

# **NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue initiative: Italian positions, interests, perceptions, and the implications for Italy-US relations**

## **Abstract**

The Report first analyzes the origins of the Mediterranean Dialogue initiative in order to highlight the functions that it was intended to perform in the larger context of NATO's policies. Reducing misunderstanding and improving the overall climate of relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean is the primary motivation behind the Dialogue. This attempt came against the background of growing concern among NATO members for the risk of WMD proliferation as well as more diffuse types of instability emanating from the South and Southeast. However, assessments of the implications of such risks have varied considerably in the course of the 1990s among the allies, making it difficult to develop unambiguous policies in support of common goals.

There is still limited agreement regarding the goals of the Dialogue, its scope and the substantive issues it ought to deal with. Thus, the initiative suffers from weak support among some key allies and a continuing lack of focus, in spite of recent efforts to enhance the level of activities included in the Dialogue. Factors that have constrained the evolution of the initiative include the politically fragmented character of the Mediterranean region, the priority of NATO's Eastward enlargement, the constant spillover of the Middle East peace process, and the institutional overlap between NATO's dialogue and the EU's Barcelona process. With regard to the latter factor, lack of clarity over the respective goals and priorities does not contribute to effective policies toward the Southern shore.

A series of broader regional issues, ranging from the role of Turkey and the Cyprus dispute to the future "out of area" functions of NATO and the specific tools it will adopt for crisis prevention and management, will likely continue to affect the prospects of the Dialogue.

As to Italian views and priorities with regard to NATO's contribution to Mediterranean security, the lively debate that has taken place in Italy in the 1990s reveals that only a combination of institutions and policy tools can produce most of the desired results. More specifically, close coordination between NATO and the EU will prove increasingly necessary.

In any event, the broad region around the Mediterranean basin is very unlikely to be transformed into a unified and coherent "Security Complex" in the foreseeable future. What can be achieved is avoiding further fragmentation in the security field, which would have negative effects especially on Italian interests, given the country's central and exposed geopolitical location. From this perspective, the role of the United States remains absolutely crucial as the major military power in the region and a fundamental component of NATO's own political credibility.

A serious problem which could undermine the initiative is its insufficient degree of integration with NATO's and American broader policies. However, as long as the Alliance itself continues to rapidly evolve and the Mediterranean region remains a complicated set of strategic subsystems, the Dialogue should be evaluated on its own merits by attempting to maximize its positive impact.

The analysis of the current state of the initiative, its prospects and likely results, as well as specific Italian interests, has led to the conclusion that a widening of the initiative would be advisable at this stage. The United States should also welcome such a move, which would not commit NATO to high-level political or military cooperation with the Dialogue countries, but would simply facilitate mutual exchanges of information and ideas.

NATO Institutional Fellowship

**NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue initiative:  
Italian positions, interests, perceptions,  
and the implications for Italy-US relations**

Final Report

by **Roberto Menotti**



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## Preface

The Mediterranean basin – the “Southern flank” – has been NATO’s “second flank” in terms of priority during most of the Cold War. The focus of the Alliance’s deterrence function was clearly located in Central Europe. To the extent that the region was incorporated in allied planning, it was as an extension of the potential Soviet threat coming from the East. Unless the Soviet factor was adopted as the unifying strategic consideration, the Mediterranean theater traditionally presented policymakers and military planners with a fragmented, often unclear and volatile environment characterized by shifting alignments and fault lines. Even more importantly, the Mediterranean/Middle East complex, which became an extremely sensitive issue in inter-Alliance politics especially in the wake of the 1957 Suez crisis, almost invariably saw some of the major allies (the US, France and Great Britain) take very different views of regional problems and prospects.

As a consequence, until the end of the Cold War there was little common NATO policy toward the Mediterranean to speak of, beyond a basic commitment to common defense of allied territory, maritime space and sea-lanes.

The 1990s have witnessed a gradual and reluctant – yet massive – shift in emphasis in NATO’s overall projection and day-to-day planning from Central Europe to Southeastern Europe, but there has been no comparable increase in the level of attention devoted to the Mediterranean basin. There are geopolitical and institutional reasons for this uneven development of NATO’s political and military focus. Essentially, NATO as both a coalition and a formal organization has refrained from inserting itself deeply into the Mediterranean area. This reflects the geopolitical balance among members (Northern, Central Europeans, Mediterranean) as well as the unique nature of the Mediterranean basin as a strategic region. Thus, the starting point for evaluating the MD is to acknowledge that this initiative does not stem from a compelling strategic rationale or a kind of “clear and present danger”, but rather from a willingness to gradually give NATO a *touts azimuth* international projection. In other words, the MD does not signal a redirection of the Alliance’s priorities but instead a modest addition to its numerous and fast-growing functions.

The present Report is based primarily on open sources, as well as a series of personal contacts, interviews and off-the-record discussions between the Research Director and a number of foreign policy analysts, observers and government officials with a direct knowledge of the issues under consideration. As a rule, Italian sources have been preferred in order to focus the Report on Italy’s perceptions as well as the implications for relations with the United States.

The nature of the Mediterranean Dialogue has made it difficult and impractical to conduct a systematic series of interviews with business leaders, given the marginal impact that this specific NATO initiative has had so far on areas such as the business climate or investors’ confidence, and even diplomatic relations among Mediterranean countries in the Northern and Southern shore.

# **PART I**

## **1. Origins and goals of the MD initiative**

### **1.a. The origins**

The end of the Cold War was immediately followed by a flurry of diplomatic activity, designed to seize the enormous opportunities offered by the “unfreezing” of the international system.

An important signal of the new political climate was the attempt by Italy and Spain, in 1990, to focus the attention of the Euro-American coalition on Mediterranean security issues, broadly understood, through the establishment of a brand new international forum or “Conference”. This was the first visible effort, in the post-1989 world, to give prominence to Mediterranean issues in a multilateral institutionalized format, and can be regarded as a forerunner of the MD as well as other initiatives.

In October 1990 Italy and Spain jointly proposed a “Conference on Security and Cooperation in the Mediterranean” (CSCM), thus specifically modeled after the European CSCE and the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Act. The proposed “Conference”, would, among other things, define the region in a highly inclusive fashion by also encompassing the entire Middle East. The Italo-Spanish move was a high-profile initiative, given the venue that was chosen at the opening session of the CSCE conference in Palma de Majorca (September 24-October 19, 1990). The choice of CSCE as a model strongly suggested that the intended approach was not only multilateral but “macro-regional” and inclusive to the highest possible degree.

Although the CSCM concept has not come to fruition during the 1990, it can be regarded as a sign of the times: in the course of the decade, we have witnessed a proliferation of “Mediterranean initiatives” within various fora: the EU Barcelona Process, the WEU Mediterranean Dialogue (launched in 1992), the OSCE Mediterranean Contact Group, and the Middle East and North Africa initiative (MENA).

Where NATO’s potential role came under consideration was in the formulation of new strategies dealing with post-Cold War risks and threats: after all, hard security through close multilateral cooperation – now designed to “project stability”, in addition to protecting the territorial integrity of member states – has always been the functional specialization of the Alliance.

Clearly, the various “diffuse” and “omnidirectional” threats identified by the Alliance in the aftermath of the Cold War – such as the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, ethnic conflicts, organised crime, environmental threats, etc. – are at the core of NATO’s overall transformation. All of these dynamic elements happen to be present to varying degrees in the Mediterranean region.

In the post-Cold War security environment, the Mediterranean basin has thus acquired a new significance, although no clear “structure”. In this connection, the 1991 Strategic Concept of the Alliance explicitly recognized that the “southern periphery of Europe” posed certain identifiable problems and risks, even in the context of a much more benign international setting in Europe with positive repercussions in the Mediterranean region. The Strategic Concept thus issued first of all a statement of intention, declaring that the Alliance wished “to maintain peaceful and non-adversarial relations with the countries in the Southern

Mediterranean and Middle East'. The document then went on to formulate NATO's key security concerns:

"The stability and peace of the countries on the southern periphery of Europe are important for the security of the Alliance, as the 1991 Gulf war has shown. This is all the more so because of the build-up of military power and the proliferation of weapons technologies in the area, including weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles capable of reaching the territory of some member states of the Alliance"<sup>1</sup>.

The reference to the 1991 Gulf war is also relevant to the extent that it broadens the scope of NATO's strategic "radar screen" to encompass countries which do not geographically belong to the Mediterranean proper.

The Strategic Concept was equally explicit in emphasizing the allies' growing sensitivity to non-traditional and geographically widespread security risks:

"Any armed attack on the territory of the Allies, from whatever direction, would be covered by Articles 5 and 6 of the Washington Treaty. However, Alliance security must also take account of the global context. Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, disruption of the flow of vital resources and actions of terrorism and sabotage".

The 1994 "Alliance Policy Framework on Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction" (issued at the NAC held in Istanbul on June 9) marked another turning point in the process of widening – and better defining – the full spectrum of NATO's security concerns, and needs to be taken fully into account in assessing the prospects of the Mediterranean Dialogue. The Policy Framework asserted that "proliferation of WMD and their delivery means pose a threat to international security and is a matter of concern to the Alliance"<sup>2</sup>. Evidently, this implied that the Alliance intended to look at potential proliferation risk presented by states on NATO's periphery as well as developments in areas beyond NATO's periphery, consistently with the broad definition of post-Cold War risks and threats. Although no geographical region was actually singled out in the Policy Framework – except for the specific references to the cases of Iraq and North Korea – the image that the Alliance projects is one of watchful alert, rather than reassuring calm.

This is the background against which allied governments began to give consideration to possible initiatives toward the countries of the Southern shore.

The turning point in launching the Mediterranean Dialogue came in January 1994, when the NAC stated that the Alliance would "consider ways to to promote dialogue, understanding and confidence bulding between the countries in the region".

The final communiqué of the December Ministerial meeting of the NAC, held in Brussels, directed the Council in Permanent Session to "continue to review the situation, to develop details of the proposed dialogue and to initiate appropriate preliminary contacts", in the context of the decision taken on earlier meetings to examine "measures to promote dialogue" and "establish contacts on a case-by-case basis, between the Alliance and Mediterranean non-member countries with a view to contributing to the strengthening of regional stability".

The underlying policy assessment, stated in the same communiqué, is that: "We reaffirm the importance we attach to developments around the Mediterranean. At our meeting in Athens we encouraged all efforts for dialogue and cooperation which aim to strengthening stability in this region".

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<sup>1</sup> *The Alliance's New Strategic Concept*, Rome, November 7-8, 1991.

<sup>2</sup> [www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c940609a.htm](http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c940609a.htm)

The subsequent meeting of NATO ambassadors in Brussels on February 8<sup>th</sup>, 1995, decided “to initiate a direct dialogue with Mediterranean non-member countries. The general aim of this dialogue is to contribute to security and stability in the Mediterranean as a whole, to achieve better mutual understanding and to correct any misunderstandings of the Alliance’s purpose that could lead to a perception of a threat. The initial countries chosen on a basis of consensus among NATO member states are: Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Israel and Mauritania”. Jordan was to join the group shortly thereafter, on November 8<sup>th</sup> of the same year.

In this connection, it might be useful to compare the official formulation of the MD policy with the earlier launching of the Partnership for Peace initiative. The “Partnership for Peace Invitation” issued on January 10-11, 1994, stated that “This new programme goes beyond dialogue and cooperation to forge a real partnership”, and added that “Active participation in the Partnership for Peace will play an important role in the evolutionary process of the expansion of NATO”.

Thus, the difference between the PfP and the MD is explicit and substantial, and helps define the nature of the exercise undertaken by the Alliance toward a selected group of Southern shore countries. The logic of the Dialogue is “progressive in nature and principle”, and will develop in an “evolutionary” fashion, which means that the eventual extension of PfP-type solutions to non-OSCE members is not ruled out<sup>3</sup>.

The Madrid summit of July 1997 provided some indications that a renewed push toward a higher-profile MD might come from NATO’s “Mediterranean” members, especially France, Spain and Italy. To some extent, explicitly mentioning the Mediterranean dimension of European security in the final communiqué was a sort of (minor) compensation for the somewhat upsetting conclusion of interallied negotiations over the candidates to the first round of enlargement. The exclusion of Slovenia and Romania (however temporary, on the basis of the “open door” principle) leaves some major concerns relating to Southeastern instabilities essentially unaddressed: the paragraph devoted to the Mediterranean is largely an attempt to mitigate such concerns. The Madrid communiqué reads as follows:

“The Mediterranean region merits great attention since security in the whole of Europe is closely linked with security and stability in the Mediterranean. [...] The dialogue we have established between NATO and a number of Mediterranean countries is developing progressively and successfully, contributes to confidence-building and cooperation in the region, and complements other international efforts. We endorse the measures agreed by NATO Foreign Ministers in Sintra on the widening of the scope and the enhancement of the dialogue and, on the basis of their recommendation, have decided today to establish under the authority of the North Atlantic Council a new committee, the Mediterranean Cooperation Group, which will have the overall responsibility for the Mediterranean dialogue.”

