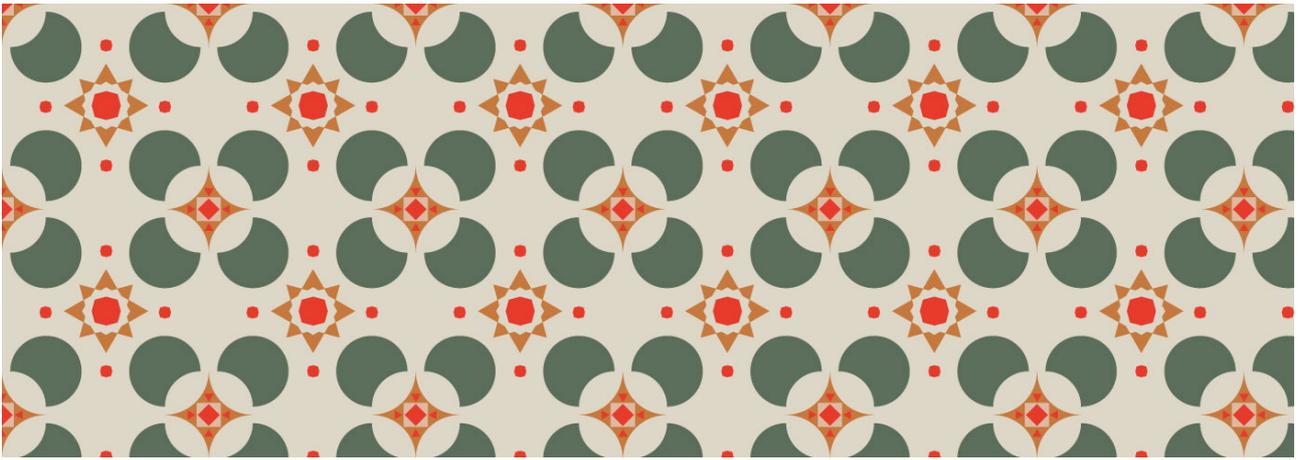




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Arab Geopolitics 2020
Working Meeting

Rome, the 12th of November 2020



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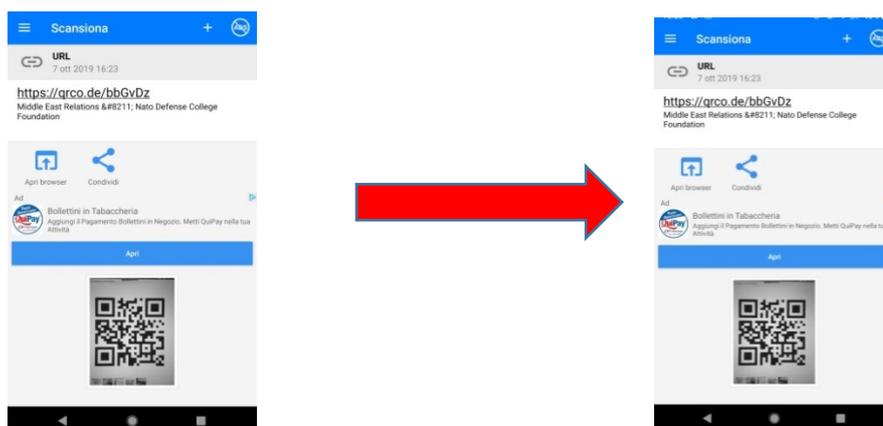


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ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2020

Working Meeting

*Organised by the **NATO Defense College Foundation***
*In co-operation with the **NATO Political Affairs and Security Policy Division** and*
*the **Euro-Gulf Information Centre***

Rome, the 12th of November 2020

Venue: The Westin Excelsior, Via Vittorio Veneto, 125, Rome

AGENDA

13,15 – 14,15 Arrival of Participants and Light Lunch

14,30 – 15,30 Working Meeting

Introductory remarks, round of interventions (3 minutes each) & first part of the discussion

15,30 – 16,00 *Coffee Break*

16,00 - 17,15 Working Meeting

Second part of the discussion

MODERATOR:

- **Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo**, President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome

PANELLISTS:

- **Francesca Astorri**, Policy and media advisor, Embassy of the State of Qatar, Rome
- **Chloe Berger**, Faculty Adviser and Researcher, NATO Defense College, Rome
- **Vincenzo Camporini**, Scientific Advisor, International Affairs Institute, Rome
- **Marco Carnelos**, President, MC Geopolity srl, Rome
- **Andrea Cellino**, Head, North Africa Desk, Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces, Geneva (Virtual)
- **Alessandra Ermellino**, Member, Chamber of Deputies, Rome
- **Fabio Nicolucci**, Press Public Information Officer, MFA expert for the European External Action Service, EuCAP Mali Mission, Bamako
- **Gaja Pellegrini Bettoli**, Independent journalist, Rome
- **Alessandro Politi**, Director, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome
- **Umberto Profazio**, Maghreb Analyst, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome (Virtual)
- **Leone Radiconcini**, Independent Analyst, Middle East, Rome
- **Matthew Robinson**, Managing Director, Euro-Gulf Information Centre, Rome
- **Giovanni Romani**, Head, Middle East and North Africa Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO HQ, Brussels (Virtual)
- **Marcello Scalisi**, Director, Mediterranean Universities Union, Rome
- **Stefano Silvestri**, Vice President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome
- **Elisabetta Trenta**, former Italian Ministry of Defense



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Arab Geopolitics 2020 *Working Meeting*

TOPICS OF DISCUSSION

The working meeting is essentially a discussion mechanism that aims at examining, on the backdrop of a political and strategic situation further detailed, four relevant subjects among practitioners at international level:

1. The present role and potential improvements of NATO partnerships in the area (MD and ICI);
2. Security interests in the area spanning from Mauritania to the Gulf;
3. The possible role of major Allies\ EU members in shaping adapted security policies in the Southern Region, also vis-à-vis the renewed Russian presence in the Mediterranean;
4. Possible short-medium term future scenarios requiring a NATO and EU response.

Over the last months, the MENA region has been shaken by major events that pose a challenge to the entire area and have the potential to redefine the geopolitical order.

At the beginning of this year, the Coronavirus pandemic further exacerbated social, economic and political conditions in the area. Civil protests, ongoing in Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon, asking for the renovation of the political élite and sustainable economic changes, were forced to an end.

Gulf countries accumulated unquantifiable debts and were obliged to cut their public spending due to the lack of revenue from low oil demand and low prices. It represents another risk for the destabilisation of the region but, at the same time, an opportunity to reflect on the diversification of energy resources, involving the entire Euro-Mediterranean area, as a key element towards the achievement of regional reconstruction and sustainable development.

This persistent uncertainty has been increased by the vacuum left by the United States that encouraged other major external actors to influence the region prioritising perceived national interests rather than international stability. Recently, the Abraham Accords, expected to normalise diplomatic relations between Israel and some of the Gulf country, still have to be measured against concrete development, leaving open some questions on the emerging geopolitical developments vis-à-vis an isolated Iran.

The evolving role of the Alliance as well as the European Union has to be rethought and analysed in this volatile and fragmented context.



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PREPARATORY DOCUMENTS



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Arab Geopolitics 2020 *Working Meeting*

BACKGROUND POLICY PAPER

A year of change, 2020 is having a deep impact on the Middle East and North Africa, questioning decade-old assumptions and presenting emerging realities that will shape the region for years to come. The normalisation process between Israel and the UAE will certainly represent the major legacy of US President Donald Trump, who made the reinforcement of Israel's position a priority for its administration. On the other hand, it is fair to say that the normalisation agreements only made public the converging interests between Tel Aviv and several Arab capitals, which were already aligned on many pressing issues. The containment of Iran is a case in point, with Teheran able to navigate a challenging regional landscape, but whose perceived expansionism is seen with concern by regional powerhouses.

Despite the hype that surrounded the Abraham Accords, which inevitably relegated the Palestinian question to the list of non-priority issues, the normalisation process has only certified a *fait accompli* that has been carefully nurtured by Washington. In this perspective, a complete overhaul of outgoing administration's policies in the region is certainly far-fetched. Despite some changes on the most controversial decision are most likely, including the end of the campaign of 'maximum pressure' against Teheran and the US return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, a degree of continuity to preserve historic gains that go well beyond the political divide in the US, must be expected. In this context, a further reduction of the US military footprint in the region is not inconceivable. Having served in the Obama administration, President-elect Joe Biden is already accustomed to the pivot to Asia, a rebalancing doctrine that can be resumed in times of escalating tensions with China.

