



## NATO's Maritime Considerations vis-a-vis MENA

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# **NATO's maritime security considerations vis-a-vis MENA**

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**Abstract:** The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) coast and landward from it have always been a central focus of NATO. NATO is a regional security alliance formed in 1949 where the Atlantic Ocean, north of the Tropic of Cancer, and the Mediterranean Sea are part of its region (in-area). Africa and so the Mediterranean Sea is the southern border of NATO in Europe. And the Middle East and so the Mediterranean is its Eastern maritime border. Some NATO member states share the Mediterranean as a maritime border with North African And Middle East states. Their economies through trade depends on secure sea routes and shipping security in the Mediterranean and onward through the Straights of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal. Where necessary NATO has also conducted military operations out of area to protect shipping off Africa's coasts for example the Indian Ocean off the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of Africa and landward, for example in Sudan, Somalia, and Libya. NATO assistance and military involvement is in two focuses 1) the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and 2) support for the African Union. There are also specific operations for immediate security needs for example to support United Nations Resolutions in 2011 on Libya.

**Keywords:** NATO, Maritime security, Landward security, Middle East, North Africa, Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean, Arabian Peninsula, Iran

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## Introduction

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) coast and landward from it have always been a central focus of The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), also known as the North Atlantic Alliance. It is an intergovernmental military alliance between 30 European and North American countries. The organization implements the North Atlantic Treaty that was signed on 4 April 1949. Article 5 provides that if a NATO Ally is the victim of an armed attack, every other member of the Alliance will consider this act of violence as an armed attack against all members and will take the actions it deems necessary to assist the Ally attacked.<sup>1</sup>

It was Lord Ismay, NATO's first secretary general, who defined the goal of the trans-Atlantic alliance as created to "keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in and the Germans down."<sup>2</sup> But NATO is more than this. Born after World War II, NATO linked America and Europe not just in a mutual defense pledge but in advancing democratic governance, the rule of law, civil and human rights, and an increasingly open international economy. The alliance was the core of an American-led liberal world order that extended to Asia and relied on a web of international institutions, including the United Nations and the World Bank. American military protection gave the allies space to develop their economies and pluralistic societies. During its existence, NATO has often been strained as the security and political environment evolved. Despite compromises and occasional failures, the experiment was broadly successful.<sup>3</sup>

When NATO was established in 1949, one of its fundamental roles was to act as a powerful deterrent against military aggression. In this role, NATO's success was reflected in the fact that, throughout the entire period of the Cold War, NATO forces were not involved in a single military engagement. For much of the latter half of the 20th century, NATO remained vigilant and prepared.

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<sup>1</sup> Deni, John (2017) NATO and Article 5 The Transatlantic Alliance and the Twenty-First-Century Challenges of Collective Defense, (New York: Rowman and Littlefield)

<sup>2</sup> Schake, Kori and Pepe, Erica (2019), 70 Years of NATO: The Strength of the Past, Looking into the Future (Rome: NATO Defense College)

<sup>3</sup> Asmus, Ronald D. and Kugler Richard L., Building a New NATO, Foreign Affairs Vol. 72, No. 4 (Sep. - Oct., 1993), pp. 28-40

At the beginning of the 1990s, the end of the Cold War led to deep changes in the international security environment. The first iteration of “whither NATO?” in a post-Cold War environment came with the overarching Strategic Concept that was defined in 1991 at the Rome Summit of NATO heads of state and government. The Alliance witnessed the emergence of new threats and the resurgence of old but familiar ones. With these changing conditions came new responsibilities.<sup>4</sup>

In the post-Cold War world from being an exclusively defensive alliance for nearly half a century, NATO began to assume an increasingly proactive role within the international community. During the 1990s it found a new purpose, defending Muslims in the Balkans, and after 9/11, helping the United States fight terrorists in Afghanistan, Iraq, Africa and elsewhere. Former Communist countries swelled the alliance from 12 members to 30, with others knocking on the door even now, concerned about an aggrieved and aggressive Russia. With this the Alliance took on new responsibilities within the international community including humanitarian purposes

NATO also conducts naval operations in reaction to the increase in acts of piracy along the Somali coast, and at the request of the UN Secretary General, NATO’s naval forces escorted ships of the World Food Program (WFP) transiting in the Gulf of Aden, firstly within the framework of the Operation Allied Provider (October to December 2008) then within Allied Protector (March to August 2009). Operation Ocean Shield extended the activities of the previous operations and contributed to the international efforts against piracy off the coast of the Horn of Africa from 2009 to 2016. NATO has been the most successful military alliance in history, the anchor of an American-led and American-financed peace that fostered Western prosperity and prevented new world wars. No one has proposed anything credible to improve upon it. NATO remains central to major American national security initiatives in a world shaken by the rise of an increasingly assertive China, the expansion of competing power centers from India to Saudi Arabia, the surge of migration from the Middle East and Africa and the dislocations caused by globalization.<sup>5</sup>

