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Africa and NATO's southern flank The forgotten dimension of transatlantic security

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Introduction

It is well known that the Atlantic Alliance was founded in 1949 as a collective defense organization, with the primary mission of confronting the threat posed by the Soviet Union. In addition, NATO was part of a broader effort to prevent the resurgence of nationalist militarism in Europe, which was achieved through a strong American military presence whose security guarantees must, at the same time, foster European political integration.

This commitment to collective defense, which was very explicitly included in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, was not of a global but a regional in character, so that NATO only considered responding to armed attacks when they occurred against the territory of any of the Parties, either in Europe or in North America, or against the French departments of Algeria¹, or against the territory of Turkey or against the islands under the jurisdiction of either Party in the North Atlantic area north of the Tropic of Cancer. In other words, the founding treaty of NATO said nothing about what decades later would be called the "southern flank", meaning the broad peripheral region that covers the territory of the Middle East and extends through North

¹ On 16 January 1963 the Council noted that, in so far as it might affect the former French departments of Algeria, the clauses relating to this Treaty were null and void as from 3 July 1962.

Africa to the south of the Sahel and the Atlantic Ocean, much less mentioned an African continent that was subject to colonial rule at that time ² (Anon s. f.-b).

With the end of the Cold War, the formidable adversary that had been the Soviet Union disappeared and the former members of the defunct Warsaw Pact became partners, as a waiting room before becoming full members of the Alliance. New possibilities opened up and NATO strengthened its political character, to the point that the fourth Strategic Concept adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the Rome Summit in November 1991 recognized that "the opportunity to achieve the objectives of the Alliance through political means is greater than ever". As a result, the allies understood that, in the new context, NATO could afford to adopt "a comprehensive approach to security through dialogue, cooperation and the maintenance of collective defense capabilities"³, three elements of Allied security policy that were mutually reinforcing.

NATO thus adopted a broader and more ambitious approach to its security strategy through the idea of partnership, a broad concept that allowed deterrence and defense to be complemented by the new notions of cooperation and security that the new times demanded. This required expanding the scope of the Alliance outside the area covered by the Treaty of Washington, thus bringing the African continent into the Euro-Atlantic security field for the first time.

This was in response to the sensitivity of some Atlantic partners in southern Europe who argued that, in the new context in which "in Central Europe, the risk of a surprise attack has been substantially reduced"⁴, the Mediterranean should become a priority axis of the Alliance's new security policy. The stability and prosperity of the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean were becoming increasingly important, at a time when the region was undergoing profound changes. The Mediterranean began to be seen as an increasingly complex and fragmented area, in which new threats and new actors were appearing that challenged Euro-Atlantic security. Consequently, NATO began to understand that "conflicts arising from fragile or failed states, instability caused and derived from terrorism and transnational terrorist groups, as well as all forms of illegal trafficking, cyber and also chemical threats, biological, radiological and nuclear threats (CBRN) and challenges in maritime

² CACHINERO Jorge: "NATO Strategic Concept 2022 (2/2)", https://abcblogs.abc.es/jorge-cachinero/otros-temas/concepto-estrategico-otan-2022-2-2-direccion_amp.html

³ «NATO - Official text: The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991), 25, 07-Nov.-1991», paragraphs 16,25. www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm

⁴ «NATO - Official text: The Alliance's New Strategic Concept (1991), 07-Nov.-1991», Paragraph 7, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_23847.htm

security" generated security threats in the Mediterranean and North African regions that had a direct impact on the Alliance⁵.

Especially notorious for demonstrating the fragility of these states and their enormous potential to destabilize the region was, in North Africa, the case of Algeria. In the decade of the 80s, the fall in the price of oil had caused a deep discomfort in broad sectors of Algerian society that saw its welfare state and social balance threatened, given the lack of liquidity suffered by the country. The crisis hit all social classes, and showed the weakness and inability of the state to continue ensuring control of the population. As a result, in October 1988, the political situation unraveled, leading to fierce revolts led mainly by young people demanding jobs and justice, while Islamist groups took root in Algerian society and became a violent political movement ready to seize power.

This phenomenon of social revolts in Algeria, reproduced to a lesser extent in other countries of the Maghreb and encouraged by the return of thousands of Islamist fighters, the so-called Arab-Afghans, who returned from Afghanistan ready to repeat in their countries of origin the process of armed insurgency that had produced such good returns for them against the Soviets, made NATO understand that Europe's security was closely linked to that of the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.