Creation of a specific body devoted to managing the MD and tackling regional issues is obviously a sign of seriousness on the part of the allies: at a minimum, what has been achieved so far in terms of opening regular channels of communication will not be easily lost due to a lack of institutional foundations. Political discussions in the bilateral “16+1” mode can now be conducted in a pre-designed format which renders the whole exercise less precarious.

In spite of the commitment made by NATO to enhancing the MD, a certain lack of momentum was easily discernible by 1998, when Deputy Secretary General Sergio Balanzino indicated two areas where progress could be expected – but still lagging: “the first area is to

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<sup>3</sup> J. Solana, in N.A. Stavrou and R.C. Ewing, 1997, pp.18-20.

further develop a dialogue of variable geometry. We must enable the Mediterranean countries to shape this dialogue according to their specific needs [...]. The second area we need to explore more fully is the development of military related cooperation”<sup>4</sup>. The Deputy Secretary General pointed out that NATO’s comparative advantage lay in “military competence”, and specifically referred to search and rescue operations, maritime safety, medical evacuation, as well as peacekeeping.

The April 1999 Washington summit confirmed that “The Mediterranean Dialogue is an integral part of the Alliance’s co-operative approach to security since security in the whole of Europe is closely linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean”. The declaration reiterated the fundamental goals of the MD, as well as its “complementary and mutually reinforcing” relationship with “other international efforts, including the EU Barcelona process”. This phrasing was included in the document on “An Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, which is intended to set the agenda for the future evolution of NATO. Given this important policy framework, it is interesting to note that the subsequent section of the statement is devoted to the proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons and their means of delivery. Although no logical connection can be inferred from the sheer proximity of the two sections, it is a matter of fact – as noted earlier – that current and foreseeable concerns among NATO countries with regard to WMD proliferation in their immediate periphery are centered on the Mediterranean basin and the Middle East.

A recurring idea that has been cautiously explored (in part on Italy’s initiative) but never officially embraced is an extension or adaptation of the PfP model to certain Mediterranean countries. A “Partnership for the Mediterranean” (PfM) would be modeled on the PfP precedent, which now involves a very large number of participants with diverse political backgrounds and geopolitical priorities. However theoretically attractive, such analogy encounters major obstacles: by 1994 it was already clear that no sufficient consensus existed among the allies to follow such a path, although a possible PfM endpoint was indeed mentioned by a session of the North Atlantic Assembly in October 1995, which called at least for measures that could evolve, over time, into forms of Partnership for Peace with the countries of the area. As will be seen in the last section of this Report, even as recently as in April 1999, at the Washington Summit, only gradual steps toward “cooperation” have been envisaged, without ever mentioning “partnership”.

The rationale behind the cautious attitude officially adopted by NATO was aptly explained by the then Acting Secretary General of the Alliance, Sergio Balanzino, who made the following comments in September 1994, on the occasion of a public Conference on security in the Mediterranean

“[...] it is possible to steer political evolution in this region in a constructive direction. As a starting point, we need to make use of our experience gained elsewhere in confidence building and in providing fora for better contacts and discussions. Preventive diplomacy and enhancing security through political means, such as dialogue and cooperation, can help to minimise suspicions and misunderstandings. [...] I was asked why could there not be a Partnership for Peace in the Mediterranean. [...] I would like to add a word of caution here. As we progress in the Partnership, we will develop invaluable experience which we could usefully share with others. But, realistically, PfP is not a model we could

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<sup>4</sup> Remarks by the Deputy Secretary General at the Conference on “Mediterranean Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, Rome, December 3, 1998.

apply wholesale to the Mediterranean region. In the Mediterranean we can learn from PfP, but we have to find and apply our own solutions”<sup>5</sup>.

From this brief reconstruction of the evolution of the dialogue initiative, it emerges quite clearly that the Mediterranean region is considered uniquely complex, and currently too volatile to be dealt with through an institutional instrument (PfP) that was designed in close connection with the enlargement process<sup>6</sup>. It is true, of course, that the PfP has been extended to as many as twenty-seven non-NATO countries spanning the whole of the European continent and part of the Asian continent; but the fact remains that in the European geopolitical context NATO is capable of playing a pro-active function of stabilization and reassurance through the enlargement process, in addition to major crisis-management initiatives and a series of ad hoc “partnerships” with key countries to the East (namely, Russia and Ukraine). This has not been the case, at least so far, in the Mediterranean region, where NATO’s security functions have retained an essentially reactive – instead of proactive – character.

The political assessment which is implicit in NATO’s selective policy is that the Alliance should be constantly aware of the danger of geographical overstretch in fluid political and strategic conditions; to this should be added the risk of institutional overburden, given the priority attributed to Eastward enlargement and Balkan stabilization.

It is important to identify the goals that the MD can realistically be expected to achieve in its current configuration, taking into account that the initiative is, by its very nature, a work in progress. Clearly, the measure of success for even the most modest of NATO’s initiative can only be its actual contribution to the Alliance’s broader goals and functions.

### **1.b. The goals**

Given that NATO’s primary function, beyond territorial defense, is to strengthen stability, as well as manage/contain instability when that should occur, one must assume that a NATO-initiated dialogue can only be aimed at the same goal. The truly meaningful statement of intention contained in the above-mentioned official documents is “achieve better mutual understanding” and “correct any misunderstandings of the Alliance’s purpose”. This appears to be the distinctive mission of the MD at the current stage.

Therefore, the goal of the MD is essentially to mitigate the effects of NATO being perceived as a threat because of misunderstandings. The approach is thus primarily reactive (in terms of damage-limitation) rather than pro-active (in terms of “gain-maximization” in the security field). This appears to be a sensible choice, given the current fragmentation of the region, but it sharply limits the scope of the dialogue.

Obviously, the possibility that NATO might be perceived as a threat is real, as shown by various manifestations of deep mistrust toward the Alliance in many quarters of the Arab world. The type of “reassuring” function that the Alliance might perform through the dialogue is

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in R. Aliboni, J. Joffe, T. Niblock (eds.), 1996.

<sup>6</sup> PfP was born primarily as a substitute for NATO enlargement (which would be indefinitely postponed), but then evolved into a successful framework for gradual and graduated integration, serving as a useful clearinghouse and in other cases as a complement to the enlargement process. On the genesis and meaning of PfP in the context of NATO’s enlargement policy, see R. Menotti, 1999.

largely determined by the regional security and political environment, which presents a number of objective constraints.

The reasons for such difficulties are more easily seen in comparative perspective: these constraints seem to be much weaker in the area on which NATO enlargement is now focusing, that is, the NATO-led process of “partnership-building” in Central-Eastern Europe<sup>7</sup>. In Central-Eastern Europe, the notion of cooperative security that seems to be gaining wide acceptance is based on a shared perception of threats and even risks; the Mediterranean as a whole lacks such a shared perception, which is precisely why the MD was launched in the first place. However, as will be seen in Section 2 of this Report, the main limitations of the initiative stem not only from these North-South differences, but also from the additional fragmentation of strategic priorities among the countries of both the Northern and the Southern shore.

Whatever the original intentions and ambitions behind the MD, the only way to get the process started was to present it as a “work in progress”, like so many other institutional dynamics in today’s dense international environment. Consequently, a frequent reassessment of the partial results and experience obtained through the dialogue was needed, and has indeed been carried out in various fora, including the North Atlantic Assembly (NAA). Given its consultative function as a parliamentary body, the NAA is well placed to give a relatively dispassionate evaluation of progress of the MD. The NAA Reports issued in November 1996 are especially revealing: in reviewing the first stages of development of the initiative, the Rapporteur to the Sub-Committee on the Mediterranean Basin – Pedro Moya of Spain – noted that the MD had been “received as a mixed blessing” by the Mediterranean countries to which it had been offered, for three major reasons: “most arab countries exhibit an ingrained mistrust against ‘the West’ in general, and its embodiment in the Alliance in particular [...]; few in Arab countries understand what NATO is and does [...]; before committing themselves, southern countries (and this includes Israel) wanted to make sure that the NATO initiative would not be a remake of the somewhat disappointing experience of dialogue with the WEU”<sup>8</sup>. The most interesting point of this analysis is that after the first year of dialogue it had at least become clear what NATO could offer in order to attract its MD counterparts: activities designed to show what NATO is and does, and specifically activities offering practical knowledge and experience, not just cordial handshakes<sup>9</sup>.

Arguably, this is the spirit in which the initiative has been developing since then. NATO is the political initiator – unlike in Central-Eastern Europe, where all the original pressure came

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<sup>7</sup> Although a mixed assessment at best is warranted with regard to the former USSR, due to the sensitive nature of direct links between the Alliance and former Soviet Republic such as the Baltics and Ukraine, channels of communication between NATO and Russia can build upon decades of Cold War negotiations and “*détente*”, and in any case are greatly simplified by the unitary nature of the counterpart or would-be-partner. In other words, dealing with a single counterpart is enormously less complex than dealing with a very fragmented region.

<sup>8</sup> North Atlantic Assembly, International Secretariat, AN 83 - CC/MB (96) 1, November 1996, p.2.

<sup>9</sup> Another sobering conclusion offered by the NAA Rapporteur in November 1996 was that the key stumbling block on the road to a more substantive dialogue – both in the MD and in the Barcelona process frameworks – was the stalemate in the Middle East peace process: in this connection Mr Moya concluded that “What has clearly emerged from the experience of a few months of institutional commitment by the EU and NATO [...] is that neither organization has much of a role to play in the political and military dynamics of the Middle East until a peace treaty has been signed among the principal enemies, Israel and Syria [...]. What is also clear, and even more distressing, is that neither the EU nor the Alliance has a common view on the situation and the respective responsibilities”. (ibid., p.12).

from the “new democracies” – and thus the Alliance offers a (modest) package which can be progressively fine-tuned to accommodate specific requests and case-by-case requirements.

On the occasion of a major public event organized to discuss the MD, which took place in Valencia on February 25-26, 1999, Stefano Silvestri convincingly argued that there are two main paths for future development of the initiative: one is a strict adherence to the notion of a “dialogue”, which would imply the need and opportunity to enlarge the range of participants; the other is a move toward true “partnership”, which needs to be selective and graduated.

In a sense, we are confronted with a classic policy alternative between a form of widening and a form of deepening. Whatever the alternative that will be chosen, there is much to be said in favor of dialogue even in the absence of rapid progress toward partnership: in other words, public relations and “peaceful offensives” can be good for regional stability by marginally improving the political climate. Yet, the much more demanding goal of building partnerships should be kept distinct from the ongoing effort to improve mutual understanding.

The MD is, potentially, a sort of gateway to the common search for a “Partnership for the Mediterranean”, or PfM. Official NATO statements only refer to “partnership” as a more distant goal, but it is clear that the MD may serve the purpose of exploring and testing schemes that are broadly based on the successful experience of the PfP model. The PfP framework is highly flexible, by virtue of its “multi-bilateral” nature, and could address the need for ad hoc forms of cooperation between NATO and non-NATO Mediterranean countries. In any event, a graduated and differentiated approach will be required: from the Alliance’s viewpoint, there are major differences among the various state actors in the “greater Mediterranean” region. At least four categories can be identified – with the possibility for each country to shift from one group to the other:

- the Dialogue partners
- “grey” countries (Syria, Lebanon, Algeria)
- “black” countries or “rogue states” (Iraq, Libya, Iran)
- countries belonging to a de facto “American reservoir” in the Persian Gulf and the Arab peninsula.

This picture is probably more diversified than in the case of the current PfP participants on the European continent: yet, PfP itself has shown that a wide variety of political regimes and geostrategic situations can be accommodated in a loose “partnership” framework. Based on the example of PfP, positive changes in political outlook could also be anticipated and to some extent even encouraged in some of the problematic Dialogue partners, especially if the Dialogue offers tangible incentives to cooperate. For instance, Algeria and Libya might reasonably be considered for inclusion (a move that has been advocated by Spain and Italy) with a view to enhancing the prospect of gradual reconciliation at the regional level.

The MD also serves another simple purpose, which has a chiefly symbolic nature but also some political value especially to NATO’s Southern members: counterbalancing, or rather complementing, the Eastward expansion of the Alliance. Such complementary function can offset some of the negative consequences of selecting European candidates to NATO membership largely on the basis of cultural proximity/homogeneity to the existing Euro-American community. The political implication of such a selection criterion can indeed be especially significant in relation to the Mediterranean region, which is characterized by an

historically rooted reciprocal diffidence – though not necessarily in the form of open conflict – between the Muslim and Christian worlds (each with its own distinctive social, economic, political tradition). Although the Islam/Christianity cleavage is certainly not the only significant divide in the region, this “civilizational” issue is perceived as a sort of latent problem hanging over the prospects for cooperation.