### **How does NATO function?**

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<sup>5</sup> NATO, Operations and Missions, <https://shape.nato.int/ongoingoperations>

The 30 NATO states of which 28 are European and the United States and Canada request from and contribute to NATO as and when it is in their interests. They also may act independent of NATO and / or in other frameworks. The same personal may have served in these, or will serve in these, for example the European Union and / or United Nations peace orientated missions. There are thus multiple options to achieve the same objective, but limited to the same national budgets, personal and decisions. NATO is thus a ‘clearing house’ that retains and maintains few if any of its own equipment while staff are on secondment from their national forces.<sup>6</sup>

Each national NATO member state to the various battle spaces and threats - air, sea, land and cyber and conventional, sub-conventional, and non-conventional – in different ways. Dependent on interests and priorities these funnels into NATO. One of which is the NATO Alliance Maritime Strategy of 2011 that informs that whether in support of Alliance joint operations, or when leading in a predominately maritime mission, maritime forces have critical roles to fulfill, defending and promoting the collective interests of the Alliance across a spectrum of defence and security challenges, as defined in the NATO Strategic Concept. The maritime environment also lends itself well to strengthened engagement in cooperative security. It identifies the four roles of NATO's maritime forces: deterrence and collective defence; crisis management; cooperative security – outreach through partnerships, dialogue, and cooperation; and maritime security.

To implement this there is a command structure. Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) is the central command of all NATO maritime forces and the MARCOM Commander is the primary maritime advisor to the Alliance. MARCOM was officially launched on 1 December 2012, to reflect the NATO Heads of State’s decision to create a leaner and more effective command structure. Like its land and air counterparts (LANDCOM & AIRCOM), MARCOM answers directly to NATO’s Allied Command Operations (ACO) which is located in Mons, Belgium.<sup>7</sup>

As a core of answering the command, NATO has Standing Naval Forces under the control of NATO Allied Maritime Command which responds to Allied Command Operations. They are comprised of the Standing NATO Maritime Groups 1 and 2, and Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Groups 1 and 2. This multinational, integrated force is continuously available to perform tasks ranging from

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<sup>7</sup> NATO, Allied Command Nato, <https://mc.nato.int/>

participating to exercises to conducting NATO missions. These forces are part of the maritime component of the NATO Response Force.<sup>8</sup>

### **NATO's maritime defense interests**

To be defended are the territory, citizens and interests of the state. NATO allies share Africa's three sea basins: while eight of its European Member States are coastal states on the Mediterranean, and five on the Atlantic. This makes the African coast and landward from a central focus of NATO. The Atlantic Ocean, north of the Tropic of Cancer, and the Mediterranean Sea are part of its region (in-area) to be defended as these are the location of its member states. Africa is the southern border of NATO in Europe. NATO member states share the Mediterranean as a maritime border with North African states. Seas, as direct or transit routes for illegal migration from Africa to Europe, are an important concern. European and African economies through trade depends on secure sea routes and shipping security in the Mediterranean and onward through the Straights of Gibraltar and the Suez Canal.<sup>9</sup>

Where and when necessary NATO has conducted military operations to protect shipping off Africa's coasts and landward. As these African states have or could host elements that would endanger the security and indeed the shipping security both civil and military of NATO member states. Since the end of the Cold War in 1990, looking at each instance of NATO assistance and military involvement vis-a-vis Africa shows the two main focuses of NATO and Africa. The first is in 1994 when the North Atlantic Council initiated the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) It currently involves seven non-NATO countries of the Mediterranean region: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. There are also specific operations for immediate security needs for example to support United Nations Resolutions in 2011 on Libya.<sup>10</sup>

The second is with the African Union (AU) and its request. It is NATO policy, and it has in practice assisted, non-NATO African states because it is in NATO interest to do so as their security and stability projects into NATO member states security and stability. Landward security and stability are a prerequisite to that of maritime. As such, for example, shipping security, both civil and military, sea

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<sup>10</sup> Chesterman, Simon (2011), *Leading from Behind': The Responsibility to Protect, the Obama Doctrine, and Humanitarian Intervention After Libya*, (New York: New York University Public Law and Legal Theory Working Papers)

route patrols, and air-sea surveillance and rescue are part and parcel of NATO's maritime dimension vis-a-vis Africa. These have included Non-Article 5 crisis response operations (NA5CRO) that can be described as multifunctional operations that encompass those political, military, and civil activities, initiated, and executed in accordance with international law, including international humanitarian law, contributing to conflict prevention and resolution and crisis management, or serve humanitarian purposes, in the pursuit of declared Alliance objectives.<sup>11</sup>

## **NATO in MENA**

There are two main focuses of NATO and MENA. The first is the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and the second is the African Union (AU). There are also unique circumstances such as to support United Nations Resolutions in 2011 that resulted in strikes and embargoes on Libya.

