NATO in the 'New' MENA Region

Competing Priorities amidst Diverging Interests and Financial Austerity

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Contents

Summary

While the Arab Spring has brought significant opportunities for reform and the emergence of more stable democratic states in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), recent events have seriously undermined security and stability in the region and reshaped the security environment there. This has put NATO's stated ambition of strengthening and deepening its regional partnerships in order to address common security challenges to the shared goals of peace, security and stability into question. This report looks into how NATO is likely to address the 'new' MENA region by investigating how factors internal and external to the Alliance shape its possibilities and limits for strengthening and developing partnerships in order to enhance security and stability in the region. In addition, this report outlines some implications this may have for Norwegian security and defence policy.

NATO has so far played a hesitant role towards current conflicts and regional rivalries in the MENA region. This reflects its problematic historical experience and its fragmented record of developing working relationships with partners there. NATO's role in the MENA region has been very limited due to the importance placed on bilateral relationships among the various MENA states and NATO members as well as NATO's priority given to Eastern and Central Europe after the Cold War. The failure to establish common vision and interests between the partners and NATO have led to a mismatch between what NATO is willing to offer and what the MENA partners want from the partnerships. Many of the initial difficulties related to the establishment of the partnerships will continue to **limit NATO's possibilities** for strengthening cooperation with states in the MENA and NATO's stated aim of contributing to regional security and stability.

Moreover, competing priorities within the Alliance and the political changes and regional rivalries in the region have made NATO's ambition in the region much more complicated to achieve. While NATO's historical track record in the region does not reflect the importance placed on the region by many of its members and the organization itself, financial constraints and diverging interests have made the situation even worse. The competing priorities within NATO, as the members are facing diverging interests and financial austerity, have exacerbated in recent years something that hampers the Alliance's ability to establish a common vision for the future of the MENA region and its goals there. Member-state perceptions of risk and threat towards the crises vary; and without financial clout or political will, NATO's

ability to achieve consensus on a strategy for furthering security and stability in the region remains limited.

With domestic political change sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa, struggles for influence and leadership in the region have intensified. Given the security interdependencies in the MENA, the impact and outcomes of the Arab Spring cannot be understood in isolation from the larger regional picture and the policies and actions of major regional players as well as other external factors. Although NATO is seeking a far more influential role, through its partnerships, in the MENA, such ambitions are likely to be curbed by domestic political changes that have led to a more assertive audience sceptical to the West, and regional rivalries and changing alliances that have led states to pursue policies more independent of the West. This will continue to hamper NATOs ability to influence states' strategies and subsequently its possibilities for strengthening and developing its partnerships to enhance security and stability on its own terms.

Although **NATOs possibilities** to address the new security environment in the MENA is limited by both internal and external factors, it has a few options that would increase its chance of playing a more influential role there in order to strengthen and developing its partnerships towards the common goal of security and stability in the region. In order to address the new security environment in the MENA, NATO needs establish what its goals towards the region are. NATO should focus more narrowly on solving common security challenges through cooperation rather than the more ambitious goal of enhancing security and stability in the region. This will provide NATO with a clearer sense of what it wants from its partnerships and what 'strengthening and developing partnerships' actually entails.

In order to make itself more attractive to its partners, NATO must focus on creating a common ownership with the MENA states over the partnerships rather than the current top-down approach. This would help establish what the common security challenges are, how to deal with them through cooperation and what NATO can offer in this respect. In addition, NATO needs to articulate to its partners what they bring of added value that the partners cannot get through its other bilateral agreements. This means becoming more proactive towards its partners, inviting them to develop and articulate requests for assistance, in consultation with NATO, on areas where they actually needs support rather than making them choose from a list of options.

Because NATO is the cornerstone in Norwegian defence and security policy, any changes in NATOs priorities will likely have **implications for Norway**. While there are some possibilities for NATO to

strengthen and developing its partnerships in order to address the new security environment in the MENA, prospects for greater emphasis on and prioritization of the region within NATO remains slim, at least in the short-term. Even so, the volatility of the region and its proximity to the Euro-Atlantic RSC means that contingencies may draw the Alliance closer to the region in the future, and as such, events there must be followed closely. The main implication that can be drawn from this report is that Norway needs to balance its needs for NATO as a collective defence alliance as well as an Alliance that is both able and willing to contribute collectively to security and stability in its own neighbourhood.

Acknowledgements

Introduction

While the Arab Spring has brought significant opportunities for re-
form and the emergence of more stable democratic states in the Mid-
dle East and North Africa (MENA)[1] region, such developments are far
from certain. NATO's stated ambition of strengthening and deepening
its regional partnerships in order to address common security chal-
lenges to the shared goals of peace, security and stability has been put
into question as insecurity and instability are once again sweeping
through the region. Unstable democratic transitions in Tunisia, Egypt
and Libya, civil war in Syria, the exchange of missiles between Israel
and Hamas, intensified regional rivalries and power vacuums – these
are only some of the recent events that have made the MENA region
more volatile than ever. The result is a changed security environment
with new risks and challenges, which have already impacted upon the
Alliance. Security and stability in the MENA region are intertwined
with the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic region. How
NATO approaches the "new" MENA region has become a vital ques-
tion.

How, then, is NATO likely to deal with this new security environ-
ment? The present report looks into this central question by investigat-
ing how factors internal and external to the Alliance shape its possibil-
ities and limits for strengthening and developing partnerships so as to
enhance security and stability in the MENA region. Because any like-
ly NATO responses will have implications beyond the MENA region,
the report also examines how this may affect the interests and policies
of Norway. What is NATO's current and historical relationship with
and strategy towards the MENA region and its partnerships? How do
competing priorities within the Alliance affect the possibilities and
limits for its future role towards the region? How do the political
changes within the MENA region shape NATO's possibilities and
limits towards the region? How are NATO's future security policies
towards the MENA region likely to affect Norwegian security policy
and interests? These are the specific research questions in focus here.

Following on from the research questions, the first part of the report is
devoted to a critical examination of NATO's current and historical
strategy towards the MENA region and its partnerships there. Alt-
hough the region has been viewed as important to the security and sta-

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[1] The MENA region consists of the states of the Maghreb (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Mo-
rocco and Tunisia) and the Middle East (from Egypt in the west to Iran in the east).

bility of NATO members, MENA partnerships have always had low priority within the Alliance and among its members. The region has been dominated by a preference for bilateral relations and the interests of major powers and states with historical ties to the region. There has also been a mismatch between what NATO has been willing to offer in terms of actual security and what the partners have expected. These factors continue to put NATO on the sidelines; and, in the current setting of cooperation, the Alliance's possibilities for dealing with the new security environment in the region in any meaningful way appear very limited indeed.

The second and main part of the report examines how internal and external factors shape the limits to NATO's future policy towards the region. Firstly, how competing priorities within NATO affect its security strategies is examined. Although competing priorities within NATO are nothing new, increasingly diverging interests and financial austerity have made the competition more intense than ever. This circumstance obstructs a coherent strategy towards the region and thus also NATO's ability to increase its influence and achieve its aims in the MENA. Next, this report looks into the domestic political changes and the geopolitical rivalries unfolding in the region since the Arab Spring. NATO's troubled past, domestic political changes, increased geopolitical rivalries and shifting alliances as well as its negative reputation among the public in the MENA region have made it increasingly difficult to exercise any influence on the strategies and policies of MENA states. It is crucially important for Alliance to re-examine its policies and strategies towards the region. How this can be done is the focus of the third part of this report.

While there certainly are possibilities for improving current policies and strategies, the Alliance first and foremost needs to develop a common strategy and vision for the long-term development of the region on which all 28 NATO members can agree. Without consensus on NATO's role, security policies towards the region are more likely to be driven by individual members and their own bilateral relations to MENA states than by the Alliance as a whole. Identifying common interests and mutual benefits between the Alliance and the states in the region will also be important – but NATO's future policy towards the MENA region is as much about the future priorities of the Alliance as it is about the security challenges in and from the region and the various constellations and rivalries there.

Future NATO policies towards the MENA region are likely to have implications also beyond the immediate area as such, through possible shifts in political priorities, security interests, regional cooperation frameworks and the defence budgets of NATO and its members.

Therefore, the final part of this report focuses on how NATO's proba-ble future security policy towards the new MENA region may affect Norwegian security interests in general.

Theoretical Framework and Methodology

In explaining how competing priorities within the Alliance and politi-cal changes in the MENA region may affect the possibilities and lim-its for NATO's future role in the region, this report draws on two the-ory frameworks. To examine the internal workings in NATO, this re-search has been informed by practice theory, which distances itself from the more traditional realist and constructivist theories in interna-tional relations, by stressing the need to analyse the shared practices of NATO, what the states do together, rather than traditional security in-terests or identity. In order to analyse how external factors are influ-encing the limits and possibilities for NATO's future policy towards the MENA, this report draws on Regional Security Complex (RSC) theory. This theory is informative on how to study security regionally. Complex regional security interdependencies means that security con-cerns cannot be analysed apart from each other, something that makes regional security an important area of study. In addition, RSC theory is informative on how regions may also consist of different subcom-plexes and how outside powers shape and alter the security interde-pendencies of the RSCs. This makes this theory very apt for studying the MENA region and its relations to outside powers such as NATO.

Thinkers within the realist camp in international relations have viewed the presence of a common enemy like the Soviet Union as a prerequi-site for a military alliance. In the early 1990s, realists argued that, without an external enemy, the Alliance would lose the very reason for its existence: 'It is the Soviet threat that provides the glue that holds NATO together.'[2] Seeking to explain the persistence of NATO despite the loss of the Soviet 'glue', a burgeoning literature emerged from the constructivist camp. From this perspective, NATO did not fragment as predicted by realists because its members shared common values and a collective identity. For constructivists like Adler and Barnett[3], collective identity is the key mechanism for the development of security communities – the dependable expectations of peaceful exchange. Recently however, this idea of collective identity as a pre-requisite for security communities has been challenged. Vincent Pouliot holds that such communities emerges out of shared practices,

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[2] Mearsheimer, J.J. (1990), 'Back to the Future: Instability in Europe After the Cold War', *International Security,* No. 15, Summer, p. 52. See also Waltz, K. N. (1993), "The Emerging Structure of International Politics', *International Security,* No. 18, Fall, pp.75–76.

[3] See for instance, Adler, Emanuel and Barnett, Michael (1998) eds., *Security Communities,* New York: Cambridge University Press.

rather than a common identity in the sense that '*it is not only who we are that drives what we do; it is also what we do that determines who we are*'.[4] In this sense, 'defending the West defines the West',[5] and whatever the West and its institutionalized self (NATO) is, is determined by what we do together. This insight has profound implications for how we view NATO, not merely as a security community, but also as a political community and military alliance whose members see their security as intertwined along with the necessity of common action.

Although the transatlantic security community is alive and well, NATO as political community of states who believe it should act together is rapidly deteriorating. Strains in the Alliance are nothing new and the debate about its future has become a part of what NATO is, but financial austerity and diverging interests have intensified in recent years, adding a new dimension to this debate. Even if the members were to agree on the future of NATO, many of them lack the financial means to collaborate on common challenges. The absence of a shared approach to the MENA region reflects the competing priorities within the Alliance, which stand in contrast to the very real security challenges there. This may change due to unforeseen events, but if competing priorities within the Alliance continue to hamper shared practices, what we do together, what NATO is, will profoundly change. Thus, the key to understanding how NATO will approach the new security environment in the MENA region lies in analysing how lack of cooperation, or shared practices, in an era of financial austerity and diverging interests, is likely to affect the Alliance.