In sum, to avoid projecting the image of a “Western fortress”, NATO can direct its dynamism also Southward, instead of inserting itself into Eastern and Southeastern Europe while simply neglecting the South. In this perspective, the MD is quite a logical, low-cost and low-risk step designed to ameliorate the psychological aspect of a traditional “security dilemma”. The message attached to the dialogue is thus: the most powerful Alliance in the world is expanding Eastward – by responding to the pressure for inclusion exercised by the local states – but NATO is also reaching out to the South. As a consequence, even a sort of “pan-Euro-American” NATO that could be in the making would not have anti-Muslim or anti-Arab connotations.

The very sensitive nature of this “exclusion dilemma” is indirectly confirmed by the European Union’s oscillating attitude vis-à-vis Turkey, in particular: indeed – allowing for the profound differences between the two organizations – the EU is acutely aware of the very same dilemma that NATO is experiencing with many of the “leftouts”. In dealing with Turkey, the EU is developing an “association” and selection mechanism that struggles to accommodate increasing diversity among partners and would-be members, while still maintaining a high degree of cohesiveness on common values and practices – similarly to what NATO is doing through the MD. For this very reason, both the NATO and EU enlargement processes are deliberately kept open-ended.

Related to the latter point, a major issue that looms over the whole initiative is the overlap between the MD and the EuroMed Partnership. EuroMed, also known as the Barcelona process, launched in November 1995, has a formalized “security dialogue” dimension. There is indeed a substantial security agenda inherently tied to the Barcelona process<sup>10</sup>. Most of the broader goals are indeed similar to the MD, with substantial overlap and possibly a need for an explicit division of labor. As things now stand, the overall picture of “Western” initiatives toward the Mediterranean might appear rather confusing to the Southern counterparts, because no inter-institutional coordination has yet been established.

The role that NATO officially claims for itself is auxiliary to that of the EU, as clearly pointed out by Secretary General Solana: “To help stabilize the Mediterranean region and build a peaceful, friendly, economically vibrant area is [...] a major strategic objective for *all* Euro-Atlantic institutions. The European Union must take the lead, yet NATO, too, can lend a helping hand”<sup>11</sup>.

The crucial link between the two tracks – EuroMed and the MD – is the evolving Euro-American relationship, which may be seen as being “mutually constitutive” vis-à-vis a security dialogue in the Mediterranean region. By this I mean that the distinctively European role in the Transatlantic alliance will be defined in part under the pressure for some kind of visible progress generated by the “Mediterranean fora” that are slowly emerging, and at the same time the evolving European contribution to NATO will deeply affect the nature and content of the MD. As Roberto Aliboni has argued, there is great potential for a constructive adjustment of transatlantic relations with regard to the broad Mediterranean security agenda: provided all

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<sup>10</sup> See in particular: F. Tanner, 1997; and F. Attinà, in F. Attinà et al., 1998, pp.91-116.

<sup>11</sup> J. Solana, “NATO and the Mediterranean”, in N.A. Stavrou and R.C. Ewing (eds.), 1997, p.20.

principal actors will be willing and able to seize the opportunity, EuroMed and the MD could both contribute to a strengthened and renewed Euro-American link<sup>12</sup>. As will be seen later in greater detail, this perceptive evaluation is based on the assumption that current differences between the European and American views are mostly tactical rather than strategic: thus, Aliboni is putting forth a well-grounded scenario, but a best-case scenario nonetheless.

In any case, a basic objective of the MD is to make the Alliance an active participant in the possible reshaping of political and security relations in the region. Such reshaping will inevitably be based on a combination of American initiatives – especially in the Middle East – and European initiatives, increasingly pursued within the EU framework – which will be centered on North Africa but will gradually extend to parts of the Middle East, in addition to the Balkans and Southeast Europe.

## **2. Conceptual problems and political constraints**

### **2.a. Uncertain concepts**

From its inception, the MD was burdened with a series of conceptual problems. In a sense, the entire initiative is designed to set a constructive process in motion but does not rest on existing political conditions that are conducive to such a process: in fact, quite the opposite is true, as the Mediterranean region has a high conflict potential and offers no precedent of successful multilateral cooperation. In these less than ideal circumstances, the MD also lacks the virtue of clarity of purpose: the logic of the exercise is flexible enough to allow for “learning by doing”, but fails to provide consistent guidelines to participants or prospective participants. This is both the strength and the weakness of the initiative. On the one hand, constructive ambiguity may be required to keep the parties interested in the dialogue; on the other hand, a talking shop may also generate some frustration especially if it encourages frank discussion of controversial issues while failing to offer strong incentives to reach compromises and make firm commitments.

The participants need to strike a balance between what the dialogue can achieve in terms of mutual understanding, and the profound differences in perspective that it may inadvertently bring into the open.

In brief, the major factors negatively affecting the prospects of the MD are the following:

- There is a certain disagreement regarding the goals of the Dialogue, its scope and the substantive issues it ought to deal with<sup>13</sup>.
- The geopolitical scope of the MD may turn out to be largely artificial, by identifying a purely North-South axis that excludes the Balkans while including countries from both North Africa and the Middle East proper. The current geographical delimitation of the Dialogue rests on a “unitary” view of the Mediterranean basin, but does so in an inconsistent way by adopting a strictly East-West perspective, thus excluding the countries facing the Adriatic from the East.
- The Middle East peace process remains a key exogenous variable with the potential to forestall any serious effort to establish a substantive forum for dialogue in the Mediterranean.

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<sup>12</sup> R. Aliboni, 1998, pp.105-134.

<sup>13</sup> This circumstance has been aptly described by Jerrold Green, who argues that “there is no consensus amongst the Mediterranean states about the thrust, focus, significance, and ultimate goals of this dialogue” (J.D. Green, in CeSPI, 1997, p.49).

- Although there is a broad consensus that “soft security” is one significant component of the MD, security in the Mediterranean basin remains deeply affected by (“hard”) military issues, dynamics and concerns, such as weapons proliferation. In any case, it is debatable whether NATO is in fact the most appropriate organization to undertake “soft security” tasks, given its controversial image in the Muslim world and the lack of any single power or coalition with the capacity to counterbalance NATO. Traditional confidence-building measures usually require a relatively balanced strategic relationship between two or more sides.

- Relating to the previous point, the Mediterranean basin is seen by many as one of the major “fault lines” between different civilizations, and as such would seem to be especially conflict-prone. In particular, culturally and religiously inspired conflicts or interests appear to be the least amenable to compromise, negotiation and thus dialogue. The MD is essentially designed to counter such simplistic “civilizational” interpretation of the current and future security environment, but the initiative might still be affected by these views and perceptions.

The problem is not so much that a generalized “clash of civilizations” is underway, but rather that there are significant divergent interests of a practical and material nature – starting with a massive economic gap – between Northern and Southern Mediterranean countries, in a context of persistent cultural/political differences.

- The interrelation and overlap of the MD with Euro-Med (the Barcelona process) appears to be a particularly complex and partly controversial issue. No clear division of labor has been established. One of the most authoritative non-governmental sources on the evolution of the MD – the RAND Corporation – has produced a series of arguments supporting the rationale and logic of the initiative (even while acknowledging the serious limitations affecting its results) in its most recent comprehensive Report on the issue. One such argument is, in the words of the Report, that “As the EU becomes more deeply involved in the Mediterranean region, Mediterranean issues will increasingly become part of the European security agenda – and inevitably part of NATO’s agenda as well”<sup>14</sup>.

However, there seems to be a rather weak linkage between the EU’s growing involvement and effectiveness of NATO’s role: this thesis of a sort of positive “contagion effect” presupposes that the central requirement is more commitment by both the EU and NATO, but this would not suffice. In fact, the key variable is the conditions under which a commitment to overall Mediterranean security and stability is made and, accordingly, the criteria that are used to determine which countries of the Southern shore are partners, or at least potential and ad hoc partners, and which are not. Of special concern is the growing impact of EU internal politics – and the specific “enlargement politics” – as a determinant of the Europeans’ policies, both common and national<sup>15</sup>. In other words, consistency between EU and NATO strategies is far from assured in any case.

The same Report appears to admit just as much, in concluding that *“The real issue, therefore, is not whether NATO should have a Mediterranean policy but what the nature and content of that policy should be and how it can be most effectively implemented”* (italics in the original)<sup>16</sup>. Therefore, in this view the MD in its current form lacks any clear “nature and content”: indeed, NATO at present has no clear and comprehensive Mediterranean policy, except for an embryonic common position on WMD proliferation (which, however, is not specifically – much less explicitly – focused on the region). Therefore, the dialogue initiative is essentially a sort of interim policy, which one day may or may not

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<sup>14</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p.78.

<sup>15</sup> In this regard, see for example Gordon, 1998a.

<sup>16</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p.78.

usher in a full-fledged regional strategy. For the time being, the initiative suffers from very serious structural weaknesses, as the RAND study explains, because it is “divorced from NATO’s broader security and defense agenda in the Mediterranean”, which involves “such important security issues as counterproliferation, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, and humanitarian assistance”<sup>17</sup>.

In sum, the unresolved policy issue regards the nature, content and implementation of a NATO (and an EU) strategy toward the region. The sheer fact that security problems will present themselves does not imply that the NATO and EU approaches will be successfully synchronized.

An intriguing feature of the MD is that this initiative has been launched in spite of the obvious absence of a widely shared conception of its desired content, goals and realistic prospects. Evidently, there is a minimum consensus on a basic (albeit somewhat vague) rationale, at least among the “Mediterranean” members of the Alliance, who are primarily responsible for the initiative. The lack of a more solid consensus over the essence of the Dialogue has not deterred its sponsors, which is in itself an indication of the unique characteristic of this consultative forum: the unspoken premise seems to be that a weak dialogue is better than no dialogue at all.

In order to develop a better understanding of the potential and challenges of the MD, one important conceptual requirement is to constantly be aware that, as Jerrold D. Green has nicely put it, “security is not narrowly the product of geography, but is rather a state of mind”<sup>18</sup>. This is especially true of the MD, as it attempts to deal with a geopolitical region that presents major descriptive and interpretive difficulties. A strictly geographical definition would of course be contradicted by the absence of Lybia and Algeria, although the political reasons for such choices are understandable. By the same token, the inclusion of Mauritania would be questionable if geography were a prime criterion.

The secondary importance of geography should not be surprising, given the fact that NATO itself currently includes as full members countries such as Italy (a founding member), Greece, and Turkey (both members since 1952), whose “Atlantic” ties are clearly not geographical in nature. The underlying assumptions about sub-regional security to the South and Southeast of NATO are political rather than geographical, and are thus linked to behaviors and established practices/institutions in each current or potential participant in the MD. Inclusions and exclusions are thus strongly influenced by an assessment (made by NATO) of the “security state of mind” of the non-NATO countries which are located in a very broad area centered on the Mediterranean basin.

Somewhat ironically, some of the official presentations of the MD initiative tend to stress precisely the geographical rationale as if it were an autonomous and self-evident motivation and incentive for institutionalized dialogue. For instance, the *NATO Review* carried an article in its July-August 1997 issue which stated that “the idea of a dialogue with Mediterranean countries raises questions among some as to its necessity and/or underlying motive. The answer is very simple, however. Several allies border the Mediterranean [...]. This fact of geography means that there will always be a link between security in Europe and that of the Mediterranean. The dialogue is a natural outcome of this fact”<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p.80.

<sup>18</sup> Jerrold D. Green, in CeSPI, 1997, p.51.

<sup>19</sup> Jette Nordam, 1997, p.26.

Such an explanation is somewhat misleading – though perfectly understandable in the context of the benign and reassuring image that the Alliance is attempting to project – because it begs the question: why now rather than before? If geographical proximity is the obvious and objective reason for the MD, it should flow that NATO has been blind to this obvious fact during its first 45 years of existence. The point here is not to take one statement in a semi-official presentation of NATO policy out of context and use it as proof of a misguided approach, but rather to highlight that the Alliance seems intent on downplaying the markedly skewed nature of its stabilizing function in the immediate post-Cold War period. Central-Eastern Europe has been propelled to the highest level of priority by the dissolution of the Soviet presence in Europe (and by the ex-Yugoslav crises), while the “Southern Flank” has remained a secondary concern: this asymmetry is not due to a lack of challenges and risks in the Mediterranean theater, but instead to the peculiar type of risks as well as the extreme difficulty of devising a unified policy to deal with them.