### **The Mediterranean Dialogue**

NATO is an active and leading contributor to peace and security on the international stage. It promotes democratic values and is committed to the peaceful resolution of disputes. However, if diplomatic efforts fail, it has the military capacity to undertake crisis management operations alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organizations.

NATO has recognized that non-alliance partnerships are also required because security in Europe is closely linked to security and stability elsewhere, for example in the Mediterranean. The catalyst to formalizing the Mediterranean Dialogue came after NATO was requested to assist a member state for the first in the Africa arena. Operation Agile Genie (1-19 May 1992) came during a period of growing Western tension with Libya after the UN Security Council imposed sanctions designed to induce Libya to surrender suspects in the bombing of a Pan Am airliner over the town of Lockerbie in Scotland in 1988. NATO provided increased AWACS coverage of the Central Mediterranean to monitor air approach routes from the North African littoral. NATO AWACS aircraft flew a total of 36 missions with a total of 2,336 flying hours.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> NATO Mediterranean Dialogue News, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52927.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm)

In 1994 the North Atlantic Council initiated the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD). The MD is progressive in terms of participation and substance. Such flexibility has allowed the number of Dialogue partners to grow - witness the inclusion of Jordan in November 1995 and Algeria in March 2000 - and the content of the Dialogue to evolve over time. It currently involves seven non-NATO countries of the Mediterranean region: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia.<sup>13</sup> NATO's MD process is an integral part of NATO's cooperative approach to security. It provides a framework for confidence building, promotes transparency and cooperation in the region, and reinforces and is reinforced by other international efforts. It is an integral part of NATO's adaptation to the post-Cold War security environment, as well as an important component of the Alliance's policy of outreach and cooperation.<sup>14</sup>

The Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG), established at the Madrid Summit in July 1997 under the supervision of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), had the overall responsibility for the Mediterranean Dialogue, until it was replaced in 2011 by the Political and Partnerships Committee, which is responsible for all partnerships. The Committee meets at the level of Political Counselors on a regular basis to discuss all matters related to the Dialogue including its further development.<sup>15</sup>

The MD is primarily bilateral in structure (NATO+1). Despite the predominantly bilateral character, the MD nevertheless allows for multilateral meetings on a regular basis (NATO+7). The MD is based upon the twin pillars of political dialogue and practical cooperation. Political consultations in the NATO+1 format is held on a regular basis both at Ambassadorial and working level. These discussions provide an opportunity for sharing views on a range of issues relevant to the security situation in the Mediterranean, as well as on the further development of the political and practical cooperation dimensions of the Dialogue. Meetings in the NATO+7 format, including NAC+7 meetings, are also held on a regular basis, following the NATO Summit and Ministerial meetings, Chiefs-of-Defense meetings, and other major NATO events. These meetings represent an opportunity for two-way political consultations between NATO and MD partners.<sup>16</sup>

The Mediterranean Dialogue's overall aim is to: contribute to regional security and stability, achieve better mutual understanding, and dispel any misconceptions about NATO among Dialogue countries.

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<sup>15</sup> NATO Mediterranean Dialogue News, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52927.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm)

<sup>16</sup> NATO Mediterranean Dialogue News, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_52927.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm)



The successful launch of the MD and its subsequent development has been based upon several principles: Nondiscrimination where all Mediterranean partners are offered the same basis for their cooperation with NATO, and Self-differentiation that allows a tailored approach to the specific needs of each of the MD partner countries.<sup>17</sup>

Particularly Individual Cooperation Programmes (ICP) allow interested MD countries and NATO to frame their practical cooperation in a more prospective and focused way, enabling interested countries to outline the main short and long-term objectives of their cooperation with the Alliance, in accordance with NATO's objectives and policies for the Mediterranean Dialogue. There is Inclusiveness so that all MD countries should see themselves as shareholders of the same cooperative effort. There is Two-way engagement as the MD is a "two-way partnership", in which NATO seeks partners' contribution for its success, through a regular consultation process; special emphasis is placed on practical cooperation.<sup>18</sup>

There is Non imposition, so MD partners are free to choose the pace and extent of their cooperation with the Alliance; NATO has no wish to impose anything upon them. There is also Complementarity and mutual reinforcement so that efforts of the MD and other international institutions for the region are complementary and mutually reinforcing in nature, such as, for example, those of the EU's "Union For the Mediterranean", the OSCE's "Mediterranean Initiative", or the "Five plus Five". Diversity means that the MD respects and considers the specific regional, cultural and political contexts of the respective partners.<sup>19</sup>

In principle, activities within the Mediterranean Dialogue take place on a self-funding basis. However, member states have agreed to consider requests for financial assistance in support of Mediterranean partners' participation in the Dialogue. Several measures have recently been taken to facilitate cooperation, notably the revision of the Dialogue's funding policy to allow funding up to 100 percent of the participation costs in Dialogue's activities and the extension of the NATO/PfP Trust Fund mechanisms to MD countries.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> NATO, Other Mediterranean Initiatives,

