

Policy Brief

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NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue: What are new possible approaches?

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Summary

NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) is a forum for cooperation launched in 1994 for non-NATO members from Mediterranean countries. It currently involves Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia. The 2004 Istanbul Heads of State NATO Summit gave new impetus to the dialogue by enhancing the level of partnership. Since then, many observers note its difficulty to position itself among other political initiatives that are multiplying in the Mediterranean. For our part, we argue that despite the imperfections of the MD, it is still an evolving process; like any institutional process, this dialogue is a process following phases and steps with achievements, inconsistencies and limitations that require a common reflection and debate on effective responses to correct defects and improve cooperation.

The current context seems favorable for relaunching the debate on the MD, with the upcoming NATO summit to be held from July 8 to 9, 2016 in Warsaw, Poland. The objective is to emphasize that the Alliance now cannot refrain from revising its Mediterranean vision for security, since the Mediterranean is a security emergency and an essential strategic perspective for Europe, the United States and partner countries.

This article is written within this perspective, and attempts to contextualize the MD according to its variable geometry. Indeed, the cooperation equation within the MD framework takes into account four dynamics that combine and reinforce each other, thereby producing a situation that necessitates the relaunch of the partnership framework on new foundations:

- Priority given to reconceptualizing the partnership;

- Utility of redefining risks and threats;
- The need to objectify interoperability;
- The need for a pooling of efforts for crisis management.

1. Priority given to reconceptualizing the partnership

The design of the NATO partnership in general and NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) in particular should be based on a thought pattern that is more geopolitical than functional. It is time to break with the essentialist functionalist spirit; this view in each country or across the Mediterranean's southern shore: A client, device, structure (omitting that this structure has a history), geography, constructed policy and social norms. It is true that the MD introduced new principles throughout its process: inclusivity¹ and diversity² instead

1. "All MD countries should view themselves as stakeholders in the same cooperative work."

2. "The Mediterranean Dialogue respects and takes into account the regional, cultural, and political context of each partner country."

of imposition³ tailored to each stakeholder. However, the trend is a transposition of cooperation models and programs in a context of a strategic and technological gap. The supply of expertise seems to fit more in a dynamic of expanding military-technical diagrams oriented toward an Atlanticist agenda.

Yet, it can be noted that NATO and its Mediterranean partners have neither the same perceptions nor the same instruments, and do not necessarily share priorities. The issue of defense modernization, for example, must be understood in the light of the political sphericity of each partner, most of which have not yet started the transition from a volunteer army to a professional army.⁴

This process eventually installed a kind of division of labor: NATO provides tailored expertise and contributes to the convergence of standards and procedures. Mediterranean partners are in turn invited to participate in part in maintaining peace operations. We are therefore facing a kind of outsourcing that involves a transfer of NATO solutions and, in turn, an alignment on NATO security and strategic objectives.

« The objective is to emphasize that the Alliance now cannot refrain from revising its Mediterranean vision for security.»

It is not so much a structural strategic imbalance between the two sides of the Mediterranean than it is a Mediterranean situational paradox that distorts the partnership; the conceptual and operational over-expansion of NATO occurs within a context of a geopolitical contraction of the Mediterranean's southern shore.

One of the first projects in reconceptualizing the partnership should focus on the level of visibility of one another's strategic intentions.

The partnership will gain in relevance if NATO clarifies its stance (that it still seems to hesitate between) : on the one hand, its Euro-Atlantic centrality and collective defense (Article 5 of the Washington Treaty) and, on the other, its strategic projection abroad through partnerships and military intervention (Afghanistan, Libya) (Article 4 - political consultations). The first is a constant because it is the Alliance's purpose and identity; the second is a variable or a dynamic full of uncertainties as illustrated

in the NATO-Russia tensions and limitations of the MD. Hence, the question of course is whether the Alliance would refocus on the Euro-Atlantic to make it into a global geostrategic pole in front of China and Russia while maintaining a minimum of partnership with its immediate neighborhood, especially in the Mediterranean. Conversely, does NATO really intend to project itself as a global actor? And even if it wanted to, it should first have the capacity and the necessary strategic endurance. Either path will shape the configuration of relations between NATO and partner countries.