Because NATO does not function in a vacuum, but is continuously responding and reacting to external events, how it interacts with other states and regions is determined by what happens outside the Alliance as well as within it. In order to understand how political changes within the MENA region shape NATO's possibilities and limits towards the region, this report draws on the theory of Regional Security Complexes (RSCs). RSCs are a set of units whose security concerns are so interlinked that they cannot be analysed or resolved apart from each other. According to Buzan and Wæver, 'the formation and operation of RSCs hinge on patterns of amity and enmity among the units in the system, which makes regional systems dependent on the actions and interpretations of actors.'[6] In order to understand how NATO is likely to approach the new MENA region, it is crucial to analyse and link the internal conditions of states in the region, relations among units in the

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4   Pouliot, Vincent (2010), *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.5.
5   Gow, James (2005) *Defending the West,* London: Polity, p.17.
6   Buzan, Barry, and Wæver, Ole (2004). *Regions and Powers: The Structure of National Security*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p.40.

region, relations among the Euro-Atlantic and the MENA region and the interplay of regional dynamics and other outside powers. Although a thorough study of the region and its interactions with the outside world is beyond the scope of this report, a brief overview of the region and its links to NATO is offered, to indicate the Alliance's possibilities and limits in terms of deepening its cooperation with MENA states and addressing the new security environment in the region. What makes the MENA region so complex is that there exist within it several sub-complexes, or smaller patterns of security interdependencies, as in the Levant or the Gulf, where these interdependencies overlap with each other and the wider MENA RSC. In addition, patterns of amity and enmity in the region are in constant flux, and rivalries and alliances are fluid, as the Arab Spring has highlighted. Because security concerns usually do not travel well over distances, NATO's ambitions to contributing to security and stability in the region will hinge on understanding the security interdependencies within the region, to enable it to forge cooperation with states amidst shifting geopolitical rivalries and domestic political change. On the other hand, there are considerable connection between the security and stability in the MENA and that of the Euro-Atlantic, both in terms of geography but also in terms of common security concerns such as Iran, energy flows and terrorism. Turkey, a NATO member, is situated in both the Euro-Atlantic RSC and the broader MENA RCS, leading to a considerable overlap between the region and NATO. In addition, the geographical proximity of the MENA region to other European states means that it is not 'out-of-area' to the Euro-Atlantic RSC but part of a larger region that should be considered as part of the whole.

Because any involvement in the region will necessarily follow the lines of existing alliances and rivalries, NATO must recognize that this will serve to reinforce existing amities and enmities; this may increase the security of some, it may decrease the security of others. Understanding the regional security dilemmas is important if the goal is greater security and stability in the region and for its members.

These theory frameworks indicate the importance of analysing the internal dynamics within NATO and the MENA region as well as their external relations and their interactions with each other, in order to gain an understanding of how NATO could address the new MENA region. For the purposes of the present report, this has been done through a range of interlinked research tasks connecting desk studies and interviews. Through an extensive literature review, NATO's historical interaction with the MENA region has been assessed, as a critical examination of past policies and strategies as well as the existing partnerships is important to future NATO–MENA relationships. The second research objective has been to analyse the discourses and prac-

tices of NATO and key member states through reviewing official statements, policies, strategies and secondary literature. This has revealed differing views on security policies and strategies among NATO members as well as shifting NATO priorities – something that will affect the Alliance's strategy towards the MENA region. Thirdly, a brief analysis of the changing dynamics in the region has been undertaken to elucidate how NATO might approach the new security environment in the MENA region. The complexity and volatility of the region make predictions almost impossible, but the likely interests of the major powers in the region and that of NATO members can offer indications as to how and where NATO will concentrate its efforts. Due to the rapid changes underway within the MENA region, and the inherent differences between discourse and practice of NATO and its member states, it has been essential to conduct interviews with a range of NATO officials and country delegations in order to confirm or repudiate findings as well as to gain a deeper understanding of the internal workings within the Alliance. In addition, direct interviews have been important because of the limited amount of secondary literature and restricted availability of official NATO material on the MENA region. This report draws on interviews and conversations conducted during two visits to NATO HQ in Brussels.

The Troubled History of NATO's Partnerships in the MENA

During the Cold War, the two superpowers, as well as former colonial powers like France and the UK, were rivalling each other for influence in the strategically important MENA region. This brought considerable opportunities for the states of the region to exploit: bilateral relations were forged with those outside powers they sided with ideologically or could gain the most from. In this game NATO was more or less absent, and only after the fall of the Soviet Union did it establish formal cooperation and partnerships with states in the MENA region. These partnerships have existed for some time now, but have been criticized for being no more than talk-shops that have contributed little of relevance to either NATO or the partner states – due not least to the fact that bilateral relations and interests of major powers that dominated the region during the Cold War have in large part remained. In addition, following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, priority was given to enlarging NATO's community of values by including former Warsaw Pact states in Eastern and Central Europe, with lower priority accorded to NATO's partnerships in the MENA region. Also, the absence of a link between partnership and enlargement in the MENA, due to unwillingness on the part of NATO as well as MENA states, meant that NATO's influence would always be far more limited than in Eastern and Central Europe. In addition, the failure to establish common vision and interests between MENA partners and NATO has led to a gap in perceptions about what the partnerships are all about, resulting in a mismatch between what NATO is willing to offer and what the MENA partners want.

The Mediterranean Dialogue

The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)[7] was established in 1994, in order to contribute to regional security and stability and achieving mutual understanding – along with the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme in Central and Eastern Europe as an integral part of NATO's adaptation to a post-Cold War security environment. Several Southern European NATO members – France, Italy and Spain – wanted the Alliance to devote more attention to the Mediterranean. As the Spanish am bassador to NATO at that time argued, 'If the alliance is trying to

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[7] The MD consists of seven non-NATO partners: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Maurita-nia, Morocco and Tunisia.

project stability to the East, we should also be able to project stability toward the South.'[8]

Although nothing came of the attempts of former NATO Secretary General, Willy Claes, to re-assert the Alliance by arguing that Islamic fundamentalism was 'at least as dangerous' as Communism had once been, the Mediterranean Dialogue was in large part created to counter this perceived threat. The establishment of the MD in 1994 signalled that security and stability in the Mediterranean were closely linked to that of the Alliance, but the Dialogue was predicated on a negative basis – for managing perceived threats, rather than encouraging the Mediterranean states to become real partners. This stood in stark contrast to the PfP, where the idea of reintegration of former Soviet-bloc states into the European fold topped the agenda.[9] In addition, Smith and Davis argue that the creation of the MD can be seen less as a move to actually address security challenges in the region, and more as an attempt to not be left behind in the emerging institutional competition in the region. When the MD was established, both the OSCE and the then Western European Union (WEU) had established programmes and links to the region.[10] If the motives for establishing the MD were based largely on a negative basis or sheer competition for influence in the region, then it is hardly difficult to understand why NATO has failed to develop jointly defined challenges and a common vision for the partnership with its Mediterranean partners. A lack of common vision can also be traced to intra-NATO divisions over security priorities in the Mediterranean and the overall MD process – the result being that NATO's intentions are not always clear, which remains an obstacle to deeper cooperation.[11]

While the Dialogue's bilateral structure (NATO+1) has faced significant difficulties, its multilateral set-up (NATO+7) must be deemed a failure. Although differences in security perceptions among the MD members have factored in here, this is primarily the result of including Israel, a country which many of the partner states have been reluctant to work with or have viewed with direct hostility. The problems have only deepened since Israel's operations in Gaza in 2008/2009 and 2012, but the breakdown of Turkish–Israeli relations after the flotilla incident in 2010 has made matters even worse, with Turkey obstructing NATO from collaborating with Israel. Although this does not

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[8]   Ames, Paul (1995) 'NATO Calls for New Links With North Africa, Israel', Associated Press, 8 February 1995.
[9]   Smith, Martin A. and Davis, Ian (2011), 'NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue in the Wake of the Arab Spring: Partnership for Peace or Succour for Despots?', *NATO Watch,* Briefing Paper no.19, 27 June 2011.
[10] Smith and Davis (2011).
[11] Gaub, Florence (2012), *Against all Odds: Relations between NATO and the MENA Region*, Monograph, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, p.8. See also Winrow, G. (2000), *Dialogue with the Mediterranean: The Role of NATO's Mediterranean Initiative,* New York: Garland.

mean that the bilateral part of the MD has broken down – only slowed down – it is of grave concern, as both Turkey and Israel are the two main allies of the USA in the region. In NATO this problem has hardly been taken up, and there is even a reluctance to talk about it, especially on record.[12]

Unsurprisingly, the problems with NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue highlighted here have led Chris Donnelly to the following scathing conclusion: 'unlike the Partnership for Peace, the Mediterranean Dialogue has not been a great success. It has played no significant role in helping and promoting the evolution of participating countries.'[13]

Seeking to overcome these deficiencies, at its summit meeting in Istanbul in June 2004 NATO established 'a more ambitious and expanded framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue' aimed at contributing to regional security and stability through enhanced practical cooperation, 'whose objective would include: enhancing the existing political dialogue, achieving interoperability, developing defence reform and contributing to the fight against terrorism'.[14] This elevated the MD to a more genuine partnership on a par with the PfP, but it did little to remedy the root problems. At the same summit, NATO's other partnership programme in the MENA region was launched: the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).[15]

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

According to NATO, the ICI 'aims to contribute to long-term global and regional security by offering countries of the broader Middle East region practical bilateral security cooperation with NATO.'[16] The initiative was launched against the backdrop of the post-invasion chaos in Iraq, arguably motivated by the 'urgent need to secure regional support for efforts to stabilise Iraq' and the wider US-led war on terror,[17] with both counterterrorism and counter-proliferation operations explicitly mentioned as areas for collaboration. In line with this, the ICI adopted 'a bottom–up approach by building practical military-to-military ties to flesh out the political rapprochement.'[18] The ICI's focus on practical cooperation within a purely bilateral framework

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12 Interviews at NATO HQ, Brussels, 17-18 September, 2012.
13 Donnelly, Chris (2004) 'Building a NATO Partnership for the Greater Middle East', *NATO Review,* 1, 2004.
14 NATO Policy Document, *A more Ambitious and Expanded Framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue,* NATO Summit, Istanbul, 28-29 June, 2004. Available at: http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/docu-meddial.htm
15 The ICI consists of four non-NATO members: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.
16 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, NATO website, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52956.htm
17 Smith and Davis (2011). Op. cit.
18 Samaan, Jean-Loup (2012) 'NATO in the Gulf: Partnership Without a Cause?', Research Paper, No.83, NATO Defense College, Rome, October 2012.