On the other hand, the wider Mediterranean region has still a paramount strategic value for the US and the EU, especially in the context of a renewed great power competition. Tectonic shifts produced by the most recent developments, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the plunge in oil prices, are challenging an out-of-date status quo in which Russia's inroads in the region require a multifaceted response. Indeed, resorting to a hybrid warfare playbook, including the use of local proxies, the deployment of private military companies (PMCs), the supply of weapons, military equipment, aircraft and election interference, Russia has been able to establish a foothold in Libya, following the successful precedent set in the Syrian civil war. At the same time, economic difficulties resulting from the COVID-19 have made the role of China as lender of last resort more attractive, raising concerns about the future ownership of national strategic assets vulnerable to the debt-trap diplomacy.

It could be particularly interesting to see if the incoming Biden administration would adopt an ideological standpoint or a pragmatic approach to deal with authoritarian rulers in the region. This will have immediate repercussions on the relations with some of Washington's strict allies, including Turkey. Despite considerations of national security (Syria) or reactions to unfavourable developments (Libya) are often driving decisions-making in Ankara, it is also true that doctrines such as the Blue Homeland (Mavi Vatan) enlist Turkey into the category of revisionist powers, which have often taken advantage from a sympathetic US administration.

Building upon a likely change of approach in Washington towards international organisations, NATO needs to revamp its partnerships in the MENA to face an ever-changing and unpredictable regional landscape. Progress made by the outgoing US administration in cultivating relations with Non-NATO Major Allies (NNMAs) such as Morocco and Tunisia must be preserved and translated from a bilateral to a multilateral format, in which reviving the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) must represent a priority. Furthermore, harmonising NATO's Operation Sea Guardian with the Operation Irini of the EUNAVFOR MED would make the arms embargo in Libya more effective, despite needing a buy-in from France and Turkey, whose unyielding stances have created a predictable rift in the organisation and beyond.

NATO is in a privileged position to take advantage from the reset of transatlantic partnership after the Trump era and its multilateral format is particularly suitable to face the challenges coming from the Mediterranean region. In this context, a possible option to make NATO central is assisting the security sector reform (SSR) in Libya. The reunification of the Libyan military and the rebuilding of security institutions could help revert the fragmentation process that has created the perfect breeding ground for the proliferation of militias and armed groups, an environment which favoured Russia's hybrid approach. In addition, integrating the Turkish training of GNA military officers into a NATO framework would also remove a predictable obstacle in the peace process, reassuring international partners and laying down the premises for the successful outcome of the ongoing negotiations.

Umberto Profazio, *NDCF Maghreb Analyst*

Maghreb Analyst for the NATO Defence College Foundation, he was previously Libya Analyst for the Conflict, Security and Development Programme at the IISS and regularly publishes on issues such as political developments, security and terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa region. Profazio holds a Ph.D. in History of International Relations from the University of Rome 'Sapienza', with a thesis on Libya after independence.



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BACKGROUND POLICY PAPER

HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE

ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2020 – *THE MIDDLE EAST: WHAT KIND OF FUTURE?*

ROME, THE 27TH OF JULY, 2020

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 Iridi. 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 assertiveness 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.

Eleonora Ardemagni, *NDCF Gulf Analyst*

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)

Maghreb Analyst for the NATO Defence College Foundation, he was previously Libya Analyst for the Conflict, Security and Development Programme at the IISS and regularly publishes on issues such as political developments, security and terrorism in the Middle East and North Africa region. Profazio holds a Ph.D. in History of International Relations from the University of Rome 'Sapienza', with a thesis on Libya after independence.



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BACKGROUND POLICY PAPER

HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE

ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2019 – *HOW TO EXIT THE FRAGMENTATION TRAP*

ROME, THE 9TH OF OCTOBER, 2019

Two years after the fall of the Caliphate the Arab world has still been unable to express a stable regional order built upon the material and political/moral ruins left. The end of the territorial dimension of the Islamic State (also known as ISIS or ISIL) could have represented a turning point to re-discuss and re-arrange a new concert of powers in the region. On the other hand, a distorted paradigm of the civilian-military relationship, the role of external actors and the rise of asymmetrical threats are all factors fuelling a new cycle of fragmentation that is threatening the stability of the region once again.