The partnership also will gain in relevance if North Africa, the Maghreb in this case, acquires a minimum of shared views and vision on the form and substance of relations with NATO; by together addressing the NATO leaders, the partners can present their arguments concerning the development of the partnership. Meanwhile, for geopolitical reasons these countries prefer the bilateral format to the multilateral format.

2. Utility of redefining risks and threats

The biggest effort of adaptation is to redefine the MD based on a redefinition of the threat in the Mediterranean. Indeed, the perception of the threat and its location has always been oriented towards the southern shore of the Mediterranean, seen as the only source of instability factors.

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The geopolitical and security changes underway are beginning to undermine this certainty, so it is legitimate to speak of a threat on multiple scales: just as it is true that the threat is changing in nature and geography:

First, tensions between the Western countries and Russia cause strategic threats to resurface. Strengthening NATO's military presence in Eastern Europe and the Baltic countries is a perfect example. NATO defense ministers in Brussels adopted dissuasive measures against Russia on February 10, 2016. The objective is to rapidly deploy ground, air and naval forces in threatened regions.⁵ As

3. "The MD countries are free to choose the pace and extent of their cooperation with the Alliance; NATO does not intend to impose anything on them."

4. The Royal Armed Forces (FAR) are the only professional army in the Maghreb since a Royal Decree dated August 31, 2006 abolished the conscription.

5. NATO reinforces its defense and deterrence position, www.nato.int/cps/fr

such, the United States intends to strengthen its military presence in Europe by allocating a budget of \$ 3.4 billion to the initiative. Transposed to the Mediterranean, this rivalry seems to manifest with Russia's diplomatic, strategic and geo-economic return: Will we see a strategic rebalancing, even as NATO and the Western powers have strategic monopoly in the Mediterranean? It is still early to make a comprehensive and thorough assessment, as long as the speed of events fails to enable a clear forecast of what configuration will emerge from this dynamic. However, preliminary indications highlight Russia's desire to position itself as a regulator and referee of the Mediterranean game, as demonstrated by its role in the Syrian crisis.

« If one pools the security efforts of this dialogue with the economic commitment of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, an overall vision and effective management of the problem could therefore be implemented.»

Furthermore, the Southern Mediterranean does not yet have a collective mode of governance to guarantee solidarity and a comprehensive treatment of new asymmetric factors that may cause a crisis. The Libyan and Malian crises give way to an instability that affects the whole Sahara-Sahel and Maghreb regions through the fragility of some regimes in the region (Libya, Mali, Niger) and through the mobility of terrorist groups. These networks thrive in a vulnerable corridor from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic.⁶ The stability of the Mediterranean is no longer exclusively linked to considerations inherent in this region. It also became dependent on the stability of other peripheral regions in Africa (Sahel-Saharan strip, Atlantic side). Any change, dysfunction or crisis within these peripheral areas has a direct impact on the security and stability of the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole.

Next, the terrorist threat is not confined only to the South. In other words, European countries are incubators of radicalism and terrorism just as are North Africa and the Middle East. The series of attacks that hit France informed us about the network of radical Salafists throughout the continent -born in Europe and socialized in European schools – who massively adhere to an exclusive and dogmatic political project. The rise of these networks is a

threat both for Europe and for the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, given the ease with which they can travel between the two sides, especially in the North-South sense.⁷ This situation should place the hybrid threat at the center of the MD, since the terrorist networks use unconventional means to achieve their goals by taking advantage of the structural limits of the States and NATO itself. This is one more reason to guide the fight against terrorism towards the strengthening of border control capacities, cyber defense, and management of terrorist threats, through the transfer of technology solutions to partners.

Lastly, the demographic issue provides a challenge to the Mediterranean and globally because of its strategic consequences in terms of conflict and security. If the demographic transition seems underway in the Maghreb with a fertility rate of 2.3 for Morocco and Tunisia, and 2.7 for Algeria, in the Sahel-Saharan region and in West Africa the situation is more complex, if not dramatic, and it will be increasingly so based on UNICEF's demographic projections⁸: the fertility rate is 7.6 in Niger, about 6.5 in Mali, 6 in Chad, 4.7 in Mauritania, 4.3 in Sudan, and 5.3 in Nigeria. So, according to these forecasts, Niger's population will increase from 19 million in 2015 to 69 million in 2050, in 2050 Nigeria will be the third largest globally with 433 million inhabitants, while Egypt could reach a population of 180 million.