[https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph\\_reports/MR1164/MR1164.chap5.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monograph_reports/MR1164/MR1164.chap5.pdf)

<sup>20</sup> Stivachtis, Yannis and Jones, Benjamin (2009), NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, An Assessment, (Greece: RIEAS Research Paper 137)

It was at the June 2004 Istanbul Summit, that NATO's Heads of State and Government elevated the MD to a genuine partnership through the establishment of a more ambitious and expanded framework, which considerably enhanced both the MD's political and practical cooperation dimensions. This was guided by the principle of joint ownership and taking into consideration their interests and needs. The aim is to contribute towards regional security and stability through stronger practical cooperation, including by enhancing the existing political dialogue, achieving interoperability, developing defence reform and contributing to the fight against terrorism. Since then, the constant increase in the number and quality of the NATO-MD political dialogue has recently reached a sustainable level.<sup>21</sup>

The NATO Training Cooperation Initiative (NTCI), launched at the 2007 Riga Summit, aims at complementing existing cooperation activities developed in the MD framework through: the establishment of a "NATO Regional Cooperation Course" at the NATO Defence College (NDC) in Rome, which consists in a ten-week strategic level course also focusing on current security challenges in the Middle East.<sup>22</sup>

The new Strategic Concept, which was adopted at the Lisbon Summit in November 2011, identifies cooperative security as one of three key priorities for the Alliance, and constitutes an opportunity to move partnerships to the next generation. Mediterranean Dialogue partners were actively involved in the debate leading to its adoption.<sup>23</sup>

The Strategic Concept refers specifically to the MD, stating that: "We are firmly committed to the development of friendly and cooperative relations with all countries of the Mediterranean, and we intend to further develop the Mediterranean Dialogue in the coming years. We will aim to deepen the cooperation with current members of the Mediterranean Dialogue and be open to the inclusion in the Mediterranean Dialogue of other countries of the region."<sup>24</sup>

MD partners have reiterated their support for enhanced political consultations to better tailor the MD to their specific interests and to maintain the distinctive cooperation framework of the MD. Measures of

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<sup>23</sup> Park, Bill (2019) NATO Summits in David Dunn (ed) *Diplomacy at the Highest Level* (London: Springer) pp 88-105

<sup>24</sup> Yost, David (2010), NATO's evolving purposes and the next Strategic Concept, *International Affairs*, Volume 86, Issue 2, March 2010, Pages 489–522

practical cooperation between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries are laid down in an annual Work Programme which aims at enhancing our partnership through cooperation in security-related issues. The annual Work Programme includes seminars, workshops, and other practical activities in the fields of modernisation of the armed forces, civil emergency planning, crisis management, border security, small arms & light weapons, public diplomacy, scientific and environmental cooperation, as well as consultations on terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD).<sup>25</sup>

There is also a military dimension to the annual Work Programme which includes invitations to Dialogue countries to observe - and in some cases participate - in NATO/PfP military exercises, attend courses and other academic activities at the NATO School (SHAPE) in Oberammergau (Germany) and the NATO Defense College in Rome (Italy), and visit NATO military bodies. The military programme also includes port visits by NATO's Standing Naval Forces, on-site train-the-trainers' sessions by Mobile Training Teams, and visits by NATO experts to assess the possibilities for further cooperation in the military field. Furthermore, NATO+7 consultation meetings on the military programme involving military representatives from NATO and the seven Mediterranean Dialogue countries are held twice a year.<sup>26</sup>

Since the June 2004 Istanbul Summit, an annual Mediterranean Dialogue Work Programme (MDWP) focusing on agreed priority areas has been the main cooperation instrument available and has been expanded progressively in more than 30 areas of cooperation, going from about 100 activities in 2004, to over 700 activities and events in 2011. While the MDWP is essentially military (85 percent of the activities), it comprises activities in a wide range of areas of cooperation including Military Education, Training and Doctrine, Defence Policy and Strategy, Defence Investment, Civil Emergency Planning, Public Diplomacy, Crisis Management, Armaments, and Intelligence related activities.<sup>27</sup>

At their Berlin meeting in April 2011, NATO Foreign Ministers endorsed the establishment of a single Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM) for all partners. As of 1 January 2012, the single partnership menu will be effective, thus dramatically expanding the number of activities accessible to MD countries.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> NATO, Summit Meetings [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50115.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50115.htm)

