

AUGMENTING NATO SOUTHERN PARTNERSHIPS



ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2024



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NATO DEFENSE COLLEGE FOUNDATION

The NATO Defense College Foundation, the only existing think-tank bearing the name of the Alliance, was established in Rome in 2011. It grew out from a common intuition of the President Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo and the NATO Defense College top decision makers, who understood the value of a non-profit NGO that could work beyond usual and institutional outreach, training, communication and scientific research activities.

The principles stated in the preamble to the Washington Treaty of 1949 are our heritage.

Our mission is to promote the culture of stability and well-being in the North Atlantic area and in NATO Partner nations.

Our aim is to meet the highest standards in contributing to public debate and future deliberations on strategic, security and geopolitical issues.

Therefore, the NDCF strives at considering relevant issues not just in a descriptive or prescriptive way, but by catching the sense of events and the essential vectors of future developments.

In a claim: Charting ahead.

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Arab Geopolitics 2024 Augmenting NATO Southern partnerships

CONCEPT

The general public, including sizeable parts of the women and youth, have been polarised by the conflicts and their possible expansion, within a **complex and confusing media and propaganda environment**. Media have duly underlined the considerable disruption on the normalisation agreements, especially regarding **new Gulf participants**. Regional ties are in flux concerning **NATO allies, Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Cooperation Initiative** countries and other GCC or regional capitals in a context of **sharp medium and great power competition**.

These circumstances have been taken into account by the **final communiqué of the past Washington Summit**, that features some initial concrete measures to restart **political dialogue and practical cooperation** in an appropriate **strategic communication and perception setting vis-à-vis the partners**. Under the guidance of **NATO's Strategic Concept**, cooperative security needs to receive a new impulse, as indicated by the opening of the **NATO Liaison Office in Amman** and by the continuation of the **dialogue with the Gulf Cooperation Council**.

Steps that are relevant in shaping the future.

The high-level conference, preceded and closed by appropriate remarks and supported by special interventions, will address **two major subjects**: a **new strategic narrative** of the Southern Region, overcoming the hazy and chaotic perception of the region and outlining a new cooperative security path; and **how to develop a converging strategic framework between NATO, the MD partners and the Gulf Cooperation Council** countries, and hence appropriate cooperative security policies, fostering an enhanced political dialogue and a practical cooperation.

The **conference's objectives** are three: reinforce the consensus, through an effective strategic narrative, on **strengthening and enlarging partnerships**; explore a converging **strategic framework** among allies and partners, old and new; improving the **Alliance's perception**, also in the most polarised juvenile public opinion.

ARAB GEOPOLITICS 2024
Augmenting NATO Southern partnerships
High-Level Conference

Organised by the **NATO Defense College Foundation**
with the support of **Luiss University**

In co-operation with the
NATO Public Diplomacy Division, the NATO Defense College,
Ministero degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale,
Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo and International Council on
Environmental Economics and Development (ICEED)

Rome, 25th of October 2024

Venue: **Luiss University - Aula Toti**
(Viale Romania, 32)

14,00 – 14,30 Participants Registration

14,30 – 14,50 WELCOME REMARKS

- **Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo**, President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome
- **Florence Gaub**, Director, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome
- **Nicolò Russo Perez**, Head, International Affairs, Compagnia di San Paolo, Turin

14,50 – 15,05 OPENING REMARKS

Giovanni Romani, Head, Middle East and North Africa Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

15,05 – 16,15

SESSION I

THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE OF THE SOUTHERN REGION

The Washington Summit has, after a long neglect, started to refocus on the Southern Region, following also the reflection by the Group of Experts, with some concrete initiatives like the liaison office in Amman, an appointment and future deadlines. Nevertheless, more is needed. The South should not be perceived as a heterogeneous entity for which it is difficult to find solutions and resources. How to change this narrative? How to structure a different discourse that allows to handle the region differently, in a more positive way? The Gulf Cooperation Council may be a good example of regional cooperation.

Chair: **Matthew Robinson**, Director, Euro-Gulf Information Center, Rome

- **Christian Koch**, Director, Research Division, Gulf Research Center, Brussels
- **Ahmad Masa'deh**, Former Secretary General, the Union for the Mediterranean, Amman
- **Luigi Narbone**, Director, Mediterranean Platform at the School of Government, Luiss University, Rome
- **Len Ishmael**, Senior Fellow, Policy Center for the New South, Rabat

Q&A Session

16,15 – 16,45 *Coffee/Tea Break*

16,45 – 17,55

SESSION II

TOWARDS A CONVERGING STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The aim is to develop a converging strategic framework between NATO, the Mediterranean Dialogue partners and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries. What kind of policies can be implemented to foster an enhanced political dialogue and a practical cooperation? In fact, despite the diversity of the countries included, there are common security interests in various areas: security guarantees through prevention and resolution of crises; protection of essential maritime routes and infrastructures, alongside the security of energy supply and other essentials; blended risks like illicit trafficking, terrorism and hybrid operations.

Chair: **Silvia Colombo**, Senior Researcher and Faculty Advisor, NATO Defense College, Rome

- **Mahmoud Karem**, Professor, British University; former Ambassador to NATO and the EU, and Commissioner, Human Rights Council, Cairo
- **Ebtesam Al-Ketbi**, President and Founder, Emirates Policy Center, Abu Dhabi
- **Manal Al Hasawi**, Founding Partner, Think Tank Strategy & Development Consulting, Kuwait City

Q&A Session

17,55 – 18,05 *Special Intervention*

Benedetto Della Vedova, Member of Parliament, Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Deputies, Rome

18,05 – 18,15 *Special Intervention*

Aaron Leshno-Yar, Former Ambassador to EU and NATO, Ben Gurion University, Tel Aviv

18,15 – 18,45 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Stefano Pontecorvo, Chairman, Leonardo Company, Rome

Abdulaziz Aluwaisheg, Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs and Negotiations, Gulf Cooperation Council, Riyadh

END OF THE CONFERENCE

*Le posizioni contenute nel presente report sono
espressione esclusivamente degli autori e non
rappresentano necessariamente le posizioni del Ministero
degli Affari Esteri e della Cooperazione Internazionale*



NATO Foundation
Defense College

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International Council on Environmental Economics
and Development (ICEED)

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NATO Defense College Foundation

The NDCF is a unique think-tank: international by design and based in Rome, due to its association with the NATO Defense College. Its added value lies in the objectives stated by its charter and in its international network, which make the Foundation a body with considerable freedom of action, transnational reach and cultural openness. The charter specifies that the NDCF works with the Member States of the Atlantic Alliance, its partners and the countries that have some form of co-operation with NATO. Through the Foundation the involvement of USA and Canada is more fluid than in other settings. The Foundation was born in March 2011 and is rapidly expanding its highly specific and customer-tailored activities, achieving an increasingly higher profile, also through activities dedicated to decision makers and their staffs. Currently, the Foundation is active in three areas: high-level events, strategic trends research and specialised decision makers' training and education.



Arab Geopolitics 2024. Augmenting NATO Southern partnerships. Rome, 25 October 2024.



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ALESSANDRO MINUTO-RIZZO
President, NATO Defense College Foundation,
Rome



FOREWORD

Ladies and gentlemen, good afternoon, and welcome to this international conference, *Arab Geopolitics 2024*. This marks the tenth time the NATO Defense College Foundation has organised such an event dedicated to the region. The first took place in 2011, which reflects the long-standing priority we have maintained since the inception of the Foundation.

This region holds immense significance for us for many compelling reasons, starting with its historical relevance and culminating in its profound connection to humanity. In Rome, situated at the heart of the Mediterranean, we feel a deep sense of attachment, making it an ideal venue for fostering constructive and amicable dialogue. On several occasions in the past, we have reiterated our aspiration to support the MENA region in evolving into an *arc of opportunities*, rather than an *arc of crisis*.

We are acutely aware that this is a particularly challenging time, marked by tragedy, violence, and widespread human suffering. The current situation has been starkly highlighted by the unprecedented and heinous attack on the 7th of October. However, the ongoing war won't be the topic of our discussions—this is being addressed daily by numerous actors and is already the subject of extensive media coverage. We believe our role lies elsewhere. It is instead time to look ahead, to a future we hope is not far off. It is during storms that ships must maintain their course towards a safe harbour, and that is precisely our intent here today.

Given the extraordinary diversity of this region, stretching from the Atlantic Ocean to the Arabian Gulf, it would be reductive to attempt to summarise its complexities in simplistic terms or superficial judgments. Our focus today is to explore the potential roles of the Atlantic Alliance and the European Union, traditional providers of security that have played significant roles in the past. These institutions must now adapt to new realities, fostering innovative solutions to overcome fragmentation and promote regional cooperation.

Since 1994 and 2004, NATO has implemented the Mediterranean Dialogue, involving seven countries across the Mediterranean and the Levant, and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, engaging at different levels the six nations of the Gulf Cooperation Council. Over the years, these initiatives have fostered meaningful relationships, strengthened ties, and connected people and institutions. I had the privilege of personally contributing to the establishment and development of these partnerships. Built on political dialogue and practical cooperation, they must operate as two-way streets, guided by the principles of joint ownership and prior consultation.

In recent years, the events in Eastern Europe have commanded much of NATO's attention. Nonetheless, the Washington Summit in July, commemorating NATO's 75th Anniversary, reaffirmed the importance of the Southern Neighbourhood. It set a course to revitalise past partnerships, adapt existing frameworks, and devise new tools to address emerging challenges. This process is now underway, and it represents the central aim of this conference. While it is not my role to prescribe specific measures, areas such as the protection of maritime and trade routes, safeguarding energy infrastructure, training, and personal exchanges naturally emerge as key priorities.

We are delighted to welcome a distinguished group of speakers and moderators from diverse countries. I extend my gratitude to them for accepting our invitation and am especially pleased to collaborate once again with many long-standing friends in pursuit of peace and cooperation. We are fully aware of the difficulties we face and the challenges of envisioning a different reality. Yet history teaches us that wars eventually give way to peace. It is our duty to focus on this horizon, firmly believing that cooperative security is paramount, and to dedicate ourselves to this endeavour.

We look forward to engaging in a high-level, scientific exchange of ideas, and I urge everyone to participate in a spirit of mutual respect, as is customary in our conferences. Finally, I wish to thank all those who have made this event possible.