(NATO+1) stood in contrast to the MD's focus on mutual understanding through dialogue and its bilateral and multilateral setup, and was seen as a way to overcome the difficulties like those encountered by the MD. Although the ICI was set up in a bilateral fashion, emphasizing a bottom–up approach focusing on practical cooperation on counterterrorism and counter-proliferation, it suffers from many of the same problems as the MD. There is a chronic absence of vision from NATO on what it wants from its partnerships, as well as a lack of incentives for partners to engage NATO. According to Saaman, 'strengthening cooperation in the operational domain could have been effective if there had been a clear common perception of the ICI's raison d'etre.'[19] In addition, a basic problem with the establishment of the ICI was the absence of the major US allied power in the region: Saudi Arabia. With its military and economic power, Saudi Arabia holds tremendous sway over its lesser partners in the Gulf Cooperation Council, from where the ICI partners were drawn. Although Saudi Arabia has shown interest in collaborating with NATO, it has not been willing to enter into a partnership thus far. Without the most influential state in the Gulf region as a partner, and lacking a clear vision and incentives to its partners, it is not difficult to conclude, with Saaman, that 'eight years after NATO initiated its engagement with the Gulf countries, the results have been modest, not to say disappointing.'[20]

Another problem concerns how NATO divided the MENA regional security complex and its subcomplexes into two clusters – the MD, consisting mainly of the North African states, and the ICI the Gulf States. As pointed out by Isaac, this 'misleadingly places the "Middle East", actually the most important security subsystem in MENA, in an indefinite intermediate position between the Mediterranean and the Gulf.'[21] While this is undoubtedly problematic, engaging the whole MENA security complex has been difficult for NATO due to historical circumstances and its status in the region. NATO has engaged 'friendly' states in the region along pre-existing patterns of rivalries and alliances, thereby in fact reinforcing regional amities and enmities. At the time, the regional clustering of the states into the MD and the ICI was done largely because they were believed to have similar security concerns and could thus work together. That was a mistake, and raises the question of whether bilateral agreements (NATO + 1) with the various states outside of the current partnership programmes would not have been a better approach, or could at least have served the same purpose.

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[19] Samaan (2012), p.6.
[20] Ibid., p.1.
[21] Isaac, Sally K. (2011), 'NATO and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) Security: Prospects for Burden Sharing', *NATO Defense College,* Forum Paper, March 2011.

It could be argued that NATO would always be playing a losing battle for influence in the MENA as its primary objective was Central and Eastern Europe, whereas bilateral ties between various members and the MENA states were already established and thriving. As such, 'despite the limited success of NATO's official partnerships in the MENA region, bilateral military and intelligence relationships between major players in the Middle East and the US, UK, and France are thriving.'[22] For example, the first three countries to establish Individual Cooperation Programmes (ICPs) with NATO – Egypt, Israel and Jordan – are also the states in the region that have the closest ties to the US and that receive the most in military aid. In addition, there is considerable overlap and parallel projects offered through bilateral projects to those offered by NATO, and many NATO members view these partnerships as conflicting with their bilateral agreements in the region.[23] In this situation, individual NATO members seem to be the main competitor to the Alliance in its efforts at deepening its cooperation with states in the MENA region.[24] Historical ties to the region and regional interests of individual NATO countries certainly trump over the MD and ICI partnerships when strategies are formulated. Thus it should come as no surprise that the partnerships are often overlooked, chronically weak in both human and material resources, in turn resulting in very modest gains.[25] Indeed, what can be the added value of partnership programmes when the MENA countries get the same or more out of bilateral relations?

What the states in the MENA really desire, besides from practical fixes to security challenges, are security guarantees from NATO against external as well as internal threats to their regimes – but this is something NATO is neither willing nor able to offer. It seems that all NATO is willing to provide of value to its partners are 'military exercises and related education and training activities'.[26]Although valued by the MENA states, such training focuses primarily on interoperability, with the purpose of having the partners contribute to NATO missions – which only reinforces MENA suspicions of NATO as having a hidden agenda to control the states in the region.[27] This mismatch between what NATO is willing to offer and what the MENA partners want creates a gap in perceptions symptomatic of the failure to establish a sense of common purpose and a common approach to security challenges.

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22 LeBaron, Richard (2012) 'NATO's Reluctant Dance with the Middle East' Atlantic Council, 5 December 2012.
23 Interview with NATO official, Brussels, 17 September, 2012.
24 This was confirmed in an Interview with a NATO official, Brussels, 17 September 2012.
25 Interview with NATO official, Brussels, 17 September 2012.
26 Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, NATO website, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_52956.htm
27 Saaman (2012), p.6.

NATO's new Strategic Concept[28], adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, identifies cooperative security as one of three core tasks for the Alliance, which constitutes an opportunity to move partnerships to the next generation. Although written before the Arab Spring, and despite the Alliance's troubled record in the MENA region, the Strategic Concept is clear in its ambition to further develop and deepen the partnership and cooperation with the MD and ICI partners as well as being open to including more states in the MENA region. At the Foreign Ministers meeting in Berlin in 2011, the MENA partners were offered the same cooperation package as the Euro-Atlantic partners 'to substantially deepen and broaden NATO's partnerships, and increase their effectiveness and flexibility.'[29] In addition, any state participating in the MD or ICI can also step up its political and security cooperation with NATO through an Individual and Partnership Cooperation Programme (IPCP). As yet, none of the participants in the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative has an IPCP, whereas in the Mediterranean Dialogue it is only Algeria out of the seven members that does *not* have an IPCP with NATO. On the other hand, the details of what each country takes from the toolbox and attendance records at various events and training courses remain confidential, making it difficult to assess what these partnerships really offer.

Despite the limited success of the MENA partnerships over the years, NATO's military operation in Libya showed the utility of the partnerships, with Qatar, the UAE, Morocco and Jordan playing key operational roles. The trust generated from the MENA partnerships helped NATO to find regional support for military action against the Gadhafi regime, while 'behind the scenes' consultations with its partners were conducted prior to the operation.[30] This happened at the same time as NATO was finalizing its new partnership policies at the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Berlin, and Operation Unified Protector reinforced the objective of the Lisbon Summit, which called for a more efficient and flexible partnership policy. Although this demonstrated the validity of a longstanding commitment to partnerships within the Alliance, as the partners proved vital for regional support and legitimacy as well as the ability to work together in the face of common security challenges, the actual assets deployed by partners was of limited value to the Libya operation.

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[28] NATO (2010), *Acitve Engagement, Modern Defence,* Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the NATO Summit in Lisbon, 19-20 November 2010. Available at: http://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/index.html

[29] Berlin meeting, 'Active Engagement in Cooperative Security: A More Efficient and Flexible Partnership Policy', 15 April 2011, available at: http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_04/20110415_110415-Partnership-Policy.pdf

[30] Interviews with several NATO officials, 17–18 September 2011.

Limitations for NATO's Future Policy towards the MENA Region

Although the troubled history of NATO's relationship with the MENA region reveals many difficulties that continue to hamper its partnerships, additional factors limit NATO's future policies towards the region. The first factor that is considered in this report is internal to the Alliance: it concerns the competing priorities between the member states as they face financial austerity and have diverging interests. Although there is nothing new about competing priorities within the Alliance, in today's situation of financial austerity the room for action diminishes, and diverging interests may become more explicit, resulting in less cooperation. This lessening of shared practices means that what the Alliance is will change, and possibly also the belief in the necessity of common action. The second factor is external to the Alliance: it involves an analysis of the political changes and region rivalries in the MENA. These political changes alter the relationships within the MENA RSC as well as between the Euro-Atlantic and the larger MENA regional security complexes to such an extent that existing alliances and partnerships need to be re-examined and rethought. Both these factors limit NATO's possibilities for forging a coherent strategy towards the region and its stated aim of strengthening and deepening its partnerships to enhance regional security and stability.

Internal limitations – Competing Priorities within the Alliance

Despite the many predictions of the demise of NATO with the end of the Cold War, it managed to survive by adapting to the new security environment. Today, the future of the Alliance is again being questioned. Defence budgets have been slashed and diverging security interests are more evident than ever before – between the US and Europe, as well as among the states of Europe. These trends led former US Secretary of Defense, Robert Gates, to warn of the real possibility of a 'dim, if not a dismal future'[31] for the Alliance. NATO as a security community may be alive and well, but its ability to solve security issues collectively is dwindling.

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[31] Gates, Robert M. (2011) *The Security and Defense Agenda (Future of NATO),* speech delivered in Brussels, 10 June 2011.

The NATO-led Libya operation highlighted both the diverging inter-
ests and the financial austerity within the Alliance. The most obvious
conclusion to be drawn was the lack of unity, with less than one third
of the member states willing to participate in strike missions. It also
highlighted a trend that has been visible for some time: NATO acts as
a resource pool for coalitions of the willing. While this is something
can add the speed and flexibility necessary for the conduct of modern
war, it also points up the problem of burden-sharing within the Alli-
ance. Despite its military success, Operation Unified Protector high-
lighted the lack of military means among NATO's European mem-
bers, symptomatic of a long and steady decline in defence invest-
ments. It was especially the enablers of modern warfare – intelligence,
surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets – that the Europeans
lacked; then, as some states ran short of munitions, the Libya opera-
tion underlined Europe's inability to act independently of US capabili-
ties.

This led Gates to conclude that NATO had become a two-tiered alli-
ance. According to Gates this was not only a matter of the lack of will,
as on previous occasions, but also the lack of capabilities. 'Many of
those allies sitting on the sidelines do so not because they do not want
to participate, but simply because they can't. The military capabilities
simply aren't there.'[32] With many members simply not able to partici-
pate, NATO is moving into an era where future operations may not
only be conducted by 'coalitions of the willing' as in the past, but in-
creasingly only by 'coalitions of the able', if the current decline in de-
fence spending continues. While NATO has never gone to war with
the full support of all its members in combat operations, if it remains
unable to act together due to lack of will or ability, what NATO is will
continue to change and with it the belief in the necessity of common
action.

Financial Austerity

North American and European cuts in current and future defence
budgets have raised concerns about the future of NATO's military ca-
pabilities and transatlantic security cooperation. As Ivo Daalder, the
US Permanent Representative to NATO, and James Stavridis,
NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe, have warned in a re-
cent *Foreign Affairs* article, 'if defence spending continues to decline,
NATO may not be able to replicate its success in Libya in another
decade.'[33] The authors of a large-scale Brookings Institution study on
the effects of the economic crisis on defence budgets conclude that

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[32] Gates (2011).
[33] Daalder, Ivo and Stavridis, James (2012) 'NATO's Victory in Libya', *Foreign Affairs* 91:
     2, 2012.

'the economic crisis is having a significant – and detrimental – impact on allied armed forces', and caution that 'current military spending trends are reducing the ability of most NATO allies to contribute to international security.'[34] In addition to former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates' warning that the USA 'may not consider the return on America's investment in NATO worth the cost',[35] if the Europeans do not contribute more to their common defence, the current Secretary of Defense, Leon Panetta, has argued that 'we are facing dramatic cuts with real implications for alliance capability.'[36] Unsurprisingly, much of the criticism comes from the USA, which has grown tired of carrying most of the burden of transatlantic security cooperation. Although these warnings are not new and may be part of an ongoing 'transatlantic ritual' where the US side continuously requests greater European financial and political commitment, also NATO officials and European politicians are voicing concerns. NATO's Secretary General has argued that if 'European defence spending cuts continue, Europe's ability to be a stabilizing force even in its neighborhood will rapidly disappear.'[37] Furthermore, these warnings are no longer only about NATO's ability to project power outside its borders: they also question its ability to defend its own members. In a speech in January 2012, former Norwegian Defence Minister Espen Barth Eide warned: 'Article V is not in such good shape (…) Exercises have shown that NATO's ability to conduct conventional military operations has markedly declined … Not only is NATO's ability to defend its member states questionable, it might actually deteriorate further as financial pressures in Europe and the US force cuts in military spending.'[38] The effects of the economic crisis on NATO's military capabilities are a new development that should be taken seriously.

