

A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY
ORGANIZATION'S SOUTHERN STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS
FOR EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY

A thesis presented to the Faculty of the U.S. Army
Command and General Staff College in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE
General Studies

by

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2019

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				<i>Form Approved</i> <i>OMB No. 0704-0188</i>	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 14-06-2019		2. REPORT TYPE Master's Thesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) AUG 2018 – JUN 2019	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE A Qualitative Examination of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Southern Strategy: Implications for Euro-Atlantic Security				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Major Emanuele Malberti, Italian Army				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Command and General Staff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort Leavenworth, KS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORG REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution is Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is facing unpredictable challenges from Europe's eastern periphery and the southern one. On the eastern flank, Russia is challenging the Allies, threatening the sovereignty of the countries in the Baltic and the Black Sea regions. To the southern flank, coincident with the African and the Middle East area, terrorism, the threat of conflicts from failed states, second-order issues such as illegal immigration, reemerging Russian activism, and an ambitious Iran jeopardizes Europe. If NATO seems to be well prepared to face a conventional threat along the east and has already adopted many measures as part of the Readiness Action Plan, the implementation of a robust strategy to the south appears more volatile and complex to pursue, posing significant risks to the security of the whole Euro-Atlantic area. In this context, this thesis examines NATO's southern strategy through the operational design framework, and the ends, ways, means model of strategy to illustrate the Alliance's approach to the security threat from the south, focusing on the main strategic and operational challenges and the initiatives the Alliance has already implemented. Finally, the research aims to highlight the potential weaknesses of this strategy, and formulate recommendations to enhance NATO's capacity to gain in-depth situational awareness and understanding in the region, and to assure a quick response to the south as part of a global approach to security.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS NATO, European Union, Euro-Atlantic Security, Africa, the Middle East, Security Challenges, Terrorism, Russia, Iran, China, Strategy, Operational Design, Ends, Ways, Means, Risk.					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT (U)	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 122	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT (U)	b. ABSTRACT (U)	c. THIS PAGE (U)			19b. PHONE NUMBER (include area code)

Standard Form 298 (Rev. 8-98)
Prescribed by ANSI Std. Z39.18

MASTER OF MILITARY ART AND SCIENCE

THESIS APPROVAL PAGE

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

ABSTRACT

A QUALITATIVE EXAMINATION OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION'S SOUTHERN STRATEGY: IMPLICATIONS FOR EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY, by MAJ Emanuele Malberti, 122 pages.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is facing unpredictable challenges from Europe's eastern periphery and the southern one. On the eastern flank, Russia is challenging the Allies, threatening the sovereignty of the countries in the Baltic and the Black Sea regions. To the southern flank, coincident with the African and the Middle East area, terrorism, the threat of conflicts from failed states, second-order issues such as illegal immigration, reemerging Russian activism, and an ambitious Iran jeopardizes Europe. If NATO seems to be well prepared to face a conventional threat along the east and has already adopted many measures as part of the Readiness Action Plan, the implementation of a robust strategy to the south appears more volatile and complex to pursue, posing significant risks to the security of the whole Euro-Atlantic area. In this context, this thesis examines NATO's southern strategy through the operational design framework, and the ends, ways, means model of strategy to illustrate the Alliance's approach to the security threat from the south, focusing on the main strategic and operational challenges and the initiatives the Alliance has already implemented. Finally, the research aims to highlight the potential weaknesses of this strategy, and formulate recommendations to enhance NATO's capacity to gain in-depth situational awareness and understanding in the region, and to assure a quick response to the south as part of a global approach to security.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

First and foremost, I wish to thank my wife and my daughters without whom I could never have achieved this goal. Daniela, you have always supported me in my military life, following me in all the transfers and sharing sacrifices and satisfaction. Also on this occasion, you were a patient and an unlimited source of motivation. Denise and Asia, you have brightened my days with a simple smile and seeing you facing this experience of life in the United States with enthusiasm and determination was an example. I am sure that as a family we have grown and become stronger than ever. This is our greatest accomplishment and success.

A big thank goes to all my committee, Lieutenant Colonel Kenneth C. Rich, Gerald J. Leonard, and Nathaniel Stevenson, Jr. Your suggestions and our discussions have been a precious source of ideas since our first meeting. You provided me with precious advice that strengthened my professional knowledge and decisively contributed to the success of this research.

Finally, I want to honor all our fallen soldiers who have fought everywhere and at all times to give us peace and prosperity. Your sacrifice can be an example for all of us.

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ACRONYMS

EU	European Union
IO	International Organization
ISIL	Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JFC	Joint Force Command
JP	Joint Publication
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NSD-S	NATO Strategic Direction – South
NSS	National Security Strategy
OE	Operational Environment
RAP	Readiness Action Plan
U.S.	United States
VEO	Violent Extremist Organization

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) is a political and military alliance founded in Washington in 1949, whose purpose is to assure the freedom and security of its members, and defend them against aggression or threat of aggression. When diplomatic efforts fail to resolve disputes peacefully, NATO has the military power to conduct operations. By the collective defense clause in the NATO founding treaty - Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, the basic concept is that an attack against one or several members is considered as an attack against the Alliance as a whole.¹

Currently, NATO is composed of 29 countries, 22 of which also belong to the European Union (EU). NATO also has a specific plan, the Membership Action Plan (MAP), through which it provides advice, assistance, and practical support to countries wanting to join the Alliance. There are also many partnership initiatives with non-NATO countries and other international organizations (IO) such as the EU to project stability and security across the globe.²

During the cold war period and until 1990, NATO was mainly committed as a defensive organization to face the Soviet Union threat. With the fall of the Berlin wall and the progressive dismemberment of the Soviet Union, NATO restructured its

¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “What Is NATO?,” accessed 16 January 2019, <https://www.nato.int/nato-welcome/index.html>.

² Ibid.

organization to face different challenges and threats, mostly represented by rogue states and terrorist organizations. From 1990 to the present day, NATO has thus been committed in a large number of operations across the entire range of military operations.³

With the 2010 Strategic Concept still valid, NATO defined its strategic objectives for the next decade, highlighting collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security as essential core tasks to deal with the security environment. In addition, the 2010 Strategic Concept considered NATO-Russia cooperation as strategically essential to create universal peace, stability, and security.⁴

In 2014, Ukraine's crisis with the Russian annexation of Crimea changed the situation drastically. The event not only put an end to peaceful cooperation with Russia but raised the possibility of a renewed Russian threat to Europe.

Consequently, in the 2014 Wales Summit, the Allies focused their attention on the Russian military intervention in Ukraine, emphasizing their full commitment to Article 5. At the end of the summit, NATO introduced a Readiness Action Plan (RAP) "to respond swiftly and firmly to the new security challenges"⁵ along the NATO's borders, ensuring

³ Nicholas Burns, *NATO's Return to Europe: Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond*, ed. Rebecca R. Moore and Damon Coletta (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017.)

⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), *Active Engagement, Modern Defence: Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization*, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, last updated May 2012, accessed January 20, 2019, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120214_strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf

⁵ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales," September 2014, accessed 16 January 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

that “NATO remains a strong, ready, robust, and responsive Alliance capable of meeting current and future challenges from wherever they may arise.”⁶

The RAP includes a package of measures to deal with the current security challenges, including those from the eastern periphery represented by Russia and the southern neighborhood, coincident with Africa and the Middle East countries. The primary aims are to reinforce the NATO deterrence and defense posture through operational activities and long-term changes in the command structure and capabilities. Within this framework, after the 2014 Wales Summit, NATO adopted a new concept of an enhanced NATO Response Force (eNRF) and established six NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) along the eastern periphery.⁷

The 2016 Warsaw Summit confirmed NATO’s full commitment to accomplish all three core tasks to deal with the “arc of insecurity and instability along NATO’s periphery and beyond”⁸ and indicated to implement further measures as part of the RAP. Among them, the Alliance established an Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) consisting of four battalions on a rotational basis deployed to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland

⁶ NATO, “Wales Summit Declaration.”

⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Readiness Action Plan,” accessed 16 January 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_119353.htm.

⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Warsaw Summit Communiqué - Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016,” last updated March 2017, accessed 16 January 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.

and a Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) based on a Romanian framework brigade, in the south-eastern periphery.⁹

Along with the mentioned initiatives, the heads of state and government at the 2016 Warsaw Summit approved a “framework for NATO’s further adaptation to the challenges emanating from the south”¹⁰ as part of the adaptation measures of the RAP. This decision, strongly supported by southern European countries, was adopted to deal with the instability across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). The MENA region is even now characterized by continuing crises, in particular in Syria, Iraq, and Libya. The presence of violent extremism and transnational terrorism, as well as second-order problems like refugees and migrant crisis, represents an immediate and direct threat to Europe, NATO, and the international community as a whole. Notably, this decision led to the establishment of the NATO Strategic Direction South (NSD-S) Hub inside the Joint Force Command (JFC) Naples in 2017, whose mission is to facilitate regional understanding in the MENA region and represent a specific forum for NATO to engage in with its southern partners.¹¹

The years 2016-2018 confirmed the resurgence of Russia and high instability in the MENA region. Russia has continued to reinforce its military posture, and has also adopted provocative actions, such as the deployment of modern missile systems in

⁹ NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué.”

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ NATO Strategic Direction South Hub (NSDS HUB), “NSDS HUB Naples: Mission,” accessed January 16, 2019, <https://www.thesouthernhub.org/about-us/mission.aspx>.

Kaliningrad, the violation of NATO airspace, and the enhancement of military capabilities in Crimea. Indeed, Russia has assumed a primary role in the Syrian crisis and increased its presence in the Mediterranean Sea. In addition, the ongoing Libyan crisis, still without a solution even after the 2011 western intervention, contributes to Islamic terrorism, instability, and the deterioration of the migration crisis.

The 2018 NATO Summit, held in Brussels, confirmed once again the full commitment of the Allies to the Washington Treaty. The heads of state and government of the 29 member nations decided to continue in a 360-degree approach to security, accomplishing effectively all three core tasks laid down in the 2010 Strategic Concept. In particular, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg announced the adoption of many actions against Russian aggression, aimed to enhance the Alliance defensive organization along the east. At the Summit, pursuing a 360-degree approach to deterrence and defense, and projecting stability, NATO also confirmed its role in fighting terrorism and stabilizing the MENA region.¹²

The NATO strategy to the east may appear more concrete due to the several initiatives already adopted and a natural Alliance inclination to face conventional military threats. In contrast, the NATO posture to the south seems to be more volatile and challenging, leaving open many doubts and considerations about the real security condition of Europe.

¹² North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, 11-12 July 2018,” last updated August 2018, accessed January 16, 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

The Research Problem

Currently, NATO is facing enduring and unpredictable challenges and threats emanating from the European eastern and southern periphery, known respectively as NATO's eastern and southern flank. To the east, Russia has been challenging Euro-Atlantic security and stability since the illegal annexation of Crimea, and ongoing destabilization of Ukraine, Baltic, and the Black Sea region. To the south, multiple threats like Violent Extremist Organizations (VEO), terrorism, the Syrian and Libyan crisis, a reemerging Russia's activism in the region, and second-order issues like irregular immigration provoke significant instability in Africa and the Middle East, affecting European security. If the Alliance has considerable experience facing state actors like Russia and has adopted many initiatives to the east, NATO's southern strategy, generally associated with the concept of projecting stability, crisis management, and cooperative security core tasks, seems to be more complex and less robust.

First, the heterogeneity of the challenges and threats to the south is in itself a factor of complexity and requires the adoption of different and integrated approaches. Second, from an organizational point of view, apart from the extension of the commitment in Afghanistan and Iraq and several cooperation initiatives, the Alliance's southern strategy has mainly envisaged so far only the creation of the NSD-S Hub. Third, the differences among the European countries in security challenges, the cooperation between NATO and EU, and the future role of the United States (U.S.) in the region affect NATO's ability to pursue a coherent approach to the south, especially after the Arab spring. Many of NATO's eastern Allies have justifiably preferred so far to focus their resources and efforts towards the Russian threat while others, such as France and

Italy, have opted for national-level responses. NATO and the EU are still working on a division of competences to avoid duplications and maximize their efforts. Finally, U.S. interests in Africa and the Middle East influence each NATO approach to the region.

In the medium-long term, this situation could jeopardize NATO's credibility across the southern partners, weaken its capacity to effectively guard against the current and emerging threats, and allow for greater Russian and Chinese influence in Africa and the Middle East. For this reason, the failure of NATO strategy to the south could be highly detrimental to the security of the Euro Atlantic area, posing significant risk to the entire Alliance.

Existing Literature

In general, there is copious literature regarding NATO and the security of Europe. However, considering that NATO approval of a framework for the south is relatively recent and the current defense literature is mainly focused to the eastern flank due to the Russian threat and a renewed emphasis on Large Scale Combat Operation (LSCO), not many studies address specifically the southern strategy. What is to be emphasized is thus the importance of considering the current security challenges with a 360-degree perspective that includes both the east and the south. For the purpose of this research, the literature, detailed in chapter 2, will be organized into three categories and have the scope to familiarize the reader with the subject and provide the basis for the researcher's analysis in chapter 4.

The first category will discuss strategic level documents and declarations by NATO. These documents are crucial to understanding the current NATO strategic posture and how the Allies have decided to deal with the south. For a more in-depth

understanding, the section will also include EU documents to offer insights regarding the areas of cooperation with the Alliance and U.S. documents to achieve a comprehensive understanding of Africa and the Middle East strategic environment. The second category will encompass documents and studies of think tank institutes that address the issue of NATO's southern strategy from different perspectives. These sources provide an analysis of the challenges in the south, the main state and non-state actors influencing the area, the actions NATO has implemented, and the potential issues that could prevent the Alliance from achieving its objectives. The third group will include books, articles, and military magazines that cover the main aspects of the research problem.

For completeness, to guarantee free access to the research and discussion on the argument, the thesis does not include the consultation and analysis of classified or sensitive documents.

Significance of the Thesis

A study regarding the current NATO southern strategy is important for three reasons. First, highlighting the importance of the southern flank can help to consider the security of Europe as a whole and not divided into different strategic directions. Viewing the strategy in the form of separate flanks can undermine European security as a whole, and NATO's cohesion, by creating virtual coalitions of interests within the Alliance and committing resources without considering the interconnection of the eastern and southern flank. Second, understanding the strategic environment, the actors operating in the area, and their objectives is crucial to identify potential challenges and threats. The continuous instability in Africa and the Middle East could be breeding ground for peer competitors

like Russia and China. Third, framing the NATO's strategic problems may lead to recommendations.

Purpose Statement

This study aims to investigate the importance of implementing a NATO effective strategy to the south as part of a global approach to European security. Thus, the study will analyze the current NATO approach to the southern flank through the operational design framework as detailed in the U.S. Joint Doctrine, describing the strategic guidance, the characteristics of the operational environment, and the Alliance's strategic problems. By assessing the current strategy in terms of ends, ways, and means, the research also aims to propose some recommendations for a more robust approach. The research is, therefore, the result of the author's view and analysis and does not necessarily reflect the views of NATO or any other organization.

Research Questions

The primary research question asks if NATO should implement a more robust strategy towards the southern flank, in a 360-degree approach that guarantees the security of Europe both to the east and south, to fulfill all three core tasks. To answer this question, this research will address the following supporting questions:

1. What is the strategic direction the Allies have agreed upon to address the security challenges emanating from European southern periphery?
2. What are the main challenges and threats emanating from the southern flank, Africa, and the Middle East, that could endanger the European security?

3. What are the main initiatives NATO has implemented towards the southern flank to achieve its objectives?

Summary

To guarantee European as well as Euro-Atlantic security, it is vital to wonder if the current NATO strategy is balanced and suitable for addressing effectively the challenges emanating from the southern flank. This is part of critical reasoning aimed to foster discussion on the subject and provide recommendations. Chapter 2 will describe the open-source literature on the topic.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to present and summarize the content of the main documents, studies, articles, and opinion pieces useful for addressing the research problem. As underlined by John W. Creswell and J. David Creswell, the literature review aims to establish a bridge among the different aspects of the topic, identify the central issues, and ultimately address the research questions.¹³ To achieve the scope, the chapter includes three sections. The first section discusses NATO strategic level documents and declarations and includes EU and U.S. documents for greater expansion of the topic. The second section presents specific studies and papers that address the subject, highlighting the importance of implementing a credible NATO strategy to the south. The third section includes the review of books, newspapers, and magazines articles to provide additional information and gain a deeper understanding of the topic.

Strategic Level Documents and Declarations

NATO official sources, mainly strategic documents, and Summit declarations, are crucial to understanding the strategic direction the Allies have decided to give to the Alliance, the future challenges and threats, and how they intend to deal with them. This subsection analyzes, in particular, the 2010 Strategic Concept that defines the three

¹³ John W. Creswell and David J. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches*, 5th ed. (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, Inc, 2018), 26-28.

NATO core tasks, the last two Summit declarations that highlight the last decisions the Allies assumed, and the RAP, the plan through which NATO is adapting to face the current security challenges. Finally, this section also includes information regarding the main contents of the 2016 EU Global Strategy as well as the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS), National Defense Strategy (NDS), and U.S. European Command (EUCOM), Africa Command (AFRICOM) and Central Command (CENTCOM) Posture Statements with the purpose of expanding the analysis of the topic.

At the NATO Summit in Lisbon, 19-20 November 2010, the heads of state and government adopted the 2010 “Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation”, a fundamental document that outlines the Alliance’s strategic objectives for at least 10 years. The document is the result of the different views of the Allies regarding NATO’s role and main challenges and threats. Emphasizing the main characteristics of the Alliance as a “unique community of values, committed to the principles of individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law”¹⁴ and an “essential source of stability in an unpredictable world,”¹⁵ the Allies recognized the importance of fulfilling three core tasks: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.¹⁶ While the collective defense has always been one of the foundation elements of the Alliance, as underlined by Article 5 of the

¹⁴ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 6.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7-8.

Washington Treaty, crisis management and cooperative security emerged as core tasks of the role of global security provider, the duty NATO assumed in the last decades.

In this context, it is important to underline the main aspects of the security environment in 2010. After the end of the cold war in 1990, the Euro-Atlantic area was substantially characterized by relative peace and by a low threat of a conventional attack due to the Alliance's "historic success for the policies of robust defense, Euro-Atlantic integration, and active partnership."¹⁷ Nevertheless, NATO decided not to ignore the risk of a conventional threat due to the assessment that many regions and countries around the world were developing modern military capabilities, mainly ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. It is clear that the assessment aimed correctly to underline the Alliance commitment to Article 5, and to maintain a robust set of military capabilities.

