

# The Cold War as a Frontier: The Mediterranean Cleavages and the View from NATO, 1967-1982

*Evanthis HATZIVASSILIOU*

## Mediterranean Legacies and the Cold War

The “unity of the Mediterranean” has been one of the historiographical equivalents to the quest for the Holy Grail. Scholars have pointed to a division of the basin following the rise of Islam in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD; others have tried to reconstruct a narrative for the whole region or even to point to elements of its essential unity.<sup>1</sup> Still, since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century a further cleavage emerged between the Northern and the Southern littorals, which the Cold War deepened and formalized. As has been perceptively stressed, “the convergence of Mediterranean history with the global dynamics of the Cold War inspires the consideration of the *longue durée*”.<sup>2</sup>

Late modernity brought about a novel division of the Mediterranean. The first stages of this process involved the impact of nationalism and the industrial revolution. The nation-state – Spain and France – had already become a model of efficiency in parts of the Northern littoral, and now proliferated in Italy, Greece and Turkey. However, the nationalist experience was not an instant or a simultaneous phenomenon in 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century Mediterranean: the peoples of the Northern coast were in the vanguard of this historical process, while the Southern littoral faced the interdictions of the European powers, and the imposition of colonial or quasi-colonial rule.<sup>3</sup> The nationalism of the South coast peaked much later, in the post-1945 period. But by then, the Northern coast had moved on, and had engaged in supranational ventures.

At the same time, the Northern states were rapidly industrializing, or at least (in the case of the Balkan countries) hoped to do so. This caused a further dramatic shift in the correlation of forces, facilitated the imposition of colonial rule in the Southern

---

1. See, among others, F. BRAUDEL, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* [translated by Sian Reynolds], University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 1995; E. MONROE, *The Mediterranean in Politics*, Oxford University Press, London, 1938; J.J. NORWICH, *The Middle Sea. A History of the Mediterranean*, Vintage books, London, 2007; D. ABULAFIA, *The Great Sea. A Human History of the Mediterranean*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2011.
2. E. DI NOLFO, *The Cold War and the Transformation of the Mediterranean, 1960-1975*, in: M.P. LEFFLER, O.A. WESTAD (eds), *The Cambridge History of the Cold War*, vol.II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, pp.238-257.
3. See, among others, R. HOLLAND, *Blue Water Empire. The British in the Mediterranean since 1800*, Allen Lane, London, 2012; H. LAURENS, *Orientales II. La III<sup>e</sup> République et l'Islam*, CNRS, Paris, 2004.

coast, and widened the division between an “advanced” Northern and an “under-developed” Southern coast. The French strategy of the *tache d’huile*, tested mostly in Morocco by Hubert Lyautey, presupposed a huge technological and economic preponderance, as well as a perceived intellectual supremacy over the colonial peoples.<sup>4</sup> The collapse of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War allowed the French and the British to extend their control to additional parts of the Eastern Mediterranean, and in the interior of what now became the “Middle East”. The peoples of the Northern coast were combatants in the Second World War; but those of the Southern shores (where major military operations also took place) remained innocent by-standers, with the partial exception of the participation of colonial troops in the fighting. The North was an actor; the South, to a large extent, a passive receiver.

The North-South cleavage was therefore already there, but the Cold War came to complete, magnify, and even formalize it.<sup>5</sup> The countries of the Northern littoral (with the exception of Yugoslavia) were integrated in Cold War institutions, namely the Western alliance. For them, the Cold War and their membership of the West signalled a continuation of their efforts to achieve modernization.<sup>6</sup> The countries of the Southern littoral, even after their independence (painfully gained in some cases, notably Algeria), became parts of the Third World. For them, the concepts of anti-colonialism, decolonization and non-alignment, or of the North-South dialogue, were means to dispute what they perceived as grave injustices in their position. Two Mediterranean countries, Egypt and Yugoslavia, became leading members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), whereas the whole of the Southern coast joined the NAM in one form or another. Moreover, by the late 1960s decolonization created a vacuum of power in the Mediterranean, which the Soviets sought to exploit. Thus, some of the major divisions of the post-war world – the one involving policy in the Cold War, and the one between the “developed” and the “less developed” – now crossed the Mediterranean horizontally.