NATO began to accept that, with the end of the threat in Eastern Europe, it was necessary to achieve not only a good neighborly relationship with the countries of its southern shore, but also an interdependent relationship that would guarantee the stability and security of a region, in which the general political situation was beginning to be worrying. Paragraph 11 of the 1991 Strategic Concept stated that "The stability and peace of the countries of the southern periphery of Europe are important for the security of the Alliance", thus recognizing that Europe's security was intimately linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean, an approach that would be repeated years later in the 1999 Strategic Concept.

For the Alliance, the new post-Soviet period was to be characterized by dialogue and cooperation, not only with the countries of the East but also with the Mediterranean, as well as by new ways of contributing to peace and stability, such as crisis management operations outside the area of responsibility enshrined in the Washington treaty. Ultimately, without changing the purpose or security functions of the Alliance, NATO assumed that the new environment offered new opportunities for the Alliance to frame its strategy within a comprehensive approach to security, in which Africa also had a place.

NATO launches Mediterranean Dialogue

⁵ «NATO - Topic: Mediterranean Dialogue», www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm

In 1991, NATO began to design a broader pan-European security architecture beginning with the creation, in December 1991, of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which would be renamed the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997, and which was a forum that brought together the Allies with their Central European, Eastern European, and Central Asian neighbors for joint consultations. Many of these countries recently liberated from the Soviet yoke considered that a relationship with NATO was fundamental to their own guarantees of stability, to their democratic consolidation and to their integration into Europe. These countries were considered potential candidates to become Atlantic partners, a goal that most of them would achieve in the following years.

But cooperation also extended southward, with NATO's so-called Mediterranean Dialogue emerging in 1994, bringing together seven non-alliance countries from the Mediterranean region. Its overall objective was to "contribute to regional security and stability, achieve better mutual understanding and dispel any misconceptions about NATO in participating countries"⁶. In 1995, a first group of countries composed of Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia joined the Dialogue, followed by Jordan in 1997 and Algeria in 2000.

With regard to Africa, there was still Gaddafi's Libya at the time facing the United States, which in 1986 had bombed its two main cities, Tripoli and Benghazi in response to the Attack on the La Belle nightclub and other terrorist attacks allegedly supported by the Libyan state. The situation of this country in relation to two other important allies, such as the United Kingdom and France, had also deteriorated at the end of the 1980s, as a result of the shooting down in terrorist attacks of two aircrafts, one in the United Kingdom and the other in Africa, events that the United States, the United Kingdom and France attributed to Libya resulting in a harsh sanctions regime that led to the isolation of the country.

In a security environment characterized, in the last decade of the last century by the Alliance's growing involvement in the Balkan wars, first in Bosnia in 1991 and, subsequently, in Kosovo in 1999, NATO understood that it should limit its crisis management role in the context of its collective defense mission, to the European territory. This left the countries of North Africa under increasing political tensions out of reach with the return of jihadist fighters from Afghanistan. It also left out the countries of the Sahel, such as Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger or Chad, where criminal organizations, ethnic militias, armed groups and government authorities had been regularly confronting each other since independence, creating an environment of insecurity that made territorial control of Governments difficult.

However, at that time it was assumed that the Sahel, an area that seemed ideal to experiment with the new concepts of crisis management that were beginning to make their way into the circles of conceptual definition and political decision of the Alliance's missions, was within the

⁶ «NATO - Topic: Mediterranean Dialogue», www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm.

zone of influence of France, a country that maintained a policy known as the "Françafrique", which encompassed important economic and geopolitical interests as well as an extensive military presence, but was also understood by broad sectors of Africa as "neo-colonial arrogance"⁷.

With its limited level of geographical ambition, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue was based on two fundamental pillars: political dialogue and practical cooperation. The dialogue was based on the need to build a shared vision of common security challenges so that a community of security interests could be created on both sides of the Mediterranean Sea in which all participants would be comfortable. To this end, participants were offered the possibility of doing so either bilaterally (NATO+1 format) or multilaterally (NATO+7 format).

NATO began organizing bilateral and multilateral meetings at different levels (Heads of State and Government; ministers of defense and foreign affairs; Ambassadors, etc.), in which Mediterranean partners were invited to share views on security issues relevant to the region and to explore ways to broaden the political and practical dimension of the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The Dialogue was to be based on six key principles⁸:

1. Non-discrimination: all partners are offered the same basis for cooperation and discussion with NATO;
2. Self-differentiation: the Dialogue allows a personalized approach to the specific needs of each partner;
3. Two-way commitment: the Dialogue is a two-way street, in which the Alliance seeks contributions from partners through a regular consultation process, and partners express their needs and objectives to NATO;
4. Non-taxation: partners are free to choose the pace and scope of their cooperation with NATO;
5. Diversity: the Dialogue respects and takes into account the specific regional, cultural and political contexts of the respective partners;
6. Complementarity: NATO's initiative complements that of other international organizations in the region, such as the EU's Union for the Mediterranean, without seeking to duplicate efforts or create a division of roles.