After having served at the Italian Embassy in Washington DC and as Commercial Counsellor at the Embassy of Italy in Prague, Ambassador **Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo** worked as Head of the External Relations Office of the EEC from 1981 to 1986. In the following years, his career focused on Europe and Space Policy. In 1997 he was appointed Diplomatic Counsellor of the Minister of Defence Beniamino Andreatta, then of his successors Carlo Scognamiglio and Sergio Mattarella. In 2000, Minuto-Rizzo held the position of Italian Ambassador to the Western European Union and to the Political and Security Committee of the EU, of which he was among the founding members. He was Deputy Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance between 2001 and 2007. His mandate was mostly carried out in the strategic-political industrial area and in the relations with sensitive countries such as those in the Gulf and the Southern Mediterranean. He is the author of the books: *The road to Kabul* (Il Mulino-Arel, 2009); *A political journey without maps. Diversity and future in the Greater Middle East* (Rubbettino, 2013); and *NATO and the Middle East: The Making of a Partnership* (New Academia Publishing, 2018).

FLORENCE GAUB
*Director, Research Division,
NATO Defense College, Rome*



WELCOME REMARKS

My name is Florence Gaub, and I am the Director of the Research Division at the NATO Defence College. We are very pleased to co-sponsor this event. I am someone who strives to always remain optimistic. Therefore, I would like to touch on a few aspects that give me hope for the region. This is particularly important as you will spend the rest of the day focusing on challenges, given that the human mind is naturally inclined towards threat perception. Today, your task is not to dwell on what is going well, but rather to examine the areas where improvement is needed. Before you embark on this critical mission, I would like to share a few reasons why I believe the situation may not be as bleak as it might seem.

When I began working on this region in 2003, over two decades ago, its economies were overwhelmingly dependent on oil and other natural resources. However, since then, many nations have embarked on the path of diversification. Recognising the future lies not only in renewable energy but also in innovation, technology, and knowledge-based industries, they are reshaping their economic landscapes.

We now see a significant increase in start-ups, substantial investments in renewable energy, and an emphasis on education—all of which drive this transformation. For instance, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030¹ is not merely a plan for economic growth but a comprehensive blueprint for transforming the kingdom into a hub of innovation and cultural exchange.

In the United Arab Emirates, Dubai has emerged as a global centre for technology and tourism, blending modern industries with traditional values. Egypt, too, is embracing economic reform, while across the region, young entrepreneurs are creating tech start-ups, developing mobile applications, and advancing solutions in agriculture, healthcare, and FinTech. This new generation of innovators is rewriting the economic narrative of the Arab world. They are not merely keeping pace with

¹ <https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en>.

global trends but actively contributing to shaping them.

The region is also witnessing a profound wave of social empowerment. Looking through the lens of history, one cannot ignore the so-called *youth bulge*², which in 2011 often carried negative connotations. However, this youth is now driving movements in art, culture, and social justice. Young Arabs are redefining traditional roles and challenging outdated stereotypes. They are more motivated, educated, and globally connected than ever before. Women are making significant strides. In countries like Jordan, Lebanon, Tunisia, and Morocco, female entrepreneurs, scientists, and leaders are breaking barriers in every sector. This shift in dynamics is unprecedented and benefits all.

Cultural revival is another bright spot. Arab creators in music, film, art, and literature are gaining global recognition, telling stories deeply rooted in heritage while looking forward to the future. Platforms like Netflix showcase some of the region's outstanding creative talents.

The Arab world is also making impressive strides in sustainable development. Morocco, for example, is one of the only countries globally, alongside Gabon, to achieve carbon neutrality as recognised by climate trackers. Jordan has emerged as a leader in renewable energy, while the UAE, set to host the COP28 climate conference, has committed to achieving net zero emissions by 2050. Green initiatives are evident across the region, from agriculture and water conservation to urban planning. Importantly, this drive towards sustainability is not confined to governmental policies but is strongly supported by civil society.

While the progress I have outlined is undeniable, it is also true that the future I envision is threatened by ongoing and potential conflicts. The Arab world has endured its share (more than its share) of wars and struggles. However, we are also witnessing an emerging commitment to peacebuilding and regional cooperation. Increasingly, Arab nations are investing in diplomacy, mediation and conflict resolution. When leaders prioritise dialogue over division, the possibilities for peace become real.

Young people, empowered by education and connected through social media, are advocating for peace and unity in ways that were previously unimaginable. As someone with the benefit of experience, I can confidently say this is a new and hopeful trend. The future of the Arab world is still being written, and rewritten, largely by the region itself. NATO hopes to remain a steadfast partner in this journey. Whether or not we are partners, we are neighbours, and that proximity gives us a shared stake in the region's success.

² The relatively large increase in the numbers and proportion of a country's population of youthful age, conventionally 16–25 or 16–30. When infant mortality rates fall but fertility rates do not, at least in the short term, there will be a surge in the number of births relative to preceding years. www.oxfordreference.com.

Finally, I urge you not to fall into the trap of thinking, “It has never been as bad as it is now”. Every moment in history is unique. Believing that this is an unparalleled low point does not make your task any easier. There is much that can be done, and I see signs of hope everywhere.

Dr **Florence Gaub** is the Director of the Research Division at the NATO Defence College (NDC), she is responsible for developing the annual research plan, budget, and policies. Dr Florence serves on the NDC Academic Council, the Command Group, the Civil Staff Association, and various other College committees. She represents the College in international fora, fostering connections with international institutions and think tanks, and maintaining close relations with NATO. Dr Florence's career began at NATO's Middle East Faculty in 2009; she subsequently held key positions including Deputy Director at the EU Institute for Security Studies. Dr Florence holds a PhD from Humboldt University, alongside degrees from Sciences Po Paris, the Sorbonne, and the University of Munich.

NICOLÒ RUSSO PEREZ
*Head, International Affairs,
Compagnia di San Paolo, Turin*



WELCOME REMARKS

Thank you very much for the kind invitation, and good evening to all the participants. I regret not being able to join you in person in Rome. The Compagnia di San Paolo Foundation is currently one of the largest private foundations in Europe and among the leading independent funders in Italy for activities in the field of international relations studies, with a particular focus on the three traditional dimensions of Italian foreign policy: *European*, *Transatlantic*, and *Mediterranean*.

Within this framework, the Compagnia di San Paolo has been supporting the NATO Defense College Foundation for several years. This collaboration reflects a long-term strategy through which the Foundation seeks to combine its commitment to its city of origin, Turin, with a broader openness to international issues. This approach stems from the growing realisation that the challenges we face in our daily lives are often local manifestations of much larger global issues.

In this context, Russia's war against Ukraine has brought defence issues back to the forefront of the political agenda and public opinion, significantly impacting Italy's perception of its role within the Alliance. In the NATO context, 2022 was marked by the approval of the new Strategic Concept¹ at the Madrid Summit, a document that reflects both the return of large-scale war to the European continent and a broader process of renewal within the Alliance, which is looking towards 2030 in an era of aggressive multipolarity. The Strategic Concept explicitly highlights Russia as a major challenge to the Euro-Atlantic area, while also addressing the growing assertiveness of China.

Of relevance to Italian interests, and to today's conference, is the emphasis placed on the Southern Flank. NATO has identified this region as a source of instability and a target for interference by strategic adversaries of the Alliance. The Strategic Concept also underscores the implications of climate change as a source of further

¹ <https://www.nato.int/strategic-concept/index.html>.

fragility in the Sahel, North Africa, and the Middle East.

Even amidst the new strategic environment shaped by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the wider Mediterranean remains central to Italy's agenda within NATO. While expressing solidarity with the countries of the Eastern Flank, Italian political representatives consistently emphasise the importance of the Southern Flank, ensuring that attention remains focused on a region that cannot be overlooked in the current transatlantic debate, which is heavily centred on Russia and the Eastern Flank.

Italy has thus far achieved significant focus on the wider Mediterranean, advocating for synergies between NATO and the EU. These synergies must strike the right balance between Europeanism on the one hand and Atlanticism on the other. The enlarged Mediterranean, which is of strategic importance to Italy, will not become secondary for NATO, even as the Alliance reaffirms its focus on Moscow. Advancing Italy's agenda within NATO and maintaining high levels of attention on the wider Mediterranean requires significant investment and a commitment to revitalising past partnerships, such as the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)² and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)³, as well as the creation of new tools for enhanced cooperative security with partners in the Arab region.

The most pressing challenge for Italy now is to give tangible substance to its intentions, translating strategic priorities defined by recent governments into funding and operational decisions. In this regard, it is essential to develop a shared strategic framework, as exemplified by this international conference, and to implement practical cooperation among partners in the Mediterranean region. This includes addressing shared security challenges, as well as focusing on *crisis management, crisis prevention, maritime and infrastructure protection*, and other key areas of regional interest.

I would like to conclude by emphasising that the topics addressed in today's conference are of utmost importance to both public and private actors, as well as to Italy as a whole. The event exemplifies how civil and military sectors can collaborate effectively to contribute to public goods, such as a safe, secure, and rule-of-law-based international environment.

Thank you very much to the organisers, the NATO Defense College Foundation, and especially its president, Ambassador Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, as well as to the international partners, experts, and institutional representatives who have joined us today. I wish you all an engaging and productive discussion.

² https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52927.htm.

³ https://www.nato.int/cps/kz/natohq/topics_52956.htm.

Dr **Nicolò Russo Perez** is the Head of International Relations at the Fondazione Compagnia di San Paolo in Turin, Italy. In this role, he oversees grant-making and operational activities related to transatlantic and European studies, Mediterranean affairs, and emerging-country initiatives. He manages multi-year strategic partnership agreements with organisations such as The German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) and the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). Dr Russo Perez is a member of the IAI Executive Committee and the European Council on Foreign Relations. He also serves on the board of ITHACA, and on the scientific board of the NATO Defense College Foundation in Rome. Previously, Russo Perez was a member of the strategic reflection group on European affairs established by the Italian Presidency of the Council of Ministers. He has held positions at the European Commission and the International Labour Organization and served as a Senior Associate Fellow at the European Union Institute for Security Studies in Paris.



GIOVANNI ROMANI

*Head, Middle East and North Africa Section,
Political Affairs and Security Policy Division,
NATO HQ, Brussels*

OPENING REMARKS

I would like to express my gratitude to the NATO Defense College Foundation for organising this significant conference and for providing me with the opportunity to address you today. It is a privilege to speak about NATO's relationship with its Southern Neighbourhood, which encompasses both the Middle East and Africa.