For this research, it may be significant to mention the other aspects of the operational environment (OE) described in the 2010 Strategic Concept where terrorism, instability, and conflict beyond NATO borders are identified as priority security challenges. Terrorism and instability that tend to expand where states are fragile are undoubtedly related topics that depend on each other, because other issues like drugs, weapons, and personnel trafficking threaten NATO countries,¹⁸ hence, the importance of crisis management and cooperative security core tasks.

¹⁷ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 10.

¹⁸ Ibid., 11.

Recognizing that “Crises and conflicts beyond NATO’s borders can pose a direct threat to the security of Alliance territory and populations”¹⁹ and by the lessons learned from Afghanistan and Balkan operations, the Allies agreed on the importance to foster security through crisis management.

NATO has a unique and robust set of political and military capabilities to address the full spectrum of crises – before, during and after conflicts. NATO will actively employ an appropriate mix of those political and military tools to help manage developing crises that have the potential to affect Alliance security, before they escalate into conflicts; to stop ongoing conflicts where they affect Alliance security; and to help consolidate stability in post-conflict situations where that contributes to Euro Atlantic security.²⁰

In addition, many measures are identified to be effective in crisis management such as sharing intelligence within NATO, developing specific military doctrine and capabilities, bolstering integrated civilian-military planning, developing the capability to train local forces in zones of crisis, and regular consultation between Allies and Partners.²¹

Cooperative security is referred to principally as three tasks: partnerships, arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, and open-door policy.

The Alliance is affected by, and can affect, political and security developments beyond its borders. The Alliance will engage actively to enhance international security, through partnership with relevant countries and other international organisations; by contributing actively to arms control, non proliferation and disarmament; and by keeping the door to membership in the Alliance open to all European democracies that meet NATO’s standards.²²

¹⁹ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 19.

²⁰ Ibid., 7-8.

²¹ Ibid., 21-22.

²² Ibid., 8.

Open door and partnership are two main aspects to underline. Open door policy refers to the fact that NATO is open to “all European democracies which share the values of our Alliance . . . and whose inclusion can contribute to common security and stability.”²³ This is a precious instrument to foster stability and security but, at the same time, is one of the main reasons for the current tension with Russia. The Kremlin considers the NATO expansion as a political act of aggression and attrition against its past influence over the Eastern Europe countries.²⁴

On the other hand, partnership consists of making “a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organizations around the globe”²⁵ in order to contribute to NATO effectiveness. Among these relationships, particularly important are the cooperations with the United Nations (UN), the EU, Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), and other initiatives as the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), Partner Across the Globe, NATO’S Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), and Partnership for Peace (PfP) program.

The Warsaw Summit Communiqué, issued by the Heads of State and Government at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, Warsaw, 8-9 July 2016, is a crucial step for the NATO strategy towards the south. First, the Heads of State and Government reaffirmed the NATO commitment to fulfill the three core tasks and decided that the

²³ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 25-26.

²⁴ Burns, *NATO’s Return to Europe*, 9-10.

²⁵ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 26.

Alliance had to boost security in and around Europe “protecting its citizens through modern deterrence and Defense, and projecting stability beyond its borders.”²⁶

Second, they approved the implementation of a framework for NATO’s adaptation in response to growing challenges and threats from the south.²⁷ The decision was made according to the assessment of European security as described in paragraph 5 of the Communiqué,

There is an arc of insecurity and instability along NATO's periphery and beyond. The Alliance faces a range of security challenges and threats that originate both from the east and from the south; from state and non-state actors; from military forces and from terrorist, cyber, or hybrid attacks.²⁸ Our security is also deeply affected by the security situation in the Middle East and North Africa, which has deteriorated significantly across the whole region. Terrorism, particularly as perpetrated by the so-called Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL)/Da'esh, has risen to an unprecedented level of intensity, reaches into all of Allied territory, and now represents an immediate and direct threat to our nations and the international community. Instability in the Middle East and North Africa also contributes to the refugee and migrant crisis.²⁹

Countering the threat of ISIL and instability in the Middle East and North Africa are largely discussed in the *Communiqué*. ISIL was very active in 2016 and continues to represent a real threat for Allied territory and the international community, contributing to the instability of Africa and the Middle East. Consequently, this instability, in particular in Syria, Iraq, Libya, and the Sahel-Sahara region causes many issues and “demonstrates that the security of the region has direct implications for the security of

²⁶ NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué.”

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

NATO.”³⁰ Among the issues, the Communiqué mentions the threat from failing and failed states, terrorism, violent extremism as well as the trafficking of weapons, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and threats against maritime security and energy supply.³¹

Among the measures to deal with the problems and as part of the framework for the south, the Allies agreed to bolster NATO cooperative security network to enhance political dialogue and foster constructive relationships in the region, as well as increase support for partners through practical cooperation, defense capacity building, and crisis management.³²

The Brussels Summit Declaration is, at this time, the last declaration of the heads of state and government issued after the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, 11-12 July 2018. Once again, in the first paragraph of the document, the Allies agreed on “a 360-degree approach to security and to fulfill effectively all three core tasks as set out in the Strategic Concept.”³³

Regarding the challenges and threats, the NAC recognizes that NATO is facing a “dangerous, unpredictable, and fluid security environment, with enduring challenges and threats from all strategic directions.”³⁴ In particular, Russia continues to challenge the

³⁰ NATO, “Warsaw Summit Communiqué.”

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

³⁴ Ibid.

Alliance and undermine the security of the Euro-Atlantic area to achieve political goals. On the other hand, instability and continuing crises that affect the Middle East and North Africa contribute to terrorism and other problems like irregular migration and human trafficking. The ongoing crisis in Syria is considered a central cause of this instability and a potential threat for the entire Alliance.³⁵

After analyzing the strategic environment and addressing the relationship with Russia, condemning the action in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova as well as hybrid action in Montenegro and UK, the Declaration focuses on the implementation of the measures of the RAP. In this context, it is important to provide additional information regarding the RAP. This is not a proper document, but a plan approved at the 2014 Wales Summit and then implemented at Warsaw in 2016. Even if the full content of the plan is not open source, it is possible to find the main information on the NATO official web site.

The RAP aims to guarantee that “the Alliance is ready to respond swiftly and firmly to new security challenges from the east and the south,”³⁶ including both assurance and adaptation measures. The assurance measures, mainly NATO’s response to Russian aggression, encompasses land, sea and air activities, and exercises along the eastern portion of NATO territory, and is focused on collective defense and crisis management. These measures include air-policing patrols over the Baltic States, Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) surveillance flights, the Standing NATO Mine

³⁵ NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

³⁶ NATO, “Readiness Action Plan.”

Counter-Measures Group patrolling the Baltic Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean, and many land exercises.³⁷

The adaptation measures envisage changes to the Alliance command structure and forces so that NATO can better respond in case of crisis. Some measures have already been implemented, such as the new concept of NATO Response Force (NRF) with the adoption of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and eight NFIUs in Central and Eastern Europe, and the Multinational Corps Northeast Headquarters (HQ MNC-NE) in Poland. Also included is the Multinational Division Southeast in Romania (HQ MND-SE) as well as the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) with four battle groups in the east and the TFP in the southeast, based on the Romanian-led multinational brigade, and measures to protect NATO airspace.³⁸ Notably, to enhance the RAP the Allies also approved the Readiness Initiative at the Brussels Summit which states, by 2020 there will be an addition of “30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium manoeuvre battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces, at 30 days’ readiness or less”³⁹ to increase the response capability of the Alliance.

In reference to the Brussels declaration, the Allies agree to implement both the forward presence along the eastern part of the Alliance, to include the EFP and the TFP,

³⁷ NATO, “Readiness Action Plan.”

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government Participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels, 11-12 July 2018.” Accessed 16 January 2019. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156624.htm.

and the framework for the south. Concerning the south, the heads of state and government agree on the necessity to implement the framework fully.

We are determined to complete, including through the full capability of the Regional Hub for the South, the additional work required to implement all elements of our Framework for the South, namely the ability to anticipate and respond to crises emanating from the south, improved capabilities for expeditionary operations, and enhancing NATO's ability to project stability through regional partnerships and capacity building efforts.⁴⁰

To achieve its goals, the Alliance identifies multiple actions like advance planning, exercises, cooperation with selected partners, and training, advising, and mentoring capabilities. The Alliance's intent is to project stability beyond its borders. In addition, while discussing the NATO Command Structure Adaptation, the declaration highlights the "Italian offer, on a rotational basis, of a Divisional Headquarters in support of activities envisaged by the enhanced Framework for the South."⁴¹

Even if not directly mentioned as part of the Framework for the South, the declaration addresses multiple topics that are significant for this thesis. First of all is the great concern over Iran's and Syria's missile capabilities. Iran possesses a large inventory of ballistic missile capabilities, carries on an ambitious nuclear program, and is suspected of conducting destabilizing activities in the Middle East. Syria has short-range ballistic missiles that are capable of hitting NATO's territory. It is important to note missiles launched from Syria have presumably hit Turkey.⁴²

⁴⁰ NATO, "Brussels Summit Declaration."

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

Secondly, the Alliance recognizes the importance of partnership in its strategy. NATO's partnership includes relationships with other international actors and organizations, including the UN, the EU, the OSCE, and the African Union (AU), in order to "maintain a broad cooperative security network, deepen political dialogue, and foster practical cooperation."⁴³ In this context, it is essential to underline the endorsement of Package on the South.

We have today endorsed a Package on the South, which includes a range of political and practical cooperation initiatives towards a more strategic, focused, and coherent approach to the Middle East and North Africa, a region facing a multitude of complex threats and challenges, which in turn affect our security. Within that overall strategic aim, we are pursuing three main objectives: to strengthen NATO's deterrence and defence against threats emanating from the south; to contribute to international crisis management efforts in the region; and to help our regional partners build resilience against security threats, including in the fight against terrorism..⁴⁴

In particular, the Package on the South includes: a stronger relationship with Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partners in order to maximize their defense and security capabilities; the full capability of the NSD-S Hub in providing regional understanding, sharing information, and to coordinate NATO's activities in the south; an emphasized role for NATO-ICI Regional Centre to work with partners in the Gulf region; and stricter relations with the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, and the AU..⁴⁵

⁴³ NATO, "Brussels Summit Declaration."

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Finally, the declaration highlights the importance of NATO-EU cooperation. A credible EU defense is considered a key factor to assure, together with NATO, security of the Euro-Atlantic area. The areas where this cooperation have already achieved significant results include operational cooperation, exercises, defense industry, research, and defense and security capacity building.⁴⁶

Alongside the Brussels NATO Summit, NATO-EU cooperation was covered by the Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation issued by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of NATO on 10 July 2018. The declaration underlines the results of cooperation such as maritime cooperation in the Mediterranean, an increased ability to respond to hybrid threats, the capacity to build members' and partners' resilience, and support of the defense and security capacity of neighbors to the east and south.⁴⁷

On the NATO-EU cooperation subject, it is essential to mention that in 2016 the EU released the document, *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe - A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*. Moving from the consideration that "To the east, the European security order has been violated, while terrorism and violence plague North Africa and the Middle East, as well as Europe

⁴⁶ NATO, "Brussels Summit Declaration."

⁴⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Joint Declaration on EU-NATO Cooperation by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization," last updated July 2018, accessed 20 January 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_156626.htm.

itself,”⁴⁸ the strategy recognizes the importance of building a stronger EU to address the current challenges and threats. Notably, the document argues that European internal and external security are strictly related and that the security of Europe is dependent on peace beyond its borders.⁴⁹

Thus, to pursue its interests, the EU identifies the priorities of its external action: the security of the union; state and societal resilience to EU East and South; an integrated approach to conflicts; and cooperative regional orders.⁵⁰ From the analysis of these priorities emerge some details useful to address the research topic. To summarize, the EU aims to become more capable of protecting itself and responding to external crises, in particular in the crisis management field and capacity building against terrorism, hybrid threats, and organized crime. While declaring NATO remains the primary point of reference for collective defense, the EU supports deeper cooperation in “complementarity, synergy, and full respect for the institutional framework, inclusiveness, and decision-making autonomy of the two.”⁵¹

Second, the EU is trying to develop and support the resilience of states and societies to the east, from Central Asia, and south to Central Africa. The plan is an enlargement policy, the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), aimed to promote a

⁴⁸ European Union (EU), *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe. A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy*, European External Action Service, June 2016, accessed 3 January 2019, http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf, 7.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 7-8.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 9-10.

⁵¹ Ibid., 20.

prosperous economic area and a more effective Migration Policy.⁵² Significantly, the resiliency is “the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crises.”⁵³

Third, the EU supports a “peaceful and prosperous Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa.”⁵⁴ Considering all these areas are in turmoil, the documents underline the EU is planning greater support and cooperation to regional and sub-regional organizations operating in Africa and the Middle East, following multiple lines of action. Essentially, the EU intends (1) to bolster functional multilateral cooperation in the region, and through the Union for the Mediterranean; (2) intensify cooperation with Turkey to address the relations with Cyprus, and foster dialogue in the field of countering terrorism and refugees; (3) pursue cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); and (4) support cooperation between north and sub-Saharan Africa, as well as between the Horn of Africa and Middle East in light of their growing interconnections through closer relationships with the African Union, the Economic Community of Western African States (ECOWAS,) and the G5 Sahel.⁵⁵

From the analysis of the EU Global Strategy, it is clear that the EU has a strategic interest towards the European southern periphery and is potentially capable of

⁵² EU, *Shared Vision, Common Action*, 23-28.

⁵³ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 34-35.

influencing the dynamics of the region. For this reason, research on NATO strategy to the south cannot ignore the role the EU will play in the region.

To conclude the discussion about strategic-level documents and for greater depth, the following paragraphs present the main contents of U.S., NSS, NDS, and U.S. EUCOM, AFRICOM, and CENTCOM Posture Statements. Despite the ongoing American debate about the role the U.S. should play in the world,⁵⁶ it is undeniable the U.S. must continue to be as important in all matters concerning global security and consequently European security. For this reason, the mentioned documents are crucial to address the topic of NATO approach to the south as well as to understand the Africa and the Middle East operational environment.

The 2018 NSS, signed by President Donald Trump, highlights the challenges and threats the U.S. will face on the global stage, mainly represented by state actors such as Russia, China, Iran, and North Korea and non-state actor as ISIL.⁵⁷ Aiming at advancing American interests in the world, the NSS identifies different regional strategies including those in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East.

Recognizing that Europe has vital importance to the U.S., the NSS describes how Russia, China, Iran, international terrorism, and instability in the Middle East and Africa affects the security of the region and the value of transatlantic unity. In summary, Russia

⁵⁶ Zachary Karabell, "What Is America's Role in the World? Three Authors Offer Very Different Views," *The New York Times*, 18 November 2018, accessed 21 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/11/16/books/review/robert-kagan-jungle-grows-back.html>.

⁵⁷ U.S. President, *National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, The White House, 2017, accessed 21 January 2019, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, 2-3.

is violating the sovereignty of Ukraine and Georgia, while China is advancing its presence through “its unfair trade practices and investing in key industries, sensitive technologies, and infrastructure.”⁵⁸ Most significantly for this thesis, the NSS recognizes Europe is threatened by violent terrorism, such as ISIL, and instability and tensions in the Middle East and Africa that produce related issues such as immigration.⁵⁹ However, in military and security priority actions, while direct support is explicitly mentioned to deter and defend NATO’s eastern flank, there are no specific references to actions to the south, apart from the general considerations for counter-terrorism.

As far as the strategy for the Middle East is concerned, the region is depicted as “home to the world’s most dangerous terrorist organizations”⁶⁰ where ISIS and al-Qaeda continue to be active. At the same time, the analysis states Iran is the “world’s leading state sponsor of terrorism”⁶¹ and is trying to expand its influence continually. In military and security actions, the U.S. affirms a clear willingness to maintain a strong presence in the region even if President Trump’s decision to withdraw troops from Syria creates question about future strategy in the region.

Regarding Africa, the NSS assesses the continent as an area of promise and enduring challenges where, despite progress, many states deal with political turmoil and instability. Violent extremism and international terrorist organizations, primarily ISIS, al-

⁵⁸ U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 47.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 49.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 49.

Qaeda, and their affiliates, continue to conduct attacks, conquer areas and threaten U.S. citizens and interests.⁶² Indeed, China is “expanding its economic and military presence in Africa, growing from a small investor two decades ago into Africa’s largest trading partner today.”⁶³ In a common framework that encompasses the economic, political, and military sector, the NSS declares that the U.S. will continue to support partners to promote effective governance, respond to humanitarian needs, foster economic integration among African states, and fight terrorism, human trafficking, and illegal trade in arms and natural resources.⁶⁴

Consistent with the NSS, the Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy analyzes the strategic environment, and defines the U.S. Department of Defense strategic approach to achieve national objectives. Russia and China are again identified as countries challenging the U.S. to achieve global prominence, and Iran as a cause of instability in the Middle East due to terrorist activities and an ambitious missile program. Non-state actors, like ISIS, represent another source of concern because they may threaten security through advanced capabilities.⁶⁵

Moving to the Department of Defense strategic approach, great emphasis is posed on fortifying NATO Alliance to “deter Russian adventurism, defeat terrorist who murder

⁶² U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 52.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Secretary of Defense (SecDef), *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America. Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge*, U.S. Department of Defense, 2018, accessed 21 January 2019, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>, 3.

innocents, and address the arc of instability building on NATO's periphery.”⁶⁶ At the same time, the documents provide indications regarding opportunities to “*Form enduring coalitions in the Middle East*”⁶⁷ and “*Support relationships to address significant terrorist threats in Africa*.”⁶⁸ The first action aims to consolidate gains in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria, counterbalance Iran's growing influence, defeat terrorism, and guarantee free access to global energy markets and secure trade routes. The second one refers to a willingness to work with local partners and EU to counter terrorism, violent extremism, human trafficking, criminal organizations, and reduce the malign influence of competitors' powers.⁶⁹

Finally, the EUCOM, CENTCOM and AFRICOM Posture Statements provide insights regarding the OE. In his 2019 statement to the U.S. Senate Committee on the Armed Services, General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, EUCOM Commander, provides an in-depth analysis of the European strategic environment, and its challenges. Importantly, General Scaparrotti is also the NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR).

From the introduction, General Scaparrotti underlines that “Europe and the Trans-Atlantic NATO Alliance remain crucial to our national security.”⁷⁰ Subsequently, he

⁶⁶ SecDef, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy*, 9.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 10.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 9-10.