At the same time, the dialogue should be complemented by a two-way, practical cooperation in which both sides benefit from each other's experience and expertise in the areas of what NATO understood to be shared threats such as the fight against violent extremism, the

⁷ MELLY Paul: "Relations Afrique-France: pourquoi la France fait face à tant de colère en Afrique de l'Ouest", BBC News, 7 décembre 2021, www.bbc.com/afrique/region-59548555

⁸ «NATO - Topic: Mediterranean Dialogue», www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm

protection of critical energy infrastructure, missile defense or cyber security. These exchanges were considered essential to improve understanding between the two sides.

One aspect that was given special relevance was that of military education and training, a field in which NATO offered more than 37 areas of cooperation to all dialogue partners through a partnership cooperation menu (PCM with more than 1000 possibilities) that was selected by mutual agreement, according to the characteristics of each country. Activities could range from security sector reform, modernization of the armed forces and capacity building, to interoperability, cyber defense, resistance to CBRN threats, counter-terrorism, protection of critical energy infrastructure and maritime security, or civilian preparedness.

Along with cooperation activities, NATO also began inviting MD partners to participate in various allied operations and joint military exercises. In this way, Egypt and Morocco contributed to the Implementation Force (IFOR)/Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Jordan and Morocco contributed to the NATO Kosovo Force (KFOR); and Jordan participated in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan and Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya. As for the exercises, MD partners participated in various NATO and bilateral military exercises with allies, and Jordan organized in 2017 the NATO-backed regional exercise REGEX 2017, with Morocco being the second country to host this exercise in 2020 (REGEX 2020).

Finally, the Dialog enabled Mediterranean partners to access NATO's Science for Peace and Security (SPS) Program, from which countries such as Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia have benefited. As far as funding is concerned, activities within the Mediterranean Dialogue have in principle been based on the premise that 'everyone pays for their own'⁹. However, the reality is that NATO has been providing financial assistance in support of partners' participation in the Dialogue, resulting in funding of up to 100 per cent of the costs of the activities.

Critical evaluation of the Mediterranean Dialogue

In the following years, NATO continued to view the Dialogue as an integral part of the approach process in terms of security in the Mediterranean. NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept advocated the establishment of a framework of trust, while promoting transparency and cooperation in the region, reinforcing other international efforts. NATO intended to strengthen the political, civilian and military aspects of the Dialogue so as to achieve ever closer cooperation, but the results were unsatisfactory. NATO thus missed an excellent opportunity

⁹ NATO: "On Alliance Solidarity in the 21st Century, Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen - Tallinn, Estonia, 22 April 2010.

to provide greater added value in an area was to become increasingly relevant in terms of Euro-Atlantic security and where other organizations such as the European Union did not at that time have the intention or the capacity to intervene¹⁰.

The causes were multiple, but easily understandable. The Dialogue had a modest initial success given the small amount of economic and resources that NATO gave to the program, which could not be compared at all with the enormous effort that NATO was making with Eastern European countries. To these NATO offered a much more ambitious program that became known as the Partnership for Peace and whose ultimate objective was to integrate them into the Alliance as full partners, something that NATO never had an interest in offering its Mediterranean partners, on the grounds, more political than legal, of the geographical boundaries defined in Article VI of the Washington Treaty.

As a result, Mediterranean countries were less interested in finding regional integration or cooperation formulas that would bring the countries of the southern basin closer to the European socio-political model, as well as a much less powerful integrative effect of the Mediterranean dialogue than that carried out by NATO with the countries of the East.

But alongside this discrimination between its partners and partners in the south regarding the treatment given by NATO, the Mediterranean Dialogue has suffered from some additional flaws since its inception. The first is that it has had to compete with a wide variety of regional initiatives, both official and unofficial, which increases confusion and "dialogue fatigue". In any case, this situation was preferable to the strategic abandonment of the Alliance from its southern dimension in the preceding decades.

The second defect is the heterogeneity of its members and the national interests they defend (countries of Southern Europe against countries North Africa, North Africa against the Middle East, Algeria against Morocco, etc.) and therefore, very different, and often conflicting, approaches to security problems in the Mediterranean. This has resulted in a lower level of ambition when it comes to identifying objectives, interests and values with the Europeans in order to design constructive cooperation strategies.