A number of cooperation tools have also been progressively opened to MD countries, such as: The e-Prime database which provides electronic access to the MDWP allowing close monitoring of cooperation activities; The full package of Operational Capabilities Concept (OCC) to improve partners' capacity to contribute effectively to NATO-led Crisis Response Operations through achieving interoperability; The Trust Fund mechanism that currently includes ongoing substantial projects with MD countries such as Jordan and Mauritania; The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center (EADRCC) that aims at improving partners' capacity in supporting NATO's response to crises; The Partnership Action Plan Against Terrorism (PAP-T) that aims at strengthening NATO's ability to work effectively with MD partners in the fight against terrorism; and The Civil Emergency Planning (CEP) action plan that aims at improving the civil preparedness against CBRN attacks on populations and critical infrastructures.<sup>29</sup>

The Individual and Partnership Cooperation Programme (IPCP), which replaces the previous Individual Cooperation Programme (ICP) framework document, aims at enhancing bilateral political dialogue as well as at tailoring the cooperation with NATO according to key national security needs, framing NATO cooperation with MD partner countries in a more strategic way. Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Mauritania, and Tunisia have all agreed tailored Individual Cooperation Programmes with NATO. This is the main instrument of focused cooperation between NATO and MD countries.<sup>30</sup>

Considering changes in the Middle East and North Africa, NATO stands ready to support and assist those Mediterranean Dialogue countries undergoing transition, if they so request. Drawing on in-house experience and expertise, through Individual Partnership Cooperation Programmes the Alliance could aid in the areas of security institutions building, defence transformation, modernisation and capacity development, civil-military relations, and defence-related aspects of the transformation and reform of the security sector.

## **NATO and Libya**

NATO returned to Libya following the popular uprising against the Gadhafi regime in Benghazi, Libya, in February 2011, the UN Security Council adopted Resolutions 1970 and 1973 in support of the Libyan people, "condemning the gross and systematic violation of human rights". The resolutions

introduced active measures including a no-fly zone, an arms embargo, and the authorisation for member countries, acting as appropriate through regional organisations, to take “all necessary measures” to protect Libyan civilians.<sup>31</sup>

Initially, NATO enforced the no-fly zone and then, on 31 March 2011, NATO took over sole command and control of all military operations for Libya. The NATO-led Operation Unified Protector had three distinct components: 1) the enforcement of an arms embargo on the high seas of the Mediterranean to prevent the transfer of arms, related material, and mercenaries to Libya; 2) the enforcement of a no-fly-zone in order to prevent any aircraft from bombing civilian targets; and 3) air and naval strikes against those military forces involved in attacks or threats to attack Libyan civilians and civilian-populated areas. The UN mandate was carried out to the letter and the operation was terminated on 31 October 2011 after having fulfilled its objectives. In 2011 the African Union Commission Chairperson Jean Ping visited NATO twice in the context of Operation Unified Protector.<sup>32</sup>

### **NATO support to the African Union**

Between NATO’s two missions involving Libya was the Prague Summit 2002 that finally laid to rest whether NATO would be in the business of out-of-area operations, including Africa south of NATO’s southern border with Mediterranean states. NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson stated that the: “Allies agreed that in facing new threats, artificial geographic limitations make no sense. They agreed that NATO should deter, disrupt, defend and protect against threats from wherever they come. And that our forces must be able to go wherever they are required to carry out their mission. The NATO Response Force (NRF) grew out of the Prague Summit.<sup>33</sup>

NATO has been cooperating with the African Union (AU) a regional organization with 55 members, all of Africa except Morocco, created in 2002 out of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) that was created in 1963. NATO-AU cooperation has mainly been pragmatic and driven by requests from the African Union for support in very specific areas. The cooperation has evolved over time initially primarily based on ad-hoc military-technical cooperation. NATO has developed cooperation with the African Union principally in three areas: operational support; capacity-building support; and assistance

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<sup>33</sup> NATO, Summit Meetings [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50115.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50115.htm)

in developing and sustaining the African Standby Force (ASF). NATO is also supporting and assisting with the response to the refugee and migrant crisis in Europe.<sup>34</sup>

Some examples of assistance have been and some examples of ongoing cooperation are 1) Operational support that includes strategic air- and sealift, as well as planning support for the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM); 2) Capacity-building support that includes inviting AU officers to attend courses at NATO training and education facilities and delivering courses through NATO's Mobile Training Teams; 3) Support for the development and sustainment of the ASF includes exercises and tailor-made training, as well as assistance in developing ASF-related concepts; 4) NATO has also established a liaison office at AU headquarters in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It is led by a Senior Military Liaison Officer and provides, at AU's request, subject matter experts, who work in the AU's Peace and Security Department alongside African counterparts and 5) NATO coordinates its AU-related work with bilateral partners and other international organisations, including the European Union and the United Nations.<sup>35</sup>