Considering the rapidly evolving regional dynamics and the numerous ongoing crises, extending far beyond energy related issues, this discussion could not be timelier. Now more than ever, it is evident that security is not merely a regional concern but a global one. The Middle East and Africa are vital to our shared security, as stability and challenges in these regions are deeply interconnected with those faced within the Euro-Atlantic area. These challenges have a direct impact on our collective security and that of our partners in the region.

However, it is not solely about addressing challenges. NATO's engagement in the region also offers significant opportunities for collaboration on issues of mutual interest. Many of our partners in the region are active contributors to regional security and play an essential role in upholding the rules based international order. Through our partnerships, NATO aims to foster greater security and stability in the Middle East and Africa, thereby contributing to peace and prosperity.

To this end, it is crucial to understand the roles European and transatlantic actors can play in addressing these complex issues. While navigating present challenges, we must also focus on creating the conditions for a more stable and secure environment in the long term. This is precisely why NATO has been renewing and enhancing its efforts in the region. At the recent NATO Summit in Washington, Allied leaders adopted the *Southern Neighbourhood Action Plan* (SNAP).¹ This represents a stronger, more strategic, and results oriented approach to the region, following a yearlong

¹ https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_230794.htm?selectedLocale=en.

reflection process initiated at a previous summit in Vilnius. The initial phase was led by an independent group of experts appointed by the Secretary General, whose comprehensive report laid the foundation for this action plan.

The plan emphasises the importance of enhancing dialogue, strengthening NATO's visibility, and improving our existing cooperation mechanisms. Additionally, Secretary General Stoltenberg appointed Mr Colomina as NATO's Special Representative for the Southern Neighbourhood, underscoring NATO's commitment to the region. Recently, the new Secretary General, Mark Rutte, assumed office, listing partnerships as one of his top priorities.

NATO seeks to strengthen engagement through regular high-level meetings and collaborative agendas addressing common security challenges. It is imperative that we listen more attentively to our partners and expand NATO's network in the broader region by reaching out to other relevant actors. The organisation also aims at enhancing cooperation in areas where it can add significant value, such as security, defence, advisory services, education, and training. Existing facilities and tools, including the Hub for the South in Naples and the NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait, will be utilised more effectively to achieve these goals.

In addition to improving practical cooperation, NATO plans to increase its presence and visibility in the region. This includes initiatives such as establishing a NATO liaison office in Jordan, the first of its kind in the Middle East and Africa. Enhanced outreach efforts to engage with regional audiences, including youth and civil society, will also be prioritised. At the same time, NATO is committed to deepening cooperation with organisations such as the United Nations, the European Union, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the African Union and the League of Arab States to ensure a coordinated approach to regional stability.

Furthermore, NATO's longstanding partnerships, particularly through frameworks like the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the Mediterranean Dialogue, remain central to these efforts. These partnerships have fostered trust and facilitated regular discussions on shared security concerns, as seen with the Gulf States and Mediterranean Dialogue countries. Looking ahead, NATO aims at reinforcing its cooperation with Iraq, particularly through its non-combat advisory mission, which has been instrumental in stabilising the country and countering the resurgence of terrorism.

In conclusion, NATO's approach to the Southern Neighbourhood will continue to prioritise mutual benefit, respect, and shared interests. Events like this conference, which bring together diverse voices from across the region and beyond, are vital for building a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities ahead. Thank you for this opportunity to address you today. Your engagement and contributions are crucial as we work collectively to shape a more secure and prosperous future for the region.

Mr **Giovanni Romani** is the Head of the Middle East and North Africa Section within the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division at NATO headquarters in Brussels, Belgium. Mr Romani began his career in the Italian Navy, where he served from 1985 to 2006, specialising in telecommunications, combat operations, electronic warfare, and intelligence. Over the course of his naval service, he operated as a combat operations, electronic warfare, and intelligence officer aboard various Italian and US vessels. After leaving active duty in 2006, Mr Romani transitioned to NATO, where he has held a series of leadership roles. His academic achievements include degrees from the University of Pisa and the University of Trieste, as well as advanced studies at the Naval War College in Leghorn. Additionally, Mr Romani has completed command and staff officer training and the NATO Executive Development Programme. With extensive expertise in defence and security policy, Romani brings a wealth of experience to his role, fostering NATO's engagement and cooperation with the Middle East and North Africa.

ALESSANDRO POLITI
*Director, NATO Defense College Foundation,
Rome*



POLITICAL SUMMARY

The conference took place against the backdrop of the Hamas-Israel war, lasting already since one year and 18 days: when carnage, violence, tortures, wide destruction are ongoing in a highly polarised environment, it is quite difficult to talk about the future, especially concerning NATO's partnerships in the region, namely the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.

It is useful to remember that all the partner countries in both partnerships were involved in different degrees into this new war, most of them at political level. The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) includes since 1994 seven countries: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), since 2004, has four partners: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. It is also interesting to recall that between 2020-2021, under the first Trump presidency, Bahrain, UAE, Morocco and Sudan, agreed to normalise relations, while Jordan and Egypt are at peace since decades. Nevertheless, within the Arab League, Algeria, Iraq, Kuwait, Mauritania, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia do not recognise Israel.

Just four years ago, some commentators said that the Palestinian issue was practically forgotten by all major actors in the region, ignoring that both public opinions and governments in good terms with the USA and other allied countries were insisting that the problem could not be overlooked. It remains to be seen if Hamas' brutal attack (7th of October 2023) will achieve its political objectives and if Tel Aviv will win this conflict at political, legal and narrative level.

In the meantime, NATO's Southern Region had been neglected practically for a decade, a trend accentuated by the invasion of Ukraine (24.02.2022). Disregarding the 360° security approach has weakened a web of political dialogue and military cooperations that could have contributed in anticipating, defusing or mitigating the acute crises that were developing in the Levant, Gulf, North Africa and Sahel. By each year passing, the NATO Defense College Foundation's conferences could

palpably measure the disillusionment and frustration from partner countries and even from some important non-partners like the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

Only the determined push of a dozen of concerned allies, including the USA, achieved in 2024 to get general consensus at the Washington Summit for the appointment of a Special Representative for the Southern Neighbourhood, the approval of a specific action plan for the region and the historic opening of the NATO Liaison Office in Amman.

Augmenting and widening, where possible, these partnerships is an objective welcomed by all partner countries and now much better understood by all allies, especially with the continuation of the Gaza war and the growing instability in Lebanon and Syria, not to speak about the attempted interdiction of the strait of Bab-el-Mandeb by the Houthi militias.

That said, there are three objectives in the short term and one in the longer term that need to be pursued and harmonised. One is the constant improving of NATO's perception in the Southern Neighbourhood, which is attainable at a certain level, but is hampered by the continuation of the Hamas-Israel war. The second is the revitalisation and upgrade of military practical cooperation and formation, also through the NIRC (NATO-ICI Regional Centre in Kuwait) and the streamlining and integration of the NATO Strategic Direction-South HUB (NSD-S HUB) with the Headquarters activities in Brussels. More difficult is the third objective of upgrading the political dialogue because the partners want more than the existing multi-bilateral activities and want results from this political dialogue that have a direct effect on their major security concerns.

In the longer term there are obviously some missing partners in the ICI (and in much longer perspective also in the MD) like Oman and Saudi Arabia. Here much more complex issues exist and are tied to bilateral normalisation and concurrent resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian issue, to concrete security guarantees (both at bilateral and multilateral level) and to a new possible interaction between NATO and the Gulf Cooperation Council in the ICI framework. It is possible that, once a stable ceasefire between Hamas, Hezbollah and Israel is achieved with another Trump administration, the normalisation could get a new impulse to which NATO partnerships are intrinsically complementary. It is a worthwhile, if difficult, synergy that could contribute in a concrete way to stabilise the region.

Alessandro Politi is a global political and strategic analyst with 30 years of experience. Director since 12 years of the NATO Defense College Foundation. He teaches geopolitics and intelligence at the SIOI. He was senior researcher for the Italian MoD on Latin America, leading also the Global Outlook project. He has worked with four Defence Ministers, while consulting for other three major decision makers and several governmental bodies. Mr Politi has published in various roles 50 books on strategic and security matters. Latest book: "Goodbye Merkel". His last report "IHEDN, Pole Luxembourg, Quelles postures de l'Union Européenne, jeu d'échecs ou jeu de rôles, vis-à-vis de l'Alliance du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord?". Most recent podcast: "NATO and China in the Global Disorder", achieving 10.000 listeners in one week.

How can the narrative of the Southern Region be reframed for a more cohesive and positive approach?

What practical measures can strengthen regional cooperation in the South, and how can the Gulf Cooperation Council serve as a model?



SESSION II

THE STRATEGIC NARRATIVE OF THE SOUTHERN REGION

Interior of the Hassan II Mosque (Casablanca).

CHAIR



MATTHEW ROBINSON

*Director, Euro-Gulf Information
Center, Rome*

Mr **Matthew Robinson** is the Director of the Euro-Gulf Information Centre (EGIC). He oversees the organisation's strategic direction, manages its various boards and affiliated organisations, and directs EGIC's operations across its centres in Rome, Brussels, Stockholm, and Prague. Mr Robinson plays a key role in enhancing EGIC's public image through publications, events, and activities. Mr Robinson held several advisory roles at the European Parliament. With a multidisciplinary academic background and a decade of experience spanning international relations, policy advisory, and legal research, Mr Robinson continues to drive thought leadership and strategic engagement at the intersection of European and Gulf relations.



*There are many institutional
approaches to deal with
the range of crises we face,
just like there is a myriad
of other innovative solutions.*

CHRISTIAN KOCH
*Director, Research Division, Gulf Research Center,
Brussels*



UNTANGLING THE SOUTHERN REGION: CLARIFYING ISSUES AND INTERESTS

It is always a pleasure to return to Rome, a city that one simply cannot decline an invitation to visit. The theme of this discussion, *Augmenting NATO-Southern Partnerships*, is indeed pertinent, though I would suggest that augmenting alone may not suffice. As highlighted in the programme, there is mention of a shift in discourse or narrative. However, I believe the challenge extends beyond mere narrative: it requires a fundamental reassessment of the structural approach we adopt. In this context, and with a focus on the NATO-Gulf relationship, I wish to offer some reflections.