This article will discuss the test case of NATO’s conceptualizations of the region until the 1982 Lebanon War. Since the early 1950s, the alliance’s International Staff provided analysis papers to the North Atlantic Council (NAC). The NATO reports aimed to reflect a transatlantic consensus, and thus were the products both of analysis

---

4. E. BERENSON, *Heroes of Empire. Five Charismatic Men and the Conquest of Africa*, University of California Press, Berkeley, Calif., 2011, pp.228-262.
5. See E.G.H. PEDALIU, *Fault Lines in the Post-War Mediterranean and the Birth of “Southern Europe”*, 1945-1979. An Overview, in: E. CALANDRI, D. CAVIGLIA, A. VARSORI (eds), *Détente in Cold War Europe: Politics and Diplomacy in the Mediterranean and the Middle East*, I.B. Tauris, London, 2012, pp.15-31; L.S. KAPLAN, R.W. CLAWSON, *NATO and the Mediterranean Powers in Historical Perspective*, in: L.S. KAPLAN, R.W. CLAWSON, R. LURAGHI (eds), *NATO and the Mediterranean*, Scholarly Resources, Wilmington, Del, 1984, pp.3-17.
6. E.G.H. PEDALIU, “A Sea of Confusion”. *The Mediterranean and Détente, 1969-1974*, in: *Diplomatic History*, 33(2009), pp.735-750; E. HATZIVASSILIOU, *Shallow Waves and Deeper Currents. The US Experience of Greece, 1947-1961. Policies, Historicity, and the Cultural Dimension*, in: *Diplomatic History*, 38(2014), pp.83-110.

but also of negotiation, incorporating national as well as international perspectives.<sup>7</sup> This article will focus on the politico-economic assessments about the Mediterranean by the International Staff, rather than on the documents of the Military Committee, which dealt in more detail with the defence challenges.<sup>8</sup> It will be argued that the NATO reports focused on the “prime” international conflict of that period, the Cold War, while important regional developments falling outside the Cold War context were not always fully appreciated or evaluated. This Cold War “lens” tended to distort the West’s perceptions of the global South in general and of the Mediterranean in particular.<sup>9</sup>

The study of the NATO reports also points to the complementary character of NATO and European Community (EC) processes in the 1970s. Contemporary literature has shown that, by that time, the EC increasingly took into account the evolving Cold War, although its initiatives concerned mostly trade, economic relations and the stabilizing impact of its Southern enlargement.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, the EC-Mediterranean processes of the 1970s were shaped, even partially, by the demands of the Cold War and the need to keep in pace with the US.<sup>11</sup> The partial overlap between EC and NATO membership meant that, ideally, a division of labour should be established, between NATO’s strategic orientation and the EC’s economic focus. Admittedly, this proved a difficult arrangement in practice, and the search for a new balance proved troubled and long. Still, while assessing European processes and conceptualizations of the 1970s, it is useful to take into account deliberations in NATO.

---

7. E. HATZIVASSILIOU, *NATO and Western Perceptions of the Soviet Bloc. Alliance Analysis and Reporting, 1951-69*, Routledge, London, 2014.
8. On the military reports, see D. CHOURCHOU LIS, *NATO Assessments of Soviet Military and Naval Presence in Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa and the Middle East, 1964-1970*, paper presented at the Twenty-fifth annual conference of the British International History Group (BIHG), Bristol, 5-7 September 2013.
9. See mostly, O.A. WESTAD, *The Global Cold War*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2007. The notion of the “Cold War lens” emerged in a study which dealt with a Mediterranean country, Algeria: M. CONNELLY, *Taking Off the Cold War Lens. Visions of North-South Conflict during the Algerian War of Independence*, in: *American Historical Review*, 105(2000), pp.739-769.
10. N.P. LUDLOW, *An insulated Community? The Community institutions and the Cold War, 1965 to 1970*, in: N.P. LUDLOW (ed.), *European Integration and the Cold War. Ostpolitik-Westpolitik, 1965-1973*, Routledge, London, 2007, pp.137-151; S. PONS, F. ROMERO, *Europe between the Superpowers, 1968-1981*, in: A. VARSORI, G. MIGANI (eds), *Europe in the International Arena during the 1970s. Entering a Different World*, Peter Lang, Brussels, 2011, pp.85-97; A. ROMANO, *Untying Cold War Knots. The EEC and Eastern Europe in the Long 1970s*, in: *Cold War History*, 14(2014), pp.153-173; E. KARAMOUZI, *Greece, the EEC and the Cold War 1974-1979. The Second Enlargement*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2014.
11. E. CALANDRI, *The United States, the EEC and the Mediterranean: Rivalry or Complementarity?*, in: E. CALANDRI, D. CAVIGLIA, A. VARSORI (eds), op.cit., pp.33-48.