The end of the Caliphate has led to the de-structuration of ISIS, which is rolling back from a transnational phenomenon towards a local threat, in which each national or regional wilaya (province) enjoys a high degree of independence from the weakened core. A consequence of ISIS' territorial regression has also been the re-emergence of the main paradox of the post-2013 Arab world: the illusory trade-off between security and democracy (once again), reflected in the uneasy relation between civilian authorities and the military. At the beginning of 2019 this distorted perception has been shattered by the start of the protest movement in Algeria that highlighted the return of social and political grievances that were muted after the beginning of the post-Arab Spring era. Protests in Algeria and Sudan (and the most recent demonstrations in Egypt) are extending North Africa's grey zone of instability, where the face-off between the protesters and the military will be crucial to redefine a new balance of power, test the resilience of the regimes and eventually address the demands of the populations.

In the meanwhile, intractable conflicts continue to represent a source of instability. In Libya General Khalifa Haftar's offensive on Tripoli resulted in a deadly stalemate in which meddling powers with different agendas doubled down their efforts to support their proxies. The active role of Turkey is an example of how low and medium-intensity conflicts are allowing non-Arab powers to extend their influence. The Levant has not been spared also, experiencing the geopolitical resurgence of the Iranian-Shiite alliances. The fostering of sectarian identity politics in combination with the re-establishment of

territorial rule, indicate a momentum for continuity of the current Syrian state order, at least in the medium term.

Within this highly polarised geopolitical context, fragile states lacking legitimacy and faced with socio-economic and demographic pressures, will continue to exploit the ‘sectarianisation’ of regional politics to pursue national interests beyond national borders. This strategy uses sectarian norms to empower non-state actors as proxies, but combining them also with sovereignty norms to enhance state institutions. For the international community and NATO, grasping and disarticulating the ambiguity of this hybrid strategy is pivotal to play a constructive role for regional security and stability.

At the backdrop of this fragmented environment, the discovery of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean introduces a new dynamic to regional maritime energy security. The discovery of energy reserves bears the potential to trigger partial regional economic integration, yet underlying ideological and political animosities risk to turn this window of opportunity again into a scene for hegemonic regional rivalry. Within this framework, multiple smaller multilateral alliances with conflicting interests are emerging. The strategic refocus of the great powers on the region adds another layer to the already complex security environment. Concomitantly, the Eastern Mediterranean evolves to become the centre of gravity of the heightened US-Iranian confrontation in the Middle East.

The protection of energy resources and critical infrastructures are also crucial in the Persian Gulf, where the rise of asymmetric and non-conventional aerial and maritime warfare is concerning. In this region, much will depend on the current confrontation between Iran and the petro-monarchies, supported by external actors whose unpredictable choices could push the Gulf on the brink of a full-fledged conflict. At the same time, the risk of an unmanageable loose-loose scenario can still offer unexpected de-escalation measures for mitigating the crisis and build pragmatic initiatives in subjects of shared interest. The Saudi-Iranian rivalry has also destabilising effects in Iraq and Yemen, where local agencies must be supported by international stakeholders, in order to break, or more realistically downplay, the local-foreign connection that multiplies disorder.

Beyond the antagonism between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the Gulf security is undermined by the intra Gulf Cooperation Council’s rifts, highlighted also by the latest developments in the Horn of Africa. Moreover, personal and political fissures have been triggering unprecedented nationalist bursts, especially among the youth, thus undermining common threats perception and the value of the Arab Gulf states shared identity.

International organisations can play a more incisive role in helping Arab states avoid the multiple fragmentation traps. NATO in particular can offer support to address the asymmetric and non-conventional threats, also through the selected inclusion of hybrid actors in a comprehensive state-rebuilding frame, featuring institutional decentralisation, rent re-distribution and Security Sector Reform (SSR). More in general, NATO’s expertise in SSR and capacity-building can be crucial in most conflict-ridden countries, allowing the central state to gradually restore its monopoly of the use of force, thus exercising a positive influence in the long term.

Eleonora Ardemagni, *NDCF Gulf Analyst*

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).

