

Redefining the Role of NATO in MENA Region in the Aftermath of the Cold War: future prospects as a global security enabler and partner

*Mohammad Abu Anzeh**

ABSTRACT

Since the end of the Cold War, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has been undergoing an evolutionary process of redefining its mandate and posture in order to remain relevant as a security provider. This evolutionary process has centered on NATO's expansion from a static defense alliance into an organisation with a regional and global outlook on security challenges, reflecting the view that the security of the Alliance's members is now threatened by issues emanating from regions far flung from mainland Europe. Accordingly, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region has emerged as a key regional focus of NATO's expanding focus. However, this expanding focus is facing numerous challenges, ranging from internal NATO divisions to historical and cultural barriers hampering the establishment of a genuine cooperative security community between NATO and its MENA partners. As such, this paper seeks to tackle the question of is NATO's evolving role and engagement in MENA enabling it to contribute to the future peace and security of the region? To tackle this question, section 1 will provide the historical context that has been the foundation for NATO's push into MENA, namely the Alliance's efforts to redefine itself as a global security provider. Section 2 surveys how this push has played out so far, outlining how the broader forces defining much of NATO's wider global engagement – the increasing prevalence of inter-alliance divisions and NATO's strategy of pursuing partnership initiatives – have likewise played out in the Alliance's MENA presence.

Keywords: NATO; Regional Security; Partnership; Alliances, MENA.

Introduction

NATO's existence and posture as a static defense alliance had to change abruptly in 1991 following the end of the Cold War. With the end of the East vs West standoff, at least to its Cold War extent, in Eastern Europe, NATO had to remain relevant in a new age of more dispersed and diverse security challenges facing its members. The Alliance's answer to this existential issue was to begin a transformation into a regional and global security provider, with the stance being adopted that if an issue threatened the security interests of its members, regardless of its geographical location, then it was worthy of NATO's attention. Due to the obvious reality that NATO lacked the capabilities, or indeed desire, to pursue this through a global security umbrella in the vein of the United States, the primary vehicle the Alliance pursued to achieve its more global posture was partnership initiatives. In the post-Cold War era, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region – due to the rising presence of terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), and various manifestations of inter- and intra-state instability and conflict that threatened to have spill-over effects into Europe – would become a key 'out of area' focus for NATO.

Examining the state and future prospects of NATO in the MENA region is a key case study for parsing the dynamics governing the future of the Alliance at large, specifically: has NATO spread itself too thin in its push to expand its remit to global dimensions; does NATO possess the organizational cohesion to broach the ever-widening geographical scope and set of threats the Alliance has defined under its remit; does NATO have the institutional and ideational capacity to broach the cultural divides necessary to enable it to be an effective partner in international

* Ministry of Interior, Jordan. Received on 3/10/2019 and Accepted for Publication on 8/6/2020.

cooperative security communities. This paper will examine these factors to approach the question of is NATO's evolving role and engagement in MENA enabling it to contribute to the future peace and security of the region?

To tackle this question, section 1 will provide the historical context that has been the foundation for NATO's push into MENA, namely, the Alliance's efforts to redefine itself as a global security provider. Section 2 surveys how this push has played out so far, outlining how the broader forces defining much of NATO's wider global engagement – the increasing prevalence of inter-alliance divisions and NATO's strategy of pursuing partnership initiatives – have likewise played out in the Alliance's MENA presence. Section 3 introduces the key partnership initiatives that have driven NATO's MENA engagement, the MD and ICI, and how these initiatives have fared to date. Finally, section 4 synthesizes the trends and challenges that have shaped NATO in MENA to date, and looks ahead at the key dynamics dictating the future success or failure of NATO's aim of helping build peace and security in MENA: overcoming NATO's declining cohesiveness and bureaucratic divisions; overcoming NATO's faltering legitimacy as a security actor in MENA; and lastly the imperative for NATO to overcome its shortcoming, both within NATO and between NATO and MENA states, in establishing a common vision for NATO's engagement in the region.