Geographical issues relating to the goals and scope of the MD are especially ambiguous also because perceptions and images of the basin differ even among the NATO countries that have more direct interests at stake in the region. As will be seen in more detail, the Mediterranean/Middle East area can hardly be seen as an indivisible “security complex” – according to the definition proposed by political scientist Barry Buzan. In addition to wide country-by-country differentiation, the Persian Gulf region is still viewed by the US as a major geopolitical priority, while Italy looks at single countries such as Libya and Iran with special interest, and other allies like France continue to cultivate long-standing relations especially in North Africa. In sum, the level of fragmentation of the Mediterranean region – broadly understood – is not amenable to rapid changes through outside inducements, but is partly caused or reinforced by the different “radar screen” adopted by each NATO member.

## **2.b. Political factors constraining the Dialogue**

At least three fundamental factors act as constraints on the successful development of the MD: the lack of a truly unified policy; the unique position of Israel; the unsettled or rather immature relationship between the US and the EU in the security realm. The first factor is internal to NATO, and has to do with existing priorities and the limited nature of allied consensus; the second factor is external to the Alliance, and greatly contributes to slowing the pace of progress in the dialogue and even potentially working at cross-purposes with the aims of the MD; finally, the Euro-American relationship is both an inter-allied issue and a major determinant of the entire political landscape in the Mediterranean region.

A basic limitation of the MD stems from its relative position on the NATO agenda: the priority of (Eastward) enlargement is clearly a sign that the projection of security and stability follows primarily in an East-bound direction. The difficulty encountered by the allies in seeking to adapt NATO’s functions and internal structures (the process of “internal adaptation”, in official NATO language) to a possible new role and posture along the Southeastern flank is almost symbolized by the unresolved controversy over the AFSOUTH Command between France and the US. This delicate issue reveals the complexity of the strategic landscape not just on the Southern shore but also among key NATO members. France’s halfhearted support for the MD is an indication of the rather thin consensus behind the whole Mediterranean dimension of the Alliance.

In order to produce clarity, if not short-term results, the dialogue presupposes a comprehensive and unified strategy on the part of NATO, but the latter is still lacking<sup>20</sup>. There is even a temptation to use the MD as an opportunity to actually devise the central features of the missing allied strategy toward the Mediterranean: according to the 1998 RAND Report, “The NATO dialogue is a useful way both to promote internal discussion on such topics [as nontraditional threats] and to effectively communicate any Alliance decisions on these topics to Southern partners”<sup>21</sup>. If this is the case, one may sympathize with the dialogue partners if they proceed with extreme caution in dealing with a very powerful yet very unsure and divided alliance.

Relations between Israel and its Arab and Muslim neighbors are the second major factor to be taken into consideration. These relations are certain to affect any possible security dialogue in the Mediterranean, given Israel’s role as a major military player in the Middle East as well as a constant source of at least latent friction between the US and most Arab regimes. In addition, Israel also poses a special problem for NATO’s evolving WMD policy. Israel is a de facto nuclear power in a region that comprises other aspirants to the nuclear status, and also enjoys a special relationship with the dominant military power in the area – and a nuclear power itself – i.e. the United States. This combination puts NATO under considerable pressure to maintain an evenhanded stance vis-à-vis Israel and the Arab regimes, or it will lose any credibility as a promoter of “cooperative security”. The looming paradox is that NATO-Israeli relations may naturally become closer, but this would reduce the chances of establishing an open bi-multilateral channel for dialogue with Mediterranean countries in general. In other words, if the Alliance is to raise its profile in the region, it can not escape some involvement in Arab-Israeli politics, although this is likely to prove a risky venture.

The third factor constraining the scope and pace of the MD is of great significance for the whole structure of international relations in and around Europe. NATO inherently links the US to Europe in dealing with security issues. In the Mediterranean setting, just like elsewhere, active American participation and commitment lend more credibility to any initiative in the field of security (“cooperative” or otherwise), as the US remains the key military player in the Mediterranean (and the country with more leverage to influence Israel’s policies). Inevitably, the American role does constrain the freedom of action enjoyed by the European allies in the region, and this is especially true when national initiatives by the Europeans are the norm. When confronted with an array of national policies, the US naturally emerges as the dominant power, and the multilateral character of the NATO alliance can not change this. However, as

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<sup>20</sup> An indirect and yet useful indicator of the secondary role played by the Mediterranean dimension at the Madrid summit is provided by a report in the *International Herald Tribune* – usually a very reliable source of news and comments. The daily newspaper reported in its July 11, 1998, issue that “the unsuccessful campaign by France and eight other allies [over the two additional candidates] has not diminished its sponsors’ conviction that the alliance must look south. France, Spain and Italy insist on the need for an enduring security presence in the Balkans and the Black Sea region. They also want NATO to expand a Mediterranean dialogue with North African states to embrace such Middle Eastern nations as Israel, Egypt and Jordan”<sup>20</sup>. This part of the report is especially odd because the current dialogue already embraces the three Middle Eastern countries mentioned in the article, which thus misses the point entirely. This minor indicator, however limited in significance, may reflect the widespread impression among observers that most allied efforts will likely continue to focus on Central-Eastern Europe and Russia, with the Mediterranean remaining a concern almost exclusively for the NATO members with specific regional/subregional interests.

<sup>21</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p.53.

is well known the European members are becoming fully aware that a unified European position, both within NATO and through the EU, will allow them to capitalize on the pivotal role of the EU itself as the center of gravity in the entire Euro-Mediterranean geopolitical complex.

The almost extreme open-ended approach of the dialogue is so vague as to hinder the development of a distinctive identity for the MD, but also a clarification of the respective roles of the US and the European allies: according to Secretary General Solana, the initiative “is meant to reinforce other international efforts with Mediterranean partners, such as those undertaken by the WEU, OSCE, the Barcelona process, and the Middle East process, without either duplicating such efforts or intending to create a division of labor”<sup>22</sup>.

Because of the preceding considerations, the absence of a division of labor (and especially a clear recognition of the EU’s responsibilities) will become increasingly inconsistent with the requirements of the Mediterranean Dialogue and regional stability. To date, the description given by Secretary General Solana is perfectly appropriate but actually points to a serious limitation.

### **2.c. Opportunities amid constraints?**

Out of the three major constraints that have just been discussed, the first and the third are the ones on which NATO countries can exercise more control. Especially in these areas, there are indeed opportunities for overcoming current limitations which justify continuing efforts.

The central contribution that the MD can make in its current and somewhat minimalist format is probably that of providing a “light” and yet formal – i.e. institutionalized – channel for an exchange of ideas and proposals. In addition, practical cooperative activities, especially in the military-to-military field, have already taken place. Developing the habit of interacting (if not necessarily cooperating in high-profile settings) can produce positive effects even in a distant future, through a kind of delayed impact. In any event, one should not ignore the potential value of formalized fora even as they remain in a kind of standby mode: in case that the overall climate for NATO-Southern shore cooperation should improve for exogenous reasons, the new climate could also reverberate on the MD itself. The Dialogue could then be promptly activated to its full potential and serve as an available forum. For instance, participation by three Dialogue partners in the NATO-led SFOR operation in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Egypt, Jordan, Morocco) is a very constructive step toward enhanced joint activities; such a positive experience could well be incorporated in Dialogue programs and become an integral part of its future evolution<sup>23</sup>.

The logic of gradual institutionalization has its virtues, as NATO officially recognizes: “Since, for the most part, the motivation for launching the initiative was to enhance mutual understanding, it is necessary to have a forum, like the dialogue, in which to pursue this objective”<sup>24</sup>.

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<sup>22</sup> J. Solana, in N.A. Stavrou and R.C. Ewing (eds.), 1997, p.18.

<sup>23</sup> At the time of writing, it appears likely that some Arab contingents will participate in the KFOR mission in Kosovo.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.19.

NATO priorities, in terms of political commitment, allied consensus and resource allocation, are not in the Mediterranean right now. But priorities can and do change, sometimes quite rapidly and unexpectedly.

As to the “macro” variable of relations between the US and the European Union, an interesting scenario has been developed by Roberto Aliboni, who has consistently argued that the goal must be to create the necessary conditions for a European role as the main regional economic core and security stabilizer in the Mediterranean area<sup>25</sup>.

In his view, this would be a key element of the overall redistribution of burdens and functions among the Atlantic allies. In this sense, there would indeed be a convergence of interests between the US and its European allies – albeit a poorly appreciated one. Aliboni goes so far as to argue that a common NATO Mediterranean policy is indeed an element of “global” convergence which, if correctly developed, is bound to serve as an additional factor of cohesion (not division) for the Alliance. It would thus benefit both NATO as a whole and the US. In other words, an important byproduct of a successful MD could be a strengthened European voice in the context of NATO’s external projection as a regional stabilizer and crisis manager. In this moderately optimistic view, the Mediterranean track and the so called “European Security and Defense Identity” (ESDI) track could eventually become mutually reinforcing and set in a “virtuous cycle”.

Aliboni’s interpretation merits attention also in light of its larger, one might say “macro-regional”, implications: indeed, he argues that there are as many as three major geographical areas of potential cooperation between the NATO countries and the Arab world: the Arab-Israeli conflict (assuming it is headed toward a long-term negotiated resolution); the “grey areas” between the Muslim world and Europe, and particularly the Balkans; Sub-Saharan Africa. In all three areas, according to Aliboni, we find significant tensions but also “common interests in stabilization” in terms of the “maintenance of order and peace”<sup>26</sup>.

Such potential for cooperation deserves to be fully explored, but a general cautionary remark should be made in this respect: it is now undeniable that the Alliance has already inserted itself forcefully into the Balkan region and has taken on major responsibilities with regard to its political future. Should NATO become increasingly involved in the other two areas as well (Israel/Palestine and Sub-Saharan Africa), a look at the map would quickly show that a large chunk of the Arab world would effectively be encircled and the rest would be deeply affected by an unprecedented level of proximity with NATO and the West. Regardless of how well-intentioned NATO’s moves might be, it is easy to predict what the prevailing reaction would be among the countries of the Southern shore.

In sum, the optimistic scenario – even if it may be based on a sound assessment of common interests – assumes a political climate in which precisely the mistrust and differing perceptions that now require a “dialogue” are practically overcome. In a sense, such a scenario thus seems to put the cart before the horse. At a minimum, it requires an extraordinary amount of good will and enlightened political leadership.

In addition to this, for objective reasons the Balkan region has become a very high priority for the Alliance and thus, in the foreseeable future, can hardly be placed in the same category as other areas which are not adjacent to any current NATO member. Thus, opportunities are inextricably linked to new challenges: a strong and dynamic NATO is good for Europe, but an over-ambitious NATO becomes a source of further misperception: there is a fine line separating

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<sup>25</sup> R. Aliboni, 1998b, pp.105-134.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, p.128.

success (improving relations around the Mediterranean basin) and failure (causing further complications and strained relations in the region).

Similar concerns appear to animate a recent argument put forth by Gen. Carlo Jean – currently working with the OSCE, and a leading participant in the Italian foreign policy and strategic debate – who notes that Western and Italian interests in the Mediterranean will be best served by a close cooperation between NATO and the EU, which should concentrate their efforts and avoid competition<sup>27</sup>. In turn, such close cooperation now requires the forming of “a European political and strategic identity”. The most appropriate instrument is “political dialogue” with the Southern shore, as the fulcrum of any attempt at preventive diplomacy.

Ultimately, in spite of its significant flaws, the existing dialogue scheme is a useful starting point. Building on the MD, it is possible to establish at least a forum in which security issues can be discussed in a bi-multilateral framework (however loose). Since the Mediterranean as a region is much less structured and institutionalized than other regions (not only vis-à-vis Europe, but also North and South America and the Asia-Pacific) in terms of international “regimes”, a working multilateral forum constitutes a positive step toward facilitating – if not guaranteeing – dialogue and cooperation.

Even the current limited membership of the MD is strategically sensible, since at least three of the Southern shore countries that are already involved in the MD, i.e. Egypt, Tunisia and Morocco, play a significant geopolitical role. Along with Turkey, they hold the geographical key to the freedom of navigation in the Mediterranean; at the same time, they are (again, together with Turkey) in search of a political (including key socio-religious aspects) and economic formula to ensure their own political and social stability in the context of sustainable economic growth. It is clear that multiple channels should be used to constructively affect the political evolution of these strategically important countries. Even a marginal contribution to the reduction of the level of mistrust toward “the West” among these states and – a much more difficult task – their societies, would be a significant achievement.

### **3. Controversial issues affecting the Mediterranean Dialogue**

The innovative features of the MD imply a high degree of vulnerability to political developments originating in the region or even at its margins. Because the Dialogue is not a long-established and tested channel, but rather a work in progress, its evolution is constantly affected by events in the area, to the point that, under the worst of circumstances, the whole momentum could be lost. Although the Middle East peace process is the first item that comes to mind, the possible sources of trouble go well beyond that: there are other issues, controversies and risks also have a potential to seriously undermine the MD while the initiative is still in its “infant” (or perhaps adolescent) stage of development. What these issues have in common is that they dim the prospects for regional cooperation by reducing the level of mutual trust or showing the limited effectiveness of existing mechanisms for crisis prevention and management.

