



POLICY REPORT

REGIONS AT THE CENTRE

POLICY IMPLICATIONS FROM A HIGH-LEVEL WORKSHOP
ROME - FEBRUARY 11, 2026



PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN
ASSEMBLEE PARLEMENTAIRE DE LA MEDITERRANEE
برلمان البحر الأبيض المتوسط



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The high-level workshop “*Regions at the Centre – Cooperative Security: Cooperation versus Fragmentation*”, jointly organised by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean – Centre for Global Studies (PAM-CGS) and the NATO Defense College Foundation (NDCF), took place in Rome on 11 February 2026.

The discussion gathered senior policymakers, experts and practitioners from across Europe, Africa, Asia and North America to assess the **evolving role of regional actors** in a **rapidly fragmenting global security environment**.

Against the backdrop of declining trust in multilateral frameworks and increasing geopolitical competition, participants examined **how cooperative security can remain a viable and effective approach** to addressing shared challenges across the **Euro-Mediterranean, the Levant and the Gulf**.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Regional actors are emerging as **primary security providers**;
- Cooperation is shifting to **flexible, issue-based formats**;
- Maritime and economic connectivity are **strategic stabilisers**.

STRATEGIC CONTEXT

Global trends

The international system is increasingly characterised by fragmentation and geopolitical competition. Cooperation, however, continues to persist in more selective and pragmatic forms, reflecting how actors adapt to systemic pressures

Mediterranean Relevance

Within this context, the wider Mediterranean has become a critical strategic link connecting Euro-Atlantic security with developments across the Middle East and North Africa.

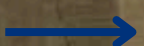
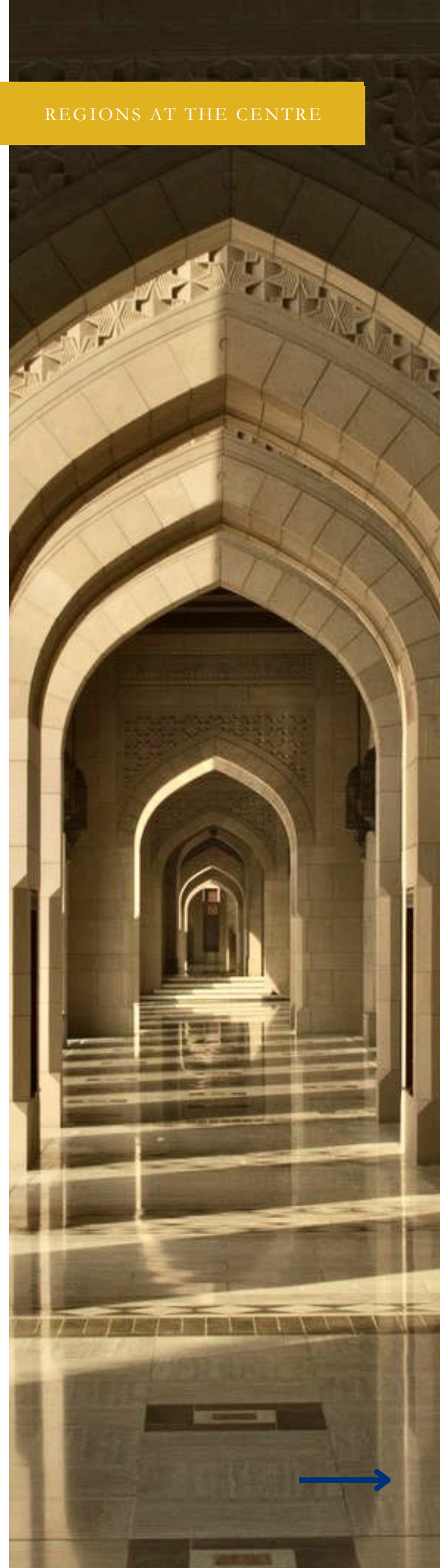
Role of Dialogue Platforms

In this context, the NDCF and PAM-CGS convened a high-level roundtable in Rome. The diversity of participants highlighted the complexity of today's strategic environment and reinforced the importance of cross-regional dialogue.

From Concept to Practice

The roundtable examined how cooperative security can move beyond a conceptual framework. It explored how it can be translated into **practical mechanisms of engagement**.

Cooperative security should not be understood as an abstract principle. It represents a **pragmatic tool** to sustain dialogue across regions and support regional actors in addressing shared challenges.



THREE STRUCTURAL DRIVERS OF INSTABILITY

The security environment in the wider Mediterranean is shaped by three structural drivers: **threat convergence**, **systemic volatility** and **geopolitical fragmentation**.