In response to the problems connected to defence cuts in most member states, the Alliance has put defence cooperation or 'Smart Defence' at the top of the agenda. As explained by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'Smart Defence is a new guiding principle for capability development. By joining together to acquire capabilities, nations will be able to afford what they cannot do alone. It is about greater resource efficiency and doing better with what we have (…) The key to Smart Defence is greater prioritization, specialization and, most importantly, multinational cooperation.'[39] This is an

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34 O'Donnell, Clara (ed.) (2012), *The Implications of Military Spending Cuts for NATO's Largest Members*, Analysis Paper, Brookings Institution, Washington DC, July 2012, pp.2 and 4.
35 Gates, (2011) *The Security and Defense Agenda*, 10 June 2011.
36 Speech by US Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta, Brussels, 5 October 2011.
37 Rasmussen, Anders Fogh (2011) 'The Atlantic Alliance in Austere Times', *Foreign Affairs,* 90: 4, 2011.
38 Quoted in George Perkovich, Malcolm Chalmers, Steven Pifer, Paul Schulte, and Jaclyn Tandler (2012) 'Looking Beyond the Chicago Summit Nuclear Weapons in Europe and the Future of NATO', *Carnegie Papers*, April, at p.29.
39 Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Keynote speech, NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Prague, 12 November 2012.

initiative launched as the solution to the current crisis, and while there certainly is room for smarter spending as regards defence, there are several problems with the Smart Defence concept.

First of all, Smart Defence involves only measures for future capability developments and other long-term projects, not for dealing with the current crisis and current cuts. Many member states are scaling back their defence budgets and cutting critical capabilities, with little or no consultation with their allies.[40] This may lead to a capability crisis, leaving the Alliance with at best an insufficient number of critical capabilities not only to conduct crisis management, but also for collective defence under Article V – as warned by Norway's Barth Eide. It may be more critical to deal with current cuts instead of focusing on future capabilities under the Smart Defence banner.

Greater specialization, one of three core aspects of Smart Defence, is highly problematic, as it infringes on the sovereignty and freedom to act/not to act of its members. With specialization, each member would focus on its own niche, leaving other capabilities to other states in order to avoid duplication of efforts. In turn, this means that in an operation NATO would need the full support of all its members in order to have access to the entire war-fighting inventory. Judging from recent operations, not least in Libya, consensus from all members on the use of force is hard to obtain. Should one member with a critical ability refuse to make its resources available to an operation, that capability is lost, and will be hard to replace. Although capabilities are vital for the conduct of an operation, without the political will, no operation can be conducted. In this sense, it is political will and not the ability that is the problem – and this is something Smart Defence does not address. To deal with the capability problem, NATO will need to find a common ground for aligning the interests of all its members, to be able to set priorities as to what kinds of capabilities it needs for the future. Although smarter spending may be a necessity, the Smart Defence rhetoric and the importance of the concept within NATO clearly defines future capabilities as being more important than efforts to build organizational cohesion. In fact the two are intertwined and cannot be dealt with separately.

Diverging Interests

The divergence of interests within NATO has become increasingly evident since the end of the Cold War, but the Libya operation and Washington's new rebalancing strategy points towards an Alliance that is not only two-tiered – where some members bear the burdens while others do not want to share the risks and costs – as Gates ar-

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40   Interview with NATO official, 17 September 2012.

gued, but also one that is torn by different interests and views on the changing security environment.

For the US, diverging interests and financial constraints have manifested themselves in a continuing shift in the main security focus, away from Euro-Atlantic area and towards the Asia-Pacific region. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has labelled the coming period as the country's Pacific century, arguing that '[t]he future of politics will be decided in Asia (…) and the United States will be right at the centre of the action'.[41] This will see the US military rebalance its forces from other regions to Asia, as well as rebalancing within the Asia-Pacific region, spreading its forces throughout the entire region. The fact that Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta has visited the Asia-Pacific region four times since taking office in July 2011 underlines this shift in US priorities. According to Panetta, Washington will 'devote more resources and effort to building its partners' capabilities and improving interoperability between the US military and forces in the region (…), and plans to have 60 per cent of its naval fleet based in the Pacific by 2020 and [the] defence budget has preserved, and even boosted, investment in new and more capable assets needed in the Pacific theatre.'[42] Despite the shift in priorities, Panetta is keen to stress that 'even as America rebalances towards the Asia-Pacific region, it will retain a significant presence in the Middle East to deter aggression and promote stability.' This statement was probably intended to reassure its allies in the region, but at the same time Iran is likely to keep the US involved in the MENA. It may be that the Iranian issue, which will continue to consume much of the US's diplomatic, political and security resources, is an area where the US and Europe can find common security interests, serving as Europe's best option for 'keeping the Americans in'. Although the US remains committed to NATO, it is clear that its interests now lie away from the European continent, making this shift in US strategy a clear signal to the Europeans that they will have to take more responsibility for defence and security in their own region. Due to the security interdependencies between the MENA and the European RSC, it is likely that 'softer' security issues in the MENA region, except for the Iranian issue and terrorism, will be largely left to the Europeans to deal with.

A divergence of interests is also visible within Europe. The major fault-lines previously went between 'old' and 'new' Europe, but today there is a fragmentation of interests all over the continent. While the Central and Eastern European states are still largely preoccupied with their Russian neighbour, Western Europe have in recent years experi-

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41 Clinton, Hillary (2011), 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy,* November.
42 Panetta, Leon E. (2012), 'US can walk and chew gum at the same time', gulfnews.com, December 27, 2012, Available at: http://gulfnews.com/opinions/columnists/us-can-walk-and-chew-gum-at-the-same-time-1.1124180

enced several disagreements when it comes to security policy and strategy. This was particularly evident in the build-up to the Iraq war in 2003, but disagreements also arose over the Libya operation, showing that patterns of agreements and disagreements continue to shift along with the issues at hand. While the European countries do not agree on where to send troops, most members, with the exception of France and the UK at least, prefer NATO to focus primarily on its Article V commitments rather than engaging globally and in 'out-of-area' missions. It could be argued that the limited number of participating states in the Libya operation shows that the Alliance is divided on what it views as 'in area' and 'out-of-area'– but this is not due solely to geography, as many Northern Europeans states took part in the operation. Due to its proximity and considerable overlap with the Euro RSC, it is difficult to view the MENA region as being 'out-of-area'.

Future of NATO – Regionalization, Global Security Network or All at Once?

One emerging trend in responding to the growing divergence of interests and declining defence budgets within NATO is for groupings of member states and non-NATO states, such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation (NORDEFCO), the Northern Group, the Visegrad Group[43] and the Franco-British Axis,[44] to explore the possibilities of enhancing cooperation on security issues as well as Smart Defence projects to complement existing arrangements within NATO. This seems set to continue, as members will increasingly seek cooperation with states that share their interests and/or that are willing to shoulder the cost of building necessary capabilities. Thus far, NATO has been supportive of these developments, viewing them as beneficial for meeting 'smart defence' targets,[45] but it remains to be seen whether these regional clusterings make NATO more effective or less so, in terms of decision-making capacity and operational effectiveness.

The willingness of France and the UK to act decisively, as witnessed in Libya, contributes to the shaping of European security policy and strategy and thus also has an impact upon NATO's future trajectory. Although bilateral and trilateral defence relations involving key European players (e.g. France-Britain + n) may loom much larger in the future than commitment to NATO,[46] it is, according to Hallams and

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43   Batora, Jozef and Matlary, Janne Haaland (2011) 'Regional Security Integration: Nordic and Visegrad Approaches', IESIR Working Paper 02/20011.

44   O'Donnell, Clara Marina (2011) 'Britain and France Should Not Give Up on EU Defence Co-operation', *Centre for European Reform Policy Brief,* October.

45   Interview with NATO official, Brussels, 18 September 2012.

46   Mueen, Saqeb and Turnbull, Grant (2011), eds., 'Accidental Heroes: Britain, France and the Libya Operation' RUSI Interim Libya Campaign Report, RUSI, September 2011, p.13.

Schreer, doubtful whether a European coalition of the willing organized around France and Britain can provide a model for real transatlantic burden-sharing in the future.[47] Although Franco-British cooperation may supplement the broader cooperation within both NATO and the EU, it excludes more than half of the European military potential. Judging from the Libya operation, it is of paramount importance for the Europeans to find a way of working together more closely, to build their capabilities and act in unison.

While financial austerity and diverging interests continues to hamper security and defence cooperation within the Alliance, NATO itself has embarked on an ambitious attempt to make itself relevant in the new security environment by 'going global', rather than sorting out its internal issues and focusing on strengthening and developing its existing partnerships. This arguably changes NATO's identity from being a collective defence alliance and a crisis manager towards a global security enabler. According to Anne-Marie Slaughter, NATO has become two different organizations: one structured around Article V as a collective defence alliance, and one as the hub in a global security network, a collective security asset for its global partners.[48] How the tensions between these 'two NATOs' will play out and the debate on NATO's core function(s) will be crucial for the future of the Alliance.

NATO's new Strategic Concept elevated cooperative security to one of its three core tasks, alongside collective defence and crisis management. This was a significant step in the evolution away from the static defence of the Cold War towards a new proactive cooperative security model deemed vital 'in today's security and economic climate (…) if we are to maintain our edge.'[49]According to the Strategic Concept, 'the promotion of Euro-Atlantic security is best assured through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organisations around the globe. These partners make a concrete and valued contribution to the success of NATO's fundamental tasks.'[50]

Since taking office in August 2009, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has stressed the need for NATO to 'go global', as the perceived key threats to the Alliance stem from global challenges such as failed states, terrorism, proliferation of WMD, piracy, energy security and cyber threats. In a lengthy speech in July 2012, the Secretary General, explained his vision for the future of NATO:

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[47] Hallams, Ellen and Schreer, Benjamin (2012) 'Towards a 'post-American' Alliance? NATO burden-sharing after Libya', *International Affairs,* 88:2, pp.313–327.

[48] Slaughter, Anne-Marie (2012) 'Two NATOs in One', *WE-NATO,* June 5 2012, Available at: http://we-nato.org/2012/06/05/two-natos-in-one/

[49] NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Keynote speech, Prague, 12 November 2012.

[50] NATO (2010) Strategic Concept, para.28 and 29.

> It is as important to invest in strong partnerships as it is to invest in modern military hardware, and in flexible forces (…) We cannot deal with today's security challenges from a purely European perspective. What matters is being engaged wherever our security matters. That means here in Europe. Across the Euro-Atlantic area. And around the globe (…) This is about NATO assuming a global perspective. Playing its part globally, and strengthening our ability to act in concert with our partners around the globe (…) We need an alliance that is globally aware. Globally connected. And globally capable. That is my vision for NATO. [51]

This echoed a 2009 article by the former US National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in which he argued that NATO 'has the experience, the institutions, and the means to eventually become the hub of a globe-spanning web of various regional cooperative-security undertakings among states with the growing power to act.' In addition, such a vision of NATO as a hub in a global security network would serve two interests: 'NATO would not only be preserving transatlantic political unity it would also be responding to the twenty-first century's novel and increasingly urgent security agenda.'[52] In an era of financial austerity, where most NATO members are likely to invest in collective defence capabilities over globally deployable forces, it makes good sense to enlist as many partners as possible, across the globe, to be globally capable. Although a more global NATO may be able to respond better to new and urgent challenges, it seems highly doubtful whether such a strategic mission would preserve transatlantic political unity.