1. Emerging from the Cold War

In the years closely following the end of the Second World War, the victorious allies soon came to the realization that a more formidable alliance than that produced by the 1948 Brussels Treaty would be needed to provide adequate opposition to the looming presence of the Soviet Union. With the United Nations facing the threat of paralysis from the Cold War that was rapidly emerging, Canada, Britain and the United States began secret talks – soon to be joined by France, Norway and the Low Countries – regarding assembling an alliance that would take its place, with the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) being the result (Duffield, 1994). Throughout the Cold War, NATO was revered and held a lofty status, as it was the key mechanism that embodied and furthered the allies' shared interests in protecting themselves and each other from communist expansion. However, upon the end of the Cold War, NATO appeared not to face any relevant threat, so the alliance had to redefine its mission, vision and role, scaling down both its military and political activities.

Three core drivers fueled NATO's redefinition and evolution: the neutralization of the residual Russian threat; addressing the prevailing conflict in Eastern and Central Europe; and the stabilization of the former Soviet Bloc (Duffield, 1994). Between the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the final dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the military threat that the Soviet bloc could pose to Western Europe declined rapidly. The most demanding contingency NATO could have faced from the Soviets following 1989 was short-warning attacks in central Europe, and this threat was quickly eliminated in this period. However, following the fall of the Soviet Union, threats were still present in the former Soviet bloc (McCalla, 1996). Successor states continued to have sustainable military capability, Ukraine had retained a nuclear arsenal larger than those of France and Britain, and Russia remained as Europe's only nuclear superpower, combined with significant Russian forces stationed near the borders of NATO members Norway and Turkey (Duffield, 1994). While the Ukrainian nuclear arsenal has since been dismantled, Russia's capabilities have remained.

In recent years, NATO has faced much criticism and accusations of obsolescence due to its continued expenditure of vast resources on containing the perceived Russia threat in Europe. For instance, at the 2018 NATO summit, the alliance approved several steps aimed at containing Russia and deterring Russian aggression against the Baltic States and Poland. Critics posit that such a Russia focus detracts from another key pillar of NATO's contemporary redefinition: fighting terrorism. This pillar saw NATO respond positively to the United States' request for NATO intervention in the Afghanistan War. Between August 2003 and December 2014, NATO took the lead in the War. At the War's peak, NATO would deploy over 13,000 troops, with this commitment declining to a non-combat presence of supporting Afghan troops towards the War's end. The pillar of combatting terrorism that was a product of NATO's post-Cold War evolution has been accompanied by NATO designs to help bring peace to MENA – an aim that has

divided opinion. The remainder of this paper further examines the evolution of NATO regarding this aim, and explores whether NATO's post-Cold War efforts in MENA are helping bring the region closer to peace.

2. NATO in MENA Region

During the Cold War, the restriction of NATO's military activity to the territories of its members worked to ensure the Alliance would not find itself in the midst of conflicts outside of its original mission. This clause was developed with the colonial wars that some members were taking part in mind. However, the act of relaxing this geographical limitation post-Cold War enabled NATO to intervene in Bosnia, which marked the start of the Alliance slowly beginning to assume responsibilities beyond the treaty area. Bosnia – specifically the SFOR mission and NATO's political effort to bring reconciliation between warring parties – would mark the start of NATO beginning to be tested as to whether it could be trusted to assume responsibility outside its original mandate. NATO's Bosnia intervention also opened the Alliance to conflicts of interest among member states, a case in point being the debate between France and the United States over NATO peace missions to Rwanda and Zaire. Inter-alliance bureaucratic and power struggles, as we will see, have become a defining feature of NATO's involvement with MENA.

The end of the Cold War saw numerous changes in MENA, starting with the United States reasserting its role in the Gulf in 1991 following its defeat of Iraq in the Gulf War. Following this, Islamic radicalism would increase in other parts of the Islamic world, such as Afghanistan, Iran, and Algeria, with this threatening to disrupt the relationship between the Arab world and the West. This rising insecurity in the Middle East during the post-Cold War era has attracted increasing NATO attention due to the potential threats such insecurity poses to its members. On top of radicalism and terrorism, threats such as the increased ability of actors in the region to produce missiles and WMD have led to NATO expanding operations in the region. Response force units like EUROMARFOR and EUROFOR – established by Spain, France, Italy and Portugal, and modeled on the Eurokorps – have been formed to enable a contingency plan in the event of a regional emergency. However, NATO's expanded presence in MENA has primarily been operationalized through the partnership organizations NATO is a part of, which expand its mandate wider than NATO member countries, such as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership, which assists partners of NATO to eventually become NATO members. However, the primary and more relevant partnership groups are the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) and the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), to be examined further below.