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Rapid population growth, combined with climate change (drought in particular) and a sustained weak economic situation, impacts the daily life of the population and promotes the conditions of migration flows to the Mediterranean and beyond. This causes a security stress in North Africa and Europe especially because illegal migration is far from being a transitory phenomenon that can be eradicated by strictly case-specific means. So when Europe adopts repressive policies in fortifying its southern and eastern borders, it ultimately treats the symptoms. It should be noted that no alternative to a security approach has been adopted for the Mediterranean; rather we are witnessing the effects of declarations without practical reach.⁹

6. Abdelhak Bassou, "From the Mediterranean to the Atlantic: a corridor vulnerable to terrorism," Policy brief, February 23, 2016, OCP Policy Center, Rabat, Morocco.

7. Dual nationality and no entry visas for Europeans in some North African countries are facilitating factors.

8. UNICEF: Africa Generation 2030, August 2014. www.unicef.org/french/publications/files/UNICEF_Africa_Generation_2030_fr.pdf

9. Rachid El Houdaïgui "La migration clandestine au Déroit de Gibraltar- quelle alternative à l'approche sécuritaire?" In Marruecos y España en el Centenario of the Conferencia de Algeciras (Alejandro del Valle G. dir.), 2007. pp. 191-198.

States have the right to manage emergencies, through law enforcement and assistance to illegal migrants, as they have a duty to address the issue of illegal migration in terms of economic and human development. Of course, the MD is not the suitable format for such an approach. But if one pools the security efforts of this dialogue with the economic commitment of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, an overall vision and effective management of the problem could therefore be implemented, which will take into account the best interest of all concerned parties.

3. The need to objectify interoperability

Improved interoperability between NATO forces and those of MD partners is a trusted step to establish a community of interests in the areas of capacities, education, training and exercises. As such, a number of programs¹⁰ contribute to this process of consolidating interoperability, in addition to programs for fighting against terrorism and those for modernizing defense.

« Interoperability remains essential to consolidating trust between NATO and its partners.»

Overall the interoperability process is confronted with a set of strategic and technical factors. It must be emphasized that this is a recurring problem within NATO; Interoperability is at the heart of the debate on the viability and relevance of the Alliance in a new security environment.¹¹ In the context of the MD, meaning on a small and peripheral scale, the limits of interoperability occur on two levels:

- At the strategic level where problems can only be solved by politics. These concern sovereignty and divergent national interests. However, the asymmetry between the two poles shapes the strategic logic of interoperability. For NATO, interoperability is a way to globalize a portion of its politico-military expertise and dynamic to normalize and standardize the security capabilities of States. In this regard, it is part of a political enunciation of NATO's world view whose central element is to defend "against global threats: terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and failed states." It fits in

10. Annual work program of Mediterranean Dialogue. • Individual Cooperation Program • The Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC) Mediterranean (since November 18, 2005). • The Training and Education Enhancement Programme (TEEP). • The Political Military Framework (PMF) • Partnership Coordination Cell (PCC), its orientation is essentially practical • Partners for Peace Status of Forces Agreements (SOFA) • NATO Fuels and Lubricant Working Group • ePRIME (Partnership Realtime Information Management and Exchange System).

11. See, James Derleth "Increasing interoperability, the foundation of effective NATO operations." NATO Review, June 2015.

fine in a logical projection of NATO's power.¹²

« There can only be interoperability when various forces have identical weapon systems or interoperable technology or adaptable to synchronization mechanisms.»