Partnerships are not an end in themselves and although the inclusion of more and more members to the NATO fold might possibly have peaceful effects, there is a strong need to articulate the larger strategic objectives these partnerships are meant to serve and how they will work in practice. Although Rasmussen and Brzezinski argue for *why* NATO needs new global partners and US President Obama and NATO Secretary General Rasmussen now both agree that NATO *is* a hub in a global security network,[53] the idea of a 'Global NATO' opens up an array of difficult issues that need to be dealt with. At the crux is the unanswered question of what NATO's core function(s) should be.

At the Berlin meeting in April 2011 it was concluded that more operational partners would provide greater flexibility, and that NATO should expand its consultations with other states and organizations outside the Euro-Atlantic area on topics of mutual interest in the 28 + N format. However, the debate on how broad this *N* should be is still

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[51]   Rasmussen, Anders Fogh (2012), *Delivering Security in the 21st Century,* Chatham House Speech, 4 July 2012, p.3.

[52]   Brzezinski, Zbigniew (2009) 'An Agenda for NATO: Toward a Global Security Web', *Foreign Affairs,* September/October.

[53]   http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/05/09/readout-president-s-meeting-nato-secretary-general-rasmussen

ongoing,[54] and broadening NATO's partnership outlook, instead of focusing on existing partnerships, may come at the expense those in the MENA region.

In the debate about the future of NATO's partnerships there is more at stake. As Rebecca Moore argues, 'disagreements within the Alliance in recent years over the form and function of NATO's partnerships reflect an absence of consensus regarding NATO's core function, including the extent to which its focus should be global rather than regional in nature.'[55] It might be argued that, by partnering up with states such as Japan, Australia and New Zealand in the Asia-Pacific region – an area of low relevance to many European member states – the idea of 'going global' is a way for NATO to make itself relevant in a bid to 'keep the Americans in'. While this is indeed important, NATO might be in danger of making itself less relevant for its European partners, who want it to focus on collective defence and challenges within its own neighbourhood and possibly also its existing partnerships. This may mean that NATO is driving states away from the multilateral security framework and towards a regionalization or even re-nationalization of security policies. Although it remains to be seen whether regional clustering will enhance or undermine NATO's will and ability to act together in the short term, in the longer term may further erode the belief in the necessity of common action.

Increasing the number of partnerships will inevitably mean that someone will have to pay – and in an era of austerity, all forms of assistance to and exercises with partners mean having to cut elsewhere. Creating a global NATO may not necessarily mean that every member will have to participate, only that all give their tacit support. Those that wish to contribute to global partnerships may do so without the full participation of all members, creating 'partnerships of the willing' under a NATO flag. Whether it will be possible to combine collective defence and a global NATO without deepening the fractures in the Alliance will remain a core question, however.

The strategic dilemma for NATO is that while the money shrinks the tasks proliferate, thus making it unable to set priorities in a strategic environment which is highly fluid and complex. While the Smart Defence concept aims at enabling NATO to do more with less, it might be time to focus on doing *what matters* with less. While having fewer priorities would allow the Alliance to be more effective, contingencies such as the Arab Spring continue to attract its attention, driving its policies and planning at the expense of longer-term strategies. The cri-

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54   Interview with NATO official, 18 September 2012.
55   Moore, Rebecca (2012), 'Lisbon and the Evolution of NATO's New Partnership Policy', *Perceptions,* Spring 2012, Volume XVII, Number 1, p.57.

ses in the Middle East and North Africa have already reshaped the security environment, but the threat perceptions of each member state will inevitably vary. This will make the Alliance's policy and decision making capacity towards the region difficult. This may force member states with interests in the region to develop and strengthen its own bilateral relationships there at the expense of NATO's efforts, further undermining its partnerships and ambitions in the region. As such, tensions within NATO over how to set priorities in an era of financial austerity and diverging interests are likely to have a deep effect on its future policies towards the MENA region.

External limitations – Regional Rivalries and Political Change

With domestic political change sweeping across the Middle East and North Africa, struggles for influence and leadership in the region have intensified, altering the international relations of the MENA states. Given the security interdependencies in the MENA RSC, the impact and outcomes of the Arab Spring cannot be understood in isolation from the larger regional picture and the policies and actions of major regional players as well as other external factors. The security dimensions of these events have significant geopolitical implications in which outside powers play an important part. Although NATO is seeking a far more influential role, through its partnerships, in the MENA, such ambitions are likely to be curbed by domestic political changes that have led to a more assertive audience sceptical to the West, and regional rivalries and changing alliances that have led states to pursue policies more independent of the West.

Regional Rivalries

What started as uprisings against the regime in Damascus and soon turned into a civil war has now evolved into a regional conflict over power and influence in the region. Syria has become the battlefront in which this regional power struggle unfolds – all major players of the region as well as many outside powers are represented, directly or indirectly, supporting one side or the other. Although strategic calculations may be at the forefront of the regional rivalries in Syria, regional involvements have introduced a sectarian (Sunni versus Shia) division to the conflict which have made the political landscape in the region even more complex and uncertain. It could be argued that the current struggles have shifted the political epicentre of the greater Middle East away from the Israel issue and the Israel–Palestine conflict towards the Gulf and the struggle for regional hegemony between Iran, Saudi Arabia, Turkey and possibly also Egypt. Evident of this shift can also be seen in the attention given to the Iranian nuclear programme by

Western states and institutions as well many MENA states in recent years. Syria has become 'part of a region-wide tussle that is essentially about the re-calibration of two interrelated balances of power: one between Iran and Saudi Arabia in the Persian Gulf; the second the overall regional balance of power between the American-Israeli axis and Iran.'[56] While the Middle East and the Gulf are seen as the MENA subcomplexes most important to NATO security, events in North Africa should not be underestimated. Power vacuums resulting from the fall of many authoritarian regimes may easily be exploited by terrorists, militants, traffickers and others, providing a security rationale for deeper NATO involvement.

The sectarian dimension of the conflict has intensified the rivalries between Sunni Saudi Arabia and Shiite Iran. While both states see themselves as protectors of Islam, their foreign policy outlooks differ considerably. In simplified terms, Saudi Arabia can be seen as a regional power seeking to maintain the status quo, whereas Iran seeks revolutionary change throughout the region. However, during the Arab Spring uprisings, the two followed strikingly similar policies, aimed at bolstering their regional influence and strengthening regime survival in the face of external and internal threats. If a troubled regime was an ally they supported it; if not, they called for change. This was most evident in their foreign policies towards Bahrain and Syria, with each trying to use its influence and power to support its side in the conflicts.

The emergence of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) monarchies, especially Saudi Arabia and Qatar, as a major player in the MENA region marks a very significant shift in the dynamics of the region.[57] They put themselves on the forefront of a counterrevolution to contain, and possibly also to reverse, the Arab Spring, viewing the events as a cause for real and immediate concern to their regime security. In a fast-changing regional scenario, the priority of Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies was to secure their own regimes, avoid widespread unrest, and maintain the status quo – in turn making the economic, political and religious dimensions even more intertwined in the Gulf monarchies' new strategies towards the MENA region. This was evident when the GCC, led by Saudi Arabia, sent troops to help its Bahraini ally King Hamad Al-Khalifa quell the unrest there. Because the uprisings in Bahrain were conducted largely by the Shia population, putting it down has widened the sectarian divide in the region. In addition, the Gulf monarchies have been quite generous to their MENA neighbours, providing them with huge loans and grants. Using their oil

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56   Ayoob, Mohammed (2013) 'The New Cold War in the Middle East', *The National Interest,* 16 January.
57   Kamrava, Mehran (2012) 'The Arab Spring and the Saudi-Led Counterrevolution', *Orbis,* Winter.

wealth to gain influence in the region, 'the financial assistance that is being provided by the EU is now being overshadowed by the far more generous offers from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.'[58] Saudi Arabia alone has granted Egypt $4 billion,[59] while Jordan and Morocco (to mention only two), get far more from the GCC than from their cash-strapped Western partners. Although the details of these deals are not known, they are likely to have very different strings attached than those coming from Western states and institutions, which are usually made contingent on domestic reforms. With less stringent reforms attached, these loans and grants may well be better offers than those from the West.

With the influx of sweeping political change in the region, countering the growing Iranian influence has become a more compelling priority for many, if not all, of the major players in the region. In addition to the uncertainty surrounding Iran's nuclear programme, their aggressive stance in the region has led the Gulf monarchies and the US into a deeper, more symbiotic relationship, trying to contain Iranian influence and possibly thwart Tehran's perceived nuclear ambitions. This was highlighted by the recent arms deal worth a staggering $123 billion between the Gulf monarchies and the US[60], which is aimed at reinforcing the level of regional deterrence vis-à-vis Iran. While NATO's new missile defence plans points towards convergence as to the threat that Iran constitutes towards Alliance territory it is the US and not NATO that remains paramount to Gulf security. Instead, the USA has been focusing on building up its own partnership structure in the region with the GCC and other allies in order to contain and deter Iran. NATO's relative absence from recent developments in the Gulf region only serves to reinforce views of its limited role there.

In Syria, the future of the Iranian security system is at stake. Not only is Persian Iran is close to losing its main Arab and Shia ally – but should this happen, it might also weaken Tehran's ability to support their protégé and proxy militia Hezbollah. Such a scenario would curb Iranian influence in the region, but while a strengthening of Sunni power in the region would weaken Iran, it is far from certain that an insecure and isolated Iran would be better for stability in the region. It could make Tehran even more determined in its pursuit of nuclear weapons to fend off perceived interventions, and more assertive in attempts at propping up other proxy militias in the region in order to increase its influence and ensure its regime survival.

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58   Behr, Timo (2012) 'The European Union's Mediterranean Policies after the Arab Spring: Can the Leopard Change its Spots?', *Amsterdam Law Forum,* 4:2, Spring, p.84.
59   MacFarquhar, Neil (2011) Saudi Arabia Scrambles to Limit Region's Upheaval, *New York Times,* 27 May:
      http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/28/world/middleeast/28saudi.html?_r=0
60   'Gulf States in $123bn US arms spree', *Financial Times,* 20 September 2012.

While Iran has pushed the US even closer to Saudi Arabia and the other Gulf monarchies, its longstanding security architecture in the Eastern Mediterranean subcomplex, US-Turkey-Israel and US-Israel-Egypt, seems to be going the other way. Egypt, Israel and Turkey are all pursuing increasingly independent policies which clash with US interests.[61] This is part of a broader trend that makes it even more difficult for Washington to set the agenda and shape the outcomes of events in the region. With NATO-member Turkey and Israel – historically the closest US allies in the region – drifting further apart, and with Egypt embroiled in domestic unrest with a population sceptical to the West and the US, Washington is likely to be forced to make more bilateral agreements with a greater emphasis on continuous contingency management at the expense of long-term strategies. While this entails a more direct role for the US, it is unclear as to what extent Washington will be able to shape and influence the policies in the region. Moreover, NATO's partnerships and influence in the region are largely dependent on US allies and backing, making it unlikely for NATO to exert more influence on its own.