⁷⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, United States Army Commander United States European Command*, March 5, 2019, accessed 25 March 2019, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Scaparrotti_03-05-19.pdf, 2.

moves to the consideration that Europe is a dynamic strategic environment where Russia represents the primary threat for the Allies due to their attempt to influence nations along its periphery, to undermine NATO cohesion, and the significant development of nuclear and advanced weapons. Significantly, Russia is also trying to increase its influence in Afghanistan, Syria, and Asia.⁷¹

In addition, Violent Extremist Organizations, China, and migration flows are presented as European Security challenges. Terrorism remains a high threat due to the ISIS capacity to expand itself, recruit personnel, and plan attacks. China is trying to extend its influence and presence through its economic power and would cooperate with Russia in anti-U.S. and west activities.

In his 2019 statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee, General Joseph L. Votel, CENTCOM Commander, analyzes the challenges in its AOR that goes from northeast Africa to the Middle East, and Central and South Asia, and the strategic approach to the region. Significantly, General Votel highlights in his introduction that its command is planning for a “professional withdrawal under pressure of U.S. forces from Syria, while maintaining our Defeat-Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (D-ISIS) efforts.”⁷² This action derives in particular from the last President Trump strategic guidance and the

⁷¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Curtis M. Scaparrotti*, 3.

⁷² U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Joseph L. Votel Commander, U.S. Central Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Posture of U.S. Central Command Great Power Competition: The Current and Future Challenges in the Middle East*, 5 February 2019, accessed 5 March 2019, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Votel_02-05-19.pdf, 2.

progress of the Global Coalition and partners in defeating ISIS, one of the main concerns in the region together with other terrorist organizations.

Regarding security challenges, General Votel emphasizes as in the previous 2018 Posture Statement, the existence of multiple threats such as terrorism, violent conflicts, the presence of malign competitors, nuclear and ballistic missile proliferation, and humanitarian crises that negatively influence Africa, Europe, and the U.S. Considerable attention is given to the role of Iran, Russia, and China in the region.⁷³

Iran remains one of the major threats to the U.S. and its partners due to the development of nuclear ballistic missile capabilities and its actions aimed to foment instability and influence the region through its political and military power in Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen. On the other hand, Moscow challenged American predominance in the area, through its massive presence in Syria where it tested its military capabilities and its diplomatic power supporting Syria's President Bashar al Assad with Iran and Lebanese Hezbollah. Finally, China is acting both in the economic and military domain. In the economic sector, China continues to implement the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) to extend its influence and access to the energy sources. Regarding the military domain, apart from a resurgent tie with Russia through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization membership, China built its first overseas military base in Djibouti close to the Bab el Mandeb Strait.⁷⁴

⁷³ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Joseph L. Votel Commander*, 5 February 2019, 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

The last document to be analyzed is the statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee by Gen. Thomas D. Waldhauser, AFRICOM Commander. From the analysis of the document, Africa is a continent with many opportunities that attract different actors, including China and Russia, who try to extend their influence. However, Africa is also characterized by a great instability where extreme poverty, corruption, health care issues, and weak governments are fertile terrain for VEOs and terrorism that continue to disrupt entire countries, such as the Sahel and Lake Chad region. Internally displaced persons, refugees, migrants, movement of drugs, and weapons are just some of the issues in this situation.⁷⁵

Regarding the role of China and Russia in the region, compared to the previous version of 2018, the document shows increasing activism of the two superpowers. China continues to invest a large number of resources in Africa in order to expand its economy, access the main ports, and take advantage of local natural and mineral resources, offering itself as a valuable partner for African nations, some of which are also signatories of China's BRI. Russia has instead adopted a military approach in the region, through the presence of many contractors, proposing itself in particular as a supplier of arms. Increasing activism in Libya would allow Moscow to conduct business both in the sale of arms and in the oil sector, and obtain potential access to the coastal areas and to the

⁷⁵ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Thomas D. Waldhauser, United States Marine Corps Commander United States Africa Command before the Senate Committee on Armed Services*, 7 February 2019, accessed 5 March 2019, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Waldhauser_02-07-19.pdf, 6-10.

Mediterranean. Libya remains one of the priorities of AFRICOM in terms of support for the Libyan Government of the National Accord.⁷⁶

Finally, it is important to underline that both CENTCOM and AFRICOM consider support and strengthening the partners and increasing collaboration with NATO allies and IOs such as UN, EU, and AU fundamental pillars of strategy. To conclude, this section aimed to present main NATO strategic-level documents that address the topic and to provide an analysis of EU and the U.S. strategy to the south for a greater understanding of the research problem and the OE.

Documents and Studies Addressing the Topic

The review of studies and papers regarding the Alliance's approach to the southern periphery dates back to the end of the Cold War when NATO moved to a new and different role that brought the Allies to conduct military campaigns in the Middle East like in Iraq and Afghanistan. However, after years of contingency operations far beyond the European borders, attention is now focused on the south in particular after the terrorist's attack in European cities, and the decision assumed at the 2016 NATO Warsaw Summit. This section illustrates the main contents of a 2010 RAND research and, in particular, of current studies regarding the subject.

In 2000, nine years after the fall of the Soviet Union, a RAND institution research sponsored by the U.S. Air Force, entitled *NATO Looks South – New Challenges and New Strategies in the Mediterranean* and written by Ian O. Lesser, addressed the importance

⁷⁶ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Thomas D. Waldhauser*, 15.

of a credible NATO strategy for the south. Ian O. Lesser is currently vice president for Foreign Policy at The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF).

Moving from an analysis of the Gulf War, and the crisis in Algeria and the Balkans, the research considered “European, Middle Eastern, and Eurasian security increasingly interwoven.”⁷⁷ The research then provided many considerations regarding the implementation of an effective strategy for an Alliance relationship with a crucial member like Turkey, the Greek-Turkey dispute in the Aegean and Cyprus, the necessity of a NATO expanded involvement in the Mediterranean, and the allocation of resources and capabilities permanently based in the south.⁷⁸ All the concepts seem to be applicable and even desirable today.

The Italian *Istituto Affari Internazionali* (IAI), a private, independent non-profit think tank for foreign policy that aims to promote understanding, debate, and solutions of current challenges, offers several documents useful for this thesis.

In their January 2017 paper “Challenges to NATO and Italy’s Role: Trump, Brexit, Collective Defense and Neighborhood Stability”, Alessandro Marrone, Paola Sartori, and Francesca Bitondo explore in particular the concept of projecting stability on the southern flank moving from the main decisions taken at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. Alessandro Marrone is an expert in security studies and a researcher at IAI where Paola Sartori also works as a researcher. Francesca Bitondo is a former-researcher at IAI, in European security and defense projects.

⁷⁷ Ian O. Lesser, *NATO Looks South: New Challenges and New Strategies in the Mediterranean* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2000), ix.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, x-xiv.

As mentioned, at Warsaw the Allies opted for a 360-degree approach to security, ideally considering the eastern and the southern flanks as equally important. The authors argue “this does not mean they have been given the same priority, neither regarding invested resources nor of strategy”⁷⁹ due to the decisions and actions that need to be implemented. Again, the first consideration is that while NATO is facing a conventional threat that is part of its “Cold war DNA”⁸⁰ to the east, the southern flank presents different and uncertain characteristics due to terrorism, migratory crisis, and instability. A scenario where NATO is probably “less prepared – in terms of capabilities and scope.”⁸¹ Moreover, the dynamics of the eastern flank appear to be even more connected with those of the southern one due to Russia’s activism in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.⁸² Emphasis is also placed on the migration phenomenon that is relevant for many NATO countries, linked to terrorism and crisis in the MENA region.

The paper highlights in order to project stability, the Allies decided at Warsaw to launch the maritime Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean, to support the international coalition against ISIS, to deploy NATO’s AWACS, and to reinforce collaboration with Iraq, Jordan, and Afghanistan to fight ISIS and terrorism.⁸³

⁷⁹ Francesca Bitondo, Alessandro Marrone, and Paola Sartori, “Challenges to NATO and Italy’s Role: Trump, Brexit, Collective Defence and Neighborhood Stability,” IAI 16/18E, International Affairs Institute, November 2016, accessed 21 January 2019, <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iai1618e.pdf>, 7.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 7.

⁸¹ Ibid., 7.

⁸² Ibid., 29.

⁸³ Ibid., 8.

The authors also discuss the importance of addressing the crisis in Libya that has a negative influence on terrorism and migration. Peacekeeping or stabilization missions did not follow the NATO air campaign in 2011, and the situation remains exceptionally critical at this time. The authors suggest that after the establishment of a specific political condition in Libya, cooperation between NATO and EU in the sector of training security forces and building civil institutions is necessary.⁸⁴ Defense and security capacity building are indeed crucial areas of cooperation between the two IOs and can involve partner countries like Jordan, Tunisia, and Morocco. Significantly, the authors argue that the Allies have to consider the role that the U.S. would play in the region due to potential different interests in the MENA region.⁸⁵

It is undoubtedly true this concept of projecting stability, beyond an agreed consensus, is complex and NATO strategy to the south appeared elusive, at least at the beginning. Alessandro Marrone, with Margherita Bianchi, and Guillaume Lasconjarias, explores again the topic in the July 2017 NATO Defense College (NDC) Report entitled “NATO and the Crises South of Europe: Projecting Stability on NATO Southern Neighbourhood.” The authors primarily move from the consideration that even though NATO was engaged in multiple activities in its southern neighborhood like capacity-building activities, maritime Operation Sea Guardian, and the establishment of the NSD-S Hub in the JFC Naples, NATO needed to move forward. In particular, the paper calls for major cohesion between the Allies and integration with other IO examining the role of

⁸⁴ Bitondo, Marrone, and Sartori, “Challenges to NATO and Italy’s Role,” 9.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the U.S. in the MENA region, the convergence of the national approaches, and the capacity to prioritize partnerships as primary elements of interest.⁸⁶

Carnegie - Europe, part of Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a global foreign policy think tank with centers in Washington D.C., Moscow, Beirut, Beijing, Brussels, and New Delhi, offers other interesting elements to develop the topic. In their June 2016 publication “A Threat-Based Strategy for NATO’s Southern Flank”, authors Sinan Ülgen and Can Kasapoğlu explore the issues the Alliance is facing in implementing a strategy to the south. Sinan Ülgen is a visiting scholar at Carnegie Europe in Brussels, and chairman of the Center for Economics and Foreign Policy Studies (EDAM), an independent think tank in Istanbul. Can Kasapoğlu is a defense analyst at the EDAM who has worked for many research institutions, including the NATO Defense College in Rome.

The authors argue that NATO’s southern flank represents a real challenge for the Alliance due to the complexity of the strategic environment, characterized by the presence of both state and non-state actors. This environment requires “a policy response framework that reflects the heterogeneity of the landscape”⁸⁷ where the Alliance needs to

⁸⁶ Margherita Bianchi, Guillaume Lasconjarias, and Alessandro Sartori, “Projecting Stability in NATO’s Southern Neighbourhood,” NDC Conference Report No. 03/17, Research Division, NATO Defense College, July 2017, accessed 2 April 2019, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/projecting-stability-natos-southern-neighbourhood>, 11-12.

⁸⁷ Sinan Ülgen, and Can Kasapoğlu, *A Threat-Based Strategy for NATO’s Southern Flank*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 2016, accessed 22 January 2019, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/06/10/threat-based-strategy-for-nato-s-southern-flank-pub-63785>, 1.

adapt and achieve a political consensus between its members in order to guarantee global and regional security.

Among the main threats, the authors identify: hybrid warfare, Russia's anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) buildup, Iran's ballistic-missile proliferation, state failure, radical and violent non-state actors, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The authors offer suggested actions NATO needs to take for each identified threat and to deal with these threats, the authors recommend that NATO adopt a strategy based on a different policy response for state and non-state actors, and on preventing or preempting actions.⁸⁸

The first dilemma the Alliance faces is the necessity to reach a political consensus despite the divergences between the Allies when it comes to talking about resources and balance among the east and the south.⁸⁹ Secondly, the rise of populism in the West that "will impact the ability of the transatlantic alliance to project peace and stability in the world"⁹⁰ and the fact that "European policymakers should reshape their domestic strategic communications and underline the need for Europe to start reinvesting in its own security."⁹¹

In his December 2017 paper from Carnegie Europe, "NATO's Southern Strategy at a Crossroads," Sinan Ülgen continues to explore the topic. He underlines that the

⁸⁸ Ülgen, and Kasapoğlu, *A Threat-Based Strategy for NATO's Southern Flank*, 1.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 5.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 2.

⁹¹ Ibid.

Alliance needs to identify a “more sustainable and ambitious strategy for the Southern flank”⁹² due to several changes that, at the end of 2017, also include a significant Russian military presence in Syria and a more assertive Turkey. The author argues that a NATO credible strategy rests upon the fact that NATO and EU have primarily to divide their competence and that the Allies need to find a common response to the threats alongside their national interests.⁹³

To understand how complex is the cooperation between NATO and EU, and between all European countries, “Friendly force dilemmas in Europe - Challenges within and among intergovernmental organizations and the implications for the U.S. Army” by Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, May 2018, is a useful document to frame the problem.

The monograph identifies several issues such as political divisions, inadequate capabilities and resources, limited interoperability, and lack of shared intelligence that prevents NATO and EU from operating effectively. Lack of shared threat perception and political division within the EU are two important topics in the study.

The first issue rests upon the consideration that the geographic position of a European state is one of the most important elements of threat perception. “The closer a state is situated to Moscow, the more prominently Russia figures into national threat

⁹² Sinan Ülgen, “NATO’s southern strategy at a crossroads,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2017, accessed 22 January 2019, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Sinan_Ulgen_NATO_Pdf.pdf, 1.

⁹³ Ibid., 4.

perceptions.”⁹⁴ The second point highlights the difficulties of the EU to become a “security community”⁹⁵ due to divergences, lack of commitment, and resources.

Significantly, one of the recommendations consists of “a division of labor strategy”⁹⁶ between the two IOs according to which the EU could lead small-scale operations along its borders, also using its economic power. According to the authors, this option would also “enable NATO to focus its main effort on deterrence in the east.”⁹⁷ Regarding NATO itself, a concern is indeed expressed for the VJTF, insufficient to deter Russia, military mobility, and an incomplete operational picture. All the mentioned deficiencies are considered critically important for the U.S. given the importance Europe is for national interests.⁹⁸

“NATO and the south: opportunities for coherence and integration,” February 2018, by Jordan Becker, current speechwriter at NATO, provides other important insights. The paper is published by The Elcano Royal Institute, a Spanish think tank specializing in international and strategic studies.

⁹⁴ Jose Luis Calvo Albero, Angus McAfee, Stefano Messina, and Kirk Gallinger. *Friendly Force Dilemmas in Europe: Challenges Within and Among Intergovernmental Organizations and the Implications for the U.S. Army*, Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College Press, May 2018, accessed 22 January 2019, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1380.pdf>, 9.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 8.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 14.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

⁹⁸ Ibid., ix.

In his paper, the author discusses the centrality of the south for Alliance security, identifies the south with the Mediterranean world, and argues that as other strategies, NATO strategy to the south is difficult to frame due to the complexity of understanding the objectives and the ends. The same declaration of Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg “to protect our territory, we must be willing to project stability beyond our borders. If our neighbours are more stable, we are more secure,”⁹⁹ creates many more questions. These questions mainly refer to a potential different understanding of the concept of stability, and who must provide stability. According to the author, the difficulty of these questions challenges consensus between 29 allies with differing situations and interests.¹⁰⁰

Another problem identified is that of allocating adequate means to protect the Allies by projecting stability, an issue that deals with defense spending and continuous adaptation to different threats related to state or non-state actors. A problem for implementing a south strategy is probably that of relating the south only to the concept of projecting stability and not of collective defense.¹⁰¹ For this reason, the author argues that “One useful step would be to broaden our understanding of NATO’s approach to the

⁹⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Projecting Stability: Charting NATO’s Future,” Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to the Atlantic Council, last updated April 2016, accessed 22 January 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_129758.htm.

¹⁰⁰ Jordan Becker, “NATO and the South: Opportunities for Coherence and Integration – Elcano,” ARI 18/2018, Elcano Royal Institute, February 2018, accessed 22 January 2019, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari18-2018-becker-nato-south-opportunities-coherence-integration.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

south to extend beyond the current focus on addressing urgent threats and challenges related to non-state actors and violent extremist organizations (VEOs.)”¹⁰²

Therefore, it would be necessary to implement different measures such as a credible maritime posture in the Mediterranean, coordination between NATO and EU, and a valid command and control structure for the south. As part of NATO’s works on adapting its command structure, a useful step would emphasize the role of JFC Naples, enhancing its regional focus.¹⁰³

This section aimed to examine some studies that specifically address NATO strategy to the south. From a first analysis, it is evident that the definition of NATO approach to the south is complex due to many factors from different NATO countries’ interests to a challenging OE. At the same time, a first pivotal consideration is the necessity to consider the southern strategy not only aimed to face terrorism and VEO but also more conventional threats emanating from state actors such as reemerging activism of Russia in the MENA that is more deeply analyzed in the next section.

Other Sources

This section includes books, documents, and articles of magazines and newspapers to complete the literature review and cover the essential aspects of the research. The sources presented below refer mostly to a renewed NATO interest in

¹⁰² Becker, “NATO and the South: Opportunities for Coherence and Integration – Elcano.”

¹⁰³ Ibid.

European security, the cooperation of the Alliance with EU, a reemerging role of Russia in the MENA region, and further insights into the NATO posture to the south.

“NATO’s return to Europe – Engaging Ukraine, Russia, and Beyond”, published by Georgetown University Press in 2017, provides a clear analysis of how NATO is adapting to the new security challenges and the problems being met. The book was written by Rebecca R. Moore and Damon Coletta with many contributors and a foreword by Nicholas Burns, Professor at Harvard University and former U.S. Ambassador to NATO from 2001 to 2005. Moore is a professor of political science at Concordia College while Coletta a professor of political science at the U.S. Air Force Academy.

Notably, the authors examine the potential of NATO changing roles from a global to a regionally focused Alliance, and if NATO can effectively continue to be relevant in the three core tasks.¹⁰⁴ Crucial deductions are offered for understanding NATO capacity to deal with the Russian threat, including nuclear deterrence, and the consequences of growth to new members and partners like Ukraine. Further considerations regard the level and significance of interoperability in a European context, lesson learned from Afghanistan and Ukraine crisis, and the China-Russia partnership.