- At the tactical level, technological disparities constitute the obstacle factor for efficient interoperability between NATO forces and those of the MD countries. There can only be interoperability when various forces have identical weapon systems or interoperable technology or adaptable to synchronization mechanisms. Otherwise, the process of interoperability would be limited only to the doctrine, procedures, terminology and training. In addition, the low level of human interoperability of some countries' forces from the southern shores, in terms of language skills or on an intercultural level, further complicates the socialization process of these units to NATO's operational environment. Due to a lack of technical and human interoperability, the units deployed in a stabilization operation, for example, will find difficulty in maneuvering effectively; this then reflects on the tactical division of labor, where these units are allocated junior and secondary tasks and missions. The level of interoperability includes a variation of situations ranging from countries advanced in interoperability, such as Morocco and Jordan, to other ones less developed for political and / or technical reasons. Still, interoperability remains essential to consolidating trust between NATO and its partners. It should be expanded according to a grid covering all countries, and according to their needs and priorities: Increase the exchange of liaison officers and provide integrated and effective training through the multinational Combined Training Initiative (CTI).¹³

4. The need for a pooling of efforts for crisis management

The weakness of a multilateral political dialogue and the lack of a crisis regulation mechanism reflect the failure of institutionalizing the Mediterranean process: The MD, just like the Euro-Mediterranean partnership, the 5 + 5 Economic Forum, and the OSCE-Mediterranean dialogue

12. See Rachid El Houaïgui: "L'opération Active Endeavour et son impact sur le Dialogue méditerranéen de l'OTAN," NATO Defense College, Rome, 2007. p.13.

13. It was launched by the Joint Multinational Training Command (JMTC) Grafenwöhr, Germany) to facilitate the implementation of NATO's Connected Forces Initiative (CFI). The Combined Training Initiative (CTI) helps promote education and training in all three interoperability components within the Alliance: technology, processes and people.

failed to establish a minimum of policy convergence needed to prevent and manage crises.

« The organization of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) could be the institutional response the Mediterranean people need.»

The Libyan and Syrian crises go beyond the capacity of Mediterranean institutions and regional structures (Arab League, Arab Maghreb Union, European Union). The two organizations that remain active are the UN, with its strong legitimacy, and NATO, the only military organization with rapid deployment capabilities to intervene in a given situation. In the aftermath, the interplay of state players allows them to position themselves as part of the solution or to referee ongoing crises in the region. Therefore, this Mediterranean configuration is organized primarily by state interests, which, when in minimum agreement, mobilize the UN and NATO to intervene in the Libyan crisis. In case of discrepancy they do not intervene, as in the case of Syria. This context supports the idea of a two-speed "responsibility to protect," which is widespread and in the perception of public opinion. The principle is less called into question, -because it is legitimate to protect the populations of genocide victims, -than its

instrumentalization, which alters its philosophy and its meaning.

The Mediterranean's southern shore countries fear above all that NATO's strategic refocusing and the European powers, in the sense of a visible military presence in the Mediterranean, causes the Mediterranean Sea to slip into NATO's hands. This possibility would immediately lead to their isolation and consequently the depreciation of their regional and sub-regional strategic value.

Taking advantage of this development, the resolution of crises and conflicts should be the subject of special attention, by improving existing channels of dialogue and multiplying initiatives such as the Moroccan-Spanish Initiative for the promotion of mediation in the Mediterranean.¹⁴ The organization of a Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean (CSCM) could be the institutional response the Mediterranean people need: a perspective for the construction of communities of economic, social, and human interest that are mastered and not only limited to a line of military and political defense. The CSCM would thus permit discussion on a charter for peace and security in the Mediterranean. This perspective is the best guarantee that NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue is more a political instrument for peace than a military means to stave off threats.

Conclusion

The future of the Mediterranean Dialogue will depend on the consistency between NATO's real intentions, the level of commitment by partner countries, and regional and extra-Mediterranean power games in a context fraught with uncertainty and concerns. One thing is certain, the Warsaw Summit should live up to the expectations of common issues and challenges, by including the strengthening of cooperation with the Mediterranean's southern shore in its agenda. The Mediterranean Dialogue partners, notably Morocco, expect the emphasis to be placed on the shared values of peace, security, stability and prosperity as a prerequisite for a balanced and reciprocal partnership.

14. As members of the Group of Friends of Mediation that share a set of values and common objectives to promote dialogue and the peaceful resolution of disputes as set out in chapter VI of the UN Charter, on September 28, 2012 in New York, Morocco and Spain launched the initiative on "promoting a culture of mediation in the Mediterranean region."

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