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Arab Geopolitics 2020 *Working meeting*

SPEAKERS BIOGRAPHIES

MODERATOR

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).

PANELLISTS

Francesca Astorri

Policy and media advisor, Embassy of the State of Qatar, Rome

Francesca Astorri is an Italian journalist based in Rome, currently working as a policy and media advisor to the Embassy of the State of Qatar in Italy. She lived for four years in Qatar where she did researches on Middle East geopolitics. While living in the Gulf, she worked as correspondent for the Middle East for different media outlets, including ANSA, Limes, Al Jazeera and Al Arabiya, with a special focus on geopolitics, foreign affairs and human rights. Previously, she worked as assistant professor at the Political Science department of the Luiss Guido Carli University of Rome where she graduated and took her Master’s Degree in International Relations.

Chloe Berger

Faculty Adviser and Researcher, NATO Defense College, Rome

Dr Chloe Berger is Faculty Adviser and Researcher at the NATO Defense College.

As a Researcher, her work focuses mainly on the broader MENA region and NATO's Agenda for the South (Projecting Stability, partnerships, etc.). As a Faculty Adviser, she oversees the Curriculum Planning of the NATO Regional Cooperation Course and the Senior Executive Regional Conference.

Before joining NDC, Chloe Berger held different positions in French educational institutions, public and private, in Syria and Egypt. She worked as a consultant for risks analysis and strategic monitoring on Middle-Eastern issues (Egypt, Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine).

Chloe Berger is a graduate from the Political Studies Institute of Paris (Sciences-Po Paris) and she received a PhD in Political Sciences from Paris II – Assas University. She also holds a Master 2 in "International Security and Defence" from Pierre-Mendes France University (Grenoble).

Her research work focuses mainly on security, political and socio-economic issues in the MENA region and their implications for NATO; security issues related to MENA non-state actors and hybrid warfare; Innovation and Defence in the MENA region.

Vincenzo Camporini

Scientific Advisor, International Affairs Institute, Rome

General Camporini is a Scientific Advisor for the International Affairs Institute (IAI) in Rome. Enlisted in the Air Force Academy in 1965, rose through the ranks to eventually take up the highest office of Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force (2006-08) and Chief of Defence Staff (2008-11). Gen. Camporini has dealt with the most topical issues of international politics as a scholar and academic, focusing on the political-military dimension of the European Union and the development of its ability to use the military instrument in the framework of its external relations. Among other things, he was President of the Centre for High Defence Studies, Rome (2004-06) and Vice President of the IAI (2011-19). Gen. Camporini graduated in Aeronautical Sciences at the University of Naples Federico II and in International and Diplomatic Sciences at the University of Trieste.

Marco Carnelos

President, MC Geopolicy srl, Rome

Ambassador Carnelos spent 25 years in the Italian Foreign Service, with postings in Somalia, Australia, the United Nations in New York and Iraq. For ten years, he covered, at the Prime Minister Office, different positions as foreign policy adviser in charge for special dossiers such as Middle East and North Africa, Russia, Afghanistan, and Terrorism. He has been Special Envoy for the Middle East Peace Process and the Syrian Crisis for the Italian Government, as well and Ambassador of Italy to Iraq. In 2017, he left the Italian Foreign Service and founded his own consultancy company, the MC Geopolicy srl. Currently, he is a Board Member of the Italian Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI), the Scientific Committee of the Institute of Global Studies (IGS) and the Mediterranean Institute for Asia and Africa (ISMAA). Amb. Carnelos is a regular columnist for the Middle East Eye magazine, and his articles have also been published by Limes, Diplomazia Italiana, La Stampa, Italiani Europei and Nomos&Kahos edited by Nomisma.

Andrea Cellino

Head, North Africa Desk, Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of the Armed Forces, Geneva (Virtual)

He is the Head of the North Africa desk at the Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF), and manages operations in Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia, focused on Security Sector Reform. Before joining DCAF, Mr Cellino spent six years leading field work for the OSCE, in the Balkans and in Ukraine, where in 2014 led a monitoring team in the conflict zone of the Donbas. Prior to that, he was Deputy Secretary General for Policy at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Brussels, directing for eight years the PA's outreach programs with parliaments in the MENA region as well as in Eastern Europe. Andrea Cellino has a degree and MA in Political Science from the University of Torino in Italy, and a Master's in contemporary history from the University of California, San Diego. He recently contributed to the ISPI MED 2019 Report "Weathering the Storm. Charting New Courses in the Mediterranean" and co-edited the study "Conflicts, Pandemics and Peacebuilding: New Perspectives on Security Sector Reform in the MENA Region" (joint ISPI-DCAF publication, forthcoming).