When talking about European security it is clear, according to the current literature, Russia is considered as the main threat. At the same time, it is also clear Russia is not only affecting the eastern flank but is increasingly influencing the MENA region.

Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secieru explore the topic with other contributors in their Chaillot paper “Russia’s return to the Middle East Building Sandcastles?” published

¹⁰⁴ Burns, *NATO’s Return to Europe*, 7.

by the EU Institute for Security Studies in July 2018. Nicu Popescu is Director for Wider Europe, a professor at l'Institut d'études politiques de Paris (Sciences Po) and previously a senior analyst at the EU Institute for Security Studies. Stanislav is Senior Analyst at the EU Institute for Security Studies, where he covers Russia and the EU's eastern neighborhood. In their document, the authors argue that "Russia's comeback in the Middle East is real and incontestable"¹⁰⁵ although its presence must be carefully assessed without exaggerating its real power.

Neither extreme is very helpful for an understanding of Russia or the Middle East. The idea that Russia is the new regional superpower, acting as it pleases in the region, and dictating terms of engagement to regional players, is as false as the previously widespread belief that Russia was an irrelevant player, driving at full speed into a quagmire. The truth is somewhere in between.¹⁰⁶

Many considerations are provided regarding Russia's return to the MENA. The Kremlin is advancing on multiple fronts: military, diplomatically, and economically.¹⁰⁷

The military return is the Russian intervention in the Syrian crisis but it is not the only one. Alongside the actions in Syria, like the transformation of its naval facility in Tartus into a permanent naval base, Russia acted in Libya training the forces of General Khalifa Haftar, and negotiated an agreement with Egypt to use its airspace and airbases. Indeed, Moscow concluded arms deals also with "countries in the region that had

¹⁰⁵ Nicu Popescu, and Stanislav Secrieru, *Russia's Return to the Middle East Building Sandcastle?* Chaillot Paper No. 146, European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2018, accessed 22 January 2019, https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_146.pdf, 109.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 109-111.

traditionally been customers of the US (e.g. Egypt), including members of NATO (e.g. Turkey.)”¹⁰⁸

Diplomatically, Russia has been able “to orchestrate a situation where even its potential regional adversaries (e.g., the Arab Gulf States) are not too unhappy about its growing presence.”¹⁰⁹ From an economic perspective, Russia has also started a cooperation with Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) countries to manage oil prices.¹¹⁰

Significantly, the authors argue that Russia’s return to the MENA region has been facilitated by the U.S.’ progressive withdrawal from the region after 2010. “In the wake of the Arab Spring, the U.S. was perceived by the elites in the region as having abandoned its allies (e.g. Mubarak in Egypt.) Washington’s reluctance to intervene in Syria’s war, in particular after the first chemical attacks carried out by the Assad regime in 2013, further undermined the credibility of the U.S. in the region.”¹¹¹

The new role of Russia in the MENA is also addressed by the Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture (MENARA), Working Papers No. 9, July 2018, entitled “Russian policies towards the MENA region.” MENARA is a research project funded by the EU that aims to investigate the complex dynamics in the Middle East and Northern Africa. In this paper, the author László Póti, an Associate Research Fellow at

¹⁰⁸ Popescu, and Secieru, *Russia’s Return to the Middle East Building Sandcastle?*, 110.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 111.

the Institute for Foreign Affairs and Trade (KKI), Budapest, supports the idea the MENA region is for Russia a “priority domain for extensive diplomatic activity”¹¹² that must be considered as part of the overall Russian strategy to become a world power.

According to the author, the Russian policy towards the MENA is based on non-interventionism, a completely different approach from the typical one of the western democracies that could match interests with the region’s autocratic regimes. Notably, the author identifies some ways through which Russia is pursuing its objectives.

Significantly, the Kremlin aims to provide “assistance (in the form of long-term loans) in the construction of nuclear power plants as well as arms supplies”¹¹³ and assume an “anti-American stance, reflecting Arab and Iranian (Islamic) interests.”¹¹⁴

Regarding the first aspect, the author highlights Russia is offering support to build nuclear power plants in countries like Iran, Egypt, Algeria, and even Turkey in order to gain support inside the UN for decisions that are crucial for Russian interests.¹¹⁵ The second aspect, strictly interconnected with the first one, translates into the Russian use of soft power in the MENA region. Leveraging on the tolerance for different political models and regimes, the Kremlin is offering an alternative to the Western model of

¹¹² László Póti, “Russian Policies Towards the MENA Region,” Working Papeers No. 9, Middle East and North Africa Regional Architecture, July 2018, accessed 22 January 2019, http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_9.pdf, 2.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 10.

liberal democracy that could offer great cooperation opportunities..¹¹⁶ Finally, the author discusses how this approach to the MENA is a direct consequence of the economic sanctions imposed by the Western countries on Russia after the annexation of Crimea. It finally pushed the Kremlin to find an alternative to Europe..¹¹⁷

The last document addressing the role of Russia in the Middle East is a RAND corporation paper entitled “Russian Strategy in the Middle East.” The authors are James Sladden and Becca Wasser, policy analysts at RAND Corporation, Ben Connable, a senior political scientist at RAND Corporation, and Sarah Grand-Clement, a research assistant at RAND Europe.

Significantly, the authors argue the importance of understanding the characteristics of Russian actions in the region beyond Syria, thus describing the potential Moscow strategy in the Middle East. This strategy is based on flexible ends adaptable to the Kremlin interests. Main points are Russia’s capacity to interact with many state and non-state actors, the weapons sales to Arab governments, and the potential longer-term approach in the economic, energy, and arms areas..¹¹⁸

To conclude the literature review, the article “The Alliance’s evolving posture: towards a theory of everything” by Dr. Kęstutis Paulauskas and published in the NATO Review magazine, offers food for thought regarding the NATO approach to the new

¹¹⁶ Póti, “Russian Policies Towards the MENA Region,” 3.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 13.

¹¹⁸ James Sladden, Becca Wasser, Ben Connable, and Sarah Grand-Clement, “Russian Strategy in the Middle East,” RAND Corporation, 2017, accessed 22 January 2019, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE236.html>, 8-10.

challenges. Dr. Paulauskas works at NATO's Defence Policy and Planning Division. In his article, the author focuses on dispelling myths such as the potential fragility of the Alliance, the weak posture to the east, and the unnecessary duplication with EU, to highlight the importance of addressing the real challenges. These would include a real perception of the Russia threat, a turning point for the South, and the capacity of "detering and countering threats under the Article 5 threshold."¹¹⁹

As far as the real perception of the Russia threat, the "views among Allies continue to differ as to whom they are talking to."¹²⁰ Arguing that NATO is not internally divided, the author hopes that the Allies identify a "coherent Russia policy."¹²¹

Regarding the south, the author underlines how complex it is for NATO to engage the MENA especially after the Arab spring and the case of Libyan and Syrian crises. The author supports the idea that despite the framework for an agreement for the south and the establishment of the NSD-S, "the toolkit of a defense organization is not fully fit for the magnitude and complexity of the challenges emanating from the South."¹²²

Unfortunately, despite all the effort NATO provided in the south, including assistance to all partners of Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, there has not been a significant difference in preventing the deterioration of the

¹¹⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "The Alliance's evolving posture: towards a theory of everything," accessed 14 January 2019, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/2018/Also-in-2018/the-alliances-evolving-posture-towards-a-theory-of-everything-nato/EN/index.htm>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Ibid.

security situation across the region. For this reason, a shift to a new strategy in the south would be desirable as “projecting stability to the South is about Alliance security, which makes it an imperative and not an optional undertaking for NATO.”¹²³ The author argues:

For NATO to have a truly strategic, stabilizing effect on the South, the Alliance needs a ‘game changer’ to galvanize its role and efforts. One such ‘game changer’ could be a fully-fledged training and capacity building mission in Iraq, and/or a comprehensive engagement in Libya, ideally under the mandate of the United Nations and in close cooperation with the European Union.¹²⁴

Finally, the author discusses Article 5 responds probably better in case of a military attack against the Alliance, rather than to terrorist or hybrid attacks that threaten the Allies daily. This translates into the fact that the Allies often “choose other national or multinational avenues than NATO to address threats or attacks that do not amount to large-scale aggression”¹²⁵ as in the case of the terrorist attack in Paris when France “invoked the solidarity clause of the EU Treaty and treated the attacks as a law enforcement, not a military/defence issue.”¹²⁶

This document concludes the literature review.

Summary

This chapter aimed to review the literature in order to familiarize the reader with the problem and collect data for the subsequent analysis in chapter 4. The first section,

¹²³ NATO, “The Alliance’s evolving posture: towards a theory of everything.”

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

Strategic level documents, and declarations, provided general information regarding NATO's comprehensive approach to the current strategic environment and specific information regarding the southern posture. EU and U.S. sources, to include strategic documents and Combatant Commanders' Posture Statements, allow for NATO's southern posture problem to be examined from a global perspective. The second section, Documents and studies addressing the topic, illustrated the main contents of specific researches regarding the subject. Generally speaking, these sources emphasize crucial aspects such as the complex definition of a shared projecting stability concept, NATO and EU cooperation, characteristics of the OE, and threats from state and non-state actors. The third section completed the literature review by providing further insights about the topic like the NATO challenges, and Russian activism in the MENA.

Chapter 3 will present the methodology that will be used in chapter 4 to conduct the analysis of NATO's strategy towards the southern flank on the basis of the literature review. This methodology will include, in particular, the operational design framework and the ends, ways, and means model of strategy through which the researcher will answer the research questions.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter outlines the characteristics of this thesis and given the complexity of the topic, will utilize a qualitative research methodology and two analytical methods, the operational design methodology and the ends, ways, means model of strategy. The qualitative research methodology has been applied to collect and analyze the literature presented in the second chapter. The literature review has highlighted the existence of related subtopics such as the relevance of NATO's three core tasks, the concept of projecting stability, the challenges emanating from the south, the reemerging role of Russia in the MENA region and the complex cooperation between NATO-EU.

The operational design methodology, and the ends, ways, means construct, which are analytical tools at the basis of U.S. Joint doctrine, will provide a framework to analyze the problem from a military perspective, emphasizing the risks of a weak southern strategy and formulating recommendations.

Qualitative Research

Assessing the NATO strategy towards the southern flank is not an easy task for many reasons. First, the African and the Middle East strategic environment is continuously evolving and would require separate research and a detailed analysis of all the variables to gain a deeper understanding. Second, evaluating how NATO is adapting to meet all security requirement would demand access to restricted documents. However, such an approach would limit the natural audience of the research and not contribute to

free debate and exchange of ideas. Third, the development of the topic forces related disagreements to be addressed, those arguments must be quickly assessed to maintain focus.

Thus, the thesis is based on a qualitative research methodology to develop the topic. According to Creswell, qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand a complex problem that involves questions and procedures, data collection and analysis, and the research interpretation of the meaning of the data.¹²⁷ For this reason, the thesis follows a qualitative method in its organization that is then integrated with military analytical tools.

Research Characteristics

The researcher is thus a key instrument who collects data through examining documents, review all of the data and make sense of it.¹²⁸ Qualitative research is, in fact, interpretative research that involves the definition of the researcher's role and his reflexivity.¹²⁹ A researcher's role and his reflexivity are two critical points that rest upon past experiences and how these experiences shape interpretations. Thus, the researcher has to present his background and describe the procedures identified to provide reliability and validity to his research.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Creswell and Creswell, *Research Design*, 4.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 179.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 183.

¹³⁰ Ibid., 183-184.

The researcher was a staff officer at the Italian Army General Staff, III Division – General Planning and worked on the NATO Defence Planning Process, identifying the national capabilities that fulfill NATO requirements to accomplish the Alliance Level of Ambition. Through participation in national and NATO meetings and the examination of strategic documents, the researcher has gained an understanding of the different perception of security that European countries have, depending essentially on their geographic position in eastern or southern Europe, and their proximity to Russia or the MENA region. According to the researcher, this could potentially undermine the concept of indivisibility of security and NATO's cohesion, if resources are allocated without considering the importance of implementing a well-balanced approach both to the east and the south.

To provide reliability and validity, the organization of the literature and critical and creative thinking materials from CGSC helped the researcher in his work. The literature was carefully selected, divided into three main categories, and compared. Official documents contributed to a general understanding of the problems without potential bias and prejudices of specific analysis that could influence the researcher. Specific studies and other sources offered various considerations regarding the topic that further informed and broadened the perspective. The literature review aimed to provide the basis to answer the supporting research questions and ultimately to conduct the research analysis of the problem.

Thus, the literature provided data and information that, according to the Cognitive Hierarchy Model, presented in the Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication (ADRP) 6-0 and outlined in figure 1, have been transformed into

understanding, “knowledge that has been synthesized and had judgment applied to it to comprehend the situation’s inner relationships.”¹³¹

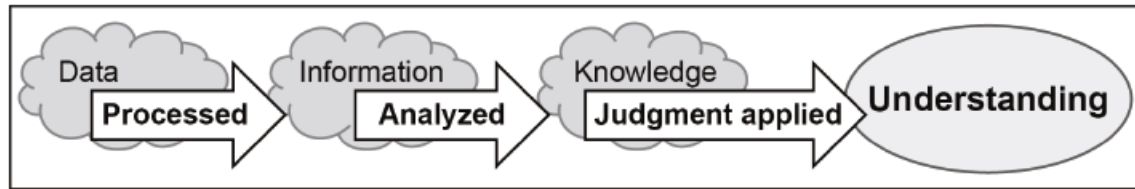


Figure 1. Cognitive Hierarchy Model

Source: Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0, Change 2, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 2-7.

This process enables the subsequent development of each step of the operational design framework.

Operational Design

The operational design is the chosen military analytical tool to conduct the analysis in chapter 4. As outlined by JP 5-0, “Operational design is a methodology to aid commanders and planners in organizing and understanding the OE.”¹³² The operational design process is strictly related to the concept of operational art, a cognitive approach used by commanders and staff to “develop strategies, campaigns, and operations to

¹³¹ Headquarters, Department of the Army, Army Doctrine Reference Publication 6-0, Change 2, *Mission Command* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2014), 2-7.

¹³² U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS), Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), IV-6.

organize and employ military forces by integrating ends, ways, means, and risks.”¹³³

Ultimately, the purpose of operational design and operational art is to enable understanding, produce an operational approach, and solve complex challenges.

Operational design is mainly based on four major components outlined in fig. 2:
Understand the strategic direction and guidance; Understand the OE; Define the problem;
Develop an operational approach.

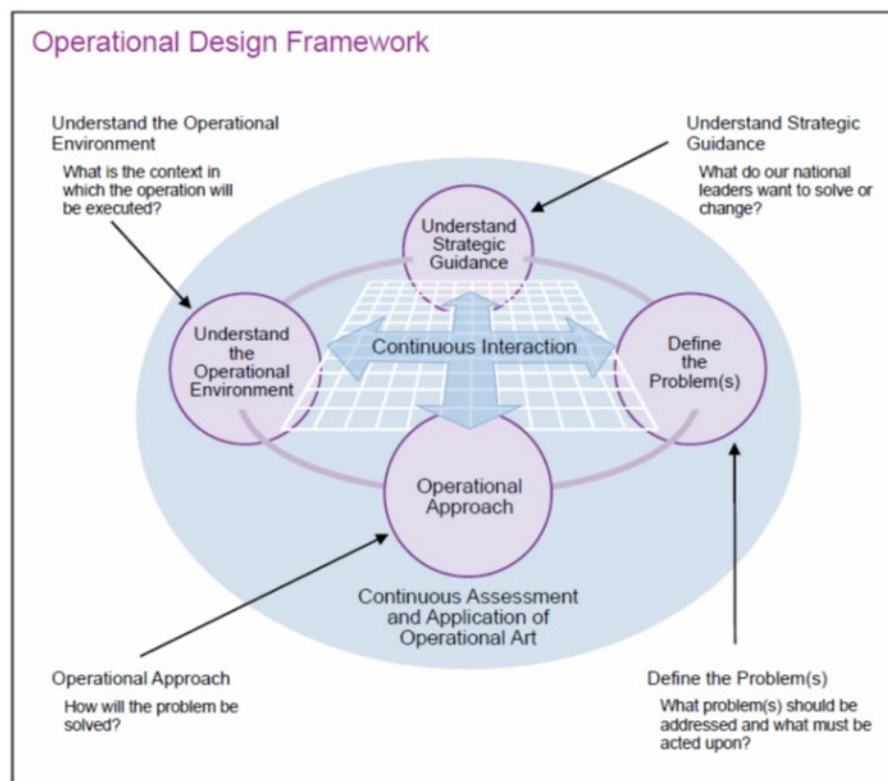


Figure 2. Operational Design

Source: U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, *Joint Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2017), IV-7.

¹³³ JCS, JP 5-0, IV-1.

Understanding the strategic direction and guidance is a crucial step for the analysis. The complexity is that “strategic direction from strategic guidance documents can be vague, incomplete, outdated, or conflicting.”¹³⁴ This is precisely the problem met in understanding NATO guidance and the content of the documents. For this thesis, reasoning as mentioned in the previous paragraph will enable the researcher to summarize the contents of the strategic level documents and declarations into concise statements. For a systematic approach, the statements will be formulated as NATO policy goals, non-NATO policy goals, and desired end state. This will serve to answer the first supporting research question.

Understanding the OE, a “composite of the conditions, circumstances, and influences that affect the employment of capabilities and bear on the decisions of the commander”¹³⁵, informs the problem. The capacity to visualize the conditions of the desired OE is critical and comparing the current state of the OE and the desired state of the OE enables the Commander to visualize the operational approach. Many analytical tools are useful to describe the OE. However, for the size and scope of the thesis, the analysis will discuss the current state of the OE, the relevant adversary, and friendly forces, and the main strategic and operational challenges, thus answering the second research question.

¹³⁴ JCS, JP 5-0, IV-8.

¹³⁵ Ibid., IV-10.

JP 5-0 states that “defining the problem is essential to addressing the problem.”¹³⁶ It is a reasoning process that translates in a concise problem statement that must summarize tensions between current conditions and desired conditions at the end state, opportunities and threats that either can be exploited or will impede from attaining the desired end state.

As the last step of the operational design, the operational approach consists of “the commander’s visualization of how the operation should transform current conditions into the desired conditions.”¹³⁷ Clearly, for the scope of this research, the operational approach will not be formulated to conduct an operation but for examining a strategy. Thus, rather than describing decisive points, and lines of efforts or operations, the operational approach will illustrate the NATO southern strategy in terms of ends, ways, and means.

