



NATO Foundation
Defense College



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ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2022

A region between conflict and normalisation

WELCOME REMARKS

Nicolò Russo Perez

Head, International Affairs, Compagnia di San Paolo, Turin

Good afternoon, and welcome to all the participants. I am Nicolò Russo Perez and I have the pleasure of representing the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo in today's event.

First of all, I would like to thank the organizers, the NATO Defense College Foundation, the NATO Political Affairs and Security Policy Division and the NATO Defense College.

I would like to stress the importance of this cooperation between the Compagnia di San Paolo and the NATO Defense College Foundation since it is very timely: as we all know, NATO recently went through a phase of important “self-reflection”, with the NATO 2030 process, and therefore the Organization had a huge opportunity to hear and possibly embed contributions from think-tanks and from experts from the scientific/academic community, which were all engaged in the fascinating and at the same time challenging task of contributing to the design of the NATO of the future.

The NATO 2030 exercise was of course the preparation for the crucial Strategic Concept of this year that replaced with the appropriate timing its predecessor of 2010. Evidently Russia looms large in this new text due to its aggressive behaviour and unacceptable annexations against Ukraine, followed by the longer-term concerns in the Indo-Pacific, but other areas are quite important for the security of allies and partners.

The so-called Southern Region, with Sahel and North Africa, represents an increasingly contested regional security complex, where the influence of external powers like Russia and China is growing. These regions are deeply connected with the greater Middle East, which remains plagued by rivalries among various States involved in ongoing conflicts and crisis - from Libya to Afghanistan through Syria, Iraq and Yemen. It may appear extraordinary that, even after the retreat of major actors, peace has not returned to some countries, but at a closer look it was local and regional hostilities that attracted further conflict from external actors and not vice versa.

Against this already complicated backdrop, the multiple linkages between local, national and regional actors are becoming more complex and multi-faceted. In the recent past, also given the new involvement of regional powers in proxy wars, escalation seemed always possible, given the fact that various terrorist groups and militias could access robust military capabilities, financial resources and logistical support that had enable them to challenge the security forces of NATO partners.

Easily accessible, relatively inexpensive technologies, had further amplified the possibilities of local and regional actors, from Unmanned Aerial System to Information Communication Technologies used for training, intelligence, propaganda and also fundraising. Needless to say, international controls on illegal arms transfers are still less than effective in stifling regional conflicts.

Such situation continues to present numerous and serious implications for NATO and its partners in the region, particularly those belonging to the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).

Moreover, to simplify things, the Alliance had to deal not only with the geopolitical approaches of relevant external actors in the region, but also with different postures among NATO Allies. It is matter of fact that some countries are so concentrated on some issues that they have difficulties in understanding the concreteness of a 360° security approach.

Today, the region is facing - perhaps for the first time - a sort of “recomposition” dynamic. And the new NATO Strategic Concept has highlighted not only the importance of projecting stability and security in the area, but also the importance of partnerships and cooperation with other major international organizations and players.

So, and here I conclude my remarks, I look very much forward to understanding more from the internationally renowned experts that are joining us today. Thanks again to the NATO Defense College Foundation for the organization of the event and in particular to its President Ambassador Alessandro Minuto Rizzo: this an event that we, at the Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation, a private sector player, consider of strategic importance to fostering a better understanding of the geopolitical contexts in which our societies are embedded.

I wish you all a fruitful conversation. Thanks.