Alessandra Ermellino

Member, Chamber of Deputies, Rome

Hon. Ermellino is an Italian politician, member of the Chamber of Deputies Defense Committee. She owns a Bachelor Degree in Literature and Culture of Local Development and a Master's Degree in Modern Philology. In 2013, Hon. Ermellino, wins the Parliamentary elections while in 2017 was a candidate in Taranto of the list of "Movimento 5 Stelle" headed by Francesco Nevoli.

Fabio Nicolucci

Press Public Information Officer, MFA expert for the European External Action Service, EuCAP Mali Mission, Bamako

Fabio Nicolucci is Press and Public Information Officer and MFA expert for the European External Action Service (EEAS), EuCAP Mali mission in Bamako and Senior Gulf Analyst at the NATO Defense College Foundation. He worked for the Italian-Arab Chamber of Commerce, RAI, the Presidency of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Chamber of Deputies, the Minister of Foreign Trade, the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Education. He is a columnist for *Il Messaggero*, *Il Mattino* and *TgCom24*, and is regularly present as a commentator on Middle Eastern affairs on other newspapers (*Radio Rai*, *Skynews24*, *Omnibus*, etc.). He is the author of the essay "Left and Israel. The moral frontier of the West" (Edited by Salerno Editori, 2013).

Gaja Pellegrini Bettoli

Independent journalist, Rome

Gaja Pellegrini-Bettoli is an independent journalist focusing on the US electoral system and the MENA region. Previously, she was posted in Gaza with the UN, and was a press officer for the European Commission and assistant at the European Parliament in Brussels. Since December 2016 she has been a frequent guest on Italy's Mediaset TV channels with commentary and freelance reporting from the Middle East. She has published in Carnegie's *Sada* journal, *Corriere della Sera* and Italy's leading geopolitical magazine *LIMES*. Her articles appear in *Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya English*, *Middle East Eye*, *Al-Monitor*, *SyriaDeeply*, *The New Arab*, *E.U. Observer*, *France24*, *Opendemocracy* and the *Atlantic Treaty*

Association. Ms Pellegrini-Bettoli is the author of “Generazioni Senza Padri” (Castelvecchi, 2019) and “Shake-Up America” (Castelvecchi, 2020). She holds a MSc. In Economic History from the London School of Economics and a BA in Political Science from Italy.

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 Coordinator, 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.

Umberto Profazio

Maghreb Analyst, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome (Virtual)

Maghreb Analyst for the NATO Defense College Foundation, Umberto Profazio holds a PhD in History of International Relations from the University of Rome La Sapienza, with a thesis on Libya after independence. He is the author of “Lo Stato Islamico. Origini e sviluppi” (The Islamic State. Origin and Development, Emuse, 2015). Previously, Libya Analyst for the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), he authored the Libya chapter of 2019 issue of the Armed Conflict Survey (ACS). His articles have appeared on the websites of several think tanks and magazines including IISS, Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI), Institute for International Political Studies (ISPI) and Limes. He gave frequent interviews to several press agencies, newspapers, radios and tv such as RFI, TRT, La Stampa, Radio Rai 3, Agenzia Nova.

Leone Radiconcini

Independent Analyst, Middle East, Rome

Leone Radiconcini is an independent analyst for the Middle East and North Africa and a PhD candidate in Political Studies at La Sapienza University of Rome. His research is mainly focused on the historical development of international relations between the West and MENA countries. After the experience gained as researcher at the EU-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC), he worked as Editorial Assistant for the NATO Defense College Foundation and as International Security Analyst for the Intelligence and

Fraud Investigation Security (IFI Security). He is an external contributor for several publishers, from think tanks (EGIC) to news outlets (AffarInternazionali) and academic journals (Mondo Contemporaneo).