Of particular concern has been the inclusion of Israel, presented as the most disturbing element of security in the Mediterranean, in the Dialogue, given the complex situation of the Middle East peace process. The lack of resolution of the Arab-Israeli conflict together with the unwillingness of Arab countries to cooperate with Israel has been systematically contaminating the Dialogue to the point that only low-profile activities can be maintained that allow the process to be kept alive, but without decisive steps being taken.

¹⁰ «NATO's limited leeway in North Africa», ISPI, www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/natos-limited-leeway-north-africa-20926

Nor does the dynamics of the dialog favor the lack of regional organizations on the southern shore that would allow these countries to speak with one voice. On the one hand, we find ourselves with a north Atlantic shore formed by thirty powerful and rich countries that, although with different opinions, speak with a single voice modulated by the rule of consensus, in front of the seven individual interlocutors of the south bank, so the dialogue is carried out in unequal terms. NATO will always have the last word, since it is the one who pays. This fact is for the Mediterranean partners a great factor of weakness as they feel relegated to a subordinate position which does not help to improve their confidence in NATO. This has led to some misgivings about the Alliance's missions, which has been heightened by the role played by NATO in scenarios such as Libya or Afghanistan.

NATO, Libya and the Afghanistan syndrome

At the beginning of the century NATO was an organization that "does not consider itself an adversary of any country", which, to the classic tasks of security, consultation and deterrence, and defense decided to add those of crisis management and partnership. The general consensus within the Alliance was to raise the profile of non-Article V operations, as had happened with the Balkans in the previous decade, at a time when Russia was considered a complicated but peaceful partner and China had not yet emerged. As Madeleine Albright stated, NATO was to be conceived as a "force for peace from the Middle East to Central Africa"¹¹. Under these circumstances, Africa seemed destined to play a significant role in the security of the new partnership of the twenty-first century.

The Alliance's need to change and become an effective instrument of global military power projection was brought on the table at the Prague Atlantic Council summit in November 2002, when NATO decided to launch a profound transformative momentum especially visible in three key areas: capacity building, action outside the Euro-Atlantic area and the fight against terrorism. But the results in all these fields were very limited and did not affect Africa.

With regard to action outside the area and the fight against terrorism, which is intrinsically linked to national capacities, after the attacks of September 11, the Alliance showed its preference for Afghanistan over other geographical areas, which was evidenced by its decision to take over the Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (ISAF) under the UN mandate as well. This mission was considered by the Organization's Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop, as the "top priority of NATO". Africa was again relegated, in the range of strategic preferences of the alliance.

¹¹ "Madeleine ALBRIGHT quoted in Royal United Services Institute", Newsbrief, Vol. 18:4, April 1998, p. 26.

The 2010 Strategic Concept "Active Engagement, Modern Defense" which was published at the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, and was complemented shortly thereafter by the Military Committee Guideline (MC 400/3) of March 2012, did not mention Africa and merely contemplated, with some complacency, a peaceful Euro-Atlantic area and a strategic context in which the threat of a conventional attack on NATO territory was low.

However, the concept recognized nuclear proliferation and other weapons of mass destruction associated with the use of ballistic missiles, along with terrorism, border instability, cyberattacks or energy security, as the new threats to NATO. In this way, NATO was shifting the center of gravity of continental security away from central Europe, and placing it increasingly on the periphery. Although not specifically thought of in Africa, the military priority was progressively oriented towards a reinforcement of defense on the vulnerable flanks of the continent¹².

In this way, together with collective defense, NATO incorporated in its 2010 Strategic Concept adopted in Lisbon, crisis management and cooperative security, as essential core tasks of the Alliance and whose implementation was thought to take place outside the Euro-Atlantic area. Crisis management was aimed at using political and military tools to prevent crises from escalating into conflict, as well as to stop ongoing conflicts affecting the security of the Alliance and to help consolidate stability in post-conflict situations in a way that contributed to Euro-Atlantic security.

For its part, cooperative security was aimed at stability in border countries to which NATO offered the possibility of becoming partners on issues such as arms control, non-proliferation and disarmament. The door to membership in the Alliance remained open to all European democracies that met NATO's political and military standards, but not to North African countries.

But the Strategic Concept of 2010 had two blind spots, and the "strategic peace" situation that NATO had contemplated soon blew up with two new international developments, which the Alliance failed to anticipate. These were the Arab Spring of 2011 and the frictions with the Russian Federation, in Ukraine in 2014. Although these were serious misjudgments in allied strategy, NATO maintained its preference for crisis management in Afghanistan that would last until the beginning of this decade.