To cope with rising MENA insecurity, NATO members would adopt a dual strategy of containment and engagement. Regarding engagement, on top of the abovementioned partnership initiatives, NATO has sought out partners who would help it in combating Islamic fundamentalism in the region. For instance, NATO worked parallel to the European Union's Barcelona initiative – aimed to better articulate relations between Europe and MENA and turn the Mediterranean basin into an area of “dialogue, exchange and cooperation guaranteeing peace, stability and prosperity” – in 1995 by initiating bilateral talks with several MENA countries such as Morocco, Jordan, Mauritania, Israel, Egypt, and Tunisia. The second arm of the dual strategy, containment, has involved controlling WMD as well as isolating states suspected of upsetting the stability of the region. However, mainly due to cross-cutting relationships and traditional ties, NATO members have found themselves in disagreement on how to deal with such countries. For instance, while the United States has favored a punitive approach to states it deems rogues, such as Libya, Iran and Iraq, on the other hand, Germany and France, who have previously had strong economic relations with these countries, advocate for the use of dialogue. Out of the containment and engagement vectors, the latter has proven to be more successful, as MENA nations, including those not part of either the MD or ICI, have increased cooperation with NATO concerning improving regional security and stability.

Such inter-NATO disagreements on dealing with MENA insecurity have typically involved divisions between the United States and various European NATO states. NATO's efforts in the Israeli-Palestinian Peace Process have been a key example. As a product of the long-standing traditional relationship between the two countries, the United States has continued to stand in support of Israel. France, however, has been more sympathetic to the Arab cause. In October

1996, for example, it was apparent that France and the United States were competing in the region following French Premier Jacques Chirac's visit to the Middle East. At the time, Germany found itself conflicted over the Peace Process. Germany is committed to supporting Israel because of historical legacies. However, as a result of its national experience, Germany empathizes with the self-determination claims of Palestine (Ringsmose, 2010). Furthermore, Germany has always had a tradition of close political and economic relations with Arab countries. Such conflicting loyalties of NATO member countries hindered NATO, and its governing body the North Atlantic Council, from reaching a consensus on this dispute between the United States and France during the mid-1990s.

3. NATO's partnership mechanisms in MENA

NATO's journey of organizational change as a means of adapting to new security challenges since the end of the Cold War has largely revolved around expanding its geographical jurisdiction, thus making it a global military alliance. In a bid to cope with security threats in the Mediterranean region, NATO launched the Alliance's Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

3.1 Mediterranean Dialogue

Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO gave undisputed priority to its relations with the remnants of the Soviet bloc. This was in the form of a policy of cooperation and outreach meant to encourage former enemies to engage in rapprochement. The main objective was to consolidate the results of the end of the confrontation between the Soviet bloc and the West. However, as the post-Cold War era took hold and the threat to Europe from the east declined, the Mediterranean NATO states began looking to the southern and eastern rims of the Mediterranean as the main source of their current and future threats. In the face of NATO maintaining a strong focus on Eastern Europe, Spain and Italy in particular called for a re-balancing of NATO's focus to give commensurate attention to the Mediterranean (Leggold, 1998).

Initiated in 1994 by NATO's North Atlantic Council, the MD – aimed to help stabilize the MENA region – was part of the answer to these calls. This dialogue is reflective of NATO's view that Europe's security is closely related to the stability and security in the Mediterranean (Prodi, 2002). Several reasons drove NATO to see the Mediterranean region as worthy of increased focus: the region's potential for social and political instability; the possibility that countries on the southern rim could become conducive to fostering terrorism; and the risk of the proliferation of WMDs. NATO also understood that the region's transit points were crucial not only for energy security in the West but also for the security of maritime trade routes (Yenigun, 2013).

