the Department of War Studies of King's College London, and a Fulbright Master of Arts in Classical Studies from Columbia University.

Younes Abouyoub

Director, Governance and State-Building Division for the MENA Region, United Nations, New York

He was former Head of the Political Office of the UN Under-Secretary-General for Conflict Prevention and Senior Political Advisor to the UN Secretary-General Special Envoy to Burundi. Dr Abouyoub directed the Political Office of the UN Secretary-General Special Envoy to Yemen and acted as his Senior Special Advisor. He also was the Senior Political Officer in charge of the regional affairs in the UN political mission to Libya (UNSMIL) and Head of Office of the Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General in Libya. He also served as Senior Regional Expert in the UN Security Council Panel of Experts on Sudan (Darfur) and worked for the United Nations Department of Political Affairs in New York, and the United Nations Environment Program in Nairobi. Dr Abouyoub holds a PhD in political sociology (Paris Sorbonne/Columbia University) and an MA in Geopolitics and Law.

Mitchell Belfer

President, Euro-Gulf Information Centre

He is currently President of the Euro-Gulf Information Centre, Senior Lecturer in International Relations, Terrorism and Security at the Metropolitan University Prague, and Editor in Chief of the Central European Journal of International and Security Studies. Dr Belfer also sits, among other editorial, research and scientific boards, on the Steering Committee of the Global Institute for Cybersecurity Technologies and the Editorial boards of New Perspectives and the International Journal of Humanitarian Studies. In addition to numerous works of scholarship and presentations in academic and political fora, he is also a frequent international media contributor and has appeared on BBC, CNN, and Radio France International. He wrote for the Wall Street Journal, the National Review, the Government Gazette, the Parliament Magazine and an assortment of others.

SPECIAL INTERVENTION

Maged Abdelaziz

Permanent Observer to the United Nations, Arab League, New York

Ambassador Abdelaziz is an Egyptian diplomat that has more than forty years of experience in multilateral affairs, including peace and security, development and

human rights. Prior to this appointment, he was the Under-Secretary-General of the United Nations and the Special Advisor of former Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon on Africa. Prior to that, he has been the Permanent Representative of Egypt to the United Nations in New York. In that capacity, he shaped the 60th anniversary declaration of the United Nations in 2005, co-chaired the 2008 Review Conference on Financing for Development, served as the Rapporteur, representing Africa, at the Conference on the Economic and Financial Crisis and Its Impact on Development in 2008, and represented Africa in the Bureau of the Rio+20 Conference on sustainable development. Ambassador Abdelaziz is endowed with an intimate knowledge of the United Nations intergovernmental processes, including its reform processes. He also played a leading role in the establishment of the Human Rights Council and the Peace-Building Commission and the Counter Terrorism Strategy of the United Nations. As an expert in disarmament, played a significant role in supporting the non-proliferation regime, through participating actively in all NPT Review Conferences since 1980. Overall, he is a strong supporter of Agenda 2030 of the United Nations and Agenda 2063 of the African Union. Prior to this ambassadorial post, he served as the Political Advisor for H.E. former President Hosni Mubarak. He served in the Egyptian mission to the United Nations four times and in the Egyptian embassy in the former Soviet Union for five years with an overall period of work on multilateralism of over 25 years.

SESSION II

Maurizio Caprara

Foreign Affairs Commentator, Corriere della Sera

He is a foreign affairs commentator for the *Corriere della Sera*, where he is writing since 1979. He was Councillor to the President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, and Director of the Presidential Press and Communication Office. Anchorman, editor and consultant for TV and radio programmes, he has collaborated with RAI-Radiotelevisione Italiana, Mediaset and Sky. He is author of several books, among them “Lavoro riservato. I cassette segreti del PCI” (Secret Job. The confidential files of the Italian Communist Party, Feltrinelli, 1997), the chapter “The Lockheed case in Parliament” of the book “Storia d’Italia” (Einaudi, 2001), and other publications. He wrote during several years for the *Enciclopedia Universale Garzanti* on the contemporary history section dedicated to Italian domestic and foreign politics. He is a member of the Steering Committee of the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and of the Scientific Committee of the Centre for Politics and International Studies (CeSPI). Dr Caprara has been awarded the honour of Grand Officer of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic.