### **The MENA maritime security dimension**

The content of MENA maritime security as a policy field is currently contested. In Africa initial continent-wide efforts to beef up search and rescue capacities evolved within the context of the 2000 International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue. At this stage, the debate on maritime security in Africa was advanced by the United Nations and the IMO, which set the tone by introducing sector standards. In 2008 the UN Security Council (UNSC) adopted a series of resolutions that, among other things, led to the establishment on 14 January 2009 of the Contact Group on Piracy off the Coast of Somalia (CGPCS), pursuant to Resolution 1851 (2008). The IMO sponsored a meeting of sixteen African and Arab states in Djibouti on 26 January 2009 that adopted a Code of Conduct Concerning the Repression of Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in the Western Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden (IMO 2009).<sup>36</sup>

The EU, NATO, and others responded to the security implications of African piracy by launching several joint operations. NATO guided by its latest strategic concept "Active Engagement, Modern Defence" (NATO 2010), launched a combined task force Operation Allied Protector (March – August

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<sup>36</sup> United Nations, Fight against maritime piracy, <https://unoca.unmissions.org/en/fight-against-maritime-piracy>

2009), Allied Provider (October – December 2008) and then Operation Ocean Shield. The last for example authorized by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2020, which calls on states cooperating with the Somali government to use “all necessary means” to combat piracy. Also at the request of the UN Secretary General, NATO’s naval forces escorted ships of the World Food Program (WFP) transiting in the Gulf of Aden.<sup>37</sup>

This led to ‘African Union - Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy – Adopted in 2014 (AIM 2050). It has its origins a discussion since around 2005 on the Africa Maritime Dimension (AMD) in the context of piracy in the Gulf of Aden, the Indian Ocean (East Africa), and the Gulf of Guinea (West Africa), in order of degree. Various African actors - among them, member states of the African Union (AU), the Regional Mechanisms for Conflict Prevention, Management, and Resolution (RMs), and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and the African Union Commission — have responded to dimensions of the ADM with a set of policies to integrate their evolving practices into a coherent maritime security and safety policy.<sup>38</sup>

AIM 2050 addresses all major issues that Africa is confronted with, namely: i. Diverse illegal activities, which include toxic waste dumping and discharge of oil, dealing in illicit crude oil, human, arms and drug trafficking, piracy and armed robbery at sea; ii. Energy exploitation, climate change, environmental protection, conservation and safety of life and property at sea; Research, innovation, and development; and iv. Maritime sector development, including competitiveness, job creation, international trade, maritime infrastructure, transport, information, communication, technology, and logistics.<sup>39</sup>

### **NATO Assistance to MENA**

It is NATO policy, and it has in practice assisted Africa and has also conducted military operations there. The rationale stems from the 1949 Washington Treaty that was signed founding NATO. Article 5 derives its substance from Article 51 of the UN Charter. According to Article 51, “nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defense if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations...”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> NATO, “The NATO Handbook,” <http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb010301.htm>

Article 5 of that Treaty is known as the “one for all and all for one” underlying the purpose of NATO. If written today the operative word would be “assistance”. To ensure the security and defense of NATO member states, NATO also assists non-NATO member states because it is in NATO interest to do so. Some are on NATO borders while others have or could host elements that would endanger the security of NATO member states. Looking at each instance of NATO assistance shows the two main focuses of NATO and Africa. The first is the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and the second is the African Union (AU). Another example was to support United Nations Resolutions in 2011 and resulted in strikes and embargoes on Libya.

Through these permeates a single line of questions: What is NATO? What are NATO’s borders? What does Africa mean for NATO? What is the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue? What is NATO-African Union relations? What are American military activities in Africa and why? Why would President Biden engage with or disengage from Africa? What would transpire if American forces were not to be there? What does China and Russia combat mean in Africa? What are the relationships between NATO and Africa? Is NATO ready for action in Africa? What would transpire if NATO were not to be there? What are other countries such as China, Russia, Turkey, and Iran doing in Africa? What can we make of the future relationship between NATO and Africa? What can we make of the future relationship between Africa and China and Russia? On what issues might there be a scramble for Africa because different states interests converge or diverge? A closer examination of these juxtaposed with the interests and role of NATO, leads to the conclusions that NATO is going to strengthen the efforts in the Mediterranean Dialogue and support for the African Union.

### **NATO’s security interests**

A number of concerns continue to be a reality on the African stage that could have impact on Europe and hence NATO and their potential to become global in nature. These include social radicalization and terrorism, energy and environmental disasters, civil war, unstable / failed governance, illegal migrants and refugees, and criminal activities in weapons, drugs, and humans, only to name a few. These



landward issues pose both a security threat and threaten economic interests seaward for example, the pursuit of lawful commerce at sea close to African shores.

There is also a clear and present threat in the new “Scramble for Africa” by external actors. The main players other than NATO members are China, Russia, the European Union, India, Brazil, Turkey, Iran, South Korea, and the Gulf State countries who are all interested in increasing cooperation with Africa. Part of their involvement is detrimental to local interests. For example arms trade, and radicalization of the population.<sup>41</sup>

Some have established foreign bases in Africa that could lead to proxy conflicts. Naval examples are China in Djibouti (port of Obock, cross the Gulf of Tadjoura ), India in Madagascar (listening post set up in 2007 to keep an eye on ship movements in the Indian Ocean and listen in on maritime communications) and The Seychelles (allocated land on Assumption Island to naval base for counter-piracy and an eye on China) and United Arab Emirates in Eritrea: (developing the mothballed deepwater port of Assab for operations in Yemen, including the naval blockade of the Red Sea ports of Mokha and Hodeida and has a 30-year lease on a naval and airbase at the port of Berbera.) And indeed Russia.