Domestic Political Change

Along with the regional rivalries in the region, the domestic political changes and the population's negative perceptions of the West and NATO in particular are likely to shape the Alliance's options in the MENA. Because the West has for decades viewed maintaining the status quo through propping up friendly autocracies as the best way of preserving stability and security in the MENA, 'Arabs tend to view NATO as a powerful, aggressive alliance committed to promoting the security and political interests of the West.'[62] Whereas MENA populations have always had a negative view of Western policies towards the region, the Arab Spring has shown repressive regimes how disgruntled populations are capable of leading regimes to fear internal threats as much as, if not more than, external threats to their survival. If cooperation with the West seems set to increase domestic instability, then these governments will probably shy away from such cooperation, opting instead to collaborate with and accept more influence from neighbours or other international powers. As Gause and Lustick argue, 'a major shift is occurring in the region toward political systems where the consent of the governed is necessary for stable domestic politics and where public opinion plays a much greater role in the making of foreign policy.'[63]

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61 Alterman, Jon B., and Haim Malka (2012) 'Shifting Eastern Mediterranean Geometry', *The Washington Quarterly,* Summer, 35 (3).
62 Alani, Mustafa (2005), 'Arab Perspectives on NATO', *NATO Review*, 4.
63 Gause, Gregory F. III and Lustick, Ian S. (2012) 'America and the Regional Powers in a Transforming Middle East', *Middle East Policy,* 19 (2), Summer.

This leads to a paradox that NATO will have to take seriously. While deepening NATO ties may enhance security against external threats, they might cause domestic unrest and thus internal instability for MENA regimes. In addition, this creates a problematic relationship between promoting democracy and maintaining stability within the region. While relying on friendly autocracies has failed to bolster security and stability, democratic regimes may be deeply sceptical to the West and its institutions, thus possibly weakening NATO's role in the region. Thus it seems ironic that the strategy of including former Soviet Union states into NATO and the West was based on the idea that democracies do not fight each other which would lead to increased security and stability. In the MENA, the converse may prove true: in the short term, democracy may increase instability and insecurity and possibly further limit NATO's influence there. The long term consequences is however unclear.

Because perceptions of NATO matter, how to engage in a region where most of the population is opposed to the organization is an important question. Can existing functional security arrangements be maintained with democratic regimes in the MENA? To that, Mustafa Alani argues: 'until NATO is able to address (…) and overcome the negative image it has in the Middle East, the Alliance has little prospect of ever playing a constructive role in the region'.[64] NATO's public diplomacy division has tried to address this problem with outreach programmes to the region,[65] but without success. Decades of policies widely seen as humiliating and aggressive are not going to be mended by outreach programmes alone.

Turkey – Bridge or Regional Hegemon?
The best option for NATO to assert any influence in the region may be through Turkey – but this may prove possible only if NATO can manage to align itself with Turkey's interests in the region.

As a NATO member and a state that borders the Middle East, Turkey has one foot in each regional security complex and thus much at stake in events in the MENA region. During the Cold War, Turkey's geostrategic location, its military and its position as a flank country were indispensable assets in NATO's attempts to contain and deter the Soviet Union. Although a valuable asset during the Cold War, Turkey depended on NATO as a consumer of security, which limited its own foreign policy choices. Since then Turkey has made a 'remarkable transformation from essentially a functional ally reliant on its hard power for much of the Cold War and early post–Cold War era to a

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64 Alani, Mustafa (2005) 'Arab Perspectives on NATO'.
65 Interview with NATO official, Brussels, 18 September 2012.

strategic partner that is more reliant on its soft power.'[66] Along with its economic growth, Turkey has sought to increase its influence in its neighbourhood by pursuing an independent foreign and security policy that has often gone against the mainstream policies of NATO members. This new foreign policy has been based a 'zero problems approach' vis-à-vis its neighbours, rather than the security-first approach that often led to confrontations in the past. With Turkey favouring diplomatic engagement with all surrounding countries, NATO became only one aspect of its wider security policies. While this new engagement with neighbours has security benefits for the West, it also raised concerns about the possibility of Turkey drifting farther eastwards in its ideology and policies. Although this new foreign policy aimed to transform Turkey into a regional power independent from the West, this did not mean turning its back on the West. Turkey attempted to diversify its foreign policy by balancing the West while seeking influence in other regions, like the broader MENA region.

In order to not become the frontline state of NATO in the Middle East, Turkey, as a part of its 'zero problems' approach, maintained that Syria and Iran should not be viewed as threats to any of NATO's members. However, this all started to change when Turkey accepted the emplacement of radars that were to serve the new NATO missile shield. Although Turkey went to great strides to reassure Iran that this posed no threat, and that Turkey would not allow the stations to be used in any form of foreign interference, relations between the two states deteriorated. The 'zero problems approach' in foreign policy also encountered difficulties with the Arab Spring. Turkey was quick to support democratic change in the region, although it initially spoke out against military action in Libya. To Ankara's secular democratic regime, the Arab Spring meant a reaffirmation of Turkey's own democracy consolidation, vindicated by the fact that many countries saw a model for their own revolutions. As the only country that has wholeheartedly supported democratic change in the region, Turkey seemed best positioned to play a leading role in a more democratic region, although this also put Ankara on collision course with many regimes in the region. While Turkey is a regional beneficiary of the recent democratic developments and will 'continue to be the inspirational leader for Arab democratization and liberation efforts',[67] the outcome of these processes is far from certain. The current move towards more democracy in the region may well get reversed in terms of benefiting Turkey. Indeed, given the changing balance of power in the region coupled with regional instability and wars, Turkey will have to reshape its foreign and security policies. Not only has the 'zero prob-

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[66] Abyet, Gülnur (2012), 'The Evolution of NATO's Three Phases and Turkey's Transatlantic Relationship,' *Perceptions,* 17 (1), Spring, pp.19–36.
[67] Ömer Taspinar (2012) 'Turkey's Strategic Vision and Syria', *Washington Quarterly,* Summer, 35 (3).

lems' approach been forced to change, but regional instability means that access to NATO has once again become a highly valuable asset likely to move Ankara's policies closer towards the US and NATO. This has been highlighted by Turkey's demands for solidarity and assistance following the shooting down of a Turkish plane and the recurrent shelling of Turkish territory by Damascus. In response, NATO has agreed to augment Turkey's air defence capabilities by deploying Patriot missiles in Turkey 'in the spirit of strong solidarity'[68]. Also, the establishment of the new Allied Land Command in Izmir is a sign of renewed commitment from NATO towards Turkey, signalling a shift in NATO priorities towards its southern borders and the MENA region. Although NATO–Turkey relations have been somewhat uncertain in the past, these recent events indicate a renewed mutual commitment.

Both NATO and Turkey share an interest in stabilizing the MENA region. Any further unrest and regional rivalries are likely to make Ankara's foreign and security policies more dependent on the West and Western institutions. However, Turkey is also rapidly becoming an indispensable strategic partner in the MENA, not just for NATO but also for the EU. This security interdependency may lead to a more sustained and constructive partnership in shaping the future of the region. Unlike the situation during the Cold War, where the West and NATO dictated Ankara's MENA strategy, Turkey is now likely to try for a leading role in shaping the evolving transatlantic strategy in the region. In turn, NATO will have to adjust to a more assertive Turkey – possibly entailing new divergences in security priorities between Turkey and its NATO allies, especially if Ankara's relations to its regional rivals deteriorate further.

Although Turkey supports a strengthening and deepening of the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, the big question is not only the appropriate role for NATO in the larger MENA region, but also what NATO's core task should be. Turkey has held that NATO should primarily be a collective defence alliance organized around Article 5 operations, rather than an organization with global outlooks out-of-area operational focus. While this is in line with the views of many of European counterparts, it is clearly at odds with the US, which wants NATO to take a more assertive role in global security.

It could be argued that NATO is not the right organization to deal with security and stability challenges in the MENA region that are is more

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68   Press conference by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the North Atlantic Council meeting in Foreign Ministers' session, 4 December 2012.

socio-economic than security/military in character. What is needed is a comprehensive approach that can bring together civilian and well as military capabilities in order to address the challenges in and from the region. This brings to the forefront the question of NATO-EU cooperation (a recurrent theme in European and transatlantic security discourse for decades), but also what sort of role the EU can play in the region. According to Fogh Rasmussen, NATO and the EU 'can, and should, play complimentary and mutually reinforcing roles in supporting international peace and security.'[69] However, the EU suffers from many of the same problems as NATO – internal divisions (intra-institutional and between member states) and serious financial constraints, as well as a strained image in the MENA region.[70]

Although NATO/EU prospects for finding a common approach to the MENA region is hampered by their relative standing in the region, by financial constraints and internal divisions, that is not to say that NATO and the EU should not come together to find a burden-sharing agreement towards the area. On the other hand, even if the two institutions could find a way to cooperate, this approach would probably prove less influential had it not been for their common problems. Even though a comprehensive approach would be the best way of enhancing security and stability in the MENA, there are no shortage of issues in which NATO could play a role on its own. If NATO is to achieve its goals of enhancing security and stability and strengthening and deepening its partnerships, it must focus on establishing a shared vision for the future of the region as well as making itself an attractive partner.

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[69] 'A Global Perspective for Europe', Address by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen to the joint meeting of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs and Sub-committee on Security and Defence, Brussels, 23 April 2012.

[70] Menon, Anand (2011), 'European Defence Policy from Lisbon to Libya', *Survival,* 53 (3), June–July 2011, pp.75–90.

Possibilities for NATO's Future Policy towards the MENA Region

During the initial stages of writing up the new strategic concept, the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partners were actively involved in the debate leading to its adoption. By including its partners in this process NATO wanted to signal the importance it places on its partnerships. The Strategic Concept itself refers specifically to the MD and ICI, with the aim of strengthening and deepening the cooperation with current members and opening the partnerships up to new members.[71] This was again confirmed at the Chicago Summit in May 2012: 'At a time of unprecedented change in the Mediterranean and broader Middle East, NATO is committed to strengthening and developing partnership relations with countries in the region, with whom we face common security challenges and share the same goals for peace, security and stability.'[72] The Summit also offered support to its partners through individualized programmes in areas like security institution building, defence modernization, capacity development, and civil–military relations, allowing a focus on agreed priorities for each partner country while stressing the need for the MD and ICI partners to become more proactive in exploiting the opportunities offered by NATO.

While official NATO documents and statements routinely underscore the importance of strengthening and developing the partnerships in the MENA region, this is not reflected in ongoing discussions about NATO. Perhaps the most startling finding from the present research has been the relative absence of discussions about NATO's future approach towards the MENA – in the academic literature, in the media and within NATO. Indeed, NATO's approaches to the MENA region and the MD and ICI partnerships have been of little interest to scholars. This may be a symptom of the historically low importance placed on these partnerships by NATO and its members in practice, but, given the current situation it is surprising. In NATO the situation in the MENA is usually brought up in relation to the collective defence of Turkey and Article IV consultations, not in relation to the partnerships in general. When partnerships are discussed, this is done in general terms arguing for the importance of partnerships in general and need

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[71] Strategic Concept , para.35.
[72] *Chicago Summit Declaration,* issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Chicago on 20 May 2012, paras. 39–44.

for global partnerships to improve Alliance members' security.[73] There have been few discussions of a long-term vision for the development of security and stability in the MENA region, or even *how* strengthening and developing partnerships could or should be undertaken.