Robert Watkins

Assistant Director; Head of the Middle East and North Africa Division, DCAF – Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Geneva

Dr Watkins has more than 35 years of experience working in political, humanitarian, development and post-conflict recovery areas with international organisations principally in the Middle East, Central and South Asia. He served as United Nations Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary-General in Lebanon (2011-2014) and Afghanistan (2009-2011); at the level of Assistant Secretary-General, as well as UN Resident & Humanitarian Coordinator, and UNDP Representative in Bangladesh (2015-17), Djibouti (2014), and Georgia (2006-2009). Before the UN, he has worked for the European Commission as Head of the ECHO Regional Office for the Middle East based in Amman, Jordan, focussing on activities in the Palestinian Territories, Iraq, Yemen, Lebanon, and Syria. After his retirement, he began working as a Research Associate at the Centre for Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies in Geneva. Dr Watkins has an MA in International Affairs and holds Canadian and British nationalities.

Brahim Oumansour

Associate Fellow, Center for Studies and Research on the Arab and Mediterranean World, Geneva; and Associate Research Fellow, Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, Paris

A consultant in geopolitics and global strategy, Dr Oumansour is an Associate Research Fellow at the Center for Arab and Mediterranean Studies and Research and at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs where he currently lectures as an expert in global strategy at the Sup' Master degrees in Defence, Security and Crisis Management, and in Geopolitics and Prospective. He also lectures in Comparing Political Systems at Université Paris-Est Créteil. His main field of research concerns Maghrebi geopolitics and the MENA region in general. He focusses on public diplomacy and the role of non-governmental players (NGOs, unions, lobbies, multinational companies, etc.), about issues mostly related to terrorism and conflict management. Dr Oumansour has published both in French and international academic journals. He is also regularly invited to speak both as a consultant and a lecturer by various institutions and various French and foreign media.

Sofia Barbarani

Freelance Journalist

Dr Barbarani is a freelance journalist with a focus on conflict and humanitarian reporting in the Middle East. From 2013 to 2016 she was based in Northern Iraq and she reported on the rise and fall of ISIS in Iraq and Syria, among other topics. In 2016 she moved to Venezuela where she covered the effects of the country's

political and economic crisis on the civilian population, before moving to Abu Dhabi in 2017 to work on the foreign desk of The National. She has also reported from Tunisia, South Sudan, Cuba and southern Europe. Her words and images have appeared in leading print and online publications, including The Economist, The Telegraph, The Washington Post, The Guardian and Al Jazeera, among others. She is also a radio and television contributor, and has appeared on the BBC, Sky News, CNN and i24 News and has been nominated for awards for her work in Syria and Venezuela. In 2015 she researched and wrote the 2015 Lonely Planet Iraq chapter.

Mohammed Loulichki

Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat

Ambassador Loulichki is a Senior Fellow at the Policy Center for the New South, focusing on diplomacy, conflicts resolution and human rights. He has an extensive experience of 40 years in diplomacy and legal affairs. He assumed inter alia the functions of Head of the Department of Legal Affairs and Treaties in the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs. He was also Ambassador of Morocco in Hungary, Bosnia–Herzegovina and Croatia (1995–1999); Ambassador Coordinator of the Government of Morocco with MINURSO (1999 – 2001); Ambassador of Morocco to the United Nations in Geneva (2006–2008) and New York (2001–2003 and 2008–2014), as well as President of the Security Council (December 2014). Ambassador Loulichki was appointed President of the Counter-Terrorism Committee of the Security Council (2013); President of the working Group on Peace Keeping Operations (2012); Vice-President of the Human Rights Council (2006); Facilitator of the Universal Periodic Review of the said Council (2006 and 2010), and President of the National Committee in charge of the follow up on nuclear matters (2003–2006).



Baghdad, Iraq – November 1, 2019 Iraqi people demonstrating in the famous Liberation Square against the government





ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2020

THE MIDDLE EAST: WHAT KIND OF FUTURE?