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<sup>27</sup> C. Jean, “Il prossimo passo è il patto di stabilità per il Mediterraneo”, *Corriere della Sera*, June 19, 1999, p.5.

I will indicate five such issues, but other contingencies could be imagined which would produce similar effects.

The first and most prominent issue remains the Middle East Peace Process, which is almost invariably indicated as a key determinant of the entire political climate between the Northern and Southern shore of the Mediterranean. The centrality of the Arab-Israeli peace process has long been taken for granted, although it remains to be demonstrated that there is no way out of the present predicament: in other words, the linkage is largely a deliberate – and not necessarily wise – policy choice on the part of the Arab governments. This circumstance should not be forgotten, because it is clear to everybody that, whatever the outcome of each step in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, peace and especially long-term stabilization in the area will be far from assured even in the event of a formal negotiated arrangement. Middle East politics will remain a conundrum of different interests and world views. Thus, just as countries like Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, have managed to stabilize and cultivate their relations with the United States and Europe over the years even in the absence of unambiguous progress in the Middle East peace process, a “de-linking” is conceivable and certainly desirable also in the context of the MD, as well as in that of EuroMed.

On the contrary, if the Middle East peace process remains the sole yardstick to assess the political climate in the entire Mediterranean region, the danger arises that, instead of functionally complementing each other, the MD and the Euro-Med process might well be damaging each other's prospects. A sort of downward spirals may set in, which would have extremely negative effects.

Arguably, the Middle East Peace Process relates to one of the most delicate and long-lasting political disputes of this century: thus, it would be advisable not to single it out as the measure of success for NATO's Mediterranean track.

The second major issue with a great potential to affect the MD is the broad debate over the future functions of NATO. This controversial issue has taken the form of an ongoing and somewhat “virtual” debate over the possible extension of NATO's missions to areas well outside any regional/geographical definition of the Alliance's responsibilities. The issue is somewhat confusing, as there is no official statement by the Alliance to date referring to anything approaching a “global NATO”; yet, talk of a “global NATO” has been a source of some concern among the European allies (and in the US foreign policy community) in the course of 1997 and 1998, following a few ambiguous statements especially by US officials – including Secretary of State Madeleine Albright – alluding to the possibility of NATO playing a role as “a force for peace” in area well outside the Alliance's defense perimeter. Secretary Albright was keen to remind, in May 1998, that the allies “always had the option to use NATO's strength beyond its borders to protect our interests [and] come together to meet common threats that might emanate from beyond the North Atlantic area”<sup>28</sup>. These and other similar statements later required some qualifications by Albright herself and the US Permanent Representative to NATO, Alexander Vershbow<sup>29</sup>.

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<sup>28</sup> Statement by Secretary of State Madeleine Albright at NAC Ministerial, Luxembourg, May 28, 1998 ([www.usis.it/wireless/wf980528/98052807.htm](http://www.usis.it/wireless/wf980528/98052807.htm)).

<sup>29</sup> On the occasion of the NAC meeting of December 8, 1998, Secretary Albright stated, in response to questions, that “we are not trying to get NATO to go global. What we want is for NATO to be able to act in the area that in now acts in and also to be able to have missions out of area that affect the interests of NATO members” ([www.usis.it/wireless/wf981209/98120907.htm](http://www.usis.it/wireless/wf981209/98120907.htm)). A letter by Ambassador Vershbow to the New York Times was published in the newspaper on December 8, 1998, in which it was argued that “NATO

Non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) is an extremely sensitive policy area in which NATO has been taking some innovative steps in recent years in terms of interallied coordination, and which constitutes an especially delicate issue in North-South relations. This is true in the Mediterranean as well as elsewhere. How the WMD non-proliferation issue has been framed directly affects the content and prospects of the Dialogue. In addition, the interplay of concerns for internal stability and intra-regional dynamics makes it difficult for Southern shore governments to fully embrace notions of cooperative security based on arms reduction and restraint in acquisitions. Thus, NATO – while pursuing legitimate and necessary anti-proliferation policies – must be extremely careful to avoid triggering further “security dilemmas” for the Dialogue countries, by its words and deeds.

With the end of the Cold War, the role of Turkey in the Mediterranean setting has become more pivotal than it used to be, due to the opening up of new opportunities for exerting influence into the Caucasus but also due to the special significance of Turkey as simultaneously a NATO ally, a Muslim country, and a geopolitical actor located in close proximity to several sources of actual or potential instability and risks to the Alliance.

The importance of Turkey is further enhanced by its unsettled relations with the European Union and the unpredictable fate of Turkish aspirations to EU membership. The role of Greece as a seemingly permanent source of opposition to Turkey’s bid only exacerbates the problem.

Although Ankara is a longtime ally, the role of Turkey vis-a-vis the Euro-Atlantic institutions can be viewed as a sort of microcosm of Mediterranean challenges, opportunities and frictions. Indeed, it involves issues of identity, culture and religion; subregional interests; fluid alignments and economic relations in Southeast Europe and the Middle East<sup>30</sup>.

In a worst-case scenario, Turkey could become a sort of Achille’s heel for NATO, which would seriously damage the Alliance’s overall effectiveness. A complex multilateral relationship among Turkey, Syria, Israel, Iran and Iraq, is likely to be the center of gravity of Middle East politics and security well into the 21st century. At the same time, Turkey is a key actor in the context of any conceivable relationship between NATO (the Northern shore) and the Southern shore. Thus, Turkey’s role can hardly be exaggerated.

Turkey has managed to cultivate working relations with both the Muslim world and Israel: thus, it is in many ways a living example of how Western interests can be combined in a multifaceted policy. If only for these reasons, Turkey is a case likely to be watched very carefully by Southern shore countries (including the Dialogue partners) in their search for clues on a possible *modus vivendi* with the Western Alliance.

Precisely because Turkey is a longtime member of the Alliance, NATO has, to some extent, “internalized” that country’s domestic difficulties and its sensitive relations with another NATO member, that is, Greece. However, apparently this has not made it easier for the EU to proceed with an analogous “internalization” dynamic. Under the international conditions of the

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is still about the security of its members, but Allies recognize the obvious fact that many of the threats to their security came from outside their territories and, in some cases, from beyond Europe’s periphery”.

<sup>30</sup> It is no accident that many of the same concerns that are often voiced by Arab countries regarding the current NATO enlargement policy have also been raised by various observers in Turkey, although from a very different vantage point. For instance, Ali Karaosmanoglu has argued that “the debate on NATO enlargement has done surprisingly little to elucidate the possible implications for Europe’s southeastern periphery and adjacent regions such as the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Black Sea area, and the eastern Mediterranean”. The author goes on to advocate a long pause in the enlargement process as the only acceptable solution, especially given Russia’s reactions. A. Karaosmanoglu, 1999, p.213.

Cold War, the task of integrating Turkey in a relatively static multilateral political-military structure turned out to be less difficult than integrating it in a growing and dynamic economic-political structure like the European Community/EU. It is worth asking if this is going to be the case in the post-Cold War environment, too.

The role of Turkey is bound to become increasingly critical, especially from an Italian perspective, as the center of gravity of the Alliance is being pushed to the North as a consequence of the first round of NATO enlargement. It can be assumed that the relative weight of Turkey as a national actor, and thus the level of unpredictability, will grow to the same extent that the Mediterranean role of NATO fails to be strengthened.

In sum, if NATO's "internal" and long-standing link to a Muslim nation – with which close military, political and economic ties have been developed in the course of four decades – is weakened or begins to wither, how can the Alliance hope to successfully develop a whole new initiative toward the Southern shore?

A more specific issue flows from the previous one: the Cyprus question remains unresolved in spite of the ongoing attempt to "Europeanize" its development through the inclusion of Cyprus in EU accession negotiations. Indeed, according to the 1998 RAND study on the MD, "the Greek-Turkish dispute over the Aegean and Cyprus is likely to remain a source of concern and keep the Alliance's attention focused on the Mediterranean"<sup>31</sup>. In a sense, then, it is argued that the difficulties experienced by the Alliance in managing its own long-standing internal political rift will continue to force NATO to come to terms with other sources of instability in the whole Mediterranean region: the MD may thus be useful to demonstrate a genuine concern for the broader regional environment, while quiet pressure may continue to be exercised on the parties to the Cyprus dispute.

However, the fact remains that from an outside perspective the Cyprus question may be the best example of NATO's inability to operate as a crisis manager, by devising a viable, lasting and self-sustaining solution to political controversies even between two of its own members.

In the Cold War context, the chief allied concern was, understandably, to prevent any development which could negatively affect the regional alignments and favor the Soviet Union. Freezing the crisis thus appeared as an acceptable compromise.

With the end of the Cold War, the Cyprus question presents the Alliance with new challenges and uncertainties, also because of its interpenetration with Turkey's bid to EU membership. There is now a collateral political risk to transforming the Green Line dividing Greek and Turkish Cypriots into a permanent border and a source of recrimination: that the island might become a sort of crossroads for international crime and Islamic terrorism.

This is all the more important in light of NATO's ongoing adaptation: allied leaders constantly underline the role of the "new" alliance with regard to both crisis-management and, broadly speaking, the new challenges to European security (from ethnic and nationalist-based conflict to WMD proliferation, and from drug and arms trafficking to terrorism). Ultimately, the de facto partition of Cyprus has produced not only a situation of permanent military tension between two NATO members, but also an environment in which precisely those non-traditional risks and threats can be generated.

The intricate Cyprus issue should be viewed in a new light in the aftermath of NATO's massive and almost decade-long involvement in the Balkans, which has been multidimensional in nature and is redefining the nature of the Alliance. NATO's claim to play the role of security-provider for the "periphery" of the Euro-Atlantic area places the Alliance into a

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<sup>31</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p.XII.

position of high strategic exposure vis-à-vis both external sources of conflict and internal rifts between its own member states. Higher expectations demand a higher-level performance. In this connection, it is true, as NATO officials often claim, that the Greco-Turkish dispute over Cyprus has never reached the threshold of political or military violence in recent years – the Alliance may thus have served as an effective and silent crisis-manager behind the scenes. And yet, the most powerful and advertised crisis-manager in the Euro-Atlantic area can hardly gain in credibility by simply continuing to freeze an ethno-national dispute between two of its member-states, however intractable it may be.

A less obvious factor with possible implications for the main promoters of the MD (the “Club-Med” within the Alliance) is the recent events in the Adriatic, with special regard to Albania. Albeit indirectly, the humanitarian operation carried out by an ad hoc coalition in Albania in the Spring of 1997 – “Operation Alba” – illustrates a potential weakness in the current functions of NATO as the major security-provider in the region.

In a paradoxical manner, the relative success of Operation Alba, in the Adriatic Sea and on Albanian territory, can be read as a sign that NATO is not the most adequate institution under all conditions even when stability at the local (or sub-regional ) level is clearly threatened and a member of the Alliance not only inevitably affected but also directly involved. As is well known, the limited humanitarian operation was conducted, under the authority of a UN Security Council mandate (UNSC Resolution 1101 of March 28, 1997), by Italian forces with the support of a small “coalition of the willing”, but initially without the full backing of either NATO or the EU. It can be argued, of course, that the level of risk/threat and the size of the operation simply did not require a NATO intervention and thus did not justify an activation of the various allied channels and instruments. However, the type of instability generated by the virtual collapse of the Albanian state in 1997 bears a certain resemblance to contingencies that are being taken into consideration by NATO (and WEU) planners in dealing with the Mediterranean basin.

This is not, by any means, to argue that the MD would have been an ideal tool to deal in a more effective way with the Albanian turmoil and its effects on a neighboring country such as Italy. Still, in connection to the MD, it is significant that not only the Alliance stayed uninvolved, but PfP, of which Albania was already a member by the time of the acute phase of its domestic crisis, failed to serve a practical purpose under the pressure of events.

A de facto division of labor or functional specialization seemed to prevail with respect to the Albanian crisis of 1997: NATO manages Bosnia-type or Kosovo-type crises, while individual countries and ad hoc coalitions (formed primarily by Europeans) are better suited to manage lower-level crises or local sources of instability before they can spill over into neighbouring areas. If this principle is applied to the entire Mediterranean basin, not only the EU (along with the WEU) disappears from the screen, but also the practical value of the MD becomes questionable with regard to precisely the types of crises where it would appear more logical to activate a channel for limited cooperation between Mediterranean countries: essentially humanitarian in nature, low-intensity, geographically contained, and whenever possible in a preventive mode.