This report argues that NATO's possibilities for strengthening and developing cooperation with the MENA region in order to contribute to regional security and stability hinges on two vital factors: its ability to compromise on future priorities for the Alliance and especially its role in the MENA region, and its ability to make the Alliance an attractive partner for the states in the region.

Internal possibilities – a Shared Vision for the MENA Region

With its presence in Afghanistan dwindling, NATO is once again entering into the debate on its future role. The Strategic Concept adopted in November 2010 aims to guide the next phase, but by emphasizing three essential core tasks the Concept has taken into account all the various issues of its members, thereby opening up the Concept to differing interpretations by its different members. Although NATO has produced a classified political guidance document to direct NATO planners,[74] it does little to alleviate the disagreements within NATO on what its core business should be. While most European members see it as a regional military alliance that should focus on collective defence, the US and a few other members stress the importance of NATO's global 'expansion' as a hub in a global security network. This debate affects how NATO should deal with the MENA region and what role it should have there.

Partnerships are not an end in themselves. In the absence of a link between partnerships and membership, NATO will need to clarify its mandate and ambitions for its MENA partnerships, towards its partners but also to its members. What is the added value for NATO from these partnerships? Is it reasonable to expect that partners themselves will eventually take care of security of stability in their own region, given the regional rivalries and difference security perceptions? Is the aim to get more partners to operate alongside NATO in future missions? or is it simply to cooperate on common security challenges, whatever they may be? Secondly, NATO must agree on what role it should play in the region. Should it be a political role, constructing partnerships around the values of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law, as in the Central and Eastern European

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73 See for instance; Meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs, NATO Headquarters , Brussels, Belgium, 4 and 5 December 2012. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/events_92579.htm
74 Interview with NATO official, Brussels, September 18, 2012.

states? or should NATO focus on a more pragmatic and practical relationship limited primarily to the provision of training, advising and assisting (TAA) opportunities for willing MENA militaries?

Establish common goals. The starting point for any discussion on how NATO could strengthen and develop its partnerships should be to establish its goals towards the MENA region. This should start with identifying common security challenges emanating from the region. Whereas issues such as regional wars, terrorism, proliferation of WMD, failed states and power vacuums, migration and energy security may all cause concern for NATO members, it is clear that those states in closest geographical proximity to the region will have different threat perceptions than those further away – Turkey's perceptions of the region and the urgency of the issues there differs from those of Norway, for example. While it may be difficult to agree on specific issues or the immediate concerns of the various members, NATO would be wise to focus on what its goals in the region should be, in order to establish what it wants from its partnerships. The goal of enhancing security and stability in the region would require a comprehensive approach that would go far beyond military solutions – many of the sources of instability that became evident with the Arab Spring were socio-economic in origin, which is not where NATO's expertise rests. Stability in the MENA region would require reform of governments, economic development, greater individual freedoms, and addressing grievances and inequalities issues – matters clearly out of NATO's reach. Thus, NATO would do well to understand its limits and lower its ambitions by focusing on the less ambitious goal of solving common security challenges through cooperation. This would not mean that norms and values should not guide NATO's approach to the region, but rather that NATO understands its limitations in seeking to deal with issues well beyond its expertise and reach. If the ambitious goal of security and stability in the region is to be endorsed, it will be necessary to achieve consensus on a shared vision for the long-term development of this goal. If, however, a less ambitious goal is established, the partnerships can be envisioned in a more pragmatic sense of working together on solving common problems. Establishing what NATO's goals in the region are will allow for a clearer idea of what it wants from its partnerships and what 'strengthening and developing partnerships' actually means.

Establish working agreement. For NATO to find a common goal towards the MENA region, it must also carve out a working agreement between the organization and those of its members with strong bilateral ties to the region, in order to avoid turf battles and duplication of efforts. This way, NATO would know where it can bring in its expertise and added value, and where it is acceptable to do so without med-

dling in its members' affairs. In addition, NATO must find a working relationship with the EU that can ensure a comprehensive approach to the region and a burden-sharing agreement that will avoid duplication of efforts.

Norms and Values. While political dialogue is often cited as an important part of NATO partnerships, this has so far not been fruitful in the MENA region. What has worked to some extent is the technical military-to-military TAA, as highlighted with the inclusion of MENA partners in the Libya operation. However, in basing the partnerships on a pragmatic policy that favoured stability over democracy, NATO sacrificed its own values, and in the end this did not promote increased security and stability in the region. On the contrary, the uprisings in the region were against many of the regimes that NATO and its members had viewed as useful in maintaining the status quo. Although NATO continues to work with partners that do not share all its values, it may now be time for values and norms to play a more constructive role in NATO's efforts to strengthen and develop its partnerships to increase stability and security. One way to do this is to focus on good governance and reform rather than explicitly on democratic values and individual liberties. That may make it possible to promote some values and engage democratic reformists to alleviate some of NATO's negative reputation, while balancing this against the interest in political stability and cooperation towards common challenges. The hope for liberal democracies to flourish in the region will have to be balanced with the need to work with the region as it is rather than what we would like it to be.

External Possibilities – an Attractive Partner

Common ownership. If NATO is able to agree on a common approach towards the MENA region, it will need to revitalize its partnerships there by making itself more attractive as a partner towards the MENA states. This will have to start with developing partnerships with a genuine common ownership. This has been problematic; prior to the Chicago Summit in 2012, Morocco led an initiative to develop a new political framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue. Even though this initiative was welcomed at the Chicago Summit,[75] it does not seem to have helped the Dialogue further. According to Nasser Bourita, the Secretary General of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, the MD is still driven by NATO, leaving little or no sense of ownership to the non-NATO members. Indeed, the Alliance decides on its own what it offers to its partners, with little consultation about what they actually want or need. Without a shared process the Mediterranean partners feel like the 'other', where NATO sees only

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[75] *Chicago Summit Declaration, ,* Para 42.

challenges and risks rather than opportunities. This makes it difficult for the partnership to move forward.[76] This is also true of the ICI. Without a link from partnership to membership, these MENA partnerships would benefit tremendously from an approach that could establish common ownership instead of a top–down approach from NATO. Such common ownership would make it easier to establish what the common security challenges are, how to deal with them, and what NATO can offer to its partners in this respect. In addition, common ownership would probably do much to alleviate the mutual mistrust and misperceptions that have plagued cooperation in the past.

Added Value. Many partners and potential partners have been reluctant to advance security cooperation with NATO because of the modest added value it offered regarding other bilateral cooperation arrangements available to them. This was something NATO tried to address with the Berlin package, but it remains unclear just what added value NATO can offer. The Alliance partnerships are unlikely to substitute for the bilateral political and security ties MENA states have with various individual NATO members and other states. Because NATO cannot offer any security guarantees on a par with Article V, it needs to do a better job at articulating to its partners what they cannot get elsewhere. This requires a dialogue with its partners, not merely a list of activities that they can pick and choose from. Because NATO is more a service provider than a security provider per se, it needs to clarify its strategy and what it is prepared to offer in terms of actual security of the region, as well as what it expects from its partners. This way, NATO can establish true partnerships aimed at sharing the burden for security and stability in the MENA region.

NATO training is welcomed by several states in the region, including non-partners such as Saudi Arabia, and this could be an avenue where NATO can bring added value. This could prove a credible and affordable basis for developing and strengthening the MENA relationships as more technical cooperation can enhance trust and confidence and help establish mutual benefit between the partners. However, NATO will need to focus on the quality and not the quantity of the activities offered. More is not always better. The Berlin package, which increased the activities offered by NATO, did little to enhance actual cooperation. If the partners are invited to develop and articulate requests for assistance, in consultation with NATO, on areas where they actually need support rather than picking from a list of options, the partnerships can be moved forward. Previously, the concept of non-imposition has led NATO to take a reactive stance towards its partnerships, waiting for them to approach the Alliance for assistance rather

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[76] Lecture and interview with H.E. Nasser Bourita, Secretary General of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation of Morocco, NUPI, Oslo, 28 Nov. 2012.

than proactively offering assistance in areas where NATO knows there is an improvement potential. This stance has brought only limited success, so it may now be time for NATO to become more proactive towards its partners, offering them assistance rather than waiting to be approached. Being more proactive does not have to mean that NATO imposes itself on its partners. On the contrary, it may actually signal that NATO values its partnerships.

Norms and values. Because of declining military capabilities and unwillingness to use them, NATO might be pragmatically best served by a focus on nurturing ties to those states with genuine military capabilities and the willingness to use them to provide security and stability in the region and possibly elsewhere. But because this may not ensure security and stability in states where the governments is unable to uphold its monopoly on legitimate violence, helping them to govern and secure their territories will be vital. However, security and stability do not flow directly from the willingness to use military capabilities. The Arab Spring showed that where the regimes were willing to use armed force against the populations, the situation only deteriorated. While it may only be by chance that the political changes in partner countries like Egypt or Tunisia have been much less violent than those in Libya or Syria, it may also be that exposure to a democratic institution like NATO has had a positive effect on the military establishment in those countries. While there are certainly many other reasons why Libya and Syria became far more violent than Tunisia and Egypt, a focus on NATO values may bring another added element to traditional notions of security and stability. By convincing its partners that addressing socio-economic grievances through governmental reform may enhance their own internal stability, NATO may be able to combine a pragmatic partnership based on cooperation towards common security challenges, while addressing root causes through reference to basic NATO norms and values.

Focus on bilateral relationships. Floating alliances, regional rivalries and differences in threat perceptions among the MENA states all make it difficult to work with the region in clusters under the banner of the MD and the ICI, and the multilateral approach in the MD has suffered from this. Although the idea of creating a shared vision for the region through multilateral dialogue makes good sense from a theoretical standpoint, in reality the partners have such different needs and expectations that it seems strange to group them together – NATO cannot be expected to have a common vision or purpose for them all. The MD consists of two distinct sub-complexes, the Maghreb and the Mashreq. The ICI covers parts of the Gulf, while the traditional Middle Eastern subcomplex is only partially covered. While the entire MENA RSC may share some common challenges, the differing perceptions, socio-

economic realities and geographical locations mean that all states have different outlooks. This brings up the question of whether NATO should continue to approach the region in two clusters, or focus more on bilateral ties outside the MD and ICI frameworks. Focusing on clusters make sense only if the partnerships have common security perceptions. While states of the region share some common perceptions, this is far from the whole picture. With regional rivalries and domestic political change sweeping through the MENA region, things may change dramatically. Thus it would be wise for NATO to focus more on IPCPs with individual states, instead of trying to strengthen and further develop the MD and ICI partnership frameworks. Offering a more tailored approach to each partner may heighten the profile of the partnerships among the partners, as they will be treated as distinct from other states and not lumped together in clusters. Increasing the status of the partnerships may also entice other states to join, as well as encouraging the partners to become more active. Thus NATO should also focus on heightening the profile of the partnerships by appointing a special representative to the region as well as raising the representation at the partnership meetings to a higher level.