The security environment in the region remains volatile and fraught with uncertainty. This is not a new observation; I made similar remarks here two years ago. However, since then, additional layers of complexity have exacerbated an already precarious situation. The horrific events of 7th October, for example, have further amplified these challenges. From the perspective of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, there are profound concerns about being inadvertently drawn into broader conflicts. These concerns encompass threats to critical energy infrastructure, such as the precedent set by the September 2019 attacks on Saudi oil facilities, and the potential for retaliation against US bases in the region. Furthermore, the heightened extremism of recent years raises pressing questions about the impact on future generations.

Another major source of anxiety is the potential for escalations involving Israel and Iran, and the fear that the region could witness a scenario akin to post 2003 Iraq, a period marked by inadequate post-war planning, state collapse and regional destabilisation. It took Iraq two decades to begin recovering from this devastation. From NATO's perspective, there is a glaring lack of effective policies to address

key issues such as violent non-state actors, ballistic missile proliferation, the Iranian nuclear programme and maritime security. Broader global challenges (climate change, energy transition, shifts in the world order, and artificial intelligence) only compound the uncertainty. Reconstruction of infrastructure may be relatively straightforward, but institutional reform, particularly to foster good governance, is an immensely more complex and pressing endeavour.

The Gulf region, particularly the GCC, recognises the urgent need for a new approach to break away from the patterns of the past. The Gulf states are taking a leading role in implementing de-escalation strategies, mending intra-GCC divides, and pursuing diplomatic solutions to the crises in Gaza and Palestine. Efforts to find political resolutions in Yemen, shift away from military strategies, and even mediate in conflicts beyond the region, such as facilitating prisoner exchanges in the Russia-Ukraine conflict, reflect this proactive stance. The GCC has articulated a vision for regional security and has been actively engaging with international partners. This reflects frustration with the international community's historic focus on managing problems rather than resolving them. Questions about US reliability and Europe's capacity as a security actor further underscore the need for regional self-reliance. However, there is also a clear understanding that violence and instability threaten the region's ambitious economic and modernisation programmes.

The message to NATO is clear: the GCC states are ready to act. They value their relationship with NATO but will not wait indefinitely. If NATO does not engage effectively, they will seek alternatives. While security ties to the USA and other Western actors remain critical, diversification is already underway, and this reality must be acknowledged. At the same time, a more optimistic view reveals the potential for a more structured approach to NATO-Gulf relations. NATO's review process and the recommendations of the expert group provide a strong foundation. The GCC represents a willing partner with increased capacity, resources, and aligned interests, offering an opportunity for deeper collaboration.

Looking at the successful development of the EU-GCC relationship over the past two years provides a useful model. The appointment of an EU Special Representative, the establishment of structured security dialogues, and the hosting of high-level summits have fostered a multilayered, flexible framework for cooperation. NATO could draw lessons from this approach to strengthen its engagement with the Gulf. Maritime security is a key area where action is urgently required. The Gulf's energy significance makes the security of sea lanes and freedom of navigation paramount. From the Gulf's perspective, it is puzzling that NATO, as a security organisation, is not more actively involved in this domain, especially given existing American and European-led initiatives.

Artificial intelligence is another critical field where the rapid pace of development necessitates capacity building, an area where NATO has significant expertise. Leveraging the NATO Regional Centre in Kuwait could foster closer cooperation and help meet the region's growing interest in this field. A more structured and proactive approach from NATO is essential to strengthen its partnership with the Gulf. The time for action is now.

With an extensive career in the field of Gulf studies and international relations, Dr **Christian Koch** has held prominent roles in leading research institutions. Prior to his current position, he served as Director of the GRC Foundation, Research Program Leader on Gulf-Europe Relations at the Gulf Research Center (GRC) in Dubai, and Head of Strategic Studies at the Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research in Abu Dhabi. Dr Koch's work focuses on analysing the foreign and security policies of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, with a particular emphasis on strengthening GCC-EU relations. His research intends to deepen understanding of the dynamics driving regional security issues in the Gulf region and to foster cooperative security among regional and international actors. Dr Koch earned his PhD from the University of Erlangen-Nürnberg in Germany. His expertise and contributions have established him as a respected figure in the study of Gulf affairs and international cooperation.

AHMAD MASA'DEH

*Former Secretary General, the Union
for the Mediterranean, Amman*



RECONCILING DISCOURSE AND REALITIES: STARTING FROM THE AMMAN LIAISON OFFICE

The first issue I will address concerns the implications of opening the NATO liaison office in Jordan. From NATO's perspective, this represents a renewed commitment and deeper engagement between NATO and its Southern partners, further strengthening the ongoing and well-established relations and cooperation frameworks between the Alliance and the region. It is a step in the right direction, signalling that NATO should prioritise this part of the world.

For Jordan, this development is hardly unexpected. Over the past three decades, Jordan has cultivated a deeply rooted relationship with NATO, actively participating in the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD). During my tenure, we signed a strategic cooperation agreement and established trust funds for mine clearance in Jordan, illustrating the country's consistent and constructive engagement with NATO.

This development also highlights Jordan's critical role as a beacon of stability, both regionally and globally. Jordan has long been a champion in combating transnational threats, including extremism and terrorism. I believe the establishment of the liaison office will deepen political dialogue between Jordan, other Arab nations and NATO, while opening avenues for expanded cooperation programmes. These might include seminars, lectures, and a focus on key issues such as counterterrorism and security, which lie at the core of NATO's expertise. Additional topics that merit attention include climate change, civil emergency planning, public diplomacy, and artificial intelligence (AI). Addressing these matters through the NATO liaison office in Jordan offers considerable promise and represents a significant step forward.

The second issue pertains to the overarching theme of this session: whether the South should continue to be perceived as a heterogeneous entity, making it difficult to devise effective solutions and allocate resources. How can we shift this narrative?

Moreover, how can we reconcile discourse with realities?

I begin with a fundamental question: in NATO's view, how do we define the South? Is it homogeneous or heterogeneous? If we consider only the Arab nations, the South appears relatively homogeneous. However, when Israel is included, the picture changes, and heterogeneity becomes evident. Examining the past 50 years, since the Arab-Israeli wars of the 1970s, Arab nations have refrained from military hostilities against Israel, upholding the principles of the UN Charter and international law. They have consistently sought amicable resolutions to the conflict, culminating in the peace process launched three decades ago. This process led to peace agreements between Israel and both Egypt and Jordan, with the hope of having at the end a Palestinian state.

On the other side, Israel's actions over the same period tell a different story over the past 50 years. It has repeatedly violated international law and its obligations under United Nations General Assembly resolutions, it has derailed the peace process. And eventually over the past year, as we have witnessed, Israel has been accused of committing acts of genocide against Palestinians in Gaza and war crimes in Lebanon. If we look at the two values upheld, I cannot see the region in other way as heterogeneous. Furthermore, there are also intentions by Israel to place Jordan in a complicated situation in the future; this would not only be detrimental to Jordan but also destabilise Israel itself and jeopardise the interests of NATO and the EU. And I will promise you that this will mushroom more extremism and radicalism in the region.

How, then, can we reconcile discourse with reality? The answer lies in holding Israel accountable and under scrutiny; Israel cannot be above the law and the UN Charter. It has to be back on track and uphold its international obligations. Until this occurs, all the initiatives of NATO, including the liaison office in Amman and other cooperative activities, I am afraid they will struggle to achieve their full potential.

The application of technology can foster understanding among nations, facilitate economic development, and address pressing issues such as maritime security, drug trafficking, and climate change. With 300 million young people in the Arab world in need of opportunities, harnessing technology to stimulate innovation and create jobs is essential for promoting social stability.

Regarding NATO's role and mandate, the answer one gets is that this is a security-oriented organisation and that the focus is on its own security not meddling with internal affairs of other countries, letting aside that there are other fora and channels for the peace process in the Middle East. Moreover, the focus is on Eastern Europe, more than the Southern Flank, close nearby but not at the forefront of NATO. Nevertheless, it does not harm to remember the member nation states of the Alliance as such that regional and global security integrity matters and that, if you do not have political solutions for political issues, then the security issue comes to you.

If peace will arrive and killings will stop, of course NATO will have a role and it must have a role, probably with some boots on the ground, in order to create some security or buffer zones, or, through expertise and technology in the areas mentioned already above, by facilitating cooperation also between parties or states in the region. But I do believe that to talk about the role of NATO in the conflict now, I do not see it now; it will come at a different stage, if and when we will have a peace agreement.

When we bring the very big questions to the nitty gritty details, the dialogue must extend beyond technical discussions, including AI and regulatory frameworks, to encompass the broader geopolitical challenges facing the region. Credibility is a critical issue, because it has been tarnished. Over the past two years, the value system promoted by the West (human rights, democracy, and women rights) has been tarnished in the eyes of many in the Southern Mediterranean: the people are saying that they do not want to be preached again about values. To rebuild trust, these values must be backed by tangible actions addressing core regional issues, including the Arab-Israeli conflict, Iran, Houthis, etc.

This Arab-Israeli conflict remains the root cause of many regional challenges, yet it is often overlooked. Resolving it is crucial, not because it is an Arab issue but because Israel has shown little willingness to seek a solution. This reluctance undermines the credibility of international organisations and complicates efforts to address other pressing matters.

In the end it is not a matter of pessimism or optimism, it is about realism and look forward. I have hope because my region deserves to have hope.

Dr **Ahmad Masa'deh** is a distinguished Jordanian diplomat, lawyer, and academic with a career spanning public service, international relations, and legal practice. He has held prominent roles as Jordan's Ambassador to the EU, Belgium, Norway, Luxembourg, and NATO. In 2010, he was elected as the Secretary-General of the Union for the Mediterranean. Dr Masa'deh's legal career is equally impressive. He has served as an International Business and Arbitration Lawyer, representing clients in high-profile cases and offering expert counsel on complex legal matters. In addition to his professional accomplishments, Dr Masa'deh has contributed to academia as an Adjunct Professor at the University of Jordan. Dr Masa'deh holds a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in Law, further underscoring his commitment to excellence and thought leadership in his field. Through his extensive diplomatic, legal, and academic experience, Dr Masa'deh continues to make significant contributions to fostering international cooperation and advancing legal and governance standards globally.