### The Beginning of NATO Analysis on the Mediterranean, 1967-73

In 1945-52, the Americans managed to block a Soviet exit to the Mediterranean basin, and the accession of Greece and Turkey to NATO completed the Western defensive perimeter in the region.<sup>12</sup> However, NATO's Southern Flank could be outflanked. The Arabs did not feel threatened by Soviet policy (on the contrary, Moscow promised aid “without strings”), and thus they were not interested in Western offers of an anti-Soviet alliance; the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt in 1956 alienated them further.<sup>13</sup> The 1957 Eisenhower doctrine promised the Arabs support against Soviet infiltration; but as Greece and Italy noted, the Americans were offering something which did not interest the recipient states, especially Egypt.<sup>14</sup> After 1959, the US reached a more workable relationship with Gamal Abdel Nasser, accepting (to some extent) his non-alignment.<sup>15</sup> However, Soviet gains had been made in Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad.

The Western alliance was present in the basin; apart from its coastal member-states, in 1949 Algeria had been explicitly included in the guarantee of Article Five, and a NATO Mediterranean Command was set up in the early 1950s.<sup>16</sup> The US Sixth Fleet, although technically not a NATO force, ensured Western air and naval predominance. During the Cold War,

“the Mediterranean basin constituted a vast communications zone which provided strategic depth to local NATO-assigned forces through the existence of an extensive network of bases and other facilities”.<sup>17</sup>

12. M.P. LEFFLER, *Strategy, Diplomacy and the Cold War. The United States, Turkey, and NATO, 1945-1952*, in: *Journal of American History*, 71(1985), pp.807-825; E. ATHANASSOPOULOU, *Turkey. Anglo-American Security Interests, 1945-1952. The First Enlargement of NATO*, Frank Cass, London, 1999; E. CALANDRI, *Il Mediterraneo e la difesa dell'Occidente, 1947-1956. Eredità imperiali e logiche di guerra fredda*, Manent, Firenze, 1997. See also S. PAPASTAMKOU, *Les États-Unis, la Grande-Bretagne et la France face à l'adhésion de la Turquie et la Grèce à l'OTAN. Divergences et compromis entre alliés atlantiques*; A. VARSORI, *Italy's Reaction to Turkey's and Greece's Application to the Atlantic Pact*, in: G.-H. SOUTOU (ed.), *L'Europe et l'OTAN face aux défis des élargissements de 1952 et 1954*, Bruylant, Bruxelles, 2005, pp.45-56 and 57-70 respectively.
13. P.L. HAHN, *Containment and Egyptian Nationalism. The Unsuccessful Effort to Establish the Middle East Command, 1950-1953*, in: *Diplomatic History*, 11(1987), pp.23-40; E. CALANDRI, *Il Mediterraneo ...*, op.cit., pp.220-289; S. PAPASTAMKOU, *La France au Proche-Orient, 1950-1958. Un intrus ou une puissance exclue?*, Ph.D. Thesis, Université de Paris 1, 2007.
14. H.W. BRANDS, *The Specter of Neutralism. The United States and the Emergence of the Third World, 1947-1960*, Columbia University Press, New York, 1989, pp.282-289; E. HATZIVASSILIOU, *Greece and the Arabs, 1956-1958*, in: *Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies*, 16(1992), pp. 49-82.
15. H.W. BRANDS, op.cit., pp.296-303; R.B. RAKOVE, *Kennedy, Johnson and the Nonaligned World*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013.
16. J.W. YOUNG, *Britain France and the Unity of Europe, 1945-1951*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1984, pp.103-104; D. CHOURCHOULIS, *High Hopes, Bold Aims, Limited Results. Britain and the Establishment of the NATO Mediterranean Command, 1950-1953*, in: *Diplomacy and Statecraft*, 20(2009), pp.434-452.
17. D. CHOURCHOULIS, *NATO Assessments ...*, op.cit.

However, what counted for Cold War NATO was its “treaty area”. The territorial waters of the member-states were part of the area, but the Southern coast was not. Cyprus was expressly exempted from the NATO area in 1951, shortly before the entry of Greece and Turkey.<sup>18</sup> Moreover, NATO always feared that the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East might start a crisis which could affect the treaty area, if only because Turkey might be drawn in a regional conflict triggering the guarantee of Article Five. Thus, this was a qualitatively different case, compared to other “out-of-area” regions.<sup>19</sup>

In 1957-68, the NATO reports on the Middle East and on Africa carefully avoided touching upon the Southern Mediterranean coast, with the exception of Egypt. This was for many reasons: any mention of the Algerian War could spark internal disagreements (over France’s conduct), which NATO always wanted to avoid. But, mostly, the alliance’s expert working groups were primarily interested in the Cold War in the regions they studied; and the Soviets were not yet permanently established in the Mediterranean. NATO started dealing with specific Mediterranean issues in 1964, because of the new Greek-Turkish crisis over Cyprus, the need for adjustments of its Mediterranean Command after Maltese independence, but also as the sporadic appearance of Soviet warships started. The Southern Mediterranean became a subject of special reports in 1968, only after the emergence of a Soviet naval squadron in the region.<sup>20</sup> A Soviet military threat needed to emerge, for the region to come into NATO’s “radar”.