Ends, Ways, Means Model of Strategy

The ends, ways, means model of strategy proposed by Arthur F. Lykke, Jr. and described by the *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, February 2001, is the second military tool used to complete the analysis. Generally speaking, this model can be applied at all levels of decision-making and underlines that strategy is the employment of “ways and means” in order to achieve the “ends.” Essentially, the “ends” can be considered as

¹³⁶ JCS, JP 5-0, IV-14.

¹³⁷ Ibid., IV-16.

objectives while the “ways” refer to the various methods for achieving those objectives and “means” to the resources required.¹³⁸

This conceptual approach will be utilized to illustrate how NATO is pursuing its ends to the south, thus answering the third supporting research question, and will be concluded with a running risk assessment. Risk assessment, known as “ends-means mismatch”¹³⁹, is a crucial component for each strategy as highlighted by B. H. Liddell-Hart, “Strategy depends for success, first and most, on a sound calculation and coordination of the end and the means . . . An excess may be as harmful as a deficiency.”¹⁴⁰ Finally, the mentioned analysis will serve to answer the main research question and provide recommendations in chapter 5.

Summary

This chapter aimed to present how the researcher will examine the topic to answer the research questions and draw conclusions and recommendations. The research rests upon a qualitative methodology based on the analysis of the literature review and two military conceptual tools, operational design and the ends, ways, means model of strategy. Hence, the researcher will discuss in chapter 4 NATO’s strategic direction, guidance, the characteristics of the OE, and the problems that the Alliance faces. Finally,

¹³⁸ Joseph R. Cerami, and James F. Holcomb Jr., *U.S. Army War College Guide to Strategy*, ed. Joseph R. Cerami and James F. Holcomb Jr., Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, accessed 17 November 2018, <https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB362.pdf>, 179-180.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 187.

¹⁴⁰ B. H. Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd ed. (New York: Meridian, 1991), 322-323.

the NATO strategy will be discussed in terms of ends, ways, means, and a related risk assessment will be formulated to provide recommendations for further implementation in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4

ANALYSIS

Overview

This chapter aims to understand NATO's southern strategy, highlighting its main characteristics, weaknesses, and opportunities. The analysis will be primarily presented using the operational design framework, and the ends, ways, means model of strategy. Through information in the available literature, the operational design has the purpose to help the reader understand the strategic direction and guidance, understand the operational environment, and define the problem. Through the ends, ways, means model of strategy and the related risk assessment, the researcher wants to present the initiatives NATO has already implemented to pursue its objectives, and highlight the sectors where the NATO's southern strategy could be further implemented. This methodology will lead to recommendations to enhance NATO's posture to the south in a 360-degree approach that satisfies the fulfilment of all three main tasks in chapter 5.

Understand the Strategic Direction and Guidance

The operational design methodology begins with the analysis of strategic direction from NATO strategic guidance documents to describe the Alliance's policy goals to the south and thus answer the first research question: What is the strategic direction the Allies have agreed upon to address the security challenges emanating from European southern periphery?

Since this guidance can be broad and include multiple aspects, the main contents are synthesized for clarification. This section also includes a description of the EU and U.S. policy goals and the formulation of an assessed end state by the researcher.

NATO Policy Goals

At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, the Allies decided that NATO needed to deal with the challenges and threats from the south, and approved the future implementation of a strategy for the south, posing the eastern and the southern flanks ideally on the same level. The main elements of this strategy that have been implemented since Warsaw and confirmed at the 2018 Brussels Summit have the overall goal to anticipate and respond to crises from the south and are based on the concept of projecting stability. Even if a clear and shared definition of this concept is difficult to formulate, it essentially rests upon the NATO ability to engage regional partners and capacity building efforts. However, responding to crises implies the necessity to assure adequate capabilities for expeditionary operations to accomplish all three core tasks. Deterrence and defense ultimately begin beyond the NATO territory. Paraphrasing what Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said at “NATO Projecting Stability: Charting NATO’s Future”, the security of NATO depends on the stability of its neighbors.¹⁴¹ To conclude, considering also what reported in the Brussels Summit Declaration, NATO three policy goals towards the south are “to strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defense against threats emanating from the south; to contribute to international crisis management efforts in the region; and to help our regional partners build resilience against security threats, including the fight against

¹⁴¹ NATO, “Projecting Stability.”

terrorism.”¹⁴² The overall objective of pursuing these goals is to protect the Alliance territory and assure its security.

Non-NATO, EU, and United States Policy Goals

Understanding the strategic direction and guidance also requires a discussion of what non-NATO policy goals are. It is clear that a deeper investigation should incorporate the analysis of all NATO members’ goals. However, such analysis would be an extraordinarily weighty and onerous task and not particularly useful. For this reason, this subsection only examines EU and U.S. goals to the European southern periphery, with the scope of finding convergences of interests and thus opportunities of greater cooperation.

As presented in the literature review, with the approval of the EU Global Strategy for foreign and security policy, the EU has moved forward towards a recognized role as a global security provider. Even if the passage from a vision to action is not easy, the EU has extraordinary potential as a First World economy, a vast cooperation network, great diplomatic capabilities, and the availability of both soft and hard sources of power. The EU strategy to the south, similar to that of NATO, is based on the assumption internal and external security are strictly interwoven. Thus, with an overall objective of guaranteeing the European security, the EU intends to bolster its capacity to respond in cases of crisis in close coordination with NATO, increase the resiliency of the southern

¹⁴² NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

countries, adopt an integrated approach to crisis and conflict, and foster cooperation with all the main organization operating in Africa and the Middle East.¹⁴³

The U.S., as the first contributor to the Alliance and strategic partner of all the European countries, plays a primary role when it comes to talking about the south. Through the geographic COCOM, in particular EUCOM, AFRICOM and CENTCOM, the U.S. has unparalleled capabilities to develop regional understanding, shape the OE, and intervene in case of crisis in the MENA region, and the African continent.

The 2018 NSS and the summary of 2018 NDS confirms the U.S. will continue to support a safe and secure environment in the European southern periphery. In the Middle East, the U.S. intends to seek a region that is a stable energy market and not dominated by terrorism or hostile powers such as Russia and Iran.¹⁴⁴ At the same time, looking at Africa, the U.S. supports the resiliency of the African states across all the sectors, from citizens' needs to security, for a more stable continent.¹⁴⁵ It is evident that this approach to the south needs to be verified in future strategic documents to evaluate if the U.S. will continue to pursue present objectives in the region in the light of the announced military disengagement from Syria and the Middle East.

To conclude this subsection, EU and U.S. policy goals are essential for defining a comprehensive western strategy to the south. It is evident that the EU and the U.S. have a common interest for a more secure and stable south. Despite some potential divergences,

¹⁴³ EU, *Shared Vision, Common Action*, 9-11.

¹⁴⁴ U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 48-49.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 52-53.

this interest should translate in an increasingly shared approach to the southern challenges.

End State

The final piece of the first step of operational design aims to describe the NATO strategic end state. According to the analysis conducted so far, there are many convergences of interests between NATO, EU, and the U.S. that lead to opportunities of greater cooperation. As it is not possible to deduce this end state from the available documents, the researcher provides the following definition by way of example, and for this thesis. European southern periphery, to include Africa and the Middle East, is not dominated by hostile powers and by VEO that undermine the stability of the region and represent a direct threat for the Euro-Atlantic security. NATO Allies are able to respond effectively to challenges from the south, thus contributing to the stability of the region. The African and the Middle East partners are fully integrated into the Alliance network and capable of managing threats to security and peace. This assessed end state also represents the desired state of the OE and will be linked to NATO's ends in the south in the last section.

Understand the Operational Environment

The second step of the operational design involves analysis of the OE in order to build an understanding that is crucial to develop the next steps. Many tools are available for the scope. However, the size and purpose of the analysis requires the focus to be on the following elements: current state of the OE, relevant adversary forces, relevant friendly forces, and major strategic and operational challenges. The assessed end state

described in the previous section outlines the desired state of the OE. The following analysis answers the second supporting research question: What are the main challenges and threats emanating from the southern flank, Africa and the Middle East, that could endanger European security?

Current State of the OE

Africa and the Middle East are a vast area with significant differences at a political, economic, and social level. However, what Africa and the Middle East have in common is great instability and the presence of existing and emerging challenges from both state and non-state actors that could provoke unpredictable consequences. The MENA region, in particular, was hit at the end of 2010 by the Arab Spring, a series of violent protests and demonstrations against the regimes across all the Arab world. The countries most involved were Tunisia, the first site of violent uprising, then Egypt, Libya, Syria, Yemen, and Bahrain. However, Algeria, Iraq, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Morocco, and Kuwait have also been affected by this phenomenon. Eight years later, the mentioned countries of the region have experienced different evolutions. Some governments have been able to carry out timid reforms and today seem to hold power firmly. Other countries such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen have failed, undergone civil war and humanitarian crises without precedent, and become home to violent extremism and terrorist organizations. Still today, these countries, also dominated by a violent escalation in the relationship between Sunni and Shia sects, are in chaos and near collapse with a series of internal conflicts that cause humanitarian disasters such as the Syrian refugee crisis, which have many implications for Europe and NATO countries. Unfortunately, the

situation in Iraq and Afghanistan remains extremely worrying despite years of U.S. and NATO operations.

In addition, the entire region from the Middle East to Africa is a breeding ground for jihadism with different terrorist organizations, such as al-Qaeda and ISIL in all their ramifications that continue to represent a primary concern for global security, after proving they were able to hit the heart of western democracy. From the U.S. 11 September slaughter, to terrorist atrocities on the European continent, such as in Belgium, England, France, Germany, and Spain, terrorism has devastated the western perception of security, and raised many questions regarding the effectiveness of intelligence apparatus as well as that of security organizations in general. Despite the excellent results Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS achieved, it is evident that terrorism remains a significant threat in the south due to the capacity of these organizations to be resilient, and branch out. General Votel, CENTCOM Commander, declared to the House Armed Services Committee the “fight against ISIS and violent extremism is far from over.”¹⁴⁶

Ultimately, the instability in Africa and the Middle East does not offer only opportunities to terrorism but also to powers like Russia, Iran, and China that take advantage of the situation to advance, directly or indirectly, their influence and interests as an anti-Western model. The evidence is again confirmed by CENTCOM and AFRICOM Commanders in their 2018 and 2019 Posture Statements as well as by research studies on the topic and to a lesser extent by the 2018 NATO Summit

¹⁴⁶ CNN, “Top US General in Middle East Says Fight against ISIS ‘far from over’ – CNNPolitics,” 7 March 2019, accessed 7 March 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/2019/03/07/politics/votel-isis-fight/index.html>.

Declaration at Brussels that calls on the mentioned states, Iran in particular, to contribute to stability and not to fuel terrorism.¹⁴⁷

Deciding to play a long-term role in the Syria crisis and offering itself as an arbiter for the conflict in place of UN and western political negotiation, Russia certainly considers the MENA as a region of great opportunities. To achieve its scope, the Kremlin is trying to establish closer relations with Iran while sharing common interests, attempting to expel the U.S. from the MENA, and fracturing the U.S.-Turkey partnership that will result in a highly detrimental impact on NATO cohesion. Iran, considered by the U.S. as the main threat in the Middle East, also seeks to extend its arc of influence, and establish allies in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon with a Shia crescent strategy aimed to disrupt western partnership activities. Significantly, in an unpredictable scenario, Russia and Iran could also find China as a potential ally, which thanks to its economic power, has already entered Africa and the Middle East and extended its influence thanks to programs such as the BRI and CPEC.

Africa and the Middle East are regions of great opportunities characterized by a series of threats that make the situation complex and with consequences that are difficult to predict for global security and primarily for Europe. In this context, NATO, in addition to military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, launched a series of partnership initiatives such as the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative as part of its southern strategy in an attempt to support recognized partners in the governance and

¹⁴⁷ NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

security sector. Similarly, the EU is active in these regions and is trying to implement the provisions of the EU Global Strategy.

The following subsections will analyze in more detail the elements discussed so far in order to identify the relevant actors, and the major strategic and operational challenges.

Relevant Adversary Forces and Competitors

The relevant adversary forces considered for this analysis are terrorist organizations along with Russia, Iran, and China. A clarification is, however, necessary at this point. While NATO addresses VEO as a primary and direct threat for the global security and cause of multiple second-order problems, the Allies do not categorize Russia, Iran, and China openly as adversary forces in their last Summit declaration although they condemn Teheran's support of terrorism and instability in the south. For this reason, at least for now and for this thesis, the mentioned countries must be considered more like regional competitors than real enemies.

Terrorist Organizations

When it comes to talking about terrorism, it is evident it is difficult to identify the organizations since these are able to connect to each other, tighten alliances, and branch off creating multiple subnetworks. To provide an example of the complexity of terrorism, the U.S. Department of State recognized 61 different foreign terrorist organizations in its

Country Reports on Terrorism 2017. Notably, the same report identifies the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Iran, Sudan, and Syria as State Sponsors of Terrorism.¹⁴⁸

Regarding Africa and the Middle East, ISIS, al-Qaeda, Boko Haram and al-Shabaab are the main organizations operating in these regions. Despite the great effort of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which has significantly reduced its power in Syria and returned 99 percent of its territorial gains to Syrians, ISIS is still active. According to a U.S. Department of Defense Inspector General, ISIS would be able to resurge within six to twelve months without counterterrorism pressure.¹⁴⁹ This is even more important in case of a U.S. massive withdrawal from Syria and Iraq. Indeed, ISIS has several branches, affiliates, and sympathizers operating in Libya, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Sinai Peninsula, and Yemen.

Along with ISIS, and despite many of its leaders were killed in the last years, al-Qaeda, through its different ramifications and alliances, continues to exercise its influence exploiting the instability across the region, particularly in Yemen and Syria. Significantly, al-Qaeda has an alliance with al-Shabaab, a Somalia-based terrorist group able to threaten regional security, in particular in West Africa. To provide an example of

¹⁴⁸ U.S. Bureau of Counterterrorism, "Country Reports on Terrorism 2017," U.S. Department of State, September 2018, accessed 24 February 2019, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/283100.pdf>, 217-220.

¹⁴⁹ CBS News, "Defense Dept Inspector General Says ISIS Likely to 'Resurge' without 'Sustained Pressure'," accessed 5 March 2019, <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/defense-isis-likely-to-resurge-without-sustained-pressure/>.

its potential, al-Shabaab is believed responsible for conducting a vehicle-borne IED attack in Mogadishu in 2017, killing over 500 people.¹⁵⁰

Concerning Africa, Boko Haram, a terrorist organization based in Nigeria, has killed thousands of people since 2009. Linked with an African ramification of ISIS known as ISIS West Africa, Boko Haram is responsible for many attacks in Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad, and Niger that caused a massive humanitarian crisis with about 2.5 million displaced people and 8.5 million people to require humanitarian assistance in Nigeria. Many other terrorist groups generally affiliated with al-Qaeda and ISIS continue to also threaten the Sahel, extending their actions to Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger.¹⁵¹

Apart the high number of groups and ramifications, which deserve further consideration is the capacity of most terrorist organizations to “be resilient, determined, and adaptable,”¹⁵² and to inspire attacks through the Internet, and to be able to hit at great distances as in the European attacks. Equally important is their increased military capability to use Unmanned Aircraft System (UAS) and rudimental Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) like chemical weapons¹⁵³ and to conduct large operations for territorial gains as demonstrated by ISIS in Syria. Terrorism and the presence of “non-

¹⁵⁰ U.S. Bureau of Counterterrorism, “Country Reports on Terrorism 2017,” 41.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 11.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*

state actors that have state-like aspirations,”¹⁵⁴ remains one of the biggest challenges for NATO.

Russia

Most of the literature, together with the CENTCOM and AFRICOM Commanders' Posture Statements, shows that Russia has returned to play a primary role in the Middle East and, to a lesser extent, in Africa. The actions taken by Moscow are evident both at the diplomatic, military, and economic levels. In this context, support for the Bashar Al-Assad's regime in Syria would be the most evident part of a broader Russian strategy aimed at exerting greater influence in those regions. The motivations of this new Russian activism in the Middle East are many, starting with the economic sanctions adopted against Russia following the illegal annexation of Crimea and the consequent Russian difficulty in strengthening trade relations with European countries. However, Russia's desire to reaffirm itself as a world power and a valid alternative to the Western model would be no less important.

What raises concerns from a security point of view is also the substantial deployment of military forces adopted for the Syrian crisis. This deployment of military forces and capabilities in Syria and the western Mediterranean includes, in particular, a wide range of A2/AD capabilities. These encompass a complex air defense system built around the S-400 anti-aircraft weapon system, and the SA-17 medium-range surface-to-air missile systems, completed by advanced electronic warfare assets and Intelligence Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR) assets. Indeed, it must be considered the growing

¹⁵⁴ NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

role of Russia's Black Sea Fleet, through a base in Tartus and a further one in Latakia, to project combat power in the Mediterranean. To complete the picture, Russia has also deployed in Syria air-to-air combat advanced aircraft, such as the Su-30 and Su-35, and the SS-26 Iskander ballistic missile, potentially able to hit southern Europe..¹⁵⁵

Russia's intervention in Syria would, therefore, be well beyond temporary assistance and could lay the foundations for an ever-increasing influence in the Middle East. This is especially important in light of the American withdrawal from the region and the tensions between the U.S. and Turkey. Turkey, thanks to its geographical position, is as an ideal link between the eastern and southern flank and is therefore, a member of strategic value for NATO.

To conclude this digression on Russia, no less worrying is its ability to forge potential alliances of interest with Iran and to replace NATO, EU, and the U.S. as a partner for many countries in the area. For these reasons, Russia today not only poses a threat to NATO security in the east but also to the south, in a strategic environment that will become increasingly interconnected.

Iran

The U.S. considers Iran to be the largest state sponsor of terrorism that, fomenting violence and instability, seeks to exert ever-increasing influence in the Middle East to

¹⁵⁵ Ülgen, and Kasapoğlu, *A Threat-Based Strategy for NATO's Southern Flank*, 9-10.

achieve its interests. From a security point of view, the ambitious nuclear and ballistic missile development program launched by Teheran is of particular concern.¹⁵⁶

As for the nuclear program, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) of 2015, known as the nuclear deal, has set some limitations on the ambitions of Tehran but also showed the difficulties of fully implementing this agreement in light of the U.S. withdrawal from the same. Regarding the ballistic missile program, it seems that Iran continues to strengthen its arsenal and is already able to hit many NATO countries including countries bordering the Mediterranean, such as Turkey and Italy, also Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia, Czech Republic, and Poland. According to a study by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies, the range of medium-range ballistic missiles would range between 1,200 and 1,900 miles while Iran would also develop intermediate-range ballistic missiles capable of reaching between 1,900 and 3,100 miles. This missile program would have the negative effect of pushing the Gulf countries to a growing purchase of self-defense weapons.¹⁵⁷

This concern for Iran's policy is evident in many specific studies and, particularly, in the 2018 and 2019 CENTCOM Posture Statements. These documents report that Teheran is expanding its influence in Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen to establish a Shia arc of influence across the Middle East. The adverse effects of Iranian policy, which includes support for Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shia militia groups in Iraq and Syria, and

¹⁵⁶ U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 49.