LUIGI NARBONE

*Director, Mediterranean Platform at the School
of Government, Luiss University, Rome*



THE EU AND THE ALLIANCE: A NEW NARRATIVE

When examining the security environment in the broader Euro-Mediterranean region, one observes pervasive instability, recurrent shocks, and escalating strategic competition. This dynamic is particularly evident in the MENA region, which, over the past fourteen years since the Arab uprisings, has experienced an intensifying cycle of crises and violent conflicts. These developments have led to widespread instability, state fragility, and state failure, with numerous areas marked by limited statehood. The human cost has been immense, manifesting in acute humanitarian crises, mass displacement, and severe socioeconomic challenges for many nations. Additionally, these issues have had repercussions on migration and radicalisation, which, in turn, affect the northern shores of the Mediterranean.

The pre-existing regional order has effectively collapsed over the past thirteen years, giving rise to heightened confrontations and polarisation among regional actors. This situation has been further exacerbated by great power competitions, proxy wars, and the destabilising influence of non-state actors, often supported by Iran.

These challenges have resulted in a consistent inability on the part of international and regional actors to resolve conflicts. Unresolved conflicts tend to recur, with violence reigniting, instability spreading, and new threats, both traditional and non-traditional, emerging. This includes disruptions to maritime traffic and critical infrastructure. These issues have become even more pronounced following the horrific Hamas attack of 7th October, which ignited escalatory dynamics through the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and recent tensions in Lebanon. The human toll has been immense, heightening confrontations among various parties and posing a grave risk of a wider regional conflict.

The immediate solutions lie in establishing ceasefires in Gaza and Lebanon. However, recent events serve as a stark reminder of the disruptive consequences of

unresolved conflicts. Normalising relations across the region is unattainable without addressing the core issues, particularly the Palestinian question. This was perhaps a critical flaw of the Abraham Accords.

For NATO and the European Union, the landscape has become increasingly complex since Russia's aggression in 2022, which served as a wake-up call for the alliance. There has been a renewed focus on the Eastern Front, strengthening deterrence and defence capabilities in response to the Russian threat. Yet, it is imperative to recognise the interconnectedness of developments on the Eastern and Southern Flanks. Russia's presence in the region, coupled with its growing military ties with Iran, highlights this link.

This strategic reality necessitates a renewed focus by NATO and the EU on the Southern Flank, which has been neglected over the past thirteen to fourteen years. A key conclusion is the recognition of strategic interdependence between Europe and the MENA region. This interdependence, however, is shaped by the evolving multipolar international system and the rise of multi-alignment strategies among regional countries, who prioritise their own interests over allegiance to any single power.

The EU has already taken steps in this direction, exemplified by the EU-GCC strategic partnership. This ambitious, multi-sectoral initiative addresses areas ranging from investment and energy to digital transition, climate change, connectivity, and economic diversification. Such measures highlight the untapped potential for positive collaboration between the two regions. Nonetheless, the security and geopolitical dimensions require greater attention. NATO and the EU must engage in closer dialogue with Southern Neighbours to understand and address their needs. Diplomatic initiatives, such as the rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as ongoing regional communication channels, offer a foundation for stability and conflict de-escalation.

Looking forward, NATO, the EU, and the GCC must collaborate to establish sustainable solutions that promote stability and security across the region. This includes addressing the Palestinian question and fostering a two-state solution. NATO can play a pivotal role through the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) by promoting political dialogue and cooperative security measures of mutual interest, such as maritime security.

Additionally, more ambitious efforts could include facilitating dialogue and regional initiatives aimed at confidence-building measures. These could pave the way for enhanced multilateralism and a robust regional architecture that benefits both the MENA region and its partnership with Europe.

Professor **Luigi Narbone** is the Director of the Mediterranean Platform at the School of Government, Luiss Guido Carli, and a Professor of Practice at Luiss Guido Carli University. From 2015 to 2021, he co-founded and directed the Middle East Directions Programme at the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies. He also served as a professor and coordinator of the Peace and Security cluster at the School of Transnational Governance at the European University Institute. Professor Narbone had a distinguished diplomatic career with the EU and the UN. From 2008 to 2012, he served as Ambassador and Head of the EU Delegation to Saudi Arabia, as well as non-resident EU Ambassador to Qatar, Oman, Bahrain, the UAE, and Kuwait. Professor Narbone holds a degree in Political Science from the University of Bologna and an MA in International Affairs from Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) in Washington, D.C.

How can NATO, the MD partners, and the GCC develop a shared strategic framework to address common security challenges?

What policies can enhance cooperation in areas such as crisis prevention and maritime security?

An aerial photograph of Amman, Jordan, showing a dense urban landscape with numerous multi-story buildings in shades of tan and beige. A winding road with some greenery runs through the lower left portion of the city. In the upper left, a tall flagpole stands prominently, flying the Jordanian flag. The sky is a clear, vibrant blue with a few scattered white clouds.

SESSION II

TOWARDS A CONVERGING STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

NATO on the Road to the South – The City of Amman
with the Jordanian Flag at its Summit.

CHAIR



SILVIA COLOMBO

Senior Researcher and Faculty Advisor, NATO Defense College, Rome

Dr **Silvia Colombo** is a Researcher and Faculty Advisor at the NATO Defense College in Rome. She also serves as an Associate Fellow in the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Africa Programme at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI). Dr Colombo's research primarily centres on contemporary politics in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, with a particular focus on EU and US foreign policies towards the Middle East, their roles in regional conflicts, and the implications for NATO. Additionally, she has a keen research interest in the relationship between the European Union and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Dr Colombo earned her PhD in Comparative Politics from the Scuola Normale Superiore of Pisa in London.



NATO's Partnerships need to be changed from within by providing content to them, both on the front of practical cooperation and of political dialogue.



MAHMOUD KAREM

Professor, British University; former Ambassador to NATO and the EU, and Commissioner, Human Rights Council, Cairo

TERRORISM, NON-STATE AND HYBRID THREATS: PAST LEGACIES AND THE ROLE OF NATO

I would like to begin by expressing my gratitude to Ambassador Minuto Rizzo for organising this high-level conference. You consistently do an exceptional job, and I thank you, the NATO Defense College Foundation, and all the colleagues who have worked so hard to bring us together from various corners of the world. I have decided to focus on two main points. The first is to comment on the discussions in the previous panel, and the second is to propose some action-oriented suggestions which, in my view, will address the issues mentioned.

Once again, it seems that Ambassador Masa'deh and I share similar views, as I was somewhat disturbed when I heard or read the term “heterogeneous”, and I found myself questioning: how can the Arab world be considered heterogeneous when it is united by religion, history and a common language, all functioning under the umbrella of the League of Arab States? Of course, the Arab world is not heterogeneous. However, I cannot begin my remarks without first condemning the situation we are facing. It seems that we are discussing the future, while not giving enough attention to the present reality.

It appears that we are looking ahead, without sufficiently addressing the current situation: the targeting of civilians, forced deportations, the killing of women and children, the deaths of UN personnel, the catastrophic humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the West Bank, and Lebanon, violations of international humanitarian law, and the forced displacement and ethnic cleansing, which has even been recognised as genocide by the International Court of Justice. We must not forget that this is the grim reality that the region is experiencing as we speak, and of course, we hold Israel responsible for all these actions.

War is destructive for all parties involved. However, the expansion of military confrontations, which is a growing threat in our region, will have direct and negative consequences for you and your Southern neighbours. International trade through the Suez Canal has been affected and, when the Suez Canal suffers, your Mediterranean ports on the opposite side also experience repercussions. Trade, tourism, and foreign direct investment are all suffering. Our combined economies will continue to suffer if this war is prolonged. The role of NATO should be to work towards an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and Lebanon, the release of all hostages and the unconditional passage of much-needed humanitarian assistance to alleviate the suffering of the people in Gaza.

What can NATO do? We can be innovative. You have established a field hospital in Afghanistan, so why not build one in Gaza to address the pressing humanitarian needs of the people there? NATO should also consider safeguarding the territorial integrity and unity of countries in the Horn of Africa, combating the spread of fundamentalism and terrorist ideologies in the region, and ensuring the stability of these nations, as their stability directly impacts the fight against illegal immigration to Africa. We need to address the root causes, and this is one of them.

The same applies to West Africa, particularly in Mali, where these countries need aid to combat illegal trade, human trafficking and the influence of warlords, by enhancing their capabilities in terms of security and territorial integrity. Therefore, NATO's role should not be confined to security alone but should include economic and social initiatives aimed at tackling the root causes of terrorism. Such methods, in my opinion, are far more effective in the long term than direct military interventions, which often leave behind historical negative legacies.

Now, the question is: what can NATO do? There are specific areas where cooperation could be beneficial, especially for your southern borders. One of these areas is *climate change*. Why? Because climate change is causing challenges such as desertification, famine and growing concerns about food security in our region, resulting in the loss of thousands of lives. Along with this comes *water security and scarcity*, which we are grappling with. How can we cooperate? Through one of your programmes, "Science for Peace and Security", which can offer funding and tailored support, particularly for water desalination projects. This is a practical and effective area of cooperation. Science for Peace and Security can also contribute to civil emergency planning, as our region has witnessed devastating earthquakes in Morocco, destructive floods in the Comoros and Libya, and other parts of Africa.

Natural disasters demand civil emergency measures, and you have a good example in Mauritania with Prometheus (an advanced free data management system for urban emergencies), which, together with centres created and supported by NATO SPS, helped enhance their operational and emergency management capabilities in

public health, civil protection, medical emergencies, and telemedicine. Of course, we can also collaborate on countering terrorism, particularly through better border control and enhanced information-sharing. Cooperation against non-state actors and potential hybrid attacks can assist your Southern Partners by improving alert mechanisms and information-sharing systems. A notable example is the support provided through the Science for Peace and Security Programme for the Dexter system (Detection of Explosives and Firearms), that helps to detect firearms and explosives in civilian settings such as subways, train stations, and airports. Rome is a prime example of this technology in action.

Now, moving on to new ideas, the NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence offers another valuable medium for cooperation. We heard earlier from the previous panel about artificial intelligence, and I am aiming to present innovative ideas. Cyber Defence, as a tool for enhancing cooperation and situational awareness with your southern borders, provides a promising area for collaboration. Cyber Defence training and operational programmes, such as those carried out in Jordan and Tunisia, are excellent examples of improving cyber incident response capabilities. Science for Peace can also strengthen defence and related security capabilities, particularly in areas like cyber defence, border security, and countering improvised explosive devices. These initiatives can be extremely beneficial for your neighbours.