By the late 1960s the Mediterranean basin, with its peculiar role in NATO geography and its particular tensions, raised important problems of strategy. As the British noted in 1968, the alliance had decided to adopt flexible response, but this was best applied in the Central Region; it probably was not suitable for the “fragmented situation of the Mediterranean”.<sup>21</sup> The NATO Secretary-General, the Italian Manlio Brosio, had to balance the various pressures on the alliance structure, including the reorganization of alliance processes following the French withdrawal from the military command; at the same time, he was sceptical about détente, which also made him deeply concerned about Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean. The prospect of détente should not allow the Soviets to outflank NATO: in 1971 the Italian Permanent Representative, Felice Catalano Melilli noted that the area was an indicator of Soviet intentions.<sup>22</sup> In public analyses of the early 1970s, it was stressed that it was

---

18. TNA [The National Archives, London] FO 371/137827/1, Hood (FO) to Ewbank (Cabinet Office), 16.11.1951.
19. D. CHOURCHOULIS, *The Southern Flank of NATO, 1951-1959: Military Strategy or Political Stabilisation*, Lexington Books, Lanham, MD, 2014.
20. E. HATZIVASSILIOU, *Out-of-Area. NATO Perceptions of the Third World, 1957-1967*, in: *Cold War History*, 13(2013), pp.67-88.
21. TNA/FCO 41/253, Minute (Barnes), 24.05.1968.
22. See B. BAGNATO, *NATO in the mid-1960s. The View of Secretary-General Manlio Brosio*, in: C. NUENLIST, A. LOCHER (eds), *Transatlantic Relations at Stake. Aspects of NATO, 1956-1972*, Center for Security Studies, Zurich, 2006, pp.165-187. See also NATO [NATO Archives, International Staff, Brussels] CR(71)29, 07.06.1971.

“difficult to discover NATO’s role in the Mediterranean”: the alliance had not really succeeded in providing for security in the region.<sup>23</sup>

These pressures sparked a new NATO interest in the region. American rethinking about the area “from the Maghreb through the Middle East to the Horn of Africa” had started before the Six Day War, but now received new impetus. In September 1967, the US Permanent Representative to NATO, Harlan Cleveland, suggested that the alliance monitor Soviet penetration of the Mediterranean, especially the Soviet naval presence.<sup>24</sup> This view gained ground in NATO. After the Six Day War, Italy tried to approach the Arabs, and was severely concerned at Soviet penetration of the Mediterranean.<sup>25</sup> Thus, the Italians accepted the idea, also calling for care in order to avoid alienating the Arabs.<sup>26</sup> France’s attitude was crucial: Paris had a strong interest in the Mediterranean; the country had clashed with the Americans and had withdrawn its forces from the NATO military command, but Cleveland’s suggestion involved political consultation, in which France fully participated.<sup>27</sup> Last but not least, in 1968-69, following NATO reorganization according to the Harmel Report, a new balance was formed in French-NATO relations, which allowed Paris fully to participate in the discussions on the Mediterranean.<sup>28</sup> Still, the Canadians and the Scandinavians were against commitments outside the area, while care should be shown to avoid the impression that NATO was trying to buttress the position of the Greek dictatorship.<sup>29</sup> In February 1968, Brosio submitted a first document on “The Threat to NATO in the Mediterranean Area”, pointing to the Soviet military presence:

“While the ground forces threat has remained fairly constant in numbers, though improved in quality, the Soviet naval presence in the Mediterranean has greatly increased in each of the four last years [...] the Soviet Mediterranean force has a significance out of proportion to its comparative strength. It is the only constantly deployed Soviet fleet in the NATO area and, of course, contains no ships under repair or refit. It is 100% operational and is