Matthew Robinson

Managing Director, Euro-Gulf Information Centre, Rome

Dr Robinson is the Managing Director of the Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC) in Rome. Matthew grew up in Northern Ireland as the province evolved out of the “Troubles” and embraced the peace-process. He has worked in the sphere of public policy in Washington DC at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and has over six years experience working at the EU institutions in Brussels. While at the European Parliament he served as an advisor to the Chairman of the Delegation for relations with Iraq and for the Chairman for relations with countries in South Asia, and has worked on legislative issues in the Committee on International Trade and Subcommittee on Security and Defence. Matthew has a LL.B. (Hons) in Law and American Studies from the University of Wales, and a LL.M. in Law from the University of Edinburgh. He is a parliamentary approved candidate for the British Conservative Party, and was selected for the constituency of North Down in last year’s General Election. He currently serves as Managing Director for the Euro-Gulf Information Centre in Rome.

Giovanni Romani

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

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 the Middle East and North Africa Section at NATO Political Affairs and Security Policy Division.

Marcello Scalisi

Director, Mediterranean Universities Union, Rome

Mr Scalisi is the Director of the Mediterranean Universities Union (UNIMED) since 2008. He holds a degree in Historical Sciences and in International Cooperation at the Faculty of Literature, Philosophy and Languages of University of Roma Tre, Rome. He gained extensive experience in Sicily in the sustainable tourism sector, managing and monitoring EU projects for local tourism development. He started working at UNIMED in 1998 as project manager and moved gradually to the coordination of UNIMED’s European, International and National funded initiatives and projects. Since Marcello Scalisi became director of UNIMED, there has been a significant increase of the number of associated universities to the network, funded projects and employees and collaborators. Moreover, UNIMED is nowadays a permanent stakeholder of the European Union.

Stefano Silvestri

Vice President, NATO Defense Collage Foundation, Rome

Dr Silvestri is the Vice President of the NATO Defense College Foundation. From 2001 to 2013, he has been the President of the International Affairs Institute (IAI) from 2001 to 2013. He has been a lead writer for *Il Sole 24 Ore* since 1985. Between January 1995 and May 1996, he served as Under Secretary of State for Defence, having been an advisor to the Under Secretary of Foreign Affairs, for European matters, in 1975, and a consultant to the Prime Minister's Office under various Governments. As a professional journalist, he has been a special correspondent and columnist for *Globo* (1982), member of the Policy Committee of *Europeo* (1979) and has contributed articles on foreign and defence policy to numerous national daily papers. He was Professor for Mediterranean Security Issues at the Bologna Centre of Johns Hopkins University (1972-1976) and has worked at the International Institute for Strategic Studies in London (1971-1972). He is currently a member of administrative council of the Italian Industries Federation for Aerospace, Defence and Security (AIAD), and of the Trilateral Commission.

Elisabetta Trenta

Former Italian Ministry of Defense

Elisabetta Trenta is an Italian politician and former Minister of Defense. Previously, she worked as an adviser for the mission “Ancient Babylon” for the Italian Ministry of Defense and as a senior expert in the task force in Iraq. In 2009, Dr. Trenta, was the captain of the UNFIL mission in Lebanon. In 2018, she was appointed Minister of Defense in the Government of the Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte. Beside her political career, she was also Deputy Director of the Master in Intelligence and Security of Link Campus University, and has collaborated with the Military Center for Strategic Studies (CEMISS), focusing particularly on Proxy wars. Dr Trenta graduated in Political Science from La Sapienza University of Rome and owns a Master’s degree in International Development and a Master in Intelligence and Security.

THE FOUNDATION

The NATO Defense College Foundation, the only existing think-tank bearing the name of the Alliance, was established in Rome in 2011. It grew out from a common intuition of the President Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo and the NATO Defense College top decision makers who understood the value of a non-profit NGO that could work beyond usual and institutional outreach, training, communication and scientific research activities.

The principles stated in the preamble to the Washington Treaty of 1949 are our heritage.

Our mission is to promote the culture of stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area and in NATO partner nations.

Our aim is to meet the highest standards in contributing to public debate and future deliberations on strategic, security and geopolitical issues.

Therefore, the NDCF strives at considering relevant issues not just in a descriptive or prescriptive way, but by catching the sense of events and the essential vectors of future developments. In a word: Charting ahead.

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