### **NATO and the African Union**

Much has been said about allowing for African solutions to African problems. But what happens when African solutions fail, or do not achieve anticipated results? What happens when the failure of African solutions threatens to destabilize regional or international security? The use of regional organizations to solve African issues is not a new phenomenon. One issue is that the African regional organizations cannot sustain themselves for prolonged security operations and logistical concerns plague them. Two of the significant African regional organizations currently operational in various security missions across the continent are 1) The African Union (AU), currently all 55 African states except Morocco and 2) ECOWAS, comprised of 15 West African states.

They need support for their missions and NATO is well placed to provide this. At the beginning of the 1990s, after the Cold War NATO began to assume an increasingly proactive role within the

international community and gradually projected itself beyond the Euro-Atlantic space (out of area operations). With this NATO took on new responsibilities within the international community. NATO's Prague Summit 2002 finally laid to rest whether NATO would be in the business of out-of-area operations, including Africa south of NATO's southern border with Mediterranean states.<sup>42</sup>

Since 2005, NATO has been cooperating with the AU. The NATO-AU relationship started modestly with AU requests for logistics and airlift support for its mission in Sudan. The cooperation has evolved over time and, although primarily based on ad-hoc military-technical cooperation, NATO Allies are committed to expanding cooperation with the AU to make it an integral part of NATO's efforts to work more closely with partners in tackling security challenges emanating from the south. Cooperation is being developed in three main areas: operational support; training support; and structural assistance. Operational support includes strategic air- and sealift, as well as planning support. NATO has also supported the build-up of the African Standby Force through exercises and training. For day-to-day activities, the Alliance maintains a liaison office at the AU's headquarters in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia. NATO and the African Union signed a new cooperation agreement on Monday (4 November 2019), laying the ground for closer practical and political cooperation between the two organizations. The deal supersedes an earlier NATO-AU cooperation agreement from 2014.<sup>43</sup>

### **NATO deployment in and off MENA**

NATO's deployment in Africa has been driven by direct requests from the AU for support in very specific areas and with United Nations Security Council Resolutions. This was to firstly improve the humanitarian situation in Darfur from 2005 to 2007 in support of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS) by providing logistical airlift to AU forces.<sup>44</sup>

Following this NATO provided logistical airlift to AU forces in Somalia and conducted naval operations in reaction to the increase in acts of piracy along the Somali coast. NATO naval forces conducted surveillance tasks and provided protection to deter and suppress piracy and armed robbery, which were threatening sea lines of communication, shipping security and so economic interests. Examples are Operation Allied Provider 2008 and Operation Allied Protector 2009 off the Horn of

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<sup>44</sup> African Union Mission in Sudan, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2006/01/19/sudan-imperatives-immediate-change/african-union-mission-sudan>

Africa. Operation Ocean Shield contributed to the international efforts against piracy off the coast of the Horn of Africa from 2009 to 2016.<sup>45</sup>

In detail NATO's role in Operation Ocean Shield was to provide naval escorts and deterrence while increasing cooperation with other counter piracy operations in the area to optimize efforts and tackle the evolving pirate trends and tactics. NATO conducted counter-piracy activities in full complementarity with the relevant UN Security Council Resolutions. All Allies contribute to the

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<sup>4</sup> Park, Bill (2019) NATO Summits in David Dunn (ed) *Diplomacy at the Highest Level* (London: Springer) pp 88-105

<sup>6</sup> NATO, What is Nato? <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>

<sup>8</sup> NATO, NATO Standing Naval Forces, <https://mc.nato.int/missions/NATO-standing-naval-forces>

<sup>9</sup> Razoux, Pierre (2019), *The NATO Mediterranean Dialogue at a crossroads*, (Rome: NATO Defense College)

<sup>11</sup> Smith-Windsor, Brooke, (2013), *AU-NATO Collaboration*, (Rome: NATO Defense College)

<sup>13</sup> NATO Mediterranean Dialogue, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_60021.htm?](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_60021.htm?)