¹⁵⁷ Anthony H. Cordesman, *Iran's Rocket and Missile Forces and Strategic Options*, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2014, accessed 26 March 2019, https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/141007_Iran_Rocket_Missile_forces.pdf, iv.

Houthis in Yemen in terms of ballistic missiles, would be particularly evident in the continuation of the crisis in Yemen.¹⁵⁸

Finally, the possible links between Iran, Russia, and China are of particular interest. Despite the historic rivalry, Tehran and the Kremlin would be interested in cooperation aimed at limiting and ultimately expelling the U.S. and therefore the western countries from the region. The relations between Iran and China would instead be due to Tehran's renewed interest in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, a Eurasian political, economic, and security organization after the lifting of UN sanctions in the context of the JCPOA.¹⁵⁹ Finally, Iran and Russia are also partners of the Chinese BRI initiative.

To conclude, Iran, despite all the problems of internal stability, is one of the major state actors in the Middle East that could, in greater cooperation with Russia and China in an anti-western key, pose a threat to NATO and all of Europe.

China

Although there is no reference to China in the declaration of the heads of state and government at the 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels, it is clear that an analysis of the main competitors of NATO and its member countries in Africa and the Middle East cannot fail to consider the role of Beijing in these regions. However, the strategy undertaken by

¹⁵⁸ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Joseph L. Votel Commander U.S. Central Command before the Senate Armed Services Committee on the Posture of U.S. Central Command*, 13 March 2018, accessed 4 March 2019, https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/Votel_03-13-18.pdf, 5-6.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-8.

China is different from both the Russian and the Iranian one, as shown in the 2019 AFRICOM and CENTCOM posture statement.

Specifically, China would be interested in extending its influence in Africa and the Middle East for economic reasons as demonstrated in particular by the BRI, which includes the CPEC. As part of BRI, China has already invested in the development of the Suez Canal, the port of Haifa in Israel, and the port of Khalifa in the United Arab Emirates.¹⁶⁰ Furthermore, the economic relations with the GCC countries that represent the main oil suppliers for the country are of primary importance for China. However, this strategy would also allow Beijing to strengthen its military posture in the region. For instance, it is known that China has established its first overseas military base in Djibouti to extend its access to the Red Sea, Suez Canal, and Bab al Mandeb strait. In any case, to extend its interests, China would not seem for now interested in playing a primary role in the ongoing conflicts, from which it probably would not derive any benefit.¹⁶¹

However, if particular elements of concern for the security of NATO countries do not emerge from a non-exhaustive analysis of the role of China in the region, unlike Russia and Iran, it is clear that a potential Beijing alliance with Moscow and Tehran could have unpredictable consequences difficult to mitigate.

¹⁶⁰ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Joseph L. Votel*, 5 February 2019, 10-11.

¹⁶¹ U.S. Congress, Senate, Armed Services Committee, *Statement of General Joseph L. Votel*, 13 March 2018, 8.

Relevant Friendly Forces

As outlined earlier, NATO possesses and maintains several important multilateral partnerships with countries in Africa and the Middle East. For ease of analysis and the purposes of this research, the considerations on these countries will be presented in the context of the two major NATO initiatives in Africa and the Middle East which are the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. This subsection also includes an analysis of the role of the European Union as a facilitator for an effective NATO strategy in the south.

Mediterranean Dialogue Members

The Mediterranean Dialogue initiative was launched in 1994 and includes seven non-NATO countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. As described in the official NATO website, the initiative rests upon on the concept of political dialogue and practical cooperation in order to contribute to regional stability and security, also through greater mutual understanding. The initiative is also discussed in the 2010 Strategic Concept, which highlights a further implementation within the cooperative security core task. The areas in which NATO contributes to this partnership are mainly those of the Defense and Related Security Capacity Building.¹⁶²

The value of the Mediterranean Dialogue was, moreover, mentioned in the NATO Summit in Brussels, where it highlighted support to Jordan in areas such as cyber defense, C-IED, crisis management, and the future implementation of similar support

¹⁶² North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Mediterranean Dialogue,” accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm.

with Tunisia. Significantly, Jordan also hosts the Defense and Related Capacity Building (DCB) training activities for Iraq.¹⁶³ Finally, it should be noted that Morocco and Israel also contributed to the Active Endeavor operation in the Mediterranean.

For completeness of analysis, it is necessary to point out that the Mediterranean Dialogue member countries receive support in terms of DCB and counter-terrorism from the U.S. In the AFRICOM AOR, Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia are crucial partners in the fight against terrorism while Mauritania is part of the African-led, French-assisted, U.S.-supported G5 Sahel organization to combat the proliferation of terrorism in the Sahel. Egypt, Israel, and Jordan are instead strategic U.S. partners that fall within the CENTCOM sphere. These countries suffer even if in a different way from the effects of the Syrian crisis as well as the presence of ISIS and the negative influence of Iran.

Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Members

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative was launched in 2004 and currently includes Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates. Here again, the countries mentioned above are strategic partners of the U.S. in the region. In this regard, it should be noted two additional GCC countries, Saudi Arabia and Oman, even though invited to join the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, have for now decided not to participate while continuing to show interest.¹⁶⁴

¹⁶³ NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

¹⁶⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI),” accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52956.htm.

Similarly to the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative is an integral part of the 2010 Strategic Concept and includes a wide range of cooperative activities ranging from increased interoperability with NATO, to the fight against terrorism, and the proliferation of WMD. Many Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries have also contributed to ISAF and RSM operations. Qatar and the United Arab Emirates also provided aerial assets for Operation Unified Protector (OUP) in Libya. Recent developments include the establishment of the NATO-ICI Regional Center in Kuwait to foster interoperability between NATO partners in the region, and the launch of Kuwait's diplomatic mission to NATO.¹⁶⁵

European Union

The EU is a significant partner for NATO to ensure Europe's security both in the east and in the south. Within the EU's Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP) the EU can indeed deploy a large number of civilian missions and military operations detailed in the EU treaty, thus assuming a primary role in crisis management. In early 2019, to understand the level of commitment, the EU is engaged in 16 civilian and military missions, of which 14 are between Africa, the Middle East, and the Mediterranean.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁵ NATO, "Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)."

¹⁶⁶ European Union (EU), "Military and Civilian Missions and Operations," European External Action Service, May 2019, accessed 1 April 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-Homepage/430/military-and-civilian-missions-and-operations_en.

The desire of the Union to establish itself as an increasingly active global security provider was confirmed by the adoption of the EU Global Strategy and the establishment of the Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC) in 2017. Significantly, the MPCC, which currently commands the EU Training Missions (EUTM) in Africa, was initially designated for the “operational planning and conduct of the EU’s non-executive military missions”¹⁶⁷ but in November 2018, also assumed the ability to plan and conduct “one executive military operation of the size of an EU Battlegroup.”¹⁶⁸

With regard to the potential of ever-increasing NATO-EU cooperation to ensure south stability and to analyze EU Global Strategy, the convergence of interests of the two organizations is evident. Counter-terrorism, an increase of southern countries’ resiliency, a more effective migration policy, and an integrated approach to crises and conflicts are just some of the primary objectives of the EU that appear in line with those of NATO. These objectives are also pursued through the cooperation with the major regional and subregional organizations in Africa and the Middle East, such as the Union for the Mediterranean, the GCC, and the AU, as well as the ENP, a bilateral partnership with 16 countries, many of them from MENA.

It is clear that much remains to be done to ensure that NATO-EU cooperation will meet its full potential. Some problems, which have already been mentioned and will be analyzed in the following paragraphs, prevent the two organizations at present from

¹⁶⁷ European Union (EU), “The Military Planning and Conduct Capability (MPCC),” European External Action Service, November 2018, accessed 1 April 2019, https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/mpcc_factsheet_november_2018.pdf, 1.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

deriving maximum benefit from each other. Likewise, however, it is clear that by combining their resources, NATO and EU would be able to approach security challenges in the east and south with unparalleled political, military, and economic power.

Major Strategic and Operational Challenges

The review of the literature and the analysis conducted so far regarding the current state of the OE and the relevant actors allow major strategic and operational challenges to be identified for the Alliance in the south. These are terrorism, threats from state actors, crisis from failed states, and second order issues.

Terrorism

Terrorism is one of the main threats to security and one of the critical factors contributing to the instability of today's world, which affects almost every continent without distinction. In this context, Africa and the Middle East are regions where the most dangerous and ambitious terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda and ISIS, have developed and continue to branch out into other organizations, expand into other areas, and pose a threat to global security. These fearsome organizations, primarily ISIS, have demonstrated the ability to attract an infinite number of followers, adopt real governance, aim at territorial conquests, and face regular armies. The ability of these groups to acquire and develop WMD as well as to hit the heart of Western democracies is also of great importance. This situation, therefore, poses a threat to both NATO and all countries to the south.

In 2015, NATO created the term and concept of counter-terrorism. Using this framework, the Allies intend to prevent and counteract the phenomenon that tends to

spread more easily where states are weak and in crisis. This plan, which integrates with United Nations global counter-terrorism strategy (2006) is based on three main pillars: awareness, capacity, and engagement.¹⁶⁹

Awareness is based on political dialogue; participation in various international forums, hosted for example by the UN, the EU, the AU; and information sharing. The new Terrorism Intelligence Cell at NATO Headquarters in Brussels and the NSD-S Hub located in Naples also play an essential role.¹⁷⁰

As far as capacities are concerned, they continue to be developed as part of the NATO defense planning process and are used in different operational scenarios such as the Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, or Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean. An example of capacity are the AWACS that have been used in the fight against ISIS.¹⁷¹

Engagement translates into activities of training, assistance, and cooperation with the partners in Afghanistan or Iraq, but engagement also is the internal, interagency, and international collaboration necessary for the optimization of the counter-terrorism measures. Regarding cooperation, as anticipated, the initiatives of defense capacity building in favor of Jordan and Iraq are in progress, and several countries have requested

¹⁶⁹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Countering Terrorism,” accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_77646.htm.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

the same support. Finally, it is important to note NATO has been a member of the Global coalition to defeat ISIS since 2017.¹⁷²

Ultimately, the Atlantic Alliance's anti-terrorism efforts are high and involve all member states as well as partner countries. Much has been done, but much still needs to be done considering that many capability gaps remain and that this threat can regenerate itself with extreme ease. Among the capability gaps, first of all is the difficulty in sharing information among the various countries concerned, which have their own agencies with different cultures and approaches. Regarding the actual threat, many studies see, for example, new scenarios in which ISIS, defeated in Syria, is assuming a new appearance and is finding fertile ground in other regions such as Libya.

Worthy of note is that in Brussels, the Allies recognized the fight against terrorism as “an integral part of the Alliance's 360-degree approach to deterrence and defense and projecting stability”¹⁷³ that contributes to all three core tasks. This seems to be an excellent political and military sign against a threat that has assumed increased importance and is the cause of many related problems.

Threats from State Actors

If terrorism has undoubtedly been the prevailing threat in Africa and the Middle East for years and will continue to be one of the main cause of risk and instability, the threat posed by state actors is a phenomenon that has intensified with the Russian intervention in Syria. As widely discussed, Russia has gone far beyond a simple

¹⁷² NATO, “Countering Terrorism.”

¹⁷³ NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

intervention in support of Al Assad and could have an even more significant role if the U.S. withdraws from the region. Iran could also exploit relations of interest with Moscow and succeed in reaching its objectives of regional expansion. Even more complex would be a potential alliance of these countries with China that, as described, is leveraging its economic power in Africa and the Middle East.

In this context, the threat posed by Russia and Iran, although there is no full sharing by the Allies on the subject, appears for many reasons the most concrete with consequences that are difficult to predict, especially in light of the different ways this could evolve. Together, conventional capabilities implemented by Moscow and Tehran, even the capacity of these state actors in the hybrid warfare sector cannot be underestimated.

Regarding the conventional threat, it is good to remember the Russian deployment of huge capacity in the MENA and in the Mediterranean, in particular of the A2/AD type, and Iran's development of ballistic missiles, which have previously been discussed in the specific subsections. In this regard, NATO continues to promote a policy of continuous dialogue to mitigate such risks in addition to missile defense capabilities within the NATO Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) and conducting Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean. This mission, on the authorization of the NAC, could perform a higher number of roles than the current ones linked to the maritime counter-terrorism, security capacity building, and situational awareness.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Operation Sea Guardian," accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_136233.htm.

Even more complex is a hybrid scenario, in which Russia, state, and non-state partners could operate for common interests, to destabilize most of the NATO southern neighborhood and also Turkey. In the hybrid sector, which includes a wide range of actions from the use of conventional capabilities to terrorism, information warfare, and cyber conflict, Russia could be a tough opponent for NATO, as already demonstrated during the crisis in Ukraine. In this regard, the Allies have already committed themselves to ensure a response to this threat, such as the adoption of a new concept of eNRF and the future establishment of a new Cyberspace Operations Center as part of the NATO Command structure adaptation..¹⁷⁵

It is clear, however, that the threat posed by state actors as described, which includes aspects of conventional but also hybrid warfare with non-state actors, represents a highly complex scenario that NATO must necessarily consider even when it comes to southern flank.

Crisis from Failed States

The presence of failed states, such as Libya, Syria, and Yemen, and the danger that other countries in Africa and the Middle East may develop deep internal crises and not be able to govern their territories and peoples, or protect their national boundaries is a further challenge for NATO to the south. Significantly, according to the 2018 *Fragile State Index* all African and the Middle East countries, with the sole exception of Oman, UAE, Qatar, and Kuwait, are included in the “warning to alert” categories in regard to their level of fragility and therefore, instability. Syria, Yemen, Somalia, South Sudan,

¹⁷⁵ NATO, “Brussels Summit Declaration.”

Central African Republic, and Democratic Republic Congo are at the highest level of alert.¹⁷⁶

The situation described has important implications for the internal and external security of NATO countries. The cited instability in the Southern Alliance neighborhood and the fragility of its states is primarily linked to both terrorism and other issues such as the emergence of unprecedented migratory flows to Europe, humanitarian crises affecting millions of people like Syria, and devastating ethnic conflicts such as the Shia and the Sunni.

As a result, it is possible to understand why the stability of the neighborhood to the south of Europe has become one of NATO's priorities and of the European Union. In this regard, as already highlighted, the measures identified by the Alliance to deal with this situation fall primarily in the core task called cooperative security and in the concept of projecting stability. To achieve its objectives, primarily related to increasing their resilience and that of neighboring countries as well as promoting security and stability, in 2015 at the Warsaw Summit, the Allies approved the Partnership Interoperability Initiative and the DCB Initiative. The DCB Trust Fund that provides financial support and resources to implement the DCB Initiatives was also established.¹⁷⁷ Partnerships and DCBs have already been mentioned in the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul

¹⁷⁶ J. J. Messner, "Fragile States Index 2018: Issues of Fragility Touch the World's Richest and Most Developed Countries in 2018," Fund for Peace, April 2018, accessed 1 April 2019, <https://fundforpeace.org/2018/04/19/fragile-states-index-2018-issues-of-fragility-touch-the-worlds-richest-and-most-developed-countries-in-2018/>.

¹⁷⁷ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Defence and Related Security Capacity Building Initiative," accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132756.htm.

Cooperation Initiative. Regarding the DCB, it is worth remembering that presently support measures have been approved for Georgia, Iraq, Jordan, Moldova, and those for Tunisia will be implemented in the future.

On the other hand, NATO's difficulties in dealing with this threat that is inherently linked to others are evident, especially when the Allies do not establish a clear and cohesive strategy. Libya and Syria are probably among the most evident examples in this regard. Being only 500 kilometers from Italy, the situation in Libya continues to be highly critical, with a direct impact on the security of the country itself and its neighbors, primarily Tunisia, and on Europe. After the 2011 intervention, NATO did not play a primary role in stabilizing the country, but acted indirectly by sending the support of Operation Sea Guardian to the EU's Operation Sophia. As a result, the country is still divided between Fayeze al-Sarraj leading the National Accord Government (GNA) and General Khalifa Haftar leading the Libyan National Army (LNA). The terrorist threat posed primarily by ISIS-Libya is evident since the leading European and NATO countries have still not found a common strategy.

On the other hand, the Syrian scenario is in many ways the most complex since, in addition to the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad, many state and non-state actors influence the conflict such as the U.S., Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Russia, as well as the Kurds and the Sunni Arabs. Despite the success of the anti-ISIS coalition announced by the U.S., it is worth highlighting that Syria is devastated by a civil war that has been going on for eight years, with substantial repercussions on all neighboring states, and will be unlikely to recover from this crisis in a short time.

Among the security challenges coming from the region of North Africa and the Middle East, NATO must therefore necessarily face the one coming from failed or otherwise fragile states. As discussed, the instability in the southern neighborhood is, in fact, a fertile ground for terrorism and regional and external competitors, including Iran and Russia, as well as second-order problems such as immigration, humanitarian crises, and arms trafficking, to name just a few.

Second-Order Issues

Finally, the southern instability causes a multitude of second-order problems but they are not less important. Among these, the greatest influx of migrants since World War II is one of the most discussed and most worrying phenomena among European countries. The migration crisis is, in fact, a real challenge to security for European countries being linked to illegal border crossing, trafficking in human beings, and organized crime.