The MD includes seven countries that are not part of NATO: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The Dialogue has taken a progressive approach in terms of participation and its structure. The MD has grown since its inception, seen in Jordan and Algeria's inclusion in 1995 and 2000 respectively. While nearly all activities within the MD occur on a self-funding basis by individual members, NATO members consider requests for financial help to support the participation of Mediterranean partners in the Dialogue. Measures taken to facilitate cooperation include revising the funding policy of the Dialogue, thus revising participation costs and extending the NATO/PfP Trust Fund mechanisms to countries in the Dialogue. In terms of structure, while the MD is bilateral (NATO+1), the structure allows for regular multilateral meetings, taking the form of NATO+7.

This Dialogue is an important part of NATO's redefinition and adaptation after the end of the Cold War. It is also an important part of NATO's policy of cooperation and outreach, and is built on three aims: to contribute to the security and stability of the region; to dispel misconceptions about NATO among countries in the Dialogue; and achieving better mutual understanding (Frühling & Schreer, 2010). Several policies are meant to drive the Dialogue.

Self-differentiation: This has involved allowing approaches that are specifically tailored to the needs of every MD partner country. A specific mechanism enabling this has been Individual Cooperation Programs, which allow NATO and interested MD nations to mount their cooperation in a focused way. These Programs enable the non-NATO MD

nation to outline what they hope to gain from their cooperation with NATO based on the Dialogue's policies and objectives.

Non-Discrimination: Every member of the MD is offered the same basis for cooperating with NATO.

Two-way Engagement: The MD is considered as a two-way partnership, where NATO looks for the active contribution of partners for success in the Dialogue's mandate. Such contributions are pursued through regular consultation, between NATO and MD nations, with special attention being placed on practical cooperation.

Inclusiveness: All MD members are advised to view themselves as shareholders of a single cooperative effort.

Non-imposition: NATO does not wish to impose anything on its partners, so partners choose the extent and the pace of their cooperation with NATO.

Diversity: The specific cultural, political and regional contexts of MD partners are respected.

Mutual and Complimentary Reinforcement: Effort is made to look for complementarities and areas of mutual reinforcement between MD work in the region and efforts by other international organizations, for instance: the Five plus Five, A trans-Mediterranean forum set up as a security initiative to secure closer cooperation between five EU Member States and five Arab Maghreb countries; the Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation initiative by the OCSE, a dialogue to address shared security challenges; and the Union for the Mediterranean by the EU, a mechanism that promoted economic integration.

3.2 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

Launched by NATO during an Alliance summit in Istanbul in 2004, the main goal of this initiative is to contribute to regional and global security by offering bilateral security cooperation to countries of the greater Middle East region (Ringsmose, 2010). The initiative places emphasis on practical cooperation in places where NATO has the ability to add value, especially in the field of security. Initially, six countries were invited to participate, all of which were part of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Only four of these countries have so far joined - Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates - with Saudi Arabia and Oman having shown interest at various stages. However, based on a principle of inclusiveness, the ICI has opened itself to all countries that are interested and lie in the broader Middle East, granted that they subscribe to the initiative's mandate, namely countering the proliferation of WMD and combatting terrorism. (Yenigun, 2015).

The level of interest and capacity vis-à-vis the ICI's aims determines what extent ICI members will cooperate with NATO. The Initiative offers participants the choice of cooperation area they would like to participate in, including:

1. Tailored advice on defense budgeting, defense transformation, defense planning, and civil-military relations.
2. Cooperating in fighting terror, especially through sharing of intelligence.
3. Cooperation between military forces to increase interoperability. This is achieved by participating in specific military exercises and relevant training and education activities which have the capacity to improve the ability of the forces of participating countries to operate alongside NATO forces.
4. Cooperation with NATO's efforts in countering the proliferation of WMD and their delivery mechanisms.
5. Civil emergency planning, which includes taking part in training courses on disaster assistance.
6. Cooperating on border security vis-à-vis terrorism, light weapons, small arms and the fight against trafficking.

Since its inception, the ICI has developed in the practical as well as the political dimension. The practical dimension has developed progressively through the contribution of member countries in NATO-led operations and through the establishment of new tools of partnership. A key example of the latter has been the annual Menu of Practical Activities - a document that outlines engagement plans on previously agreed upon priority areas - which has expanded rapidly in the number of events planned for each year since its inception in 2004. Furthermore, the NATO Regional Cooperation Initiative, started in 2007, established the NATO Regional Cooperation Course, which is designed to complement cooperation activities under the framework of the ICI and focuses on contemporary security challenges in the Middle East.