In sum, the case of the Alba Operation serves to illustrate that the MD would do well, from an early stage, to fully incorporate – and embrace, at least conceptually – the trend toward flexible cooperative instruments designed to deal with specific and local sources of instability in a timely fashion. As Ettore Greco has noted, the Italian-led operation, despite the serious obstacles it had to overcome through improvisation, eventually demonstrated “that efficient

combination between national and multilateral action is achievable”<sup>32</sup>. This lesson should not be lost, which implies that more can be done to be prepared to prevent and manage similar crises, should they occur again in the Mediterranean. The hardly controversial nature of the Albanian mini-crisis – and the subsequent brief outside intervention – of 1997 makes it almost an ideal case study in limited crisis-management<sup>33</sup>.

Generalizing on the basis of a single case is always a tricky endeavour, and Albania is unique in many ways, given its size, location vis-à-vis Italy, domestic conditions, proximity to the core of Balkan instability. The experience of Albania might help develop a shared sense of the basic standards of political and civil order, as well as some preliminary arrangements on how to act when a breakdown occurs. The type of institutional and economic collapse that the Albanians experienced is fortunately a rare occurrence, but “complex emergencies” (even on a small scale) should be an integral part of NATO thinking also in the Dialogue context. Thus, a limited success achieved under less-than-ideal conditions through improvisation could be transformed into a useful point of reference.

This daunting set of problems should be included in the substantial “Mediterranean agenda” that NATO, as well as the EU, will have to tackle in the years to come. Taken together, they obviously call for a coherent and carefully crafted Alliance strategy. Of course, the MD, in and of itself, can not hope and was not designed to address such a vast array of political and strategic issues. However, the initiative is closely related to them and finds itself caught in a sort of dilemma with respect to this broader Mediterranean security agenda: as the already quoted 1998 RAND Report states, “The Alliance also needs to recognize that expanding and intensifying the dialogue is likely to bring a set of new complicated issues, such as the self-selection problem in the case of a PFM. However, all these considerations stand a better chance of receiving systematic and thorough attention if NATO devises a comprehensive Alliance strategy for the South, of which the initiative would be a significant, but not exclusive, part”<sup>34</sup>.

This is certainly a sensible recommendation, based on the most logical sequence – a potentially upgraded MD flowing from a better defined regional strategy. However, such a comprehensive approach would probably make the MD less, rather than more, relevant as an autonomous initiative. The problem lays with the proposed notion of “*a strategy for the South*”, which would raise the well-known specter of a sort of “greater NATO” in search of an ever-expanding role, *in* the South as well as *in cooperation with* the South. The dilemmas of NATO’s own identity would then come full circle, leading us back to the two fundamental questions: what is the image that the Alliance wishes to project and what is the level of mistrust that it is ready to tolerate as the price for broader functions and missions? One of the reasons why NATO members hesitate before devising a consistent strategy for the South is precisely that the detailed formulation of such a strategy might well defy the purpose of rendering the Alliance less ominously dominant in the eyes of the Arab countries and other concerned observers (from Russia to China to India).

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<sup>32</sup> E. Greco, 1998, p.208.

<sup>33</sup> With respect to the Albanian mini-crisis, Stefano Silvestri has highlighted the troubling failure of coordination among the key regional organizations: in particular, “the Albanian crisis was well inside the limits and the tasks identified in Petersberg by the WEU, yet this was not acted upon, nor did the WEU play a role vis-à-vis NATO, in order to utilize its powerful assets to make up for some of the technical shortcomings of Operation Alba”. S. Silvestri, 1997, p.98.

<sup>34</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p. 56.

The dilemma is not easily overcome: NATO has chosen a path of profound adaptation and reform, but in doing so – even with the best of intentions – it risks setting off several alarm bells which are disseminated all around the Mediterranean region. If a passive stance is no longer an option, choosing the right messages to send out is now critically important. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is worth noting that the more the Alliance gets into the “dialogue” business, the more its communication skills and strategies will have to become sophisticated.

#### **4. The notion of “Security Complex”: a useful analytical tool as applied to the MD.**

For analytical purposes, it is worth attempting to apply the notion of “Security Complex”, drawn from the theoretical literature on security studies and international relations, to the Mediterranean region (bearing in mind that various definitions of the region itself are possible). Applying the concept of Security Complex will be useful in order to pinpoint some key problems affecting the MD, as well as NATO as a security organization, on the basis of a more accurate picture of the environment in which the MD is developing.

Barry Buzan is one of the political scientists that have addressed the issue of Security Complexes in the most explicit and articulate way to date. Buzan defines a Security Complex as “a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot realistically be considered apart from one another”<sup>35</sup>. He also notes that “security complexes emphasize the interdependence of rivalry as well as that of shared interests” (p.190).

With respect to the broader regional - or rather macroregional - environment, Buzan adds that “a Security Complex exists where a set of security relationships stands out from the general background by virtue of its relatively strong, inward-looking character, and the relative weakness of its outward security interactions with its neighbours” (p.193).

The concept of Security Complex is particularly suitable to the task at hand because it does not require institutionalization or established multilateral practices as a precondition for assuming a significant degree of strategic coherence of a region or subregion. On the basis of the definition put forth by Buzan, it emerges quite clearly that the Mediterranean basin is not in its entirety a Security Complex. This does not necessarily contrast with the assertion – contained in the 1998 RAND Report – that “the distinction between European and Mediterranean security is becoming increasingly blurred as a result of the spillover of economic and social problems from the South, such as immigration, terrorism, and drug trafficking, to Europe”<sup>36</sup>. However, it does contradict the idea that security is indivisible for the countries on the Northern and Southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The assumption of “indivisible security” seems to underlie the most ambitious proposals for a PfM as a progressive development of the MD. In this light, it is no accident that the US, in particular, has adopted a very cautious attitude toward the dialogue, as the country with less immediate geopolitical connections to the area. There are of course very long-standing and strong American interests in the region, but the US has a truly global approach to international (and national) security:

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<sup>35</sup> B. Buzan, 1991, p.190.

<sup>36</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p. 77.

unlike its European, and especially South European, allies, the current American role in the Mediterranean is not dictated by geography, and only in part by history.

Looking at possible Security Complexes in the Mediterranean region further highlights the overlap between the Barcelona process and the MD, which has been noted earlier: both processes, each based on a very well-established organization, attempt to project stability on the same set of Security Complexes, while also aiming at a partial redefinition of the Complexes themselves. However, a major obstacle to policy coordination between the EU and NATO stems from the fact that they are defining in different ways the fault lines between Complexes. Turkey is the prime example of this divergence: the EU is driven by political and economic considerations, while NATO looks at Turkey's role from a geostrategic perspective.

The problem in this regard is not that the most important Mediterranean issues are on the EU's agenda and not on NATO's agenda, or vice versa: they are on both agendas, but in different ways. The problem is not one of neglect, but of hardly compatible approaches.

On the basis of the Security Complex notion is that, it also becomes easier to illustrate the paradoxical nature of both Islam and pan-arabism as political forces. Both tend to legitimize a politically vague and yet widespread idea of commonality and shared interests, while also contributing to political dynamics (internally as well as internationally) which are not conducive to amity but instead have traditionally sparked competition if not open hostility among certain Islamic and/or Arab states in the region. Egypt's traditional bid for Arab leadership, and Iran's role as a non-Arab standard-bearer of the ideal of an Islamic state, are two cases in point.

As Barry Buzan argues, "Arab nationalism and Islam both weaken the identity of the local regimes, and legitimize an unusually high degree of security interpenetration" (p.197). This statement needs some qualification or at least clarification: one can argue, in fact, that Arab nationalism and Islam also *provide* significant legitimacy and identity to the local states, albeit in a way that does not always promote strong *state identities* in a secular sense. In other words, Buzan's argument is probably more persuasive if understood specifically in the context of a state-centric and essentially Western view of security relations (which he explicitly adopts in the book from which the quotations are taken)<sup>37</sup>.

This analysis suggests that pan-arabism and Islam along the Mediterranean's Southern shore are powerful enough to provide some sense of unity and even community in the region, but not powerful enough to significantly dampen or resolve local sources of conflict. Because of these features, the Middle-East/North Africa Security Complex poses a daunting problem to any NATO planner with an interest in establishing a form of dialogue or even a stable and constructive form of *security interaction*. The Arab countries are not sufficiently unified to act as a "bloc" at the international level, nor sufficiently independent (or secure) vis-à-vis each other to view relations with NATO as their prime security concern.

As Buzan concludes, it is generally the case that "external actors [such as NATO or individual NATO countries] can only have any hope of changing local patterns of hostility when they impose their own presence on the countries concerned" – and he single out as a rare

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<sup>37</sup> Buzan's view is state-centric to the extent that the state remains "central to the whole concept of security" (p.57), although "security analysis requires a view that places state and [international] system into a mutually constitutive relationship" (p.60). According to the author, the state needs to be understood "in the broad sense of territorial-political-societal nexus" (p.61) and thus should fully include dimensions such as ideals, religion, and collective identity. Even so, Buzan's approach remains essentially state-centric, albeit resting on a complex and multifaceted concept of what we might term the "state as actor" and the "state as nexus of forces and interests".

exception the US role in the peace reached between Israel and Egypt (p.215). Turning our attention to the MD, it is very unlikely that this relatively low-profile initiative, enjoying limited support among key members of NATO, will turn into an instrument to “impose [NATO’s] presence on the countries concerned”. If this reasoning is correct, the Alliance will not be able to change local patterns of conflict: it would then be wise, for the time being, to focus on the “dialogue” dimension instead of investing on the much more complicated and uncertain “partnership” dimension.

Ultimately, one is constantly reminded that the Mediterranean region is not unitary, let alone cohesive. This is true from the political, economic and cultural points of view. The Mediterranean basin comprises a large number of national actors belonging to various subregional complexes, linked by a series of interacting rivalries, animosities, and highly competitive relationships. Of course, alignments and alliances are also present and sometimes well established. In other words, the basin is practically a patchwork of sub-regional complexes showing little coherence.

As an indication of how much this non-unitary assumption is actually ingrained in mainstream strategic thinking, one has only to look at the geo-strategic structure adopted by a most prestigious publication such as the *Strategic Survey*, produced annually by the International Institute of Strategic Studies of London: in the 1994-1999 period (since the launching of the MD) the Mediterranean never appears as one of the areas in which the world is divided for analytical purposes<sup>38</sup>. The reason for the choice seems quite compelling.

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<sup>38</sup> *Strategic Survey*, Oxford University Press, London, 1994-95; 1995-96; 1996-97; 1997-98; 1998-99. Not accidentally, the only topic which might be seen as having a marked “Mediterranean” dimension in a broad sense is that of “Three Threats from Radical Islam” – treated in the 1994-1995 issue – which puts under scrutiny Algeria, Egypt and Saudi Arabia (the latter being hardly a Mediterranean country, albeit a key actor in Middle Eastern affairs). Also in terms of the section on “Strategic Geography”, the British publication adopts the same criterion, thus treating the Mediterranean basin essentially as a line separating Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

## **PART II:**

### **5. Italy and the United States**

The interaction between Italy and the United States in the context of the MD is especially interesting because of the contrasting roles played by each of these two NATO members with respect to the dialogue. Italy is an active promoter, while the US is almost a bystander – although at the same time its influence on the prospects of the initiative is great. The different perspectives on the MD reflect a natural development in the life of the 50-year-old Alliance that may now be reaching a turning point, i.e. the increasing asymmetry of geopolitical views of the various member states. What has been argued by Joseph Lepgold with regard to peace operations conducted by NATO largely applies to the MD as well: due to a structural “collective action” problem in the absence of clear, direct and massive threats, “If NATO governments want to have a viable post-Cold War peace-operations mission, they must find ways to highlight the potential selective incentives that are available. To varying degrees, all of these involve decentralizing the alliance and assigning responsibility for specific elements of its peace-operations mission to particular actors”<sup>39</sup>. When some member states – such as, in this case, Italy, Spain and Portugal – express a strong interest for an initiative consisting of a regional “dialogue”, it is quite sensible to allow them to pursue the idea within the limits defined by allied consensus. In the long run, however, allied solidarity is a precondition for any collective endeavour. The interplay of specific initiatives promoted by interested NATO members and the responses provided by the US will shape the future of the MD.

#### **5.a. Italy’s positions, perceptions and interests: an overview**

When the Mediterranean Dialogue is placed in the broader context of NATO’s internal and external adaptation (especially the enlargement process), it clearly appears that Italy has specific interests which it is trying to pursue through and within the Alliance. As events in and around the Balkans have made unmistakably clear in the 1990s, Italy is strategically exposed and thus greatly benefits from a solid anchoring to NATO, as well as to the EU. In fact, South-East is the direction from which virtually any conceivable threat to Italian vital interests can come. As then Defense Minister Beniamino Andreatta stated in November 1997 at a Conference on the MD, jointly organized by the Center for Strategic Studies of the Italian Defense Ministry (CeMISS) and the RAND Corporation, “there is still an arc of crisis and instability that goes from Morocco to the Persian Gulf to Central Asia, and worries not only Southern Europe, but also the EU and NATO”<sup>40</sup>. A dual concern is contained in this analysis: first, there is an attempt to emphasize the “macro” and multidirectional nature of Southern risks along the extended “arc of crisis”; second, and consistently with the previous point, there is an implicit call for European and Atlantic solidarity in support of the more exposed countries of the Northern shore.