In the short term, NATO will be challenged in responding to urgencies as events on the ground evolve, and future prospects of security and stability in the region. Although these may not be mutually exclusive, any form of meddling in the region is likely to have repercussions for NATO's future standing and prospects for cooperation. Here it is apt to recall Henry Kissinger's observation of the two key challenges of conducting foreign policy: learning to distinguish between urgent and important matters, and then devising techniques to keep the urgent from taking over from the important.[77] There is no shortage of urgent matters in the region – but distinguishing these from the important will be vital when NATO is to consider its options for meeting the new challenges in the MENA region. Such a long-term vision of development in the region must start with crafting common ownership between the Alliance and the MENA states, as well as a focus on where NATO can bring added value. In this way, NATO can make itself attractive to the MENA states.

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[77] See for instance: Henry Kissinger's US Naval Academy Forrestal Lecture, Annapolis, Maryland, April 11, 2007, available at:
http://www.henryakissinger.com/speeches/041107.html

Implications for Norway

Because NATO is the cornerstone in Norwegian defence and security policy, any changes to NATO's priorities will likely have implications for Norway. As this report has shown, the debate about the future evolution of NATO and its approach to the MENA region is still 'up in the air'. This makes an informed analysis about the implications for Norway very difficult. Although the prospects for greater emphasis on the MENA region within NATO are slim, the various developments sketched out in this report are likely to have implications for Norway. As has been evident from the recent terrorist attack on the gas plant in In Amenas, Algeria, events within the MENA region itself should be followed closely, as they may affect the economic and security interests of Norway. The main implication for Norway that can be drawn from this report is that Norway needs to balance its need for NATO as a collective defence alliance and a credible deterrence as well as an Alliance that is both able and willing to contribute collectively to security and stability in its own neighbourhood. The main implication for Norway that can be drawn from this report is that Norway needs to balance its need for NATO as a collective defence alliance and a credible deterrence as well as an Alliance that is both able and willing to contribute collectively to security and stability in its own neighbourhood.

- *Collective defence focus*. NATO is the cornerstone of Norway's security policy and vital for its *threshold defence*. As such, a capable Alliance is of paramount importance, and Norway should pay close attention to the ongoing defence cuts within NATO. It is essential for Norway to contribute to and encourage the development of NATO as a credible institution for deterrence and collective defence as well as being able to meet new security challenges.[78] Given the financial austerity and diverging interests, Norway would be well advised to stress the need for a credible collective defence capacity within the Alliance before embarking on new missions and roles.

- *Improve regional defence cooperation*. One way of increasing NATO's collective capabilities is through regional defence cooperation. Norway places great weight on cooperative arrangements such as the Nordic Defence Cooperation and the

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[78] Forsvarsdepartementet(Norwegian MOD (2012), *Et forsvar for vår tid,* Prop. 73 S (2011–2012), Proposisjon til Stortinget (forslag til stortingsvedtak), 23 March 2012

Northern Group as well as other types of multinational defence cooperation. This is something that is clearly valued in NATO if it complements, rather than hampers, the ongoing Smart Defence initiative in the Alliance. However, Norway needs to make sure that these forms of regional clustering do not interfere with NATO's decision-making capacities or its operational effectiveness.

- *Focus on the region and the neighbourhood.* Norway should make sure that ongoing efforts within NATO at achieving a global focus do not come at the expense of NATO's own territories and its immediate neighbourhood. While there certainly are security interests in, for instance, the Asia-Pacific, there are plenty of issues within NATO and its neighbourhood that could merit more attention. All members share an interest in a secure and stabile MENA region; and although they might not agree on how to deal with it, finding a working solution to the security environment there should have priority over 'going global'. Norway could do well to press harder for a common approach to the MENA region, as goodwill from many members who view this region as extremely important could prove useful if Norway one day needs attention brought to its interests in the Arctic.

- *MENA vs. the Arctic.* If NATO manages to prepare a common strategy towards the MENA, aimed at giving it priority over other regions, Norway should pay close attention. Although instability in the MENA region should be of concern to Norway as well as those members that are in closer proximity to the region, such prioritization should be weighed against the consequences for Norway's most important strategic area, the Arctic. The Arctic today is an area with almost no security concerns and Norway's relations with its Arctic neighbours can be deemed good. A focus on the southern part of NATO's borders is unlikely to alter the situation in the North, but two points should be considered. One: an increased focus on the MENA region may alleviate some of the tensions between NATO and Russia, in turn helping to ensure better working relations with Norway's neighbour. Second: a focus away from the High North might leave Norway open to more outside pressure, which in turn could lead to increased insecurity and instability. In such a scenario, the two would have to be balanced, although security and stability in the Arctic are currently not under pressure.

- *Strengthen transatlantic relationship.* The US is Norway's top-priority partner; if Washington's interests diverge from those of Norway, a carefully balanced strategy to make NATO and Norway relevant for the US is vital. While increased collective capacity of the Alliance is something that would be favoured in Washington, the US desire to build a more global NATO may be at odds with the interests and financial capacities of several European states. Should the US move most of its efforts east, towards the Asia/Pacific, shared practices and contact points between the Europeans and the American may decline and thus also what NATO is. As such, an effort to 'keep the Americans in' may be the most important aspect of the future of NATO. This will have to start with investing in greater capabilities in order for Europe to take more care of its own security, not with an ambitious bid to 'go global'.

- *Interoperability and training.* Increased capabilities may ensure that NATO can enhance its interoperability with the US. Although this can address only the capabilities gap, and not the problems of political will to act, it can show the US side that the Europeans have relevant capabilities. In order to increase Norway's relevance to the US and NATO, the Norwegian Armed Forces should focus on exercises within their own operational area in a NATO context. This will ensure that they are familiar with Norway's operational area as well as connecting FOH closer to its main allies. If increasing the capabilities of NATO for collective defence and crisis management should conflict with strengthening and deepening the partnerships in the MENA and elsewhere, the former should have priority prioritized. If the two are not mutually exclusive, Norway would be well advised to contribute to efforts that can bolster the security and stability of the MENA region, whether though political efforts or military-to-military cooperation.

- *Consider Norwegian security agreements with MENA states.* Given the uncertainty surrounding the future of NATO's policies towards the MENA and the ability of its partnerships to provide security and stability in the region, Norway should consider strengthening and developing its bilateral ties to MENA states in which Norway has special economic or security interests.

Conclusion

Recent events in the Middle East and North Africa have already undermined security and stability in the region. Although this new security environment calls for a response from NATO, it has so far played a hesitant role towards the MENA. This reflects its problematic historical experience and its fragmented record of developing working relationships with partners there. While NATO's historical track record in the region does not reflect the importance placed on the region by many of its members and the organization itself, competing priorities within the Alliance and the political changes and regional rivalries in the region have made NATO's stated aim of strengthening and developing its partnerships to enhance regional security and stability even more difficult. This report have concentrated on analysing how these factors, internal and external to the Alliance, shape its possibilities and limits in addressing the new security environment in the MENA.

Ever since the Cold War ended, NATO has struggled to find a rationale in the new security environment and has in large part justified its existence on interventions. The warning that NATO should go 'out of area or out of business' has become more and more acute, and many member states looks increasingly drawn towards the 'out of business' side of the equation. This has profound implications for NATO as a political community whose members see their security as intertwined along with the necessity of common action. The Libya operation showed that not all of Europe is debellicised with France and Britain taking a leading role with the support of many smaller European states, but it also showed that NATO, once again, lacked political unity. As such, it could be argued that NATO as a political community of states who believe it should act together is rapidly deteriorating. The problem is that what NATO is and should become – what its core task(s) should be – is still a question that remains unanswered and the debates about NATO's future continue to divide the Alliance.

This is also evident in NATO's approach towards the new security environment in the MENA. Because discussions about NATO's future still divide the members, this report has argued that this is likely to be the case in NATO's efforts to address the MENA region as well. Member-state perceptions of risk and threat towards the crises vary; and without financial clout or political will, NATO's ability to establish a common vision for the future of the MENA region and its goals there for furthering security and stability remains limited. Although there are some ways in which NATO can strengthen and develop its

partnerships in order to promote security and stability in the region, it seems likely that the MENA partnerships will continue to have low priority, as in the past. This means that member states with interests in the region are likely to develop and strengthen their own bilateral relationships there which will come at the expense of NATO's efforts, further undermining its partnerships and ambitions in the region.

In addition, NATO's ambitions are likely to be curbed by domestic political changes in the MENA that have led to a more assertive audience sceptical to the West, and regional rivalries and changing alliances that have led states to pursue policies more independent of the West. This will continue to hamper NATO's ability to influence states' strategies and subsequently its possibilities for strengthening and developing its partnerships to enhance security and stability on its own terms.

While there certainly are more limits than possibilities for NATO to address the new security environment in the MENA, its possibilities hinges on finding a common vision for the future of the region and make itself attractive as a partner to the MENA states. First and foremost NATO needs to establish what its goals towards the region are. NATO should focus more narrowly on solving common security challenges through cooperation rather than the more ambitious goal of enhancing security and stability in the region. This will provide NATO with a clearer sense of what it wants from its partnerships and what 'strengthening and developing partnerships' actually entails. In order to make itself more attractive to its partners, NATO must focus on creating a common ownership over the partnerships with the MENA states rather than the current top-down approach. This would help establish what the common security challenges are, how to deal with them through cooperation and what NATO can offer in this respect. In addition, NATO needs to articulate to its partners what they bring of added value that the partners cannot get through its other bilateral agreements. This means becoming more proactive towards its partners, inviting them to develop and articulate requests for assistance, in consultation with NATO, on areas where they actually needs support rather than making them choose from a list of options.

In the short term, NATO will be challenged in responding to urgencies as events on the ground evolve, and future prospects of security and stability in the region. Although these may not be mutually exclusive, any form of meddling in the region is likely to have repercussions for NATO's future standing and prospects for cooperation. Here it is apt to recall Henry Kissinger's observation of the two key challenges of conducting foreign policy: learning to distinguish between urgent and important matters, and then devising techniques to keep the urgent

from taking over from the important. There is no shortage of urgent matters in the region – but distinguishing these from the important will be vital when NATO is to consider its options for meeting the new challenges in the MENA region. Such a long-term vision of development in the region must start with reaching a consensus within NATO on a shared vision for the future of the MENA region and its goals there, crafting common ownership between the Alliance and the MENA states, as well as a focus on where NATO can bring added value. In this way, NATO can make itself attractive to the MENA states.

Because NATO is the cornerstone in Norwegian defence and security policy, any changes in NATO's priorities will likely have implications for Norway. While there are some possibilities for NATO to strengthen and developing its partnerships in order to address the new security environment in the MENA, prospects for greater emphasis on and prioritization of the region within NATO remains slim, at least in the short-term. Even so, the volatility of the region and its proximity to the Euro-Atlantic RSC means that contingencies may draw the Alliance closer to the region in the future, and as such, events there must be followed closely. Regardless, this research has uncovered some issues that may have implications for future Norwegian security and defence policies. The main implication for Norwegian security and defence policy that can be drawn from this report is that Norway needs to balance its need for NATO as a collective defence alliance and a credible deterrence as well as an Alliance that is both able and willing to contribute collectively to security and stability in its own neighbourhood.