To understand the dimension of the problem, it is enough to mention that according to the International Organization for Migration, over 1 million people reached Europe by sea in 2015. Although the number of arrivals has decreased in the following years, until 144,166 migrants in 2018,¹⁷⁸ even today thousands of people try to enter the EU venturing into risky journeys along five main routes, of which three are in the Mediterranean. Significantly, in 2018, about 50,000 illegal entries were registered at the border between Greece and Turkey, the Eastern Mediterranean Route, a number

¹⁷⁸ International Organization for Migration (IOM), “Europe: Flow Monitoring,” accessed 2 April 2019, <http://migration.iom.int/europe?type=arrivals>.

significantly higher than the previous year.¹⁷⁹ The majority of migrants along this route are of Syrian and Iraqi origin. In the same way, the number of migrants remains high along the Central Mediterranean Route, one of the major migratory routes for Europe with departures mainly from Libya and arrivals in Italy and along the Western Mediterranean Route, departing from Morocco and arriving in Spain.¹⁸⁰

In this context, NATO is contributing to international efforts to combat illegal immigration in the Aegean, cooperating in particular with FRONTEX, the European Union's border management agency. Specifically, NATO's Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) conducts reconnaissance and surveillance activities in international waters and territorial waters of Greece and Turkey and exchanges information with both the Turkish and Greek authorities and with FRONTEX.¹⁸¹

Greater cooperation in countering the migration is a priority on the agenda between NATO and EU. It is certain that the complexity and the size of the phenomenon, cohesion among the Allies, and political issues such as the Cyprus dispute between Turkey and Greece, make this theme one of the major challenges along the southern flank.

¹⁷⁹ IOM, "Europe: Flow Monitoring."

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Assistance for the Refugee and Migrant Crisis in the Aegean Sea," accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_128746.htm.

Define the Problem

The third step of the Operational Design framework is to define the problem that is functional to complete the analysis of the NATO southern strategy in the fourth and final step and provide recommendations in chapter 5. Defining the problem refers to identifying the problems that need to be solved or mitigated to attain the desired end-state. For this research, this results mainly in three substeps: analyzing the existing tensions between the current and the desired conditions, assessing the opportunities and threats that can be exploited or will prevent NATO from achieving the desired end state, and defining a concise problem statement.

Tensions

To introduce the following analysis, it is necessary to recall those that are the objectives of the Alliance to the south and the model end-state proposed by the researcher. The objectives are: deterring and defending against threats emanating from the south, contributing to international crisis management especially in the MENA region, and helping regional partners build resiliency. The end state can be paraphrased as an increase in stability in Africa and the Middle East and the mitigation or disruption of the threats described in the previous paragraph. Therefore, the tensions existing between the current conditions and those desired to the south are due to the presence of opposing forces pursuing objectives different from those of the Alliance but also to internal problems of the Alliance itself.

As for the objectives of the opposing forces, it is undoubtedly appropriate to differentiate between terrorist organizations and state actors. Terrorist organizations are apparently interested in maintaining the current status quo, hence a general condition of

instability in which to continue to achieve their interests and branch out. Mitigating the threat would seem to be insufficient considering these organizations can renew themselves and develop in particular in those areas where the presence of the state is weak, until it is eliminated.

Regarding the objectives of the main state actors, these consist primarily to increase their influence in the region in an anti-western key. Russia would, therefore, try to carve out a leading role especially in the MENA in order to reaffirm its identity as a superpower, also considering the economic sanctions following the occupation of the Crimea. Iran would also be interested in extending its tentacles for ideological as well as political, military, and economic reasons. Finally, even if China with less visibility would try to enter more and more strongly in Africa and the Middle East for economic reasons also connected to the new Silk Road.

Finally, to achieve its goals, NATO should first overcome the current problems of internal cohesion. The different perception of threat between southern and eastern countries, the non-unitary vision of Russia, and an incomplete sharing of the concept of projecting stability are only the leading causes. In this sense, understanding challenges the Allies will face in the east are intrinsically linked to those in the south, and the concept of projecting stability is an integral part of the posture deterrence and defense would be the first factor of success.

Opportunities and Threats

NATO, the EU, and the U.S. have established a significant number of cooperation and partnership activities to the south and seem willing to reinforce these initiatives. Only NATO has bilateral relations with 29 countries outside the Alliance in the context of the

aforementioned Euro-Atlantic Partnerships and the Partnership for Peace. To these are added the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative as well as the Partners across the globe. In this framework, the partnership, an integral part of the core cooperative security task, is one of the main tools for projecting stability and guaranteeing the security of the NATO territory beyond its borders.

In order to maximize the results of the partnership, the Alliance can forge even stronger relations with the EU by avoiding duplication of effort and exploiting the Union capabilities in areas such as governance, law, human rights, migration, border managing, and trade.¹⁸² As discussed, the EU also leads a multitude of CSDP missions to the south that could be integrated with the Alliance efforts. Moreover, the presence of the U.S. in Africa and the Middle East, with two COCOMs designated for these regions, offers unequaled potential. In this sense, therefore, greater integration of all NATO, EU and U.S. activities, such as in the field of intelligence sharing, represents an enormous opportunity.

At the same time, if NATO, EU, and the U.S. failed to capitalize on these benefits, other regional powers such as Russia, Iran, and China could take advantage of the situation and, as they are already doing, offer themselves as good partners in the region replacing the western model.

Problem Statement

A concise problem statement is necessary to define the areas in which NATO can implement further actions in support of its objectives and thus achieve the desired end-

¹⁸² Becker, “NATO and the South.”

state before opposing forces reach their own. The statement, therefore, allows the introduction of the last step of the operational design in which NATO's approach to the south will be examined through the ends, ways, means in order to propose some measures of implementation.

For the purpose, the problem statement is stated in the following narrative form. Africa and the Middle East, the southern flank of NATO, are characterized by extreme instability and subject to threats of various kinds that threaten Euro-Atlantic security. Terrorist organizations and regional competitors could take advantage of this situation to extend their influence in the region, achieve their interests, and expel NATO, EU, and the U.S. from the area. NATO has already implemented many initiatives to deal with the southern flank but needs to further enhance this approach by achieving full internal cohesion, increasing its capacity of situational awareness and understanding and its response capabilities, and taking full advantage of greater integration with the EU.

NATO's Operational Approach

In the last step of the operational design, the analysis focuses on how NATO is pursuing its objectives, the ends, in the south in terms of ways and means and aims to answer the third supporting research question. In this regard, for each of the three objectives highlighted in the context of the first step - understand the strategic direction and guidance - a description and related actions already undertaken is carried out. However, it is necessary to underline if the objectives have been clearly stated in the approval of the Package for the South during the Brussels Summit, ways and means will be extrapolated from the analysis carried out and put into a system by the researcher in order to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Strengthen NATO's Deterrence and Defense

The goal, “strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defense against threats emanating from the south”, recalls the core task collective defense which, as highlighted in the 2010 Strategic Concept, remains the “greatest responsibility of the Alliance.”¹⁸³ In particular, to counter existing and future threats in terms of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, as well as terrorism, and cyber-attacks, NATO has and will continue to develop an appropriate mix of nuclear and conventional capabilities. In this regard, the RAP, approved and implemented since the Wales Summit in 2014, is one of the major factors to strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defense posture since the end of the Cold War.¹⁸⁴

Designated to respond to both east and south challenges, the RAP has produced the new concept of eNRF with the VJTF, and many measures aimed at combating Russian action in the east. These include the establishment of eight NFIU in Central and Eastern Europe, two Battle Groups in the Baltic States within the EFP, the TFP in the south-east, and operations designed to protect NATO airspace. There are further south-oriented measures such as the establishment of a second Standing Maritime Group 2 (SNMG2) and Standing NATO Mine Countermeasures Group Two (SNMCMG2) in the Mediterranean, the NSD-S Hub as well as the Ballistic Missile Defense, and Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (JISR) in Italy.¹⁸⁵ These measures,

¹⁸³ NATO, *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, 14.

¹⁸⁴ NATO, “Readiness Action Plan.”

¹⁸⁵ NATO, “Deterrence and Defence.”

together with the eNRF, including the future implementation of the Readiness Initiative and the ongoing Operation Sea Guardian in the Mediterranean, represent specific ways designated to achieve the end. These ways can be summarized as follows: provide ballistic missile defense to counter southern threats, achieve situational awareness and understanding, protect the Mediterranean, and provide a quick response to the south. Figure 3 summarizes the above.

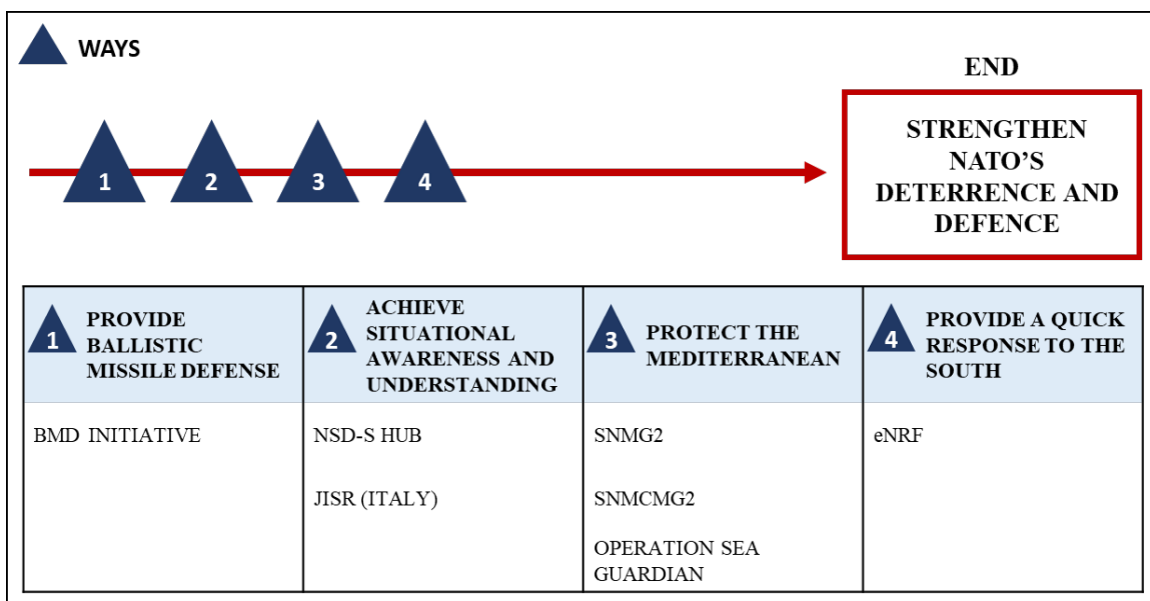


Figure 3. Strengthen NATO's Deterrence and Defence

Source: Created by author.

Contribute to Crisis Management Efforts

The end, “contribute to international crisis management efforts in the region,” refers mainly to the crisis management core task envisioned by the Strategic Concept 2010. In this regard, it is necessary to clarify that depending on the type of crisis, the

Allies can invoke Article 5, the collective defense clause or undertake a range of military operations defined as non-Article 5. According to the concept of collective defense, an attack against one or more members of the Alliance is considered an attack against all and the decision to undertake military operations is taken collectively by the members of the Alliance. This clause was invoked for the first and only time by the U.S. in response to the September 11 attack. Non-Article 5 missions refer to a series of operations conducted under a UN/OSCE mandate or by invitation from a sovereign government and are known as crisis response or peace support operations. This category of operations, including conflict prevention, peacekeeping, peacemaking, peacebuilding, peace enforcement, and humanitarian operations, is characterized by the presence of military forces, but also diplomatic and humanitarian agencies working together to achieve the objectives set in the mandate. Therefore, crisis management is complex considering the need to undertake action in all phases of the crisis as well as interact with different actors.¹⁸⁶

NATO has gained a great deal of experience in the field of crisis management as evidenced by a large number of operations conducted after the Cold War in the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, and Afghanistan, to mention some of the major operations, and has a consolidated mechanism of response to these crises. The main tools are Article 4, the NAC, and the process called NATO Crisis Response System (NCRS.) Article 4 gives all members of the Alliance the opportunity to discuss all factors and issues and represents an essential tool for crisis management at the political level. The NAC, supported by

¹⁸⁶ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), “Crisis Management,” accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49192.htm.

several committees, is the principal political decision-making body that coordinates the different visions, reach consensus, and makes a decision to undertake any operation, as well as exchange intelligence and information. The NATO Crisis Response System (NCRS) is a process that integrates different components, including for example operational planning and the NATO Intelligence and Warning System (NIWS), necessary to undertake operations..¹⁸⁷

In this framework, NATO has identified factors that are crucial to the success of these types of operations as the ability to train local forces, and enhance interoperability between NATO and partners. These factors, therefore, represent the ways NATO can guarantee an effective response in the crisis management sector and achieve its goals in the south. To these ways, it is possible to associate specific means that, other than the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, include the mentioned Partnership Interoperability Initiative and the DCB Initiative. The first one aims to foster interoperability with partners for security purposes and, at the moment, includes for the south the participation of Jordan. The second one focuses on providing countries with help to strengthen their defense and security institutions through DCB packages and currently includes for the south Iraq, Jordan, and Tunisia.

Finally, both the ends to the south analyzed so far and the core tasks, collective defense and crisis management, have common characteristics and fade into each other. This is the reason why some of the ways identified in the previous subsection, such as

¹⁸⁷ NATO, “Crisis Management.”

achieve situational awareness and understanding, and provide a quick response to the south, support both the ends. The result of this analysis is summarized in figure 4.

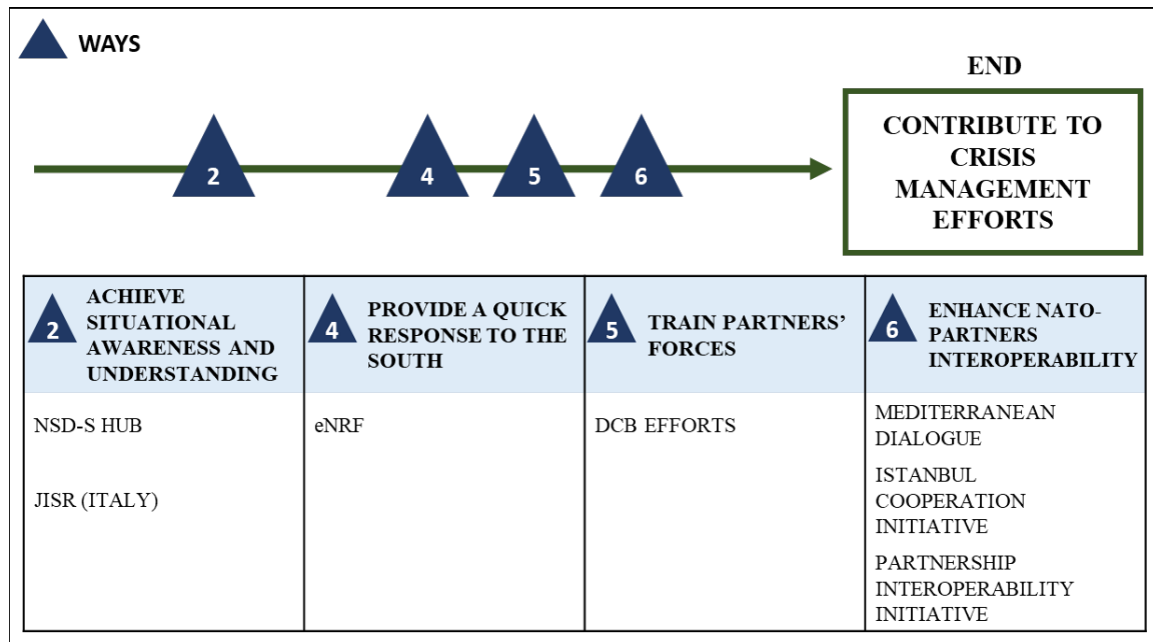


Figure 4. Contribute to Crisis Management Efforts

Source: Created by author.

Help Regional Partners Build Resilience

The end, “help our regional partners build resilience against security threats, including in the fight against terrorism”, refers to the cooperative security core task and is interwoven with supporting activities conducted by NATO towards its partners. The pursuit of this end is, therefore, an integral part of the concept of projecting stability outside the NATO territory.

The concept of resilience is also a concept shared by the EU and consists of the ability of a state to resist and overcome the shock caused by a natural disaster, an armed attack, or the collapse of critical infrastructure. In light of the challenges posed by the current security context, it also includes new threats such as cyber and hybrid warfare. It should be noted that the concept of resilience applies to the same NATO members covered by Article 3 of the Washington Treaty and requires a high level of integration between civil preparedness and military capability.¹⁸⁸

Thus, helping regional partners to build resilience means supporting partners to increase their capacities in terms of broad spectrum preparedness so that they can respond to threats that arise and contribute to global security. The level of this resilience could be inspired and assessed as already foreseen for the NATO members themselves in the seven baseline requirements for national resilience. These requirements refer in summary to the ability to ensure, even in the event of a crisis, the continuity of government and critical services, the supply of energy, the control of masses of people, resources in terms of food and water, management of mass casualties, resilience of civil communication services, and transport systems.¹⁸⁹

As highlighted during the literature review and in the previous sections of this chapter, NATO has launched a series of partnership initiatives to support the increase in its partners' resilience, such as the mentioned Partnership Interoperability Initiative and the DCB Initiative. As discussed in the previous subsection, these initiatives enhance

¹⁸⁸ North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "Resilience and Article 3," accessed 1 April 2019, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_132722.htm.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

NATO-partners' interoperability and train partner forces that are common for the end, "help regional partners build resilience," and "contribute to crisis management efforts."

Another decisive factor to increase resilience of the partners is represented by NATO-EU cooperation. As widely discussed, the increase in the resilience of the southern partners is a priority depicted in the EU Global Strategy. In addition to a substantial presence in Africa and the Middle East, NATO-EU maintains a wide range of capacities that integrate into the civilian security sector. Examples of NATO and EU cooperation in this regard were the presence of the EU's Rule of Law Mission (EUPOL) in conjunction with ISAF and RSM in Afghanistan, the respective anti-piracy missions in Somalia, NATO Operation Ocean Shield, and EU Operation Atalanta as well as the current common commitment in Iraq to support civilian security and the defense sector. Therefore, another way to increase resilience is to enhance NATO-EU cooperation, and the necessary resources were included in the Joint Declarations on areas of collaboration. Finally, it is evident that achieving situational awareness and understanding in the area is a crucial component also for this end. Figure 5 sums up the analysis.