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<sup>39</sup> J. Lepgold, 1998, p.105.

<sup>40</sup> CeMISS, 1997, p.22.

Another similarity with the Balkans is that in the broader Mediterranean area it is by no means certain that Italian medium-term objectives will invariably coincide with American goals and interests. As will be seen shortly, some observers are actually predicting an increasing divergence of interests. At the same time, a degree of Italian autonomy and “local” leadership on specific issues or crises may be highly appreciated in Washington as a constructive contribution to stability and an instance of useful devolution: the chief example is of course the case of Albania’s painful search for a modicum of stability, viable institutions and economic development.

On the one hand, subregional and local opportunities are growing in importance; on the other hand, the Mediterranean remains a highly fragmented region with the consequence that risks are also diffuse. If there is one country for which the unitary view of the Mediterranean basin makes strategic sense, this is Italy. Given its geographical location, Italy has a major stake in the continuing viability of NATO as the dominant military power in the basin, with the ability to control the sea-lanes and the choke-points that make the Mediterranean accessible from East and West. Creating zones of differentiated security would be a grave strategic setback. This is an overriding security interest which guides Italian foreign policy. Therefore, there is no substitute for NATO’s role and for the US military presence. Diplomatic initiatives by the Alliance toward the South are more than welcome and may be a useful addition to the growing multilateralization of security affairs, provided they do not interfere with the vital Euro-American link and the unifying function of NATO. In other words, a less fragmented and divided Mediterranean region could, over the long haul, ease Italy’s concerns and actually increase the practical value of its “central” location. Mainstream political and strategic thinking posits that, in the meantime, American disengagement is not in Italy’s interests, precisely because the US brings an essentially unitary view of the Mediterranean.

Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola – currently Chief of Staff of the Ministry of Defense – has made the same point, in an interview with the author of this Report, by cautioning against a Euro-American division of labor in the Mediterranean region. This would signify the loss of the unitary vision that we have inherited from NATO’s established practice.

In another interview obtained in the context of this Research Project, Marco Pezzoni, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee from the DS (Democratici di Sinistra) Party, has argued that, although the EU should be the primary instrument of Italian policies toward the South, NATO has a large role to play. NATO’s external projection should be driven by an inclusive logic, which can not rely solely on the enlargement process: on the contrary, the broadest possible participation by Southern shore countries needs to be facilitated. It is also crucial, in his assessment, to encourage the US to be more directly engaged in the dialogue process.

In Italy, the 1990s have witnessed a remarkable increase in the level of attention devoted to foreign policy issues as well as the emerging security challenges. In particular, this is evidenced by several specialized publications focusing on Italy’s international role, status and interests<sup>41</sup>. A central consideration underlying much of the recent debate is that the country should attempt to systematically exploit its “geopolitical capital”, in an era in which the

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<sup>41</sup> The series of publications sponsored by the Study Center of the Defense Minister (CeMISS) is a major case in point, with a special focus on the evolving notion of the country’s national interests.

combination of geography (especially geo-economics) and entrepreneurial capabilities determine the fate of nations<sup>42</sup>.

This approach is associated with a willingness to overcome the traditional “institutionalist” view of Italian foreign policy, which advocates the primacy of multilateral venues in the three “concentric circles” of the EU, NATO and the UN. Without rejecting an active participation in each of the three concentric circles, foreign policy experts like Sergio Romano and Ludovico Incisa di Camerana (both former career diplomats) have advocated a new, more creative and more independent-minded interpretation of Italy’s relations with its key allies, especially the US<sup>43</sup>. On relevant issues (such as how to deal with Libya, Iran, Iraq, or how to promote long-term stability in former Yugoslavia), tactical and even strategic differences are expected to become more frequent than in the past.

In essence, the 1990s have witnessed a profound shift in the prevailing Italian perception of the surrounding security environment, and for good reason. Almost the entire construction of post-war Italian foreign policy was predicated upon a relatively static international structure: allied politics as seen from the viewpoint of a minor ally used to put a premium on steadiness, loyalty and reliability in terms of passive support – instead of adaptability, autonomous decisionmaking capabilities and tangible commitment to make an active contribution. Once freed from the tight constraints imposed by the bipolar order, Italy has realized that new destabilizing forces have been unleashed, and that in the new security environment all the three following assets are required: effective multilateral organizations with (economic and military) teeth; a collective ability to initiate and pursue dialogue with countries that remain outside the Euro-Atlantic structures; and an assertive national strategy designed to hedge against possible failures or slow and inadequate responses by the key multilateral institutions.

There are three underlying Italian interests in the context of NATO’s recent evolution from a pure “defensive alliance” to a de facto “security management institution”. In particular, at least three goals which reflect “Mediterranean-related interests” and concerns have certainly contributed to shaping Italy’s attitude vis-à-vis the first round of NATO enlargement<sup>44</sup>.

The first key interest is that enlargement to Central-Eastern Europe should not be detrimental to a gradual shifting of NATO’s focus toward the South, where most future sources of instability are likely to be located. A “geostrategically balanced” Alliance is central to Italian security in the long run, both looking to the Balkans and to the Mediterranean. While the Kosovo crisis of 1999 appears to have definitely convinced NATO (as well as the EU) to invest significant resources in Balkan “stabilization”, a more focused Mediterranean policy still remains an elusive goal.

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<sup>42</sup> See in particular: P.P. Portinaro, 1996; CeMISS, 1997. Other influential works in the same vein are: C. Jean, 1995; P. Savona, C. Jean, 1995. Others have focused specifically on Italy’s “central” geopolitical location, which has acquired a renewed importance with the end of the Cold War: according to L. Incisa di Camerana (1996, pp.78-79), such location makes Italy a major power; according to C.M. Santoro (in F. Corsico, 1998, p.34) Italy is like “a sentinel of the West vis-à-vis the Adriatic, the Ionium, and the Channel of Sicily”, with an indispensable function as the unsinkable carrier of NATO operations in the Balkans.

<sup>43</sup> S. Romano, 1995; L.Incisa di Camerana, 1996. Largely in the same vein, a wide and pretty diverse policy and intellectual community, gathered primarily around the journal *Limes - rivista italiana di geopolitica*, has conducted – since the founding of the magazine in 1993 – a lively debate on the costs, benefits and possible content of a non-traditional foreign policy agenda. Adopting a more theoretical perspective, similar arguments have also been made by C.M. Santoro.

<sup>44</sup> M Dassù, R. Menotti, 1997, pp.73-76.

The second interest has to do specifically with the Southeastern and Balkan dimension of “the South”, and indirectly connects to the Mediterranean basin: Italian official support for Slovenia’s and Romania’s bid for NATO membership, before and after the Madrid Summit of July 1997, was in part a tangible sign of a genuine desire to extend the Alliance’s reach to the South, as well as to enhance Italy’s role within NATO’s Southern Command. It must be added that support for Romania was largely a byproduct of a deal between Rome and Paris designed to assure support for both Slovenia (Italy’s candidate) and Romania (France’s candidate), in a package. Even so, geopolitical considerations also dictate that NATO should take visible steps to demonstrate an increasing commitment to security in the South of Europe and beyond.

The third major goal is strengthening the European presence and visibility within NATO, in all its various incarnations: European pillar, ESDI, WEU. In the longer term, the EU itself is regarded as the natural locus of the European security and defense dimension, through development of a coherent Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Of course, there are various institutional paths which can be chosen, and the choice will make a difference in terms of the kind of enhanced European contribution that will result. Italy was among the EU members supporting the eventual merging of WEU into the EU since the Rome EU Summit of March 1997. In any case, recent signs of a stronger European determination to create a common security and defense identity (ESDI) are probably making it easier to overcome the traditional Italian attitude of sticking to a “special” relationship with the US as long as the European option seemed distant or unrealistic. This whole reasoning clearly applies to the Mediterranean as well, where US military preponderance remains uncontested but, from Italy’s viewpoint, European political leadership would be welcome on many issues.

In this regard, a number of analysts have underlined in recent years that, in dealing with Mediterranean issues, Italy should not attempt to simply mediate between US and (presumed) “European” interests in the area, but should rather concentrate on drawing all of the key allies in a common strategy toward the whole region. At the same time, it has been noted that in objective terms the importance of the Mediterranean region is less crucial to Italian economic interests than that of Central and Eastern Europe. Here, an important distinction can be drawn between geo-economic and geo-political priorities, whereby (in relative terms) the Mediterranean area is a geopolitical priority but not a geoeconomic one.

It follows, in this line of reasoning, that NATO and the EU can indeed complement each other and ought to pursue coordinated policies, rather than proceed independently of each other. After all, the same is true, in reverse order, in continental Europe, where Italy’s high geoeconomic priorities are coupled with a relatively low level of geopolitical concern. The Balkan region is of course in a class of its own and poses unique challenges.

EU-NATO coordination thus turns out to be a necessary condition for stabilizing the Mediterranean theater. The question is: on the basis of which NATO strategy? The answer to this general question will determine the Italian attitude toward the MD, more specifically.

Italy, as a member of NATO, the EU, WEU, and at least geographically a Mediterranean country, can use various channels to pursue its interests in the area. In a most simplified form, these are

1. national policies;
2. a loose policy coordination on specific issues with the United States, as the major military and political power in the region (whose core forces deployed in the area are based in Naples) and a traditional ally;

3. a loose policy coordination with its EU/WEU partners, in the context of CFSP or ad hoc regional initiatives and fora (the current Euro-Med initiative can be ascribed to this category);
4. a more integrated action in the context of the EU/WEU, in which common goals and instruments are emphasized and a unitary voice on matters of policy is the rule (such a line could potentially be pursued through an enhanced Euro-Med);
5. a closely coordinated action in the context of NATO, by defining common interests and instruments, upgrading the Mediterranean dialogue and pressing the Alliance to focus more consistently on the problems of the Southern flank by also committing increasing resources.

Of course, a mix of various options can be devised and is indeed the most likely outcome at any given time. However, option 1 is partly contradictory vis-à-vis both options 4 and 5. In turn, options 4 and 5 need to be carefully coordinated if they are to be complementary rather than simply overlapping or even competitive with each other.

In response to the rather unsettled conditions prevailing in the Mediterranean, Italian policies toward the area in the 1990s have largely responded to specific or contingent pressures and opportunities, while an all-encompassing view of the Mediterranean as a region has been conspicuously lacking – as we have seen, this is no exception, given that a NATO strategy is still in the making.

In fact, it is not easy to discern the contours of Italy's "Mediterranean policy" as a coherent whole. Rather, one can identify a number of initiatives and diplomatic tracks that are being pursued almost simultaneously.

In this eclectic policy package, Italian governments have thus joined the chorus of Western leaders in extolling the virtues of "interlocking security institutions", variable geometries and institutional pluralism. It must be noted, however, that the EuroMed track is now consistently indicated as the principal forum for Italy's Mediterranean policies.

Among other signs of the uneasy coexistence between the MD and the Barcelona process, a symptomatic circumstance is that then Italy's Defense Minister, Beniamino Andreatta, in presenting his views on NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue in late 1997 went to some length to explain the meaning of the EuroMed Partnership and the value of the Barcelona process<sup>45</sup>.

This is notable as a manifestation of the constructive overlap between the MD and the EuroMed Partnership in the minds of a majority of Italian policymakers as well as analysts. In the same article, Minister Andreatta went on to stress three important merits of the MD: encouraging multilateralism (at least as a complement to existing bilateral relations), pursuing NATO's strategy of "cooperative security" also to the South (beginning with "soft security" measures), and balancing the Alliance's current drive toward Central-Eastern Europe.

The keen awareness of NATO's controversial image in the Arab world is confirmed by the attitude adopted by top Italian policymakers when directly addressing their Arab counterparts. An example is Italy's Foreign Minister Lamberto Dini in his speech in Cairo on September 9, 1998, where he laid out some of the priorities of Italian Mediterranean policy: a key concern was to emphasize the European framework for an intra-Mediterranean dialogue as well as the conceptual link to the "experience of Helsinki", i.e. the CSCE process<sup>46</sup>. However, this was

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<sup>45</sup> B. Andreatta, 1997, pp. 7-11.