The evolution of the political dimension has mainly involved including more high-level meetings. The partnership's multilateral dimension has not stagnated, with the first NAC+4 (NAC being North Atlantic Council and the 4 being the four Middle Eastern members of the ICI) meeting taking place in 2008, and at least one meeting taking place each year after that. Additionally, the ICI Ambassadorial Conferences, typically occurring biennially, have progressed to broaching topics including deepening NATO-ICI relations. This was off the back of the 2010 NATO summit in Lisbon which launched NATO's latest Strategic Concept, with this Concept identifying cooperative security as one of the three central tasks for NATO:

"We attach great importance to peace and stability in the Gulf region, and we intend to strengthen our cooperation in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. We will aim to develop a deeper security partnership with our Gulf partners and remain ready to welcome new partners in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative." (NATO, 2010 p.31).

After the partnership policy for the Concept was approved in 2011, NATO partners were allowed in principle access to the same range of activities as NATO member states, this greatly expanding the number of activities that ICI members could take part in.

3.3 Challenges faced by the mechanisms to date

It has always been clear that the coexistence of initiatives as similar as the ICI and the MD are is a reflection of the divisions within NATO, primarily between its European members and the United States, regarding their respective views and approaches to the MENA region. The European members' attention has always been more towards the Mediterranean region. This is not only because of Europe's traditional and historic links with this region being stronger, but also because the stability and the security of this region directly affect that of Europe. Conversely, the United States' focus has typically been more on countries in the Persian Gulf, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and the new power balance in the Middle East resulting from Iraq's defeat to Iran in the First Gulf War and Iran's subsequent emergence as a regional hegemon. Furthermore, the establishment of the ICI despite the existence of the MD is also reflective of NATO's European members desiring to avoid the warping of the original character of the MD through the inclusion of Persian Gulf countries. On the other hand, the establishment of the ICI can be interpreted as the United States' need to forge a strategy for the Middle East for which the Mediterranean region was not relevant (Razoux, 2008).

The conflict of having two such organizations operational in relative proximity has been evident from the start, but this dual existence has been an inevitable by-product of two varying agendas for regional peace. However, it is not only from the NATO side that divided interests exist amongst these partnerships' members. The MD consists of two distinct geographical regions from the Arab side: the Maghreb and the Levant. Both these regions have sets of interests that don't always align. Primarily, the concerns of Maghreb MD members typically regard civil society and economic development, whereas for Levantine MD members, their concerns are largely political and the Arab-Israeli Peace Process.

As seen, the growth and development of the MD and ICI face several problems that oppose their development, including the already discussed regional conflicts, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and allies' divergent interests, but also the negative way in which NATO is often viewed in the Arab world. These issues have therefore required the Alliance to develop policies re-evaluating cooperation mechanisms and resolving regional conflicts as a means of deepening NATO's role in the region. It is these adaptations and challenges, and NATO's impending ability to overcome them, to which the paper shall now turn.

4. Looking ahead at NATO in MENA

Overcoming declining cohesiveness and bureaucratic divisions

NATO's transformation from its Cold War existence as a static defense alliance towards a regional and global security provider is still in process. But the key question is whether NATO has, or is poised to develop, the

organizational capacity to cope with this expanding remit. This question has become increasingly front and center as a result of the increasing diversification of the security matrix now facing the Alliance, especially regarding how NATO European members are now facing increasing security threats on their own territory (Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies, 2017 pp.1, 14). A primary challenge in this regard is whether NATO possesses the bureaucratic cohesiveness and efficiency to consolidate relevance in the MENA region as a security enabler. NATO's expansion into MENA has been painted as a push to stay relevant as a global security actor without having to confront its internal challenge and the frailties in some of its existing partnerships (Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2014 pp.18, 19).