These dynamics interact across security, political, economic and technological domains, generating complex and adaptive instability.

1. *Threat Convergence*

Security threats increasingly overlap and reinforce each other. Instability no longer follows traditional interstate patterns, but emerges from interactions between state and non-state actors operating across **political, economic, military, criminal, technological and cognitive domains**.

Organised crime networks, illicit trafficking networks, terrorist groups, cyber operations and information warfare are increasingly interconnected, generating **blended threats**.

As a result, the distinction between internal and external security, as well as between criminal and strategic threats, is progressively blurred.

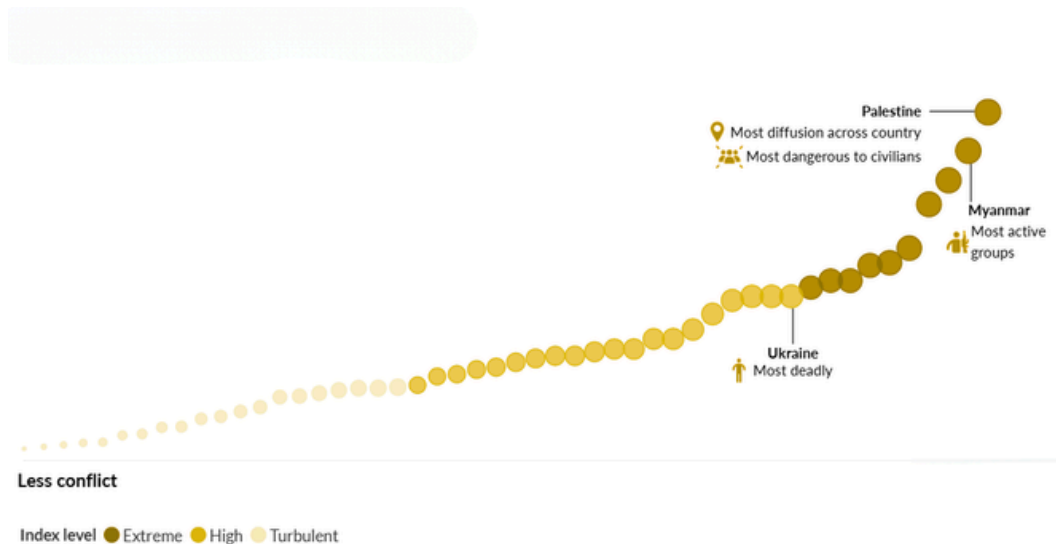
These dynamics operate simultaneously across multiple domains, including political, economic, technological and security spheres, as illustrated in this graphic:



Recent conflict monitoring data indicate that global levels of political violence have increased significantly since 2019. Major theatres such as **Ukraine** and **Gaza** account for a substantial share of global conflict activity.

At the same time, technological diffusion is expanding the operational capabilities of non-state actors. Advances in unmanned systems, encrypted communications and low-cost military capabilities have lowered the **barriers to conflict participation**. This allows a broader range of actors to engage in organised violence.

The resulting decentralisation of conflict dynamics complicates traditional crisis prevention and management mechanisms. It also challenges established deterrence doctrines.



Source: [Acled](#)

2. Systemic Volatility and Societal Pressures

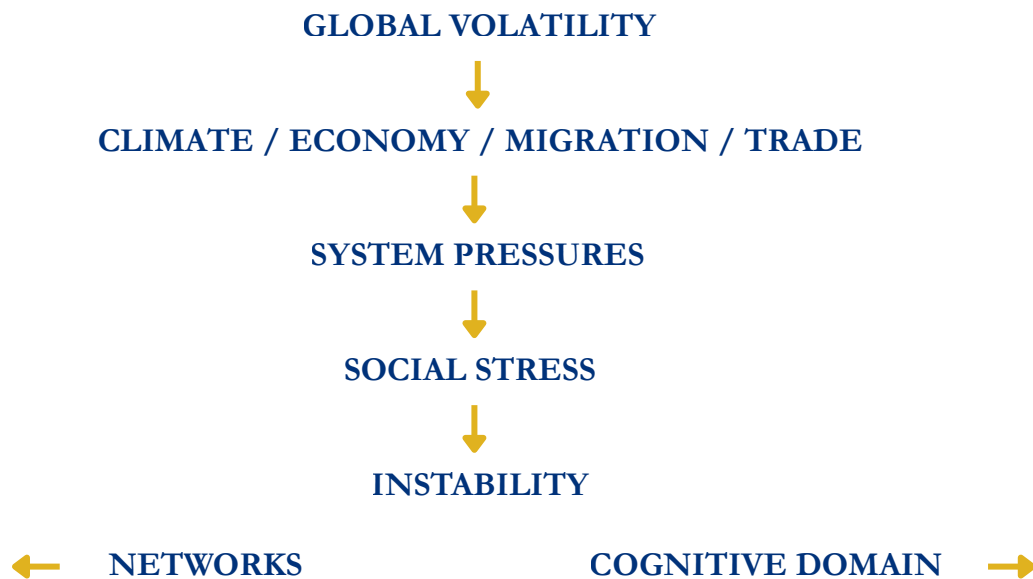
A second structural driver is the interaction between **security risks** and **broader systemic pressures** affecting Mediterranean societies. Disruptions to global trade and financial networks, climate-related stress and demographic decline combined with migration flows increasingly intersect with security challenges. This amplifies regional instability.

Climate change and environmental degradation are critically affecting water availability, agricultural productivity and coastal infrastructures across parts of North Africa and the Near East, contributing to **economic fragility** and **social tensions**.

At the same time, transnational networks trafficking goods and people operate along the same routes. These routes connect instability across North Africa, the Sahel and the Levant to wider Mediterranean security dynamics.



These pressures are further intensified by global economic volatility. This volatility is driven by technological, geopolitical and financial shocks, which generate rapid spillover effects across globalised economies and societies. Within this environment, the information domain has become increasingly contested. Hybrid activities shape political perceptions, influence governance dynamics and contribute to social polarisation across the region.



3. *Geopolitical Fragmentation*

The third structural driver is the fragmentation of the geopolitical landscape across the wider Mediterranean. Major powers remain active across the region, while regional and middle powers pursue more autonomous agendas. The result is a political landscape characterised by **fragile groupings**, **increased competition** and **short-lived collaborations** within complex international frameworks.

Cooperation increasingly develops through flexible and issue-specific arrangements rather than comprehensive multilateral frameworks. In many cases, actors cooperate on selected policy areas, such as maritime security, migration management or energy connectivity, while simultaneously competing in others. The result is the emergence of fluid or “**liquid**” **alliance** patterns, in which security relationships are situational and transactional. While these arrangements enhance short-term flexibility, they also introduce uncertainty into the regional security architecture. This weakens perceptions of long-term strategic stability.



PRIORITIES AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS: *THE WAY AHEAD*

Parliamentary diplomacy and **Track II dialogue platforms** play a strategic role. They provide flexible spaces for engagement among political representatives, experts and institutional stakeholders, even when formal diplomatic channels are limited. Existing partnership frameworks, including the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, serve as enabling platforms for embedding smaller regional initiatives.

Practical cooperation continues across the wider Mediterranean despite persistent political tensions.

Maritime security should be prioritised. As a strategic corridor for global trade, energy transit and digital connectivity, the Mediterranean requires stronger protection of sea lines of communication (SLOCs), offshore and underwater infrastructure, and major ports. Enhancing maritime domain awareness, coordinated surveillance and real-time information-sharing mechanisms strengthens collective responses to illicit trafficking, blended threats and disruptions targeting critical maritime infrastructure.

Economic connectivity is a second stabilising vector. Infrastructure networks linking Europe, North Africa and the Gulf - including energy corridors, transport routes, subsea communication cables and port logistics systems - create structural interdependencies that raise the economic costs of confrontation. Strengthening supply chain resilience and protecting critical infrastructure are both an economic and security priority.

Institutional capacity-building is essential. Governance deficits, fragile administrative systems and weak security institutions expose parts of the region to organised crime, trafficking networks and hybrid destabilisation. Security sector reform (SSR), rule-of-law support and professional training programmes enhance institutional resilience and interoperability among regional partners.



These efforts should be complemented by a **broader human security perspective**. This perspective supports dialogue and practical cooperation across institutional and expert communities. Long-term stability depends on sustained investment in societal resilience, effective migration governance and robust strategic communication capacities. These capacities are necessary to manage contested information environments.

In this context, **cooperative security strategies** should promote bottom-up engagement. They support local initiatives and regional partnerships that strengthen trust, institutional legitimacy and policy coordination. Addressing cross-cutting vulnerabilities is essential. These include civilian protection, human trafficking, governance integrity and the safeguarding of cultural heritage. These societal dimensions directly influence resilience and long-term stability across the wider Mediterranean.



These areas of action - diplomacy, maritime security, economic connectivity, institutional capacity and human security - are interconnected and mutually reinforcing.

Together, these efforts support resilience and long-term stability across the wider Mediterranean.