---

23. S. SILVESTRI, *NATO and the Mediterranean Situation*, in: F.A.M. ALTING v. GEUSAU (ed.), *NATO and Security in the Seventies*, Heath Lexington Books, Lexington, Mass, 1971, pp.43-57.
24. TNA/FCO 41/251, Bushell (NATO) to Parsons (FO), 04.09.1967; Burrows (NATO) to FCO, 12.10.1967.
25. D. CAVIGLIA, M. CRICCO, *La diplomazia italiana e gli equilibri Mediterranei. La politica Mediorientale dell’ Italia dalla Guerra dei Sei Giorni al conflitto dello Yom Kippur (1967-1973)*, Rubbettino, Soveria Mannelli Catanzaro, 2006, pp.13-42.
26. TNA/FCO 41/251, Burrows to FO, 07.12.1967 and 15.12.1967.
27. M. VAISSE, *La grandeur. Politique étrangère du général de Gaulle, 1958-1969*, Fayard, Paris, 1998, pp.381-395 and 632-646; F. BOZO, *Two Strategies for Europe. De Gaulle, the United States, and the Atlantic Alliance*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, MD, 2001, pp.143-213; F. BOZO, *Chronique d’une décision annoncée. Le retrait de l’organisation militaire (1965-1967)*, in: M. VAISSE, P. MELANDRI, F. BOZO (eds), *La France et l’OTAN, 1949-1996*, Editions Complexe, Bruxelles, 1996, pp.331-357; J. ELLISON, *The United States, Britain and the Transatlantic Crisis. Rising to the Gaullist Challenge, 1963-1968*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2007; A. LOCHER, *Crisis? What Crisis? NATO, de Gaulle, and the Future of the Alliance, 1963-1966*, Nomos, Baden-Baden, 2010.
28. F. BOZO, *Two Strategies for Europe ...*, op.cit., pp.219-240; M. VAISSE, *La grandeur ...*, op.cit., pp.407-411.
29. TNA/FCO 41/251, Roberts (Bonn) to FO, 31.10.1967; Minute (Barnes), 01.11.1967.

capable of substantial reinforcement, particularly by submarines. It also has a marked political influence".<sup>30</sup>

As was usual in every new venture of NATO, disagreements on procedure arose: the US preferred the creation of an *ad hoc* group, but the British expected the NATO Political Committee to be responsible for the study. The Political Committee, staffed by members of the NATO delegations of the member-states, was a standing body aiming to facilitate allied consultation. The Anglo-American difference thus involved a dilemma between a lower-level (but more autonomous) expert group, or a NATO committee whose conclusions would be more safely under the control of the national delegations. In March 1968 it was agreed that the North Atlantic Council (the Permanent Representatives themselves), would lead the study.<sup>31</sup> This meant that, although the first drafts would be prepared by experts, consultation over the Mediterranean would take place on a high level, and the resulting documents would be formally agreed between the member-states.

The first report, of May 1968, dealt with Soviet economic activity, noting the underdevelopment of the Southern coast's economies and the population pressures. The region was dependent on Western aid and commerce, but Moscow had managed to use the familiar pattern of "a limited number of projects of great importance in the countries concerned". An expansion of economic relations of the region with the Soviet bloc would not necessarily damage Western interests; indeed, it might offer outlets for these countries' exports. However, the area should not be allowed to become dependent on the Soviet world.<sup>32</sup> The political report noted that the Arab-Israeli dispute, the memories of Western imperialism and the "backward and unstable internal structure of Arab societies in terms of the twentieth century" facilitated Soviet penetration. The Kremlin now gave clear indications that it regarded the Southern coast "as a major target". Still, one of the problems for the Soviets was "the strength of Islamic objections to Communism". The West hoped that religious loyalties in that region could work to its advantage. Soviet military presence did not yet pose a major military threat, but had to be monitored.<sup>33</sup> The June 1968 Reykjavik ministerial NAC instructed the permanent Council and the Defence Planning Committee to continue consultations regarding Soviet penetration of the Mediterranean.<sup>34</sup>

However, the NATO studies were soon upset by the Prague Spring. The Mediterranean was included in NATO's contingency studies following the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia: the relevant document concluded that the Soviets were unlikely to incite Middle Eastern countries to war, although concern was again expressed at the Soviet naval presence behind the backs of the NATO forces.<sup>35</sup> The NATO military

30. NATO/PO/68/98, Brosio to Permanent Representatives, 15.02.1968.

31. TNA/FCO 41/252, Burrows to FO, 06.03.1968.

32. NATO/CM(68)15, "Economic Activities of the Communist Countries in the Mediterranean", 14.05.1968.

33. NATO/CM(68)16, "Report on the Situation in the Mediterranean", 17.05.1968.

34. TNA/FCO 41/254, Burrows to FO, 19.06.1968 and 05.07.1968.

35. NATO/CM(69)16, "Further Developments in Eastern Europe. Contingency Studies. Analysis of the Soviet Threat in Europe and the Mediterranean and Its Implications", 26.03.1969.

authorities noted the increasing capabilities of the Soviet squadron, combined with the presence of Soviet advisers and technicians in the Eastern Mediterranean.<sup>36</sup> The entry of a *Moskva*-class helicopter carrier in the basin was seen as important mainly in political and psychological terms. The alliance authorities suspected that Arab airplanes of Soviet origin, shadowing NATO naval forces, were manned by Soviet crews. The 1969 military coup in Libya led to the loss of the Wheelus air base for the West, which was one of the last Western facilities in North Africa.<sup>37</sup> However, the Permanent Representatives cautioned against alarmism.<sup>38</sup>