In the first case, the so-called "Arab Springs" of 2011, which had very important repercussions in North Africa, surprised NATO in its attention to the "southern flank" by showing that the recently approved Strategic Concept was insufficient to prevent and, much more, to manage this type of crisis. The collapse of decades-long regimes in Egypt, Libya and Tunisia forced the

¹² SIMON Luis: "Understanding US Retrenchment in Europe", Survival, International Institute for Strategic Affairs, April-May 2015, pp. 162-165.

alliance to reconsider its role in the region, and to seek options that would allow these countries to move smoothly in their difficult democratization processes. However, the military coup in Cairo in July 2013 and Libya's long descent into the second phase of the civil war reversed geopolitical dynamics, orienting NATO's priorities in North Africa towards growing political instability, the proliferation of jihadist organizations and the illicit activities of multiple different criminal networks.

However, NATO's intervention in Libya in 2011 through a "Coalition of the Willing", a group of allied countries operating within but not involving the Alliance, showed in all its harshness the political and operational The door to membership in the Alliance remained open to all European democracies that met NATO's political and military standards, but not to North African countries. Libya showed that the allied operational strategy in Afghanistan of deploying a limited number of "boots on the ground" did not work, even if the level of ambition and goals to be achieved were reduced. The combination of air power, some special forces and, above all, the use of native forces had served in Afghanistan to remove the Taliban from power, but not to defeat them completely.

This model also did not serve to provide the ultimate military victory in African theaters of operations such as Libya, unless NATO agreed to commit itself to the country's reconstruction, which Afghanistan had shown it was unwilling to do. The Western intervention in Libya, considered by NATO Secretary General Rasmussen, is "an example for future military interventions"¹³ demonstrated, on the contrary, that without control on the ground and without the creation of stable political structures, beyond the tribes, it was not possible to successfully manage crises in such African scenarios.

From a strictly military point of view, Libya demonstrated how relatively straightforward it was to intervene with aerial means and without deploying troops in physically accessible scenarios where action could be taken either from the sea or from local bases in allied countries, and how complicated it was to access the internal theaters of operations of the Sahel, since the greater the distance at which one had to operate, the more the potentiality of the response was degraded. This is a lesson that NATO learned in Libya and that it applied in the Sahel when it refused to intervene in Mali in 2013, not even in support of the French operation "Serval".

Libya also highlighted the different sensitivities – and serious divergences – among the allies regarding to NATO's approach to Africa. Turkey's initial indecision about which side to take in Libya, Germany's refusal to pass Security Council resolution 1973 with the withdrawal of its support for the NATO mission — including its crews of AWACS systems, essential for the command and control of Allied aircraft — or Poland's harsh criticism of Allied intervention as

¹³ WESTERVELT, "NATO's Intervention in Libya: A New Model?", NPR. 2011.
www.npr.org/2011/09/12/140292920/natos-intervention-in-libya-a-new-model

oil-motivated, they showed in all their harshness the little appetite of many allies for interventions in Africa. The prestigious magazine *The Economist* would define this view on crisis management operations as "a worrying tendency of member states to assume an à la carte attitude regarding their responsibilities to the Alliance"¹⁴.

The Russians appear

If the Arab revolutions were hardly a NATO revolt, Russia's intervention in Ukraine in March 2014, an event that surprised the Alliance despite Georgia's precedent in 2008, would not be the same. By the time NATO wanted to react to the combination of military actions and subversive efforts fostered by Russia and the use of a mix of local fighters, "little green men", and, on occasion units of the Russian regular army, as well as cyber-attacks and disinformation actions, the Crimean Peninsula had been occupied unopposed and the east of the country was in an advanced process of secession.

From that point on, NATO preferences were almost exclusively directed towards the containment of Russia, against which a "compensation strategy" was devised to take advantage both in quantity and quality of NATO's conventional forces over the Russian ones¹⁵. The need to address unpostponable security problems arising from Russian interventionism in Eastern Europe meant that the southern dimension of the Alliance, and especially Africa, was relegated to the background.

NATO thus regained a renewed preference for Article V missions concerning deterrence and collective defense, to the detriment of the crisis management that had dominated the Allied interventions in the first decade of this century. Nevertheless, NATO remained aware that the situation in Iraq, Syria, or Libya and the terrorist threat that was spreading in the Middle East and North Africa, and beginning to acquire worrying tendencies in the Sahel, required the stabilization of the vast region known in the NATO jargon as MENA ("Middle East and Northern Africa").

