



NATO Foundation
Defense College



Fondazione
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di San Paolo



ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2022

A region between conflict and normalisation

WELCOME REMARKS

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This is the annual edition of our project on the Arab Region. It is the eighth time that we organise such an event dedicated to the Middle East. For us, it is a priority since the beginning of the NATO Defense College Foundation in 2011: a real priority because the region is so important in every respect.

As I said on many occasions, we wish to help to accompany the MENA region to become “a real arc of opportunities”. We know that the potential is there. Security is at the centre of our attention and can be declined in various ways. Therefore, we wish to assess the current state of affairs with the best possible tools. Rome is an ideal place, at the centre of the Mediterranean, to engage in such a friendly discussion. Given the richness of this region, going from the Atlantic to the Arabic Gulf, it is impossible to resume things in simple formulas or with a superficial judgement. What can we say with respect to the last conference? We are going to focus on the Levant and the Gulf. A fresh look is necessary because new factors are emerging and an interesting evolution is underway. We have the impression that it goes in the direction of stability and inclusion.

We also think that, while external influence continues to play a role, the region is walking on its own feet more than in the past. These movements cannot go unnoticed. Leaving behind fragmentation and a lack of regional cooperation, a central feature in recent years. We welcome new signs within the Gulf Cooperation Council. We see changes in Israel and an upcoming energy border demarcation agreement with Lebanon.

A pattern of reconciliation seems underway. The so-called Abraham Agreements are a historic development and we hope that they are the beginning of a long journey. Looking from here, I have the impression of an overall more cooperative attitude.

Of course, the peoples in the region are the masters of their destiny. On our side we wish to extend a friendly hand in good faith, to offer support and advice, to provide a forum for discussion.

We are proud to have been able to convene so many distinguished speakers and moderators coming from such a large number of countries. I thank them all for having accepted the invitation. On a personal note, I am happy to see here many old friends with whom we worked in the direction of peace and cooperation. I have fond memories of many conversations and interactions in order to build a common architecture. NATO has tried to promote partnerships based on the principle of a “two-way street”, of joint ownership and prior consultation. A quiet strategy where I was personally much involved. I remain convinced that cooperative security remains to this day a relevant objective.

The first panel will exchange views on the overall situation aiming at relevant developments in the area. The second panel will focus on the Abraham Agreements. An emerging reality providing already good fruits. But there is a long journey ahead. The third panel will discuss the rule of law and illegal trafficking, within the potential developments of normalisation. This is a reality, a combination of all kinds of illicit trade, from cigarettes to narcotics and organised crime.

We keep the tradition to provide a framework for a high-level scientific conversation, coming from different perspectives in a spirit of mutual respect. Our objective is also to connect with a larger audience on strategic issues of general interest.