The internal tension dividing NATO's southern and eastern members regarding which security challenge – conflict-related issues erupting from the MENA region or increasing Russian aggression in Eastern Europe – deserved NATO's primary attention was 'settled' rhetorically at the 2016 Warsaw Summit, when the Alliance declared that NATO must adopt a 360-degree orientation, with eastern allies assisting southern allies in tackling their relevant threats and vice versa (Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies, 2017p.14). The next conceptual tussle facing members is one that is dividing those who believe NATO needs a southern strategy versus those who hold that the challenges emanating from the south aren't military by nature or even amenable to solution through civil-military means (*Ibid*, p.16), making the question of NATO's increased involvement a non-starter. The expansion of such a debate is indicative of the declining cohesiveness of NATO as a political community capable of unified action (Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2014 p.7). NATO has a distinct presence across the region, but "its efforts are eclectic and not held together by any unifying thread" (Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies, 2017 p.17). In other words, the challenge facing NATO is not how to be active, but how to be effective.

Perhaps a key indicator of this has been the formation of the NATO Strategic Direction South Hub, established in 2014 following the rise of the Islamic State, and a central process of NATO's political revision of its policies towards the Middle East. The South Hub was only slightly the product of a threat-driven strategy, and instead of sharpening NATO's posture towards MENA as it was established to do, it has instead been accused of perpetuating the ambiguities and internal political divisions regarding the Alliance's engagement with the region (Samaan, 2018 p.58)..

While the South Hub in its early days was driven by addressing geopolitical challenges, primarily the rise of Islamic State, it soon became a vehicle or arena through which the bureaucratic struggles internal to NATO could be played out. These struggles center on NATO's internal reform process, principally concerning the jockeying for influence of the various Joint Force Commands and other players in NATO's wider command structure. (Kirchner, 2018). In the case of the formation of the South Hub, it has largely become a case of the Joint Force Command Naples seeing an opportunity to use the South Hub to reassert its relevance within the broader NATO structure, in the face of NATO's eastern flank enjoying increasing amounts of attention and resources in recent years (Samaan, 2018 p.71). Indeed, even though the creation of the South Hub was aimed to reenergize NATO's focus on the MENA region, in reality the status quo has continued, with the eastern flank of NATO receiving an increasingly larger share of resources compared to the southern flank. This has provided an uncomfortable expose of the lesser amounts of attention NATO is willing to afford to the MENA region relative to its other interests (*Ibid*, p.73). With the upwards trajectory of the level of focus and resources committed to NATO's eastern edge combined with the increasing domestic security challenges NATO members are now facing, this does not bode well for NATO's engagement with the MENA region rising to a sufficient level to see genuine change regarding peace and security issues in the region.

5. Overcoming faltering legitimacy

The extenuation through the South Hub of NATO's lingering and longstanding internal disputes regarding the Alliance's posture towards MENA is not only perpetuating NATO's vague MENA policy, but is also undermining its legitimacy in the region and its capacity to properly address the issues afflicting the region. (Samaan, 2018 p.73). A key aspect of this faltering legitimacy, and a genuine barrier to the Alliance's future efficacy in the region, is the negative perception of NATO held by many MENA nations (Alani, 2005). If we understand NATO-MENA engagement as the

effort to engender a cooperative-security practice, then the necessity for such a practice to be able to build shared meaning and identity is seriously hampered by the suspicion Arab states hold towards NATO as a Western military alliance (Adler, 2008 pp.215-16). with fears of neo-colonialism present (Alani, 2005). As such, scholars like Adler assert that due to the lack of shared ground in negotiating the meaning of the practice, which would enable the building of genuine cooperation between the Arab/Muslim and Western dimensions of the partnership, the ability for “community-building” necessary for success is lacking. (Adler, 2008 p.215) NATO’s public diplomacy efforts in the region to fix this have largely been unsuccessful (NATO official, 2012). primarily a result of decades of policies interpreted by MENA nations as humiliating and assertive (Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2014 p.24). NATO’s historical attempts to breach this issue have involved efforts to increase its legitimacy by adapting its practices to local conditions, promoting the paradigm that such cooperative security practices must be predicated on joint ownership (Gheciu, 2005). In reality, as we will see below, the pursuit of such joint ownership by NATO in the region has largely been in rhetoric alone, not practice.