Thus, the Alliance's defense ministers' in June 2015, approved a political declaration affirming the need to provide a 360-degree view of challenges and threats, based on the principle that

¹⁴ "NATO after Libya, A troubling victory". *The Economist*, 3 September 2011, www.economist.com/node/21528248

¹⁵ Steven Pifer: "NATO's Response Must be Conventional, not Nuclear" *Survival*, vol.57, Nº2, IISS, April/May 2015, p.121.

"security is indivisible"¹⁶. A year later, at the Warsaw summit in 2016, NATO introduced the concept of "stability projection" which it understood, in Mediterranean terms, as a combination of the crisis management and cooperative security missions included in the 2010 Strategic Concept and whose objective was to address what NATO called "generalized instability"¹⁷ by shaping, to this end, the strategic environment of neighboring regions by making them safer and more stable, which would ultimately benefit the Alliance strategically¹⁸.

But this concept, more political than anything else, sought only a certain consensus among allies, with few practical consequences. In fact, Africa was relegated to Afghanistan and Iraq and NATO focused primarily on training, advising and assisting local forces in the "Resolute Support" Mission in Afghanistan – following the dissolution, in December 2014, of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) – as well as launching the Training Mission in Iraq, which would start in 2018.

In Africa, it was terrorism, "forms and in all its manifestations"¹⁹, as all the Alliance documents reflect, that topped NATO's list of priorities, so allied leaders agreed to strengthen political dialogue and practical cooperation with Mediterranean Dialogue partners to combat it. The relationship with the Mediterranean partners should be, in the NATO vision, a two-way road, "combining their interests and ours, in the conviction that the relationship is beneficial to both"²⁰. The goal was to build stable institutions and stronger security and defense capabilities, enabling greater interoperability to combat the threat posed by terrorism.

Tunisia, considered an "exception" in the democratic development of North African political processes, became the field of experimentation of the NATO concept of stability projection. In this way, and based on the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) program, in 2014, the country entered into a NATO Individual Partnership and Cooperation Program (IPCP) aimed at strengthening its capacity to combat terrorism and improve security along borders. The

¹⁶ www.ieee.es/publicaciones-new/cuadernos-de-estrategia/2022/CUADERNO_211_El_Futuro_De_La_OTAN.html

¹⁷ TARDY Thierry: "NATO's Sub-strategic Role in the Middle East and North Africa", February 11, 2022, GMF, www.gmfus.org/news/natos-sub-strategic-role-middle-east-and-north-africa

¹⁸ DÍAZ-PLAJA Ruben: "Projecting Stability: an agenda for action", NATO Review, 13 March 2018, www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2018/03/13/projecting-stability-an-agenda-for-action/index.html

¹⁹ "Brussels Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 14 June 2021", www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm

²⁰ COLOMINA Javier: "La Alianza y su aproximación 360º a la seguridad" en Cuadernos de Estrategia 211, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE), 2022, p.92

program of an enhanced bilateral partnership with NATO was announced as a major achievement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Warsaw summit in July 2016 and was to be based on the establishment of an intelligence fusion center located in Tunisia.

Tunisians, however, were not for the work of counterterrorism cooperation that seemed, to them, excessively intrusive. For this reason, his Minister of Defense, Abdelakrim Zbidi, rejected a three million dollars grant from NATO for the establishment of a joint command center in Tunisia that was to be the launching point of the new cooperation modality. The rejection, as well as the lack of progress at the intelligence fusion center, revealed the limits of cooperation between NATO and Tunisia,²¹ and led the Alliance to the conviction that any cooperation with North African countries on security matters should be based on less ambitious programmes and more suited to the needs of the partners. In this context, NATO began work on the design of ad-hoc tailored Defense Capability Development (DCB) packages based on national demands for special operations, intelligence, border controls and counterterrorism.

Other North African countries such as Morocco or Algeria, two countries confronted by the Western Sahara issue, were especially cautious from the outset of any influence of Western states in neighboring countries. Both countries opted for bilateral cooperation with NATO, rather than multilateral, as the best way to mitigate the terrorist threat. In the case of Algeria, its non-interventionist foreign policy and traditional military partnership with Russia reduced cooperation to the scientific field focused on issues of common interest.

In any case, NATO's efforts for greater counter-terrorism cooperation with Maghreb countries have been systematically undermined by the conflict in Libya, where jihadist groups have found a safe haven from which they run operations and infiltrate neighboring countries. Nor has it helped greater and more constructive cooperation, the interference of regional and international powers that has proved detrimental to NATO's efforts.