NATO's advanced capabilities in cyberspace are also of great importance. Why is this critical? Because these capabilities can be harnessed for peaceful, civilian purposes, such as predicting and monitoring natural disasters like hurricanes and floods, assisting in evacuation efforts, addressing desertification and climate change, and even locating underground water resources to improve food security. These ideas represent a form of civilian interoperability, as opposed to military interoperability.

Energy security is another critical area. More than 65% of Europe's energy demand, including oil and gas, is routed through the Mediterranean, so significant cooperation is required in this regard. *Energy transition* and the *development of new renewable energy sources* are key areas for future collaboration. Our region has the potential to export solar, wind and renewable energy, and the NATO Innovation Fund (NIF)¹ could play a pivotal role in fostering a new, innovative ecosystem for the region. NIF should invest in initiatives tailored to address climate change challenges, promote better use of green energy funds, and support emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence and digital transformation.

Addressing illegal immigration is essential for Europe's security, and I propose that this issue become a key aspect of NATO's new strategic concept for cooperation

¹ <https://www.nif.fund/>.

with the southern borders. Tackling the root causes of illegal immigration and supporting countries that bear the heavy burden of this illegal trafficking should be prioritised. Incidentally, Egypt is currently hosting over nine million refugees, treating them fairly and not placing them in camps, but this places a tremendous strain on Egypt's economy.

Landmines represent another significant issue, with the Jordanian case serving as a notable example of the impact. Egypt also benefited from NATO funds in addressing the landmine problem in the Western Desert, which, in some cases, involves unexploded ordnance from the Second World War. The Battle of Iron Main left behind nearly 17.5 million landmines that continue to pose a danger today.

Elite, specialised training and capacity-building courses can also play a significant role. For instance, in Egypt, the Centre for Counterterrorism for the Sahel and Sub-Saharan Africa has been used by NATO, and it can continue to be used in the future. Another centre, the Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Egypt, as well as increasing training courses under the Middle East Regional Training Course at NATO Defense College in Rome, would be beneficial.

Public diplomacy can play a critical role in achieving new horizons through invitations to media experts and parliamentarians from the Arab world, thereby strengthening political dialogue. NATO now has a representative for the Southern region, but when will they visit, and what kind of agenda will they have? We have not heard anything about this to date, and this is another idea that needs to be actioned.

Finally, I propose to Ambassador Minuto Rizzo the idea of a Track 2 meeting under the auspices of the Foundation, involving all relevant parties under connected to the NATO Defense College Foundation. This would provide an opportunity for all parties to sit down and engage in dialogue, which could eventually lead to positive developments in the official Track 1.

In conclusion, the Washington Summit highlighted ongoing actions that undermine the global non-proliferation regime, with nuclear disarmament talks stalled. The use of nuclear threats is prevalent, as we have seen in the war in Ukraine and from some ministers in Israel. Something must be done. October marks the UN celebration of Disarmament Day, and I hope that the ideas I have presented here today will open the doors for future practical cooperation with our region and our NATO partners.

Dr **Mahmoud Karem** is a distinguished Egyptian diplomat and expert in disarmament and nuclear energy affairs. From 2005 to 2010, he served as the Ambassador of the Arab Republic of Egypt to the Kingdom of Belgium and the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as well as Head of Mission of Egypt to the European Communities. He also held the position of Permanent Representative of Egypt to NATO during this period. Dr Karem has had a significant impact on global disarmament and nuclear non-proliferation efforts. He was a member of the Advisory Board of the Secretary-General of the United Nations for Disarmament Matters for six years. Additionally, Dr Karem served on the International Commission formed by the Director-General of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on the "Nuclear Fuel Cycle". Dr Karem's diplomatic career also includes significant roles at the UN. Dr Karem holds a PhD from the University of South Carolina and is a graduate of the American University in Cairo.

EBTESAM AL-KETBI

*President and Founder, Emirates Policy Center,
Abu Dhabi*



THE ICI AND VIABLE SECURITY GUARANTEES

Allow me to begin by reflecting on my experience since the ICI took its place in 2004. I had the privilege of being the only woman at the meeting in Doha, where we were put between two parties: the GCC and NATO. I believe there continues to be a challenge between NATO and its GCC partners due to differing threat perceptions, as well as variations in security priorities. There is a misalignment between the two sides. With the war in Ukraine, NATO's focus has shifted primarily to Europe, moving away from its Southern neighbours. It was, therefore, both surprising and encouraging to see NATO now speaking about the Southern Neighbourhood, even though I believe the concern mainly comes from the Mediterranean countries rather than from the Scandinavian ones, for example.

In the region, the threat perception is different. We must address the priorities that are most pressing to us. The situation in the Greater Middle East is dire, with ongoing wars in Gaza and Lebanon, and the possibility of more conflicts arising soon. Israel's intentions are unclear, and we also face the threat of Iran and its proxies. Both major players have agendas that impact us, and the region has become their battleground. I am curious to know how NATO views this.

I belong to a school of Realpolitik, that emphasises pragmatism. Hope alone is not enough when faced with the destruction we see around us. When we discuss the Abraham Accords and the prospects of an "arc of prosperity", how can we hope for peace when entire generations are affected by wars in Yemen, Syria, Lebanon, Gaza, Libya and Sudan? How can we talk about hope when education is lost, and entire generations grow up radicalised, their families buried in rubble? Without education, economic opportunities, and hope, how can we expect any change?

The region is on the brink of another crisis, and I wonder if NATO fully grasps the realities we face. There are vacuums being created that are being filled by forces we may not be able to control. This remains a significant issue. Furthermore, the

GCC has repeatedly expressed concern about maritime security. Many of our nations have made progress in naval capabilities, yet maritime security remains a pressing challenge. The mismanagement of the situation in Yemen, particularly NATO's reluctance to allow Gulf allies to intervene in Hodeyda, has brought us to where we are today. This highlights the lack of alignment in our interests, both at a bilateral level and within NATO as an organisation.

It is worth noting that two GCC countries, Saudi Arabia and Oman, are still outside the ICI framework. NATO deals with us on a bilateral basis, but how does NATO plan to address this gap when it comes to the Gulf? If NATO is committed to engaging in the region, why did it act in Libya, but hesitate to do the same in our region? NATO's involvement in Libya was framed as a security intervention, but why is there hesitation now, especially when the need is equally pressing?

At present, NATO's work in the region largely focuses on softer issues. While maritime security, food security, energy security, water security and cyber security are all serious threats, they are often not tackled with the urgency they require. However, the real issue is not just putting ideas on paper: it is about how to implement them and establishing a clear roadmap for doing so. Yes, NATO has a centre in Kuwait, but I have yet to see its impact. It is there, and meetings can take place, but nothing tangible seems to result from them. We are still stuck in the realm of speeches and meetings.

Track two discussions are valuable, but they need to lead to concrete outcomes. Where are the results, and how can we implement what's been discussed? There is talk about involving civil society, think tanks, and youth. That is all well and good, but how will these efforts be translated into real change? In the digital age, how can NATO reach those who need support, especially when entire generations are being lost to conflict, as seen in Syria, Libya and Sudan?

I am a proponent of Realpolitik, and I am always focused on what can be achieved on the ground. Since the inception of the ICI, we have discussed military reform and other critical issues. Perhaps it is time to revisit the ICI and evaluate where we go from here. We need a new approach, one that focuses on practicality. We need a clear division of tasks and responsibilities, and not merely more meetings. I'm not a diplomat; I am called a general for a reason. I want action, not just words.

NATO's focus on Ukraine is entirely justified, and I do not blame anyone for prioritising it, as it is an issue affecting all of Europe. However, we in the Middle East are also facing crises, and we too are dealing with our own version of Ukraine-like situations in our region, perhaps five such conflicts. This affects us directly, especially in terms of refugees and radicalisation.

NATO can play a role, but we need to move beyond theoretical discussions. We need to bring practitioners from both sides to the table in different groups to address

issues like maritime security. Let us focus on the real challenges. Think tanks, for instance, are important, but NATO needs to do more in this regard. We have written many papers on NATO, some of which have been published. These papers outline how to approach NATO, and yet, the discussions seem to lead to little action.

One specific issue I must raise is the crisis between NATO and my country, caused by Turkey's refusal to accept the UAE as a NATO partner with an enhanced co-operation. NATO did not intervene in this matter, due to Turkey's membership in the Alliance. This example highlights how NATO's bilateral interests sometimes affect its broader initiatives, such as the ICI. There are many areas where NATO can assist in our region, but without identifying and addressing the core issues, we will continue to talk without moving forward. We have had countless discussions, both in NATO conferences and beyond, about what should be done. But now the question is: who will act? What should be done, and who is responsible for it? This is the critical question we must answer.

Dr **Ebtesam Al-Ketbi** is a distinguished academic and influential policy leader, recognised for her contributions to political science and her pivotal role in shaping public discourse in the UAE and the wider Gulf region. Dr Al-Ketbi is the President and Founder of the Emirates Policy Center, an influential think tank that plays a key role in regional and global policy discussions. She also serves as a Professor of Political Science at the United Arab Emirates University. Dr Al-Ketbi was appointed in 2015 as a Member of the Consultative Commission of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), underscoring her respected status within both the UAE and the broader Gulf region. In 2021, Dr Al-Ketbi was appointed as an Advisor to the Global Commission for Post-Pandemic Policy. Throughout her career, Dr Al-Ketbi has demonstrated a commitment to advancing policy research, supporting women's leadership, and contributing to the intellectual and political development of the UAE and the Arab world.

MANAL AL HASAWI

*Founding partner, Think Tank Strategy &
Development Consulting, Kuwait City*



MARITIME SECURITY: A COMMON APPROACH FOR A SHARED ISSUE

First and foremost, thank you very much for the invitation. I cannot adequately express the breadth and depth of information and the diverse perspectives shared by all the speakers and questions presented today. It has been truly enlightening, and I am deeply grateful. I was invited to discuss *maritime security*. As a strategy advisor and a practitioner in strategic foresight and futures studies, I approach this subject differently. My perspective is shaped by a forward-thinking mindset, and I often take my audience on exploratory journeys into potential futures. Allow me to guide you today through how NATO and GCC collaboration might adopt a new and innovative approach.