NATO analysis returned to normalcy by early 1970, when the aftershocks of the Prague Spring had been absorbed. It was thus the time to establish definite procedures to monitor the Mediterranean. This was a challenging experience. In each NATO member, the area was the subject of a variety of Foreign Ministry departments (for example Middle Eastern, North African, or Maghreb departments). This maximized the difficulties of coordination not only among NATO members, but even within individual national establishments.<sup>39</sup> The process involved discussions in the Political Committee, followed by drafting by an *ad hoc* group (in which national officials could participate) under the Belgian Robert Meuwis, from the NATO Division of Political Affairs. The *ad hoc* group would then receive comments by the delegations, and submit the final text to the NAC.<sup>40</sup> The ultimate responsibility would thus rest with the Permanent Representatives.

By the early 1970s, three sets of biannual NATO studies covered the region: reports by two expert working groups on the Maghreb and on the Middle East, and the NAC-led studies on the “situation in the Mediterranean”. The latter subject was included in the ministerial NACs, together with East-West relations, under the general title “review of the international situation”. Of the three sets, the NAC-approved set of documents was an unusual case. Since these reports were issued by the Council, their status was elevated. In 1977, the Secretary-General, Joseph Luns, drew a distinction between the Mediterranean and the Middle East/Maghreb reports: he said that, unlike the former, the latter represented the opinions of the experts, and were not committing NATO in any way.<sup>41</sup>

The functioning of these NATO working groups must be carefully assessed. Much of the work was being done by members of the national delegations in the NATO Headquarters, although the working groups could also include national officials from the Foreign Ministries of the member-states. Evidently, the national officials, coming

---

36. D. CHOURCHOULIS, *NATO Assessments* ..., op.cit.

37. NATO/PO/68/524, Brosio to Permanent Representatives, “The General Situation in the Mediterranean Area”, 10.10.1968; PO/68/379, Brosio to Permanent Representatives, “The Situation in the Mediterranean – Defence Planning Aspects”, 15.07.1968; PO/69/531, Brosio to Permanent Representatives, 06.11.1969.

38. NATO/CR(69)52, 05.12.1969.

39. TNA/FCO 41/648, Davidson (NATO) to Braithwaite (FCO), 08.01.1970.

40. NATO/CM(70)12, “Report on the Situation in the Mediterranean”, 17.04.1970; TNA/FCO 41/648, Davidson to Elam, 20.01.1970; FCO 41/649, Burrows to FCO, 29.04.1970 and 07.05.1970.

41. NATO/CR(76)48, 14.01.1977; CR(77)11, 22.04.1977.

from the capitals, were the main experts; the diplomats of the delegations were better informed about NATO procedures rather than about the Mediterranean itself. Interestingly, by 1973-74 the British complained that it was mostly them, the Americans and the French that were sending national experts to the meetings; the other members tended to rely on their NATO delegations.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, since NATO had no intelligence-gathering capability of its own, it had to rely on submissions by the national delegations, mostly provided by the larger states. Thus, the larger members with a prime role in the region – the US, Britain, France and Italy – exerted the main influence in NATO analysis on the Mediterranean.

The NAC's Mediterranean reports focused on Soviet penetration. These documents discussed the whole of the Southern coast, Malta (but said little on Cyprus, since the Greeks and Turks constantly disagreed since the 1963-64 crisis, and no agreed position could emerge), the Arab-Israeli dispute, Yugoslavia, and often mentioned Bulgaria and even Romania. Indeed, during discussions in the NAC, the Greeks and the Turks insisted on the role of Soviet aircraft operating from Bulgaria, and wanted to include the Soviet Black Sea fleet in the estimations.<sup>43</sup> The reports pointed to the presence of 6,000 Soviet military advisers, technicians and instructors in the region, and to the alleged training of about 10,000 Arab military in the Soviet bloc and China. The Soviets were “well entrenched” in the area. It was also noted that the Soviet Black Sea Fleet was stronger than needed to control its area, and was probably destined to provide vessels for transfer to the Mediterranean. In the basin, “the Soviet missile-armed surface vessels and submarines have demonstrated a capability of being deployed within the range of the major units of the Sixth Fleet, particularly its carriers”, which meant that the Soviets intended to use this force to prevent nuclear strikes against their territory. Still, it was also stressed that the Soviet leaders carefully avoided adventurism in the region. The need to combat terrorism was raised by the US, although the other delegations toned down the relevant references. The reports always monitored closely Soviet naval and air activity, the operational status of the Soviet naval squadron, Soviet aid and military advisers, Soviet anchorages and port facilities. Regional events, for example the state of the Arab-Israeli dispute, were examined only in relation to the opportunities that they presented to the Kremlin.<sup>44</sup>

The documents on the “situation in the Maghreb” were drafted by an expert working group under the French diplomat Jacques de Latour Dejean, and focused on the countries of the Southern shore, minus Egypt (which was being covered in the Middle Eastern reports). The experts expected the Maghreb countries to resist Soviet penetration, and follow the path to nationalism and to the non-aligned; the West should

---

42. TNA/FCO 41/1160, Minute (Williams), 08.10.1973, and minute (Brewer), 06.11.1973; TNA/FCO 41/1439, Minute (Williams), 29.04.1974.