Even more dangerous is the growing spread of Russia's influence in the Sahel and its willingness to drive Western powers – mainly France – out of the region, taking advantage of America's disinterest, growing hostility from local populations to what they see as a European neocolonialism,²² and the tensions between European partners over NATO's role in the region.

²¹ PROFazio Umberto, "Tunisia's reluctant partnership with NATO", International Institute for Strategic Studies, 6 April 2018, www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2018/04/tunisia-reluctant-partnership-nato

²² KHADY Ndèye LO & BOUBOUTOU-POOS Rose-Marie. "Françafrique: quelle est l'histoire du "sentiment anti-français" en Afrique et pourquoi il resurgit aujourd'hui?" BBC News, 28 mai 2021, www.bbc.com/afrique/region-56971100

The Sahel, a region that until recently had been left out of the Allied spotlight, therefore requires special attention. This is acknowledged by the report of the Allied Foreign Ministers approved at the end of 2020 which concluded that "the deterioration of the security situation in the Sahel and the terrorist threats that destabilize several nations in the region have the potential to affect transatlantic security"²³.

These developments have limited NATO's room for maneuver in North Africa by reducing it, in the field of operations, practically to Operation No Article 5 "Sea Guardian", launched at NATO's Warsaw Summit in July 2016, a transformation of the previous anti-terrorist mission "Active Endeavour" in the Mediterranean. It was a broader maritime security operation with flexible tasks of "building maritime security, situational awareness and combating terrorism", without this meaning that it should play a relevant role in the fight against illegal immigration and human trafficking networks, responsible for the migration crisis in the Mediterranean Sea, a real concern for Europe's security.

In this regard, NATO has preferred to give "the carrot or the stick" or, in the words of its Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg indicate that there are no military solutions to the migration crisis²⁴, and that NATO can only commit itself punctually to mitigate this situation.

But perhaps the most relevant measure taken by NATO, thinking of Africa, was the inauguration in 2017 and under the direction of the Allied Command of Joint Forces of Naples of a "Hub" strategically directed towards the South, a decision that was taken on precisely the same dates in which the Alliance officially joined the Global Coalition against Daesh. The Naples "Hub" should be an element of "contact, consultation and coordination"²⁵ when responding jointly with the countries of the region, to conflicts such as those in Syria, Libya, or Iraq, as well as to the crisis situations produced by illegal immigration to Europe.

However, things are more complicated. Beyond North Africa or the Middle East, the geographical mandate of the Naples "Hub" is not very clear; that is if, and to what extent, this Center should also cover sub-Saharan Africa. Nor is it defined what its relationship is with existing NATO regional associations, such as the Mediterranean Dialogue, which should receive special attention. The Alliance's official narrative does not offer much clarity on these points,

²³ COLOMINA Javier: "La Alianza y su aproximación 360º a la seguridad" en Cuadernos de Estrategia 211, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE), 2022, p.94.

²⁴ CADALANU Giampaolo, STOLTENBERG Jens: "Libia, la NATO pronta ad aiutare l'Italia", La Repubblica, 23 June 2018.

²⁵ NATO: "What is the NATO Hub for the South?", 09 August 2019, www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_168383.htm#:~:text=It%20is%20crucial%20for%20the%20Alliance,leads%20to%20stability%20for%20the%20Alliance.&text=It%20is%20crucial%20for,leads%20to%20stability%20for%20the%20Alliance.&text=crucial%20for%20the%20Alliance,leads%20to%20stability%20for

but it seems logical to think that NATO should enhance the cooperative realities put in place decades ago, before dissipating efforts and resources in other projects. To this should be added the natural distrust of certain African countries to collaborate with a center that they understand is fundamentally a NATO body for intelligence gathering, rather than cooperation among equals.

However, the fact that it is a Center of such a powerful organization as NATO and its remarkable observation, monitoring, analysis and networking capabilities have made it particularly attractive to many European and African Think Tanks that have shown interest in this institution. In any case, it is too early to judge its results and its ability to build a solid structure capable of navigating the complex African environment, although all allies recognize its great potential to play an innovative and cutting-edge role in connecting the Atlantic Alliance to a region of great strategic interest such as Africa.

Africa's future after the NATO summit in Madrid

The Madrid summit held in June 2022 marks a milestone in NATO's vision of its role in the world, assuming the need for the Atlantic Alliance to play a more relevant role as an international security provider. NATO proposes that the partners adopt a more global vision that takes into account the significant changes that have occurred in the world since 2014 and, most notably, relations with Russia and the growing competition with China, countries that represent direct challenges for NATO and its members²⁶.