The Arabian Gulf, the Red Sea, and similar critical maritime pathways are not only vital to GCC nations but also hold immense significance for our neighbouring states. One essential aspect we must understand is the identification of current and future risks. Equally important is recognising the accelerating momentum of change and the increasing complexity, volatility and interconnectedness of our world. My intention is to illuminate how we might proactively activate partnerships between NATO and GCC in a manner that avoids the identity crises I believe we are currently experiencing.

There are diverse and, at times, conflicting perceptions of NATO's role. One critical question is: when will NATO clearly define who they are and what they will or will not undertake? From a futures' perspective, we understand that events unfold through temporal milestones. Analysing changes in 10-year increments often reveals significant patterns. Yet, one of our challenges lies in treating risks as isolated, immediate events without connecting them to broader dynamics.

For instance, when we examine past events and project them into the future, there is often a misconception of a logical, linear trajectory. However, disruptions (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) serve as stark reminders that wild card events

can abruptly upend global systems. Therefore, beyond monitoring current trends and signals about the future of maritime security, we must learn to anticipate and prepare for changes rather than perpetually reacting to them.

Maritime security is increasingly leveraged as a strategic tool by state and non-state actors to exert influence. This poses a substantial threat that cannot be underestimated. It is imperative to view risks and challenges through a new lens and address them systematically. For example, what does it mean to consider the future of maritime security alongside water scarcity, food security, cyber-attacks and hybrid threats? These interwoven issues demand that we rethink our approach, constructing a vision of maritime security that informs actions today.

This forward-looking strategy enables us to seize opportunities that might otherwise remain hidden, hedge against risks and address interconnected challenges that destabilise systems. One key issue that underpins all of this, as raised in earlier discussions, is *trust*. Building a shared framework for maritime security is impossible without mutual trust, which cannot be fostered simply through additional meetings. True trust involves understanding not only what each party can do but also their limitations and how to navigate them collaboratively.

Traditional security frameworks, which rely on reactive measures, must evolve. For instance, in the Gulf, there is often an overreliance on NATO or similar organisations as a catch-all solution. While agreements such as the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) are in place, there remains a misconception that external entities are omnipotent problem solvers. This narrative not only burdens international organisations with undue accountability but also diminishes local agency. To address this, we need to revisit foundational agreements, questioning their origins, objectives and relevance to present and future challenges. At the same time, capacity-building initiatives must shift from providing immediate solutions to fostering long-term self-reliance through knowledge and technology transfer.

Looking further ahead, technology (particularly AI) will be pivotal in shaping maritime security. While AI is often seen as a Western-dominated innovation, the Gulf region is uniquely positioned to lead discussions on the ethics and morality of its use, focusing on augmentation rather than replacement. Am I optimistic? Yes, but my optimism is grounded in evidence and the tools to scientifically analyse the future. With foresight and proactive collaboration, I am confident we can navigate the challenges ahead and build a more secure and sustainable maritime future.

Dr **Manal Al Hasawi** is a founding partner of the Think Tank Strategy & Development Consulting, a prominent businesswoman, government consultant, and the Chairman of the Kuwait Strategic Planning Society. A self-made and accomplished professional, she is a leading figure in Kuwait's strategic consultancy landscape. Beyond her professional achievements, Dr Al Hasawi is deeply committed to advancing the well-being of women, children and education within Kuwait. With a vision to serve her country further, Dr Al Hasawi aspires to utilise her extensive expertise within the realm of policymaking.



Satellite view of the Levant. Source: NASA.

An aerial photograph of a rugged, mountainous landscape. The left side of the image shows a dark, jagged coastline with a body of water. The central and right portions of the image are dominated by a large, light-brown, textured area that appears to be a dry lake bed or a vast, flat, arid region. A prominent, white, snow-covered mountain peak is visible in the lower-left quadrant, partially obscured by the coastline. The overall scene is one of a stark, natural environment.

SPECIAL INTERVENTION

AARON LESHNO-YAAR

*Former Ambassador to EU and NATO,
Ben Gurion University, Tel Aviv*



THE NEW ROLE OF ISRAEL IN RENEWED SOUTHERN PARTNERSHIPS

On 6th October last year, complacency reigned in the corridors of power in Jerusalem and among the general population. The Palestinian territories were firmly under control, strategic peace agreements with Egypt and Jordan remained solid, and the Saudi peace initiative seemed closer than ever. Israel's economy was thriving, with expectations of further growth, and the high-tech sector shone on the international stage. Israelis believed they had little to worry about. Admittedly, there was concern about the government's attempts to alter the judicial and administrative systems in ways that would undermine democracy and make it practically impossible to change the government through future elections. However, many Israelis trusted that street protests would suffice to deter the government from pursuing such measures further. This confidence, of course, proved to be illusory.

Then came the 7th October, a day that brought a strategic shock. In some respects, we might even thank Hamas for issuing a stark warning that spared us an even greater disaster. Israel was caught by surprise, once again, but the IDF quickly recovered, first in the Gaza Strip and then in Lebanon. As we all know, the war is far from over.

Turning to the topic of this conference, and despite my instinct to discuss developments on the ground, I would like to focus on what these events mean for NATO and Israel's relations with Arab countries. I will not address moral considerations, the challenges your countries may face in similar circumstances, the feasibility of negotiating with groups such as Hamas or Hezbollah, or how NATO militaries have dealt with adversaries who use civilian populations and facilities as shields. I will simply note that most Israelis believe that alleviating civilian suffering today through a sudden ceasefire would only pave the way for a more destructive war in the future, with far greater casualties on both sides.

Regarding NATO, Israel has consistently maintained, and I support this position, that we are not seeking NATO membership. However, we are keen to deepen our cooperation with NATO, as we believe our contributions are valuable to the Alliance. These include insights gained from the current conflict and ongoing collaboration in areas such as missile defence, counterterrorism, intelligence, battlefield medicine, drones, tunnel warfare, urban combat and the challenges of dealing with non-state actors who disregard international law, show no concern for civilian welfare and refuse to make the painful compromises necessary for a political resolution. It is also worth noting that a key ally of Israel, deeply involved in unprecedented ways in this war, is a significant NATO member.

Turning to relations with Arab states, the war has only underscored the importance of closer cooperation between Israel and its Arab partners, a necessity for both sides. While some aspects of this cooperation are best left unspoken in public, from a purely pragmatic perspective, the potential for stronger ties between Israel and certain Arab countries appears even brighter than before. Not all Arab states, of course, and not all will openly acknowledge such relations, but the war has demonstrated the resilience of Arab-Israeli partnerships. This may be due to the brutal nature of the attacks on Israel on 7th October, the identity of the adversaries in Gaza and Lebanon, and, perhaps most significantly, the role of a regional power that is the chief sponsor of Hamas and Hezbollah.

For Iran, this war has delivered a strategic shock. It may have lost, at least for a considerable time, its most important proxy force in Lebanon, while another ally in Gaza has been decimated. The impact on other Iranian allies in the region remains to be seen.

While I firmly believe that this war, like any other, must ultimately end in a political arrangement (using, for instance, the Saudi formula of a “pathway to a two-state solution”) to facilitate regional peace and further cooperation with Arab partners, many questions remain unanswered. Did Israel have better alternatives to respond to the Hamas attack on 7th October and the Hezbollah attack on 8th October? Is a peace agreement with these non-state actors possible? Can the international community play a meaningful role in ensuring Israel’s security, ending hostilities, or facilitating peace? Is there scope for a UN role, whether through peacekeeping forces in southern Lebanon or Gaza? And could NATO have a role to play?

These are serious and urgent questions that require thorough discussion with our NATO partners and regional allies. After all, the world, Europe, and our region face even greater challenges. I hope the conclusion of this war will enable Israel to contribute more significantly to addressing these global issues.

Ambassador **Aaron Leshno-Yaar** has served as the Permanent Representative of Israel to the United Nations in Geneva from August 2008 to August 2012. Ambassador Leshno-Yaar's appointment to Geneva followed a distinguished diplomatic career with the Israeli Foreign Service. Between 2004 and 2008, he held the position of Deputy Director-General and Head of the UN and International Organisations Division. His diplomatic journey began in 1981 when he joined the Israeli Foreign Service after earning a degree in Arabic Language and Literature, as well as History of the Middle East, from Tel Aviv University. By 1983, he was serving as Second Secretary with the Israeli Delegation to the United Nations in New York. Ambassador Leshno-Yaar's early international postings included assignments in Singapore and Australia. He later spent five years as Minister Counsellor for Middle East Affairs at the Embassy of Israel in Washington, D.C. From 1989 to 1993, Ambassador Leshno-Yaar led the Palestinian Desk at the Foreign Ministry's Political Research Centre. Between 2000 and 2004, he served as Acting Deputy Director-General of the Ministry's North American Affairs Division.



A Strategic Design for the Future – The Headquarters of the Gulf Research Center, Riyadh.



CONCLUDING REMARKS

STEFANO PONTECORVO
*Chairman, Leonardo Company,
Rome*



CONCLUDING REMARKS

Speaking in a personal capacity as the Chairman of a major Italian company, I have no current involvement in public service, having left it a few years ago. I believe the relationship between NATO and the Arab world is poised to undergo profound changes in the coming years. Until now, there has been a degree of hypocrisy in how NATO countries and their respective industries, of which I am part, have engaged with nations bordering the Persian Gulf. These countries have been perceived primarily as markets for products and technologies, buyers, while we sell. However, I believe this dynamic will no longer suffice.

This shift aligns with the commitment made at the 2024 NATO Summit in Washington, where the Alliance pledged to strengthen engagement and cooperation with partners in the Middle East, North Africa, and the Sahel region. While such pledges have been made in the past with limited outcomes, I am convinced this time meaningful change is imperative. NATO must revitalise its cooperation frameworks, particularly in industrial and technological sectors, enhancing partner engagement and operational flexibility.

When I speak of NATO, I refer primarily to its European component, as the USA are already far ahead in this regard. Western industries, including the one I represent, have a significant role to play in transforming NATO's strategic objectives into concrete programmes and actions. This will require a new approach, one rooted not in mercantilism, but in genuine industrial cooperation and collaboration, both technical and political. This entails initiatives such as joint production and direct technology transfer. The Gaza crisis and its geopolitical reverberations have already altered the approach of some NATO countries towards the Gulf and Arab states. At the same time, we are all acutely aware of the complex relationships involving China and the persistent ties with Russia, which even the invasion of Ukraine has not severed.