43. See NATO/CR(71)25, 22.06.1971, and CR(71)29, 07.06.1971; TNA/FCO 41/650, Porter (NATO) to Elam, 12.11.1970.

44. Reports “The Situation in the Mediterranean”, NATO/CM(70)12, 17.04.1970; CM(70)58, 16.11.1970; CM(71)29, 03.05.1971; CM(71)68revised, 11.11.1971; CR(72)53, 21.11.1972; CM(73)117revised, 06.02.1974.

encourage this trend. Soon, the experts detected a Libyan turn towards Egypt and difficulties in the “unity of the Maghreb”. Habib Bourguiba was seen as firmly in control in Tunisia (a country described as a “stabilizing factor in the Arab world”), although his succession could hide dangers. Libya’s Colonel Muammar Gaddafi had suffered a setback with Nasser’s death in 1970, but was seen as reluctant to become a Soviet stooge (indeed, the British expressed concern that he might be replaced by “someone less zealously anti-Communist”). However, by 1973 Gaddafi’s support for terrorist activities and his interventions in other Arab countries led the experts to take a more hostile attitude towards him. The rule of Houari Boumedienne in Algeria was seen as a stabilizing element in a country with a pivotal role in the region. The regional states were “among the few developing countries whose economy is relatively sound and has made marked progress”. Algeria and Tunisia feared that the CSCE process might focus East-West confrontation in the Mediterranean, and expressed a desire to participate in that process. Contrary to the findings of the Mediterranean NAC reports, this expert group constantly noted that Soviet penetration in the region was not making progress. Indeed, in 1973 the experts even claimed that, with the exception of Libya, the Maghreb was in the Western orbit.<sup>45</sup> Thus, a partial divergence, mostly attributable to their differing terms of reference, was becoming apparent between the two sets of reports. Both examined the region in terms of the evolving Cold War, but the NAC reports focused on Soviet penetration and tended to underscore it, while the more regional perspective of the expert group allowed for a wider, perhaps less alarmist approach.

### The 1973 Crisis of Consultation and the New Patterns of Analysis

The NATO analysts totally failed to predict the 1973 Yom Kippur War. The NAC’s Mediterranean report of August 1973 stressed:

“It is difficult to believe that Sadat will embark on a military adventure, it being generally agreed that the operational effectiveness of the Egyptian army sharply deteriorated following the Soviet experts’ departure [in 1972]”.<sup>46</sup>

Even in early October, the Middle East expert working group suggested that the situation in the Middle East would remain stable, only to be disclaimed immediately afterwards. The British called this a “lamentable experience”, but it was not uncom-

45. Reports “The Situation in the Maghreb”, NATO/CM(70)21, 11.05.1970; CM(70)45, 19.11.1970; CM(71)29, 03.05.1971; CM(72)22, 21.04.1972; CM(72)52, 19.10.1972; CM(73)44, 26.06.1973. See also TNA/FCO 41/982, Minute (Kay), 20.04.1972; M. CRICCO, *Libya, the United States and the Soviet Union. From the Rise of Qadhafi to Ronald Reagan’s Policy of Pressure*, in: M. GUDERZO, B. BAGNATO (eds), *The Globalization of the Cold War. Diplomacy and Local Confrontation, 1975-1985*, Routledge, London, 2010, pp.55-70; N. BADALASSI, *Sea and Détente in Helsinki. The Mediterranean Stake of the CSCE, 1972-1975*, in: E. CALANDRI, D. CAVIGLIA, A. VARSORI (eds), op.cit., pp.61-73.