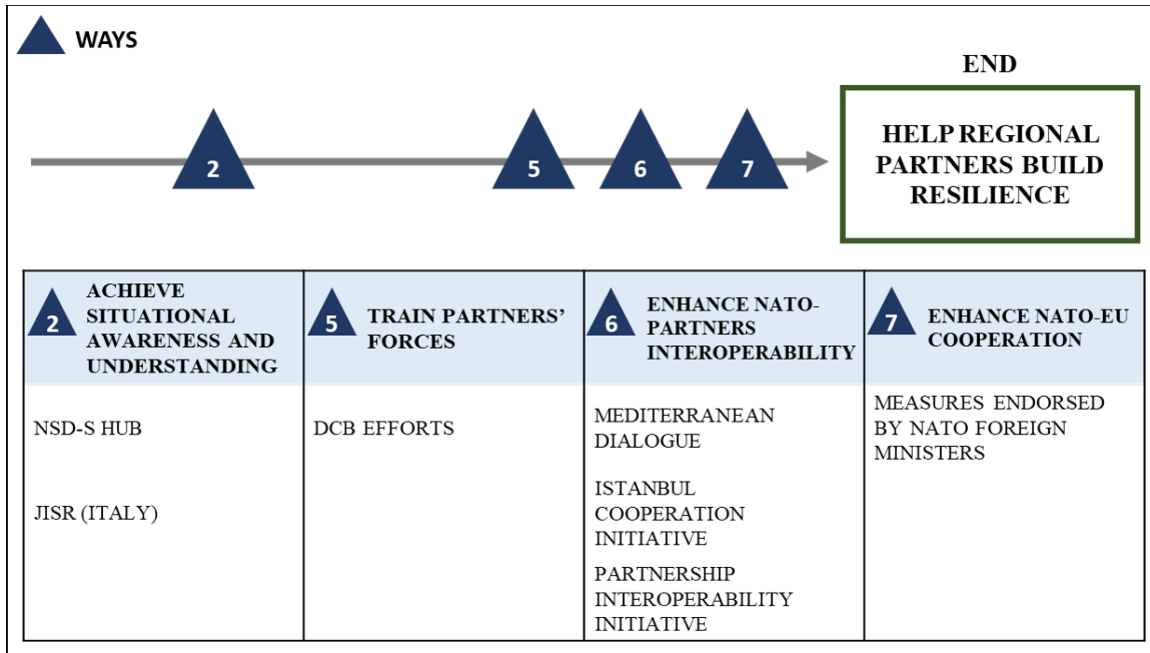


Figure 5. Help Regional Partners Build Resilience End

Source: Created by author.

Risk Assessment

The analysis conducted in the previous sections led to the objectives, the ends, which NATO has decided to pursue in the south, and identified both the ways and the means allocated for these objectives. The result of this analysis is summarized and linked to the assessed end state in figure 6 and does not necessarily reflect the strategy the Alliance is implementing.

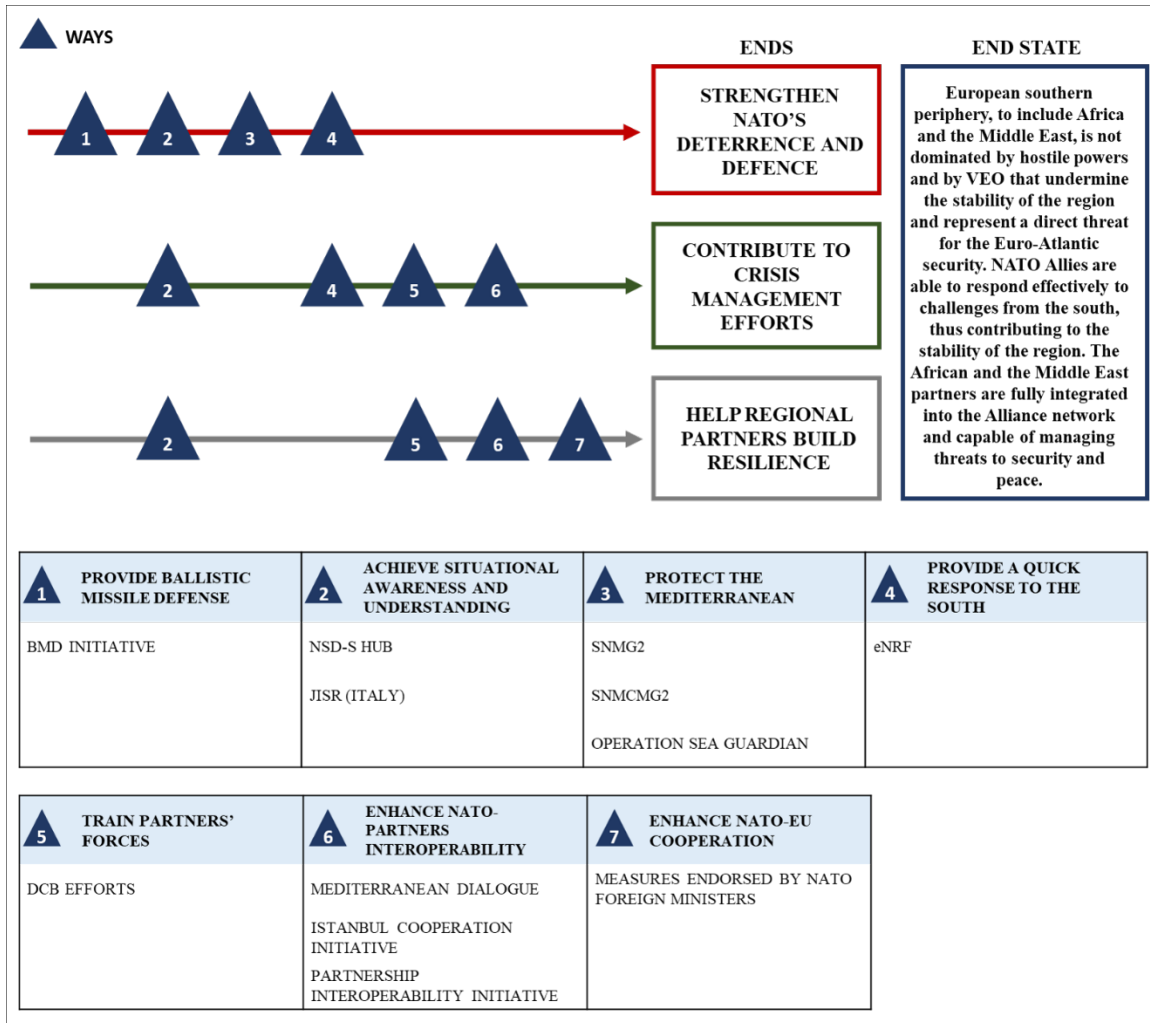


Figure 6. Result of Ends, Ways, Means Analysis

Source: Created by author.

As anticipated, the research did not include the consultation of classified documents and is therefore by its very nature general and incomplete in various aspects. However, to conclude this research, the researcher intends to provide further insights, highlight possible weaknesses and risks of the southern strategy, and suggest some mitigation measures in chapter 5.

As highlighted in chapter 3, risk is mainly expressed as a mismatch between ends and ways or means: the greater the mismatch, the greater the risk of not achieving these ends. Regarding NATO's southern strategy, the literature review, the analysis conducted through the operational design, and the simple comparison between what NATO has already implemented in the east and in the south, highlight shortcomings especially in the sector of means. These shortcomings mainly influence the effectiveness to provide a quick response to the south, the situational awareness and understanding, the protection of the Mediterranean, and NATO-EU cooperation. Finally, a more effective southern strategy cannot disregard greater cohesion among the allies in terms of threat perception and mutual assistance. These aspects will be developed in chapter 5 as part of the researcher's conclusions and recommendations.

Summary

The operational design framework has proved to be an excellent tool for examining NATO's southern strategy. The information gathered from the literature was analyzed and presented methodically in each step of the process, thus responding to the research questions posed in the first chapter. First, the researcher discussed the 360-degree approach the Allies decided to pursue in the south, highlighting their full commitment to the three NATO core tasks and the achievement of three main objectives related to strengthen deterrence and defense, contribution to crisis management efforts, and assistance to partners to build resilience. Second, the main features of the African and the Middle East OE were presented. The region is in summary characterized by a great instability due to the results of the Arab Spring, the presence of failed states, terrorist organizations, and many state actors such as Russia, Iran, and China that try to extend

their influence in an anti-Western key. Third, the measures NATO implemented such as the partnership initiatives and the constitution of the NSD-S Hub were introduced following the ends, ways, and means model of strategy. The evaluation of the NATO strategy in terms of ends, ways, and means has therefore highlighted, through a risk assessment, potential gaps primarily in the sector of allocated resources. To fill these gaps, the researcher will present his conclusions and recommendations in the next chapter, stress the need for NATO to implement a more robust south strategy, and thereby respond to the main research question.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

At the 2018 Brussels Summit, the Allies confirmed their willingness to implement their strategy to the south, along with the east, in order to satisfy all three core tasks envisaged by the 2010 Strategic Concept in the knowledge that Euro-Atlantic security starts outside NATO's borders. This strategy, closely linked to the concept of projecting stability, is mostly based on three objectives which consist of strengthening the deterrence and defense posture to the south, contributing to crisis management efforts, and helping partners build resilience. This approach is more necessary than ever to face the challenges and threats in a vast and complex area that includes Africa and the Middle East and which has profound implications not only for the security of the Mediterranean countries but for those of the entire Euro-Atlantic area.

As for the challenges and threats to the south, these refer briefly to the presence of failed states, multiple second-order problems such as immigration, human and arms trafficking, and the presence of state and non-state actors pursuing objectives different from those of the Alliance. In this context, terrorist organizations, thanks to an unerring ability to adapt and reproduce, remain one of the greatest threats to Western security despite successes against al-Qaeda and ISIS. As for state actors, Russia has already demonstrated its intention to expand its influence and even military presence with the intervention in Syria. Iran likewise continues to raise many concerns in light of the ambitious nuclear programs. China, on the other hand, with its strategy that is entirely different, even historically, from the Western one, continues its expansion in Europe,

Africa, and the Middle East, primarily thanks to the BRI initiative. However, it is clear that access to port facilities as well as to areas of strategic value such as the Suez Canal and the Bab el Mandeb Strait is a strong point for Beijing not only from an economic point of view. In this context, an alliance between the mentioned actors could be challenging to manage.

These are the reasons why the Allies should consider the importance of implementing an increasingly robust and effective approach also in the south. If in the east the threat posed by Russia seems at least more predictable and in line with the Allies' conventional capabilities, the scenario in the south is rather complex in some respects and may have unpredictable consequences. What would happen if the Allies should ensure a quick response both to the east and south at the same time? It would undoubtedly be one of the worst strategic scenarios for NATO planners. Moreover, this scenario although currently unlikely is not to be excluded in the light of the fact that the southern and eastern flanks are in any case interconnected. Turkey could be an ally of strategic value from all points of view. For this reason, on the basis of the analysis conducted in chapter 4 the researcher believes that NATO should implement a more robust strategy towards the southern flank, answering in this way the main research question, and intends to provide some mitigation and implementation measures for this purpose.

Recommendations

The measures to implement a more robust strategy towards the southern flank essentially refers to strengthening the resources allocated to provide a quick response to the south, achieve situational awareness and understanding, protect the Mediterranean, and enhance NATO-EU cooperation.

Regarding the quick response to the south, the lack of the NFIUs is evident, in contrast to the eight units established in the east. Considering that the task of these units is to facilitate the deployment of the VJTF and follow on forces, this could affect the ability to project and sustain rapid reaction forces in the short term. Further criticisms could also be derived from the need to deploy the VJTF both east and south at the same time. In this regard, the decision to implement the NATO Readiness Initiative could mitigate the problem. However, the establishment of NFIUs in the Mediterranean countries of the Alliance seems at least desirable in light of a possible reduction of U.S. military forces in the Middle East. Further measures could consist in setting up new dedicated commands for operations on the southern flank within the NATO Force Structure (NFS), in line for example with the division offered by Italy, or at least to orient the JFC Naples to the south, assigning Africa and the Middle East as primary areas of responsibility.

As the ability to achieve the situational awareness and understanding of Africa and the Middle East, the establishment of the NSD-S Hub is the first step towards this delicate task. To gain this, the Alliance has other resources such as JISR capabilities. However, even in this case, the resources currently allocated do not seem adequate for the objectives set. Achieving the situational awareness and understanding in the south is indeed an arduous task but of absolute importance given the complexity of the southern flank due to the specific cultural, social, and political aspects as well as the different types of existing threats. Furthermore, the acquisition of the situational awareness and understanding is vital for all three objectives identified. The fact that the resources allocated for this way are insufficient can be deduced from the fact that if compared to

what was adopted by NATO, the U.S. has two geographical commands responsible for Africa and the Middle East. The solution that may resolve this capacitive gap in the short term is the one as mentioned in the previous paragraph to orient the JFC Naples to the south.

The protection of the Mediterranean is a further aspect worthy of attention. As happened in the past, the Mediterranean has a high strategic value that today and in the future will continue to increase due to the Chinese BRI. While it is clear this initiative has positive repercussions on the economy of Mediterranean countries, including NATO members, it is also true that the strong Chinese expansion needs at least to be monitored. Likewise, it is necessary to monitor the increasing Russian presence in these waters. For this reason, the presence of the SNMG2 and the SNMCMG2, which are also an integral part of the eNRF may not be sufficient. One of the immediate mitigation measures could, therefore, be to strengthen the aforementioned existing groups and expand Operation Sea Guardian.

NATO-EU cooperation is finally the last sector worthy of attention. As discussed, the two organizations share values and the same threats, and have long initiated a series of joint activities in many areas ranging from the political sphere to capabilities and cooperation. According to the majority of the literature, such cooperation could, however, be maximized with a division of competences to avoid duplication. For instance, the EU could take the lead in operations characterized by a greater emphasis on the mentioned areas of governance, human rights, migration, border managing, and trade, leaving NATO to primarily lead high-intensity military operations.

The mitigation measures that, therefore, include the establishment of NFIU and new command structures within the framework of the NFS, a marked orientation of the JFC Naples to the south, the strengthening of the SNMG2 and the SNMCG2, a full implemented Operation Sea Guardian as well as a division of competences between NATO and EU are highlighted in red in figure 7.

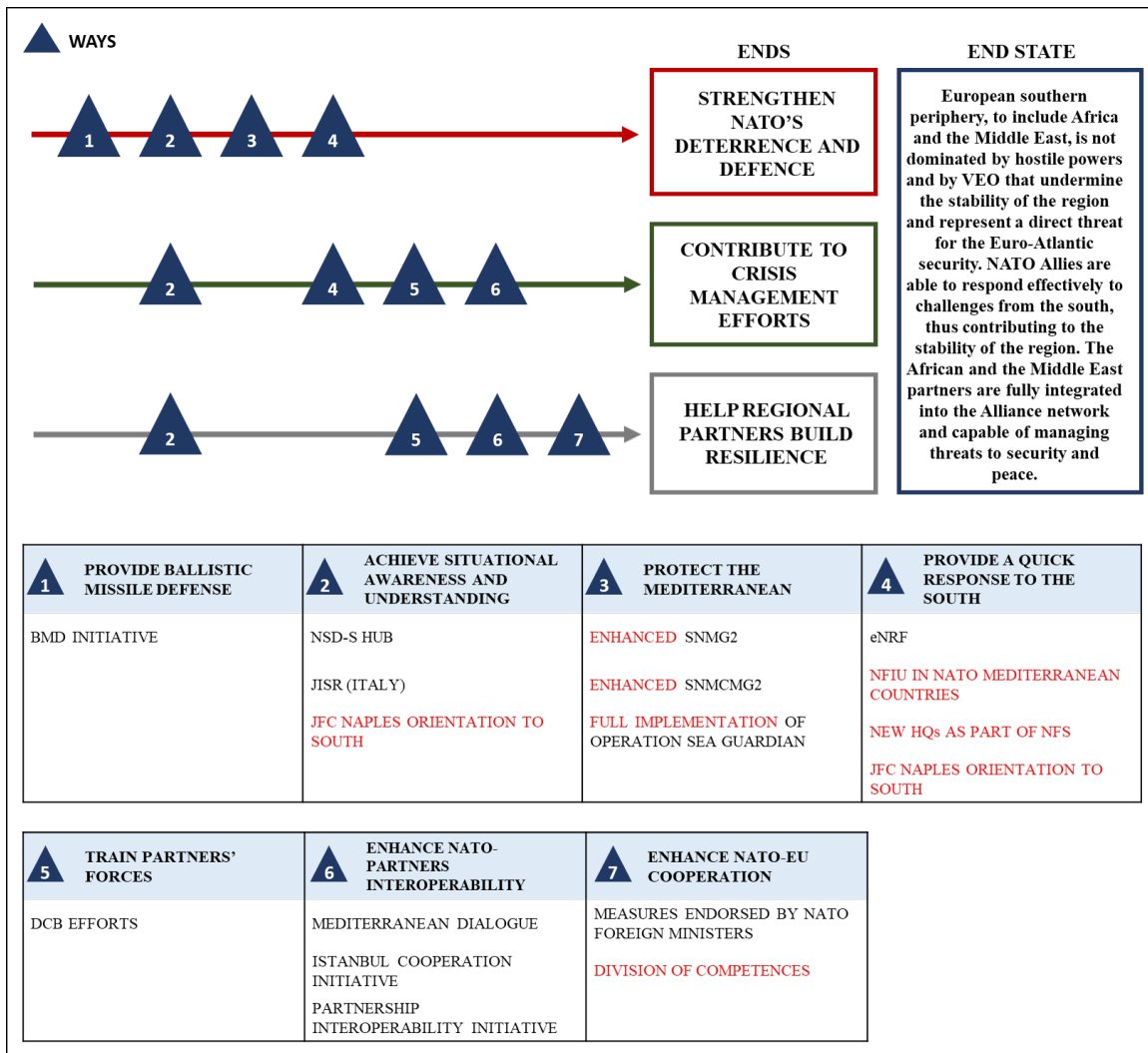


Figure 7. Ends, Ways, Means Analysis Integrated with Further Measures of Implementation

Source: Created by author.

In conclusion, it is necessary to recall that a credible and robust NATO strategy to the south also depends on intangible factors of absolute importance mentioned during the research. These include in particular the cohesion of the Alliance, whose member countries should consider the Euro Atlantic security at 360-degree and not divided into flanks according to their geographical position. It is precisely the cohesion of NATO countries that represents more than any other initiative the primary reason for success or failure.

Suggestions for Further Study

Given the relevance, complexity, and importance of the topic, further in-depth studies are recommended both with a qualitative and quantitative methodology. Primarily, from a qualitative point of view, the theme of the on-going NATO adaptation and that of NATO-EU cooperation, which is essential to avoid duplication of efforts and maximize the use of available resources could be further investigated. These topics should also be developed in light of the approval of the new NATO Political Guidance in 2019.

Finally, from a quantitative point of view, it would be of interest to interview and collect the opinions of the main senior leaders regarding the importance of implementing a southern strategy and what could be the lines of action. In summary, the continuous sharing of ideas and critical thinking will represent for NATO, 70 years after its constitution, the first factor of success to face future challenges.

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