This evolving landscape underscores the increasing importance of the Gulf for

NATO and its member states. As an Italian, I can confidently say that Italy, along with Turkey, remains at the forefront of efforts to engage with this region. While I am not suggesting that the next Cold War could originate there, this time with economic rather than political underpinnings, I believe such a scenario is not far-fetched. Many others share this perspective.

Given this context, a qualitative leap in the relationship between NATO and Gulf nations is essential to prevent potential risks from materialising. The invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing crisis in the Middle East have destabilised international dynamics. As a result, NATO is evolving from an exclusively military Alliance into a more economically integrated area, particularly in the defence sector. The new NATO Secretary General is driving this transformation, and I will personally be in Brussels twice next month to advance cooperation in this area.

This transformation is mirrored by developments in the BRICS bloc, especially after its recent expansion. While NATO started as a military alliance and is now incorporating economic and technological dimensions, there is a growing concern that BRICS, initially an economic alliance, may be moving towards a military orientation. The outcomes of the recent BRICS summit in Kazan, which saw participation from numerous countries, including Saudi Arabia as an observer, illustrate this possibility. The economic and demographic weight of BRICS, now accounting for 36% of global GDP and 45% of the world's population, compared to the G7's 30% and 10%, respectively, highlights the potential challenges the West and NATO could face if this alliance evolves militarily. Thus, NATO must deepen its engagement with Gulf nations to counterbalance this risk.

This enhanced cooperation should address shared challenges, such as maritime security, the proliferation of ballistic missiles and drones, and other complex threats. However, differences in political priorities, policies, and threat perceptions between NATO and Arab countries remain significant obstacles. How Arab countries will balance their participation in BRICS with their defence cooperation with the United States is still unclear.

The Gulf region is becoming increasingly critical, and Italy is actively advocating for greater collaboration in this area. Strengthening technological and industrial partnerships with Arab nations is vital, particularly given the multifaceted and hybrid threats these countries face. Today's security landscape demands integrated, multidomain solutions that intersect traditional domains with cyber and space technologies.

Leonardo, the company I represent, is at the forefront of providing such solutions, leveraging capabilities across land, maritime, airspace, cyber, and space domains. These capabilities enable operations ranging from aerial surveillance to anti-submarine warfare. Technology serves as a bridge, fostering dialogue and

collaboration between nations. Aerospace can play a pioneering role in forging new partnerships, as it requires collaborative investments in innovation and resources.

Critical technologies such as artificial intelligence, robotics, and cybersecurity necessitate public-private partnerships. Industrial collaboration between NATO and Arab nations can facilitate technology transfers that enhance local expertise while fostering shared industrial growth. Our efforts already include hiring skilled Arab technicians and engineers, recognising their significant talent and contributions. Ultimately, the Arab world must distinguish genuine partnerships from those driven purely by self-interest.

Ambassador **Stefano Pontecorvo** has served as the Chairman of Leonardo S.p.A. since 9 May 2023. With nearly four decades of distinguished experience as an Italian diplomat and international civil servant, Ambassador Pontecorvo has held prominent positions in diplomacy and global governance. He served as Italy's Ambassador to Pakistan and Deputy Head of Mission at the Italian Embassies in Moscow and London. His career also included assignments at Italy's Representations to the EU and at NATO. At the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Pontecorvo held roles including Head of the Financial Office for Development Cooperation, Chief of Staff to three successive Undersecretaries and Deputy Foreign Ministers, and later Deputy Director General for Africa. Ambassador Pontecorvo was NATO's final Senior Civilian Representative for Afghanistan, serving from June 2020. In this capacity, he represented the Alliance during the peace process held in Doha. Ambassador Pontecorvo has been recognised with several honours, including the title of Commander of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic and Knight of Merit of the Sacred Military Constantinian Order of Saint George. He was also awarded NATO's "Meritorious Medal for Outstanding Service" and the 2022 Amato Lamberti Prize for Social Responsibility.

ABDULAZIZ ALUWAI SHEG

*Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs and
Negotiations, Gulf Cooperation Council, Riyadh*



CONCLUDING REMARKS

I will focus on the cooperation between NATO and the GCC as organisations, outside the framework of the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) and bilateral collaborations between NATO and individual member states. It is important to note that while the ICI formally includes only four GCC member states, in practice, all six participate. In fact, Oman and Saudi Arabia often contribute significantly in terms of activities and training. However, I will speak beyond the ICI, as there is a general consensus within the GCC that we need to move past the limitations of the ICI. It does not meet the minimum requirements for the level of cooperation we seek with NATO. This has been a topic of discussion with NATO for the past decade, but we are yet to reach an agreement. These discussions remain ongoing.

Earlier this year, there was an attempt to finalise an agreement ahead of the NATO summit in July, but various factors prevented this. The GCC's regional security vision, announced in March this year, highlights a range of shared security concerns with NATO, making a strong case for enhanced cooperation. These concerns include: nuclear proliferation, missile and drone proliferation, maritime security, energy security, cyber security, counterterrorism, arms smuggling, drug trafficking, illegal migration, human trafficking, climate change, water and food security, epidemics, competing regional security concepts (including Russian and Chinese influence), economic diversification, instability in neighbouring countries, and spillover effects from regional and international crises. This extensive list demonstrates the potential scope for collaboration, provided we can agree on the parameters and modalities of such cooperation. If a comprehensive agreement proves elusive, at the very least, efforts should be coordinated to address these shared security concerns.

The discussions so far have centred on two or three key areas. The first is *political dialogue*, a proposal initiated by NATO and supported by the GCC. This is not a controversial subject within the GCC. Topics discussed in this context include Gaza

and the West Bank, Lebanon, Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Iran, Sudan, the Red Sea, the Horn of Africa and Ukraine. The second area is *security dialogue*, like the framework established earlier this year with the EU. This dialogue focuses on five key areas: maritime security, cyber security, missile and UAV proliferation, nuclear proliferation, and counterterrorism. The third and most challenging area is *technical and practical cooperation*. Both NATO and the GCC are political and military organisations. The GCC's mutual defence treaty, established in 2000, mirrors NATO's Articles 2, 3, and 5, and the GCC has a unified military command with a structure like NATO's. Although NATO's expertise was consulted during the creation of this command, no formal cooperation on implementation has been established, which is regrettable.

Further collaboration on the security concerns is under the purview of the Joint Defence Council, composed of defence ministers, and we await their response. If their reply is affirmative, we can proceed with practical cooperation as outlined in Secretary General Stoltenberg's proposal. Otherwise, we will focus on strengthening political cooperation, which remains valuable.

Among the most pressing crises identified is the situation in Gaza and Palestine, which has the potential to escalate beyond the region with unpredictable consequences. This should be a starting point for joint efforts by both organisations. Saudi Arabia, alongside the EU, the Arab League, Egypt and Jordan, launched an initiative in New York two years ago to revive the peace process. This year, in September, they introduced the Global Alliance for the Two-State Solution, which aims to transform the concept from a dormant idea into an actionable plan. NATO's participation in this initiative could be highly beneficial.

NATO has consistently emphasised its role as a political organisation focused on crisis prevention and limiting the spillover of external crises into its geographical domain. By engaging with this initiative, NATO could contribute to the practical arrangements necessary for implementing a peace deal. Any future agreement would require an international force to ensure its success. While Israel has reservations about UN-led operations, a NATO-led presence, under the leadership of the United States, would likely be more acceptable.

NATO could play a historic role in guaranteeing the implementation of a peace deal, thereby aligning itself with the right side of history. By joining the efforts led by the EU, GCC, and other key players, NATO could contribute significantly to stability in the region and beyond.

Dr **Abdulaziz Aluwaisheg** serves as the Assistant Secretary General for Political and Negotiation Affairs at the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In this role, he oversees the coordination of GCC foreign policy on regional and international matters, while managing the organisation's relations with countries and blocs worldwide. Dr Aluwaisheg is also responsible for GCC trade negotiations, strategic partnerships, and dialogues with international counterparts. He has been with the GCC since 1999, holding several pivotal roles. Prior to his current position he served as the GCC Director-General for International Economic Relations (2009–2011). From 1999 to 2008, he worked as the Director of Economic Integration, playing a key role in advancing the GCC's economic integration. Before joining the GCC, Dr Aluwaisheg worked as an economist and legal expert at the UN in New York. In Saudi Arabia, he held various roles in government departments and participated in several high-level national commissions. He studied law at Columbia University, economics at New York University, and political economy at the New School for Social Research.



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*Rome | Luiss University - Aula Toti (Viale Romania, 32)
25th of October 2024*

14,30 – 14,50 *Welcome Remarks*

- **Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo**, President, NATO Defense College Foundation, Rome
- **Florence Gaub**, Director, Research Division, NATO Defense College, Rome
- **Nicolò Russo Perez**, Head, International Affairs, Compagnia di San Paolo, Turin

14,50 – 15,05 *Opening Remarks*

- **Giovanni Romani**, Head, Middle East and North Africa Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO HQ, Brussels

Session I

The Strategic Narrative of the Southern Region

Chair: **Matthew Robinson**, Director, Euro-Gulf Information Center, Rome

- **Christian Koch**, Director, Research Division, Gulf Research Center, Brussels
- **Ahmad Masa'deh**, Former Secretary General, the Union for the Mediterranean, Amman
- **Luigi Narbone**, Director, Mediterranean Platform at the School of Government, Luiss University, Rome

Q&A Session

16,15 – 16,45 *Coffee Break*

Session II

Towards a Converging Strategic Framework

Chair: **Silvia Colombo**, Senior Researcher and Faculty Advisor, NATO Defense College, Rome

- **Mahmoud Karem**, Professor, British University; former Ambassador to NATO and the EU, and Commissioner, Human Rights Council, Cairo
- **Ebtesam Al-Ketbi**, President and Founder, Emirates Policy Center, Abu Dhabi
- **Manal Al Hasawi**, Founding Partner, Think Tank Strategy & Development Consulting, Kuwait City

17,55 – 18,05 *Special Intervention*

- **Aaron Leshno-Yar**, Former Ambassador to EU and NATO, Ben Gurion University, Tel Aviv

18,05 – 18,35 *Concluding Remarks*

- **Stefano Pontecorvo**, Chairman, Leonardo Company, Rome
- **Abdulaziz Aluwaisheg**, Assistant Secretary for Political Affairs and Negotiations, Gulf Cooperation Council, Riyadh





Serene dusk overlooking a landscape.