<sup>46</sup> According to Foreign Minister Dini, the EU had set up a mechanism of cooperation between the Northern and Southern shore, based on regional interdependence: the Barcelona process thus amounted to "a vast and ambitious project of integration". "Intervento del Ministro degli Affari Esteri On Lamberto Dini sulla politica mediterranea dell'Italia", [www.esteri.it](http://www.esteri.it).

coupled with the recognition that “the United States remains the ‘indispensable power’ in this region as well”. What is conspicuously missing in this presentation of Italy’s priorities is any reference to NATO’s Dialogue policy, which before an Egyptian audience was probably believed to sound controversial and perhaps counterproductive.

A similar line was adopted in another interview given by Foreign Minister Dini – also in the summer of 1998 – in which it was argued that the overall stability of the Southern shore must be based on intensified regional cooperation, a democratic evolution of the Maghreb countries, and increased cooperation with the European Union<sup>47</sup>.

Any positive step in the Barcelona process would certainly have a positive spin-off on NATO’s MD, and the reverse is probably true as well. What is less desirable is the establishment of a close linkage between the two initiatives with regard to security issues: if such a linkage were to be established, there is a practical risk – in a worst-case but admittedly not unlikely scenario – that the MD will be held hostage to the stumbling blocs in the Barcelona process, which in turn may end up being adversely affected by the inevitable ups and downs of the Middle East peace process. Based on this consideration, it can be argued that the value of the MD can be maximized by insulating the dialogue from broader regional developments: in other words, by using the MD simply as an open channel of communication which does not entail entangling and highly controversial political commitments.

### **5.b. The United States and its “reserved stance”**

To date, the United States has adopted “a reserved stance toward the initiative”, for fear that the MD might interfere with key priorities – especially enlargement, relations with Russia, and the Middle East peace process<sup>48</sup>. The marginal usefulness of the MD is limited to stimulating a genuine interallied debate on “nontraditional threats”. In other words, the dialogue may at best be instrumental to collateral goals, while its stated purpose per se would not justify the effort.

As noted earlier with reference to the MD’s fundamental goals, the initiative has been, so far, a sort of appendix to NATO’s overall security strategy rather than its integral part, and this of course has seriously constrained its effectiveness. What is worse in terms of political support by key ally, the MD is also “divorced from the broader U.S. strategic agenda in the Mediterranean and the South more generally”, according to the 1998 RAND Report<sup>49</sup>.

It is well known that institutionalized dialogues do at times take on a life of their own and transcend their original, more limited, goals; however, US support and active involvement in the dialogue is, for the foreseeable future, an indispensable lifeline for the possible upgrading of the initiative.

The only option available in order to circumvent the US lack of enthusiasm would be to achieve a strong European consensus within NATO on an enhanced MD. This also relates to a wider Italian interest in a strengthened common EU policy toward the Mediterranean. Therefore, the future of the MD is closely linked to the evolution of Transatlantic relations.

In the United States, there is a wide and ongoing debate on the partial re-orientation of NATO after the demise of the Soviet adversary. In this context, the projection of the Alliance’s “stabilizing” function toward the South through political dialogue is not unanimously welcomed

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<sup>47</sup> *Il Sole 24 Ore*, August 4, 1998.

<sup>48</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p.52.

<sup>49</sup> Larrabee, Green, Lesser, Zanini, 1998, p.80.

– and certainly not enthusiastically embraced. So far, the issue has been much less controversial than NATO’s enlargement to the East only because of the far lower commitments that the MD entails. Some observers have questioned or openly criticized the MD especially on the basis of the types of risks and threats that distinguish the Mediterranean region: for example, Ted Galen Carpenter – one of most vocal and articulate opponents of NATO’s Eastward enlargement – has argued that NATO simply “is not suited for dealing with the complex and somewhat shadowy security problems of the Mediterranean basin in a multipolar post-Cold War environment”<sup>50</sup>.

Against the backdrop of widespread reservations on a short-term expansion of NATO’s Southern responsibilities, US policy is likely to remain focused on the pressing tasks ahead in the Balkans and on relations with Russia and perhaps Ukraine.

### **5.c. Implications of the MD and prospects for Italy-U.S. relations**

Given Italian priorities in connection with NATO’s post-Cold War adaptation (a geopolitically balanced enlargement process; a specific emphasis on Southeast European countries as beneficiaries of NATO guarantees; a strengthened European pillar), the MD per se does not deeply affect traditional relations with the US. The novelty of Italy’s diplomacy in the 1990s lays in the assumption of greater responsibility for regional security and stability, as evidenced by the active (albeit limited) participation in the 1991 Gulf War, the role played in preventing Albania from collapsing or falling into chaos, and the broader involvement in NATO’s Balkan policies, from Bosnia to Kosovo.

Active support for the MD fits into this broader picture and is based on a preventive and even proactive approach. Yet, the Dialogue is a collective initiative, and can only be as effective as the common will and commitment which lay behind it.

The fundamental weakness of current allied policies stems from the specific limitations of the EU (or common European) and US approach, respectively. The EU has so far adopted an essentially reactive and defensive attitude toward the Mediterranean, as evidenced by the Barcelona process: this is designed primarily to reduce the risk of uncontrolled migratory flows, through an array of political, economic and legal measures to be gradually negotiated and introduced. On the other hand, the US approach remains focused on very specific interests, such as protecting Israeli security and controlling oil flows in the Gulf region. As argued by Stefano Silvestri, American policies are also characterized by a somewhat simplistic view of regional issues, which may have its virtues but does not facilitate common positions with the Europeans<sup>51</sup>.

Indeed, this seems to be true also of the prevailing approach to future development of the MD. The 1998 RAND Report, after reminding that, in principle, there are no obstacles to expanding the Dialogue, argues that “there are merits in keeping the dialogue small and focused”. In particular, it is argued that there are good reasons to exclude Algeria (to avoid providing the current regime with a sort of NATO blessing), Syria (to avoid bringing the Arab-Israeli conflict into the Dialogue), and Libya (to punish Tripoli for continuing support for terrorism).

This stance essentially views the MD as part and parcel of NATO’s overall strategy, and proposes using the Dialogue as a way to signal the Alliance’s preferences and assessments. However, the MD’s distinctive contribution risks being lost: a dialogue is needed precisely

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<sup>50</sup> T.G. Carpenter, in N.A. Stavrou and R.C. Ewing, 1997, p.59.

<sup>51</sup> S. Silvestri, in R. Aliboni (ed.), 1998, pp.17-34.

when relations are not entirely on the right track and misunderstanding is still a serious hindrance to cooperation. Furthermore, as long as there is poor integration between NATO's (or US) security strategy and the MD – as the RAND Report convincingly stresses – there is little value in keeping the latter closely tied to the former in a way that ultimately constrains the Dialogue's potential.

In conclusion, a case can be made that Italy-US relations, as well as the political climate in the Mediterranean basin more generally, would benefit from a widened MD. Recent developments in NATO's ongoing adaptation might produce different results which are largely undetermined, and thus still leave the allies with various options toward the MD.

As noted earlier, the 1999 Strategic Concept placed significant emphasis on the fight against WMD proliferation<sup>52</sup>, which is bound to be a very important issue in the foreseeable future. Although the document does not single out the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, nor actually mentions the region, the formulation strongly suggests that the area is of prime concern. It should not be forgotten that geography makes the Italian peninsula a particularly vulnerable target.

The other very delicate issue that was raised at the Washington summit in April of this year is that of the geographical extension of NATO's strategic reach. Here, too, the debate within the Alliance is far from over. Italy is very sensitive to the repercussions of US military initiatives in the greater Mediterranean region which take place outside any institutionalized multilateral framework, such as the bombing raids against Iraq in December 1998. At the same time, there are serious problems with the argument that the only way for the European members of NATO to increase their influence on Middle Eastern affairs is to make the Alliance the chief avenue for common policies in the region. This line of reasoning has been recently proposed, for instance, by Philip Gordon – currently a member of the US National Security Council – according to whom “making NATO more relevant to the post-Cold War security issues that Americans find most important [e.g. the Middle East] would help to maintain the support of the US public and Congress for the US-European alliance more generally”<sup>53</sup>. Such a view is very unlikely to find a positive reception in European policy circles, in part for reasons of intra-European divisions that Gordon himself emphasizes, but also because such a strongly NATO-centered approach would contradict the tortuous effort toward increased European *autonomy*.

No easy solution is in sight, at least as long as NATO remains mired in the difficult transition from a US-led defensive alliance to a much more equal partnership between a North American and a European pillar. Sometime down the road, a truly “new NATO” along these lines might well consider exercising a strong influence on issues like Middle East politics as well as many others; but there is still quite a way to go before intra-alliance relations are sorted out in this respect.

As a facilitator in the context of NATO's continued adaptation, one specific area in which Italy could make a practical contribution is probably the careful search for acceptable solutions to the problem of reforming NATO's Southern command, without damaging relations with either France or the US. This might be a key contribution to the common goal of making the Southern component of the Alliance more adequate to the largely new tasks that it is undertaking. Obviously, this a collective matter for the NATO allies to decide: in any case, a

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<sup>52</sup> The document on “An Alliance for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century” states that: “The proliferation of nuclear, biological and chemical (NBC) weapons and their means of delivery can pose a direct military threat to Allies' populations, territory, and forces and therefore continues to be a matter of serious concern for the Alliance”.

<sup>53</sup> Gordon, 1998, p.79.

more internally balanced Alliance would probably be better positioned to address the extremely delicate issues of Mediterranean security.

With such important aspects of NATO's future role and internal structure still in constant flux, it is probably unrealistic to expect that the MD will soon become part of a consistent allied strategy toward the South (however this vague geographical expression is politically defined). In the meantime, the Dialogue should be evaluated on its own merits.

In the longer term, the key to a NATO capability for effective Mediterranean projection is EU-NATO coordination. This is also the key to an influential Italian role that could be played in an increasingly secure environment. On the contrary, should the two organizations follow diverging paths, Italy would find itself torn between its multilateral vocation as member of the EU, and the specificity of its security concerns (which still require a reliable link to the US). In addition, a lack of EU-NATO coordination is bound to produce areas of security limbo – most likely in situations of the Albanian type – where neither European nor Atlantic solidarity can be counted on. Only a full-spectrum security policy involving both Euro-American organizations holds the prospect of successfully managing the vast array of issues that are located “in and around Europe”.

This is likely to increase in importance in the next future, as there is tendency for the risks and challenges emanating from the “South” to become hardly separable from risks and challenges flowing from the “Southeast”. These two “Security Complexes”, directly connected by Turkey, simultaneously affect Italian (and US) interests. For instance, from an Italian viewpoint it is hard to draw a meaningful distinction between migratory flows – and the related risk of massive and uncontrolled flows under extraordinary conditions – from Albania, Turkey (both Turks and Kurds) and from North Africa.

This further confirms the need for close coordination between the two major Western organizations – NATO and the EU, which are largely but not entirely overlapping in geopolitical terms – given the multifaceted nature of risks, potential threats, and opportunities that are found in the South and Southeast.

Italy is fully integrated in the two Security Complexes that are institutionally represented by NATO and the EU. It will not be possible, in the foreseeable future, to radically change the political and strategic conditions in the Mediterranean in a way that gives rise to a new and larger Security Complex including some – much less all – of the current MD dialogue countries. It follows that the drive toward an eventual “PfM” (partnership) endpoint should not hide the more tangible importance of the current MD process (dialogue) as a useful complement to the EuroMed track. Dialogue can neither harm Euro-American relations nor undermine EU initiatives. On the contrary, the MD gives NATO a role in beginning to pave the way for future “cooperative security” measures, while also leaving the EuroMed track free to pursue a much more comprehensive political agenda.

This approach seems to be consistent with the recent Italian debate as well as the prevailing trends in the United States.

A focus on an enlarged Dialogue is consistent with Italy's attempt to reconcile a solid anchoring to the NATO framework in the Mediterranean and a growing freedom of action in the diplomatic and especially economic realm. A “special role” for Italy in the context of the MD is a distinct possibility – and a positive development – as long as the initiative concentrates on exchanging ideas and information, while remaining open to a wide array of participants. In contrast to this, the selective approach required by a program of military cooperation would

reproduce in the Mediterranean setting the dilemmas that NATO enlargement has posed, and will continue to pose, in continental Europe.

As was noted earlier, the only definite measure of success for a dialogue initiative undertaken by the Alliance is its actual contribution to NATO's broader goals and functions. From an Italian viewpoint, keeping the Mediterranean actively on the allies' common agenda is in itself a significant result. However, it is not enough to be called a success.

Given Italy's geostrategic position and fundamental interests, the absence of dialogue and interaction with any country of the Southern shore can have important costs. Conversely, the existence of a working relationship, which can only spring from sustained dialogue, is a contribution to regional stability and security. The chances of this coming to fruition can be enhanced by keeping the channel of the MD as open as possible, also with the participation of the United States. And in order to maximize these chances, the dialogue countries should be allowed to grow in number, while NATO's communication strategy progressively adjusts to the changing nature of security. A limited initiative could then be exploited at its full potential.

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