<sup>14</sup> De Santis, Nicola. "Opening to the Mediterranean and Broader Middle East." *NATO Review* (Autumn 2004) <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2004/issue3/english/art4.html>

<sup>17</sup> De Santis, Nicola. "Opening to the Mediterranean and Broader Middle East." *NATO Review* (Autumn 2004) <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2004/issue3/english/art4.html>

<sup>18</sup> NATO, NATO Individual Cooperation Programmes, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_84336.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm)

<sup>21</sup> Park, Bill (2019) *NATO Summits* in David Dunn (ed) *Diplomacy at the Highest Level* (London: Springer) pp 88-105

<sup>22</sup> Park, Bill (2019) *NATO Summits* in David Dunn (ed) *Diplomacy at the Highest Level* (London: Springer) pp 88-105

<sup>25</sup> NATO, Annual Work Programme, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts.htm?keywordquery=Mediterranean%20Dialogue%20&search=true](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts.htm?keywordquery=Mediterranean%20Dialogue%20&search=true)

<sup>26</sup> NATO, Partnership for Peace programme, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_50349.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50349.htm)

<sup>28</sup> NATO, Summit Meetings [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50115.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50115.htm)

<sup>29</sup> United Nations, Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Center, <https://un-spider.org/links-and-resources/institutions/euro-atlantic-disaster-response-coordination-centre-eadrcc>

<sup>30</sup> NATO, NATO Individual Cooperation Programmes, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_84336.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.htm)

<sup>31</sup> Green, Mathew, (2019), To What Extent Was the NATO Intervention in Libya a Humanitarian Intervention?, <https://www.e-ir.info/2019/02/06/to-what-extent-was-the-nato-intervention-in-libya-a-humanitarian-intervention/>

<sup>32</sup> NATO, Operation Unified Protector, <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/71679.htm>

<sup>34</sup> African Union, The African Standby Force (ASF), <https://www.peaceau.org/en/page/82-african-standby-force-asf-amani-africa-1>

<sup>35</sup> NATO, Cooperation with the African Union, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_8191.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_8191.htm)

<sup>37</sup> Kabukuru, Wanjohi (2020) Somali piracy: in search of remedies for a global malady *United Nations Africa Renewal*, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/web-features/somali-piracy-search-remedies-global-malady>

mission, either directly or indirectly, through NATO's command structures and common funding. NATO Allies provided ships and maritime patrol aircraft to NATO Standing Maritime Groups, which in turn assigned several ships, on a rotational basis, to Ocean Shield. Also at the request of the UN Secretary General, NATO's naval forces escorted ships of the World Food Program (WFP) transiting in the Gulf of Aden. There have been no successful piracy attacks from May 2012 onward, even though Somalia-based piracy has not been eliminated.<sup>46</sup>

## Looking forward

Why NATO and not the EU or the UN to support AU maritime? The answer is that NATO brings to the table more so than any other in its interoperability and American contribution. Also even though the UN and EU do have many missions in Africa, they lack the naval capabilities of NATO. Time will tell also on NATO support to the AU's continent-wide "2050 Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy" (2050 AIM Strategy).

NATO support to the AU may even be with partners such as China. While NATO and China's operations are distinct, interaction through meetings of the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) initiative, for example helped to build mutual trust over the years.

Thanks to the SHADE process, 'China, India and Japan in early 2012 agreed to coordinate their merchant vessel escort convoys through the Internationally Recognized Transit Corridor (IRTC) off the Horn of Africa with one country being 'reference nation' for a period of three months on a rotational basis.'

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<sup>38</sup> African Union, Africa's Integrated Maritime Strategy, <https://au.int/en/documents-38>

<sup>39</sup> Larsen, Jessica and Nissen, Christine, (2017) Learning from danish counter-piracy off the coast of Somalia (Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Studies)

<sup>41</sup> Lee, Margaret C., (2007) The 21st Century Scramble for Africa, Journal of Contemporary African Studies Volume 24, 2006 - Issue 3, Pages 303-330

<sup>42</sup> NATO, Summit Meetings [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics\\_50115.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_50115.htm)

<sup>43</sup> NATO, NATO-African Union plan closer collaboration, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_170512.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_170512.htm)

<sup>45</sup> NATO, NATO concludes successful counter-piracy mission, [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news\\_139420.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_139420.htm)

<sup>46</sup> NATO, Operation Ocean Shield, <https://mc.nato.int/missions/operation-ocean-shield>

Also in the Mediterranean, the increased presence of Chinese naval assets alongside long-standing NATO ships have led some analysts to go as far as argue for joint Maritime Interdiction Operations (MIO) patrols.

## **Conclusion**

It would be fair to assume 1) that there is an unstable situation landward in many parts of MENA and 2) this is projected maritime off its coasts and hence 3) this juxtaposed with the essential security and economic interests and role of NATO and its member states would 4) tend to the conclusions that NATO is going to strengthen the efforts in the Mediterranean Dialogue and 5) further support for the African Union where 6) shipping security would be high on the list of priorities.

To examine this in detail with evidence further research would permeate through a singular line of questions: What does MENA mean for NATO? Is NATO unified for action in MENA? What do African states in the MD and AU want from NATO? and What would transpire if NATO were not to be active especially in shipping security and the maritime dimension of MENA?