Difficulties in establishing a common vision

Despite such public diplomacy measures, the fact remains that partnerships with MENA nations have typically been a low priority for NATO. To the extent that relations have existed between NATO members and MENA states, they have usually occurred on a bilateral basis – as in between an individual NATO member and a MENA state. A key example of this disconnect was the counter-ISIL coalition being formed on the sidelines of the 2014 NATO summit, even though NATO itself is not part of the coalition, and many Arab states being reluctant to see NATO (but not its individual members) become involved (Inter-University Center for Terrorism Studies, 2017 p.17). This combined with the tendency for the interests of major individual NATO powers to dominate these East-West ties, as in the example of France and the United States discussed earlier, means that a common vision and set of shared interests hasn’t been able to develop between NATO and its MENA partners (Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2014 p.7).. The resulting discord between what NATO offers the region and what the region actually wants continues to hinder the partnership initiatives and cooperation between both sides, and is set to continue to do so (*Ibid*, p.7). Despite the proclaimed tenets of the MD of “self-differentiation,” “two-way engagement,” and “inclusiveness,” officials from NATO’s MENA partners have pointed to NATO’s tendency to dictate priorities without consulting the MENA partners or genuinely considering their needs to have resulted in a situation whereby the partners feel ‘othered’ by the partnership process and unwilling, and somewhat unable, to help spur progress in the cooperation (H. E. Nasser Bourita, 2012). As outlined by Reichborn-Kjennerud, achieving “common ownership instead of the top-down approach from NATO” is the imperative development if NATO-MENA cooperation is to produce much of substance.

Even further to the priorities in the NATO-MENA relationship being largely dictated by NATO, the presentation of these priorities has largely been limited to a vague compilation of broad thematic issues facing MENA: migration, terrorism, proliferation of WMD, and failed states. The lack of an effort to clearly link these themes in a specific manner to European security and the individual security situations facing European NATO members means it is unlikely that much willingness will be elicited from the wider European NATO membership to invest time and energy on the region. Furthermore, this is indicative of the fact that NATO is still yet to clearly delineate its southern flank posture and objectives (Samaan, 2018 p.72). The uncertainty arising from internal debates over NATO’s future combined with the varying perceptions amongst member states regarding risks in MENA, mean that genuinely building the NATO-MENA partnership or developing a common vision is likely to remain a low priority (Reichborn-Kjennerud, 2014 p.31, 26).. As such, on current form, the future is likely to resemble a situation whereby NATO members with interests in MENA will focus on their own bilateral partnerships, thus undermining the NATO project or legitimacy in the region (*Ibid*, p.31).

Evidently, it seems apparent that NATO lacks the ideational and organizational capacity to fulfil the role it has designated for itself in MENA. Key improvements to make in this regard involve steps like Alliance members building, and more importantly displaying, the cohesive political will to act in a unified manner in the south. And secondly, that

NATO establishes new cooperative mechanisms in the region with actors like the EU, who are organizationally more capable of filling in the gaps that NATO doesn't have the capacity to engage. Genuinely and extensively broaching this first step though would seem to be the imperative before moving on to the second – a stable and effective house can't be built on poor foundations. In the face of financial austerity and rising domestic security challenges making many NATO members hesitant to look too far from home, it may well be that any expansion of NATO's involvement or engagement with the MENA may have to be put on hold until the Alliance truly gets its own house in order.

Conclusion

Section 1 of this paper delineated the foundation from which NATO's push into the MENA region would emanate, namely the beginning of the Alliance's evolution from a static defense alliance into a global security provider. Section 2 outlined the story of NATO in MENA throughout this post-Cold War period and how this story has generally aligned with the dynamics driving NATO at large, namely: the strategy of pursuing partnership initiatives to enable NATO's expanding remit; and the inter-alliance power struggles that have complicated the Alliance's global engagement. Section 3 introduced the two key partnership initiatives that have defined NATO's MENA engagement, the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, and how these initiatives have been indicative of, and perhaps extenuated, the fragmented sets of interests that have developed between the main NATO factions in the post-Cold War era. Finally, section 4 synthesized these historical dynamics and trends to examine what forces and processes will define NATO's engagement in MENA peace and security going forward, namely: overcoming NATO's declining cohesiveness and bureaucratic divisions; overcoming NATO's faltering legitimacy as a security actor in MENA; and lastly the imperative for NATO to overcome its shortcoming, both within NATO and between NATO and MENA states, in establishing a common vision for NATO's engagement in the region.