CONFERENCE ORGANISED BY

The NATO Defense College Foundation

*In co-operation with the Policy Center for the New South,
the NATO Political Affairs and Security Policy Division
and the NATO Defense College*

ROME, THE 27TH OF JULY 2020

Venue: Rome Cavalieri, A Waldorf Astoria Hotel, Rome

WEDNESDAY 27TH, JULY 2020

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 14,00-14,30 | Arrival of participants – Registration |
| 14,00-14,45 | Welcome remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome• Karim El Aynaoui, President, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat (Virtual)• James Huber, Military Assistant to the Dean, NATO Defense College, Rome |
| 14,45-15,00 | Opening remarks <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gilles Kepel, Scientific Director, Middle East Mediterranean Freethinking Platform, Università della Svizzera italiana, Lugano |

Session I

AN UNSETTLED MIDDLE EAST

In the course of the last years the geopolitics of the region has become more complex and apparently less tractable. The persistent fragility of the states in the area has sparked a war of all against all and in some cases hopeless local populations look for ways to leave their homelands. It is clear that some kind of stability and order needs to be established but it is necessary to assist these countries in their efforts. How can the international community help to reconcile the ongoing divergent policies?

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| 15,00-16,15 | Chair: Claire Spencer, Visiting Senior Research Fellow, King's College, London <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Giovanni Romani, Head, Middle East and North Africa Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO HQ, Brussels (Virtual)• Youssef Cherif, Deputy Director, Columbia Global Centers, Tunis• Younes Abouyoub, Director, Governance and State-Building Division for the MENA Region, United Nations, New York (Virtual)• Mitchell Belfer, President, Euro-Gulf Information Centre |
|-------------|--|

Q&A

Special intervention

16,45 -17,00 Maged Abdelaziz, Permanent Observer to the United Nations,
Arab League, New York (Virtual)

Session II

THE CIVIL SOCIETY. AN OPEN ISSUE

At the beginning of this decade, uprisings in the region ended up differently: counter-revolutions, a democratic transition (Tunisia) or a war of all against all. Also, the concept of democracy, as conceived in the West, resulted to be insufficient to overthrow the political élite and guarantee to the countries a significant social and economic development. In 2018, the second wave of revolutions asked for a complete renovation of the political system and mechanisms. However, it seems that the lack of clarity from the protesters led to political impasses. How to overcome these deadlocks? Since 2011 how has the balance changed between the military forces and civil societies?

17,00 -18,15 Chair: Maurizio Caprara, Foreign Affairs Commentator,
Corriere della Sera

- Robert Watkins, Assistant Director and Head of the Middle East and North Africa Division, DCAF - Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance, Geneva
- Brahim Oumansour, Associate Fellow, Center for Studies and Research on the Arab and Mediterranean World, Geneva; and Associate Research Fellow, Institute for International and Strategic Affairs, Paris
- Sofia Barbarani, Freelance Journalist
- Mohammed Loulichki, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat (Virtual)

Q&A



Jemaa el-Fnaa a famous square and souq in Marrakesh's old city



At the beginning of this year, the Arab region has been affected by two major events that changed the geopolitical dynamics of the area. The death of the Iranian General Qassem Soleimani and the wake of Coronavirus pandemic, compounded by a significant monetary crisis of the oil market, that hit especially Saudi Arabia and Gulf countries.

The area seems to be more fragile than ever and the situation could degenerate any time. The instability related to civil societies protests, regional power competition and the minimal interest of the United States in the region brought back on the ground external actors with divergent interests. Among which, Russia and China, that are opportunistically exploiting the vacuum left by the US withdrawal from the region, in order to expand their influence sphere.

An emerging role in this power struggle has been played by civil society, the same that in 2011 made heard her powerful voice and claim for change. War struck societies are mostly engaged in survival, but in some countries vigorous protests are staged asking for concrete reforms.

NATO needs to intensify its political engagement in the area, since it has a key role in the Alliance strategic security in the future. In this regard, it could be useful to strengthen the cooperation with other international organisations involved, such as the United Nations and the European Union.



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