46. NATO/CM(73)49revised, “Report on the Situation in the Mediterranean”, 20.08.1973.

mon in NATO analysis, which had recorded similarly impressive failures in previous years.<sup>47</sup>

A more serious problem arose during the Yom Kippur War, involving transatlantic relations. In the NAC, the Americans asked the Europeans to support US policies in the Middle East, contrary to NATO's practice of not seeking agreed positions on out-of-area crises. Moreover, the unilateral US decision, on 25 October, to upgrade its alert to DEFCON3 affected even the NATO treaty area and angered the Europeans.<sup>48</sup> On their part, the Americans were upset at what they saw as a European failure to support them in the Middle Eastern crisis, and in early 1974 bitterly complained that the EC had not consulted the NATO allies on the initiation of the Euro-Arab dialogue. The Americans and the Secretary-General of NATO, Luns, accused the EC countries for functioning as a bloc within NATO.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, the Pompidou government in France seemed to make a turn to "Gaullist Orthodoxy", and to be more ready to confront the Americans. Thus, as the difficulties of the first oil shock were being felt, the Mediterranean and the Middle East became one of the focal points for the ongoing difficulties of coordination between the US and the EC, which was pursuing institution-building, the development of its Global Mediterranean Policy (GMP) after October 1972 and of the Euro-Arab dialogue after 1973.<sup>50</sup>

In view of these difficulties, in 1974 a lively discussion took place in NATO regarding the process of consultation on out-of-area problems. NATO decided not to establish new procedures: the will to consult (which, admittedly, was not always evident) was more important than process. Thus, the issuing of the Atlantic Declaration in mid-1974, focusing on the unity of the alliance, was NATO's main response to these challenges. Moreover, practical solutions were sought. Following a British suggestion, a single set of documents would now cover both the Middle East and the Maghreb in order to avoid overlaps. The unified expert working group was specifically instructed not to examine Soviet penetration in the Mediterranean, which was a subject reserved for the "proper" Mediterranean reports issued by the NAC. The British believed that these two different sets of documents still led to duplication, but

47. TNA/FCO 41/1415, Peck to FCO, 09.01.1974.

48. TNA/FCO 41/1178, Peck to FCO, 16.10.1973 and 26.10.1973; FCO 41/1179, Washington to FCO, 16.11.1973.

49. NATO/CVR(73)74, parts I and II, 10 and 11.12.1973; TNA/FCO 41/1143, Beith to FCO, 10 and 11.12.1973, Peck to FCO, 11.12.1973; FCO 41/1415, Peck to FCO, 08.01.1974; FCO 41/1416, Peck to FCO, 04.03.1974.

50. G. MIGANI, *La politique globale méditerranée de la CEE, 1970-1972*, in: A. VARSORI, G. MIGANI (eds), op.cit., pp.193-210; E. CALANDRI, *Prima della globalizzazione. L'Italia, la cooperazione allo sviluppo e la Guerra fredda, 1955-1995*, CEDAM, Padua, 2013, pp.149-154; E. CALANDRI, *The United States, the EEC and the Mediterranean*, op.cit.; A. SCOTT, *Allies Apart. Heath, Nixon and the Anglo-American Relationship*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke, 2011, pp. 166-195; S. YAQUB, *The Weight of Conquest. Henry Kissinger and the Arab-Israeli Conflict*, in: F. LOGEVALL, A. PRESTON (eds), *Nixon in the World. American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008, pp.227-248; G.-H. SOUTOU, *Georges Pompidou and US-European Relations*, in: M. TRACHTENBERG (ed.), *Between Empire and Alliance: America and Europe during the Cold War*, Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham, 2003, pp.157-200.

proposals to merge them were resisted both from NATO members, such as Turkey, and the NATO officials (Meuwis himself) who stressed that these were “constitutionally” different documents, since the Mediterranean ones had been assigned to the NAC by the Ministers themselves.<sup>51</sup>

Now, the Middle East/Maghreb experts mostly focused on the peace process regarding the Arab-Israeli dispute, noting Anuar Sadat’s professed desire for a comprehensive settlement. Sadat’s effort to diversify his sources of arms was another positive development. According to this analysis, the resurgence of US prestige thanks to its leadership in the peace process, the relative decline of Soviet influence (Moscow was practically left outside the process), but also the desire of the Arabs themselves to develop their relationship with the EC opened the road for positive developments. Sadat’s 1977 trip to Jerusalem and the 1978 Camp David agreements sparked much hope, although the experts also noted the huge problems of the process, especially the Arab sanctions against Egypt in 1979. The oil crisis was another major aspect of the reports, and the experts constantly stressed that the increase of oil prices caused great problems to the Third World countries. From 1975 onwards, the situation in the Lebanon and in the Western Sahara became major subjects as well. The experts noted with satisfaction Gaddafi’s isolation (but they also considered that his internal position was strong, since the Libyans were not sufficiently politicized), Boumediène’s resolve and Algeria’s stability, Saddam Hussein’s distances from the Soviets, and followed the prospects of Bourguiba’s succession. Despite their initial hopes, eventually (by 1978-79) the experts grew critical of EC policy, noting it merely tended to respond to Arab overtures, rather than take initiatives.<sup