Of the five challenges nato has identified in the 2022 Strategic Concept – resurgence of systemic rivalry between great powers, increased warfare through hybrid methods, growth of warfare through third parties or intermediaries, expansion across national borders of jihadist international terrorism, and evolution of disruptive and emerging technologies – only terrorism can be considered a NATO challenge in Africa.

In a security environment in which NATO prioritizes territorial defense over crisis management and cooperative security, there is not much ground for the south and, particularly, for Africa, whose responsibility seems to be unloaded on the European Union at a time when it seeks to become a "Global Actor"²⁷. In fact, the document that the EU has approved on its Strategic

²⁶ GHANEM-YAZBECK Dalia, KUTZNETSOV Vasily: "Moscow's Maghreb Moment", Diwan-Carnegie Middle East Centre, 13 June 2018.

²⁷ EU External Action: "The EU as a global actor", 13.03.2022, www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/eu-global-actor_en

Compass in March 2022, addresses security from complementary approaches to NATO, which remains the basis of collective defense for its members²⁸.

The importance NATO now attaches to conventional military power in dealing with competing major powers makes it difficult to imagine a large-scale deployment of allied troops in Africa, as happened in the Afghanistan mission. If there are any, they will basically be Europeans with NATO support, although this will require articulating cooperation mechanisms between both institutions – beyond Berlin + – that allow it. It is more realistic to expect NATO to deploy small force contingents, mainly special operations, and to expand military capacity-building activities with a larger number of African partners, as well as increased cooperation with governments and local forces.

But NATO must be aware of the difficulties involved. The reluctance of African countries to deepen strategic alliances with the West, the creation of military cooperation agreements between these countries and third states and nato adversaries, and the dysfunctional relations and differences of opinion between allies, are the main factors that limit the Alliance's room for maneuver in Africa. Such limitations have paved the way for hostile external powers like Russia, or competitors like China to intervene in this region in an attempt to displace Western nations from a territory they have always regarded as their area of influence.

The problem for NATO's greater engagement with countries and security structures in the region is that, in it, a multitude of state and multilateral actors are already operating, while NATO has only one partner in the region, Mauritania, with whom it maintains a strong relationship within the Mediterranean Dialogue. But this relationship with a single country is insufficient. NATO needs, in order to play a relevant role as a security provider, to increase its cooperation with other international actors, starting with the European Union, based on a division of tasks that must be guided by the comparative advantages that each security actor involved brings.

NATO must also strengthen its commitment to regional security structures such as the G5 Sahel. The contacts to support its College of Defense - not so, for now, its Joint Force -, point in the right direction. However, NATO should remain open, upon request, to consider favorably new commitments in the region.

The ultimate goal of the allied strategy towards Africa in the coming years must be to contribute to increasing the stability of the region and to do so by seeking the greatest possible added value for NATO and for African partners. As the final communiqué of the June 2021 summit stated, the alliance needs to "enhance our long-standing engagement in the

²⁸ European Council: "A Strategic Compass for a stronger EU security and defence in the next decade", 23 March 2022, www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2022/03/21/a-strategic-compass-for-a-stronger-eu-security-and-defence-in-the-next-decade/

Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region" and "develop stronger security institutions and capabilities, promote interoperability and help counter terrorism"²⁹. Achieving this in Africa implies greater coordination with other efforts, both regional and international, in particular those of the European Union, avoiding duplication and without overloading the limited capacities of local structures.

Definitely, the role of the Atlantic Alliance in Africa is as indispensable as it is politically and operationally complex. But if NATO is to become a global alliance, Africa cannot be sidestepped in the range of its security priorities. The new Strategic Concept should thus be understood as a unique opportunity to increase the level of commitment to cooperative security with Africa, an objective that has become an imperative necessity if NATO is to influence the overall stability of the region.

We do not know for certain when the United States will turn definitively towards the Indo-Pacific, nor to what extent it will maintain its security guarantees with Europe in the future; but what we can be sure of is that other external powers seem to have clear ideas about what they want in Africa. Any withdrawal by NATO from this continent would likely carry unacceptable risks.

Much is at stake in this endeavor, and much can be lost in a continent that is destined to become one of the fundamental factors of Euro-Atlantic security. The debate is open within the Alliance and the member countries, although still in its initial stages, waiting to give effect to the momentum provided by the Madrid Summit so that it can move forward. It remains only to trust that it will.

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²⁹ NATO, "Brussels Summit Communiqué", 14 June 2021.
www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_185000.htm