The key limitation to NATO's future successful engagement in MENA is largely as follows. Since the end of the Cold War, and NATO's reorientation of its organizational identity into a global security provider, the Alliance has insufficiently undergone the process of building the internal cohesion necessary to enable this changed mandate to be properly fulfilled. NATO's ensuing somewhat lackluster approach to MENA has meant that the Alliance has lacked the mindset for genuine collaboration and co-creation of a security community. This mindset however is imperative for NATO to overcome the barriers limiting its success from the side of the MENA nations: namely, the lingering distrust amongst Arab nations of NATO as a neo-colonial project. For this barrier to be overcome, NATO first needs to engage in a committed introspective process whereby its members confront the lack of cohesion concerning the Alliance's approach to MENA. Once a clear and concise set of goals are established that clearly link MENA security challenges to European security interests, and tangible processes and details are delineated to begin tackling these issues, then NATO can begin to broach the ideational and trust deficit that is limiting its engagement with MENA. At this point, once NATO's designs and aims are clearly delineated, the Alliance will have the foundation necessary to engage with MENA partners. Here, a genuine process of co-creation and collaboration must occur in which the respective desires of NATO and its MENA partners shape each other's conception and approach to the *shared* issues they define and target. As discussed earlier, this may well necessitate NATO engaging other actors like the EU to lessen the abovementioned suspicions from the Arab side and to address the socio-economic or socio-political dimensions of the challenges that NATO has nominated.

Looking ahead, it is inevitable that European security in general, not just that of Mediterranean European states, will be inextricably tied to the security situations across MENA. In that sense, if NATO is to remain as a security provider and to maintain its mandate, then strongly and committedly engaging with this region is a question not up for debate. This issue is set to be a key litmus test for the future continuity of the Alliance: namely, whether in the face of the increasing domestic security challenges, financial challenges, and increasing preference for bilateral approaches of its members, if NATO inspire the cohesion necessary to engender a robust and legitimate security community. Again, however, this is only the first step, as building the genuine collaborative communities with partners like MENA states, with the capacity to approach the regional challenges to an extent more than window dressing, is the step that will

determine whether NATO's future engagement in MENA will genuinely move the needle on the peace and security issues confronting the region.

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إعادة تعريف دور حلف الناتو في منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا في أعقاب الحرب الباردة: آفاق المستقبل كعامل تمكين وشريك للأمن العالمي

محمد ابو عنزة*

ملخص

دخل حلف شمال الأطلسي الناتو في عملية تطوير عميقة بعد انتهاء الحرب الباردة في محاولة منه لإعادة تعريف دوره للمحافظة على ديمومته كمزود للأمن. وإن هذا التطور تطلب الخروج عن المألوف في دورها التقليدي الثابت الدفاعي والتركيز على أوروبا ليشمل مناطق وقضايا أمنية أخرى في العالم. وعليه كان الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا محل اهتمام رئيس لها. ولكن في الوقت ذاته وإجهاه هذا التوجه تحدي كبير ومتعدد يشمل الانقسامات الداخلية في مؤسسة الناتو وكذلك في اسباب تاريخية وثقافية تعيق ايجاد نوافق بين أعضاء الحلف ومن هنا يأتي سؤال البحث، هل يستطيع الناتو في عملية التطوير والتغيير الحالية في المحافظة على دوره في التأثير لتعزيز الأمن والاستقرار في المنطقة؟ للإجابة على هذا السؤال سيقوم البحث في فصله الأول بعرض نبذة تاريخية عن تطور دور الناتو تجاه منطقة الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا. أما الفصل الثاني يتحدث عن فعالية هذا الدور الذي تم إعادة تعريفه وتطوره كموزد للأمن العالمي. الفصل الثالث يتناول مبادرات وشراكات الحلف مع الدول في المنطقة وتقييم مدى فعاليتها حتى اليوم. الفصل الرابع والآخر سيتناول الربط بين الاتجاهات العملية من جهة والتحديات من جهة أخرى، وكذلك يحاول استشراف قدرة الحلف في النجاح في تحقيق السلم والأمن في المنطقة.

الكلمات الدالة: الناتو ، الأمن الإقليمي، الشراكة، التحالفات ، الشرق الأوسط وشمال إفريقيا.

* وزارة الداخلية، الأردن. تاريخ استلام البحث 2019/10/3، وتاريخ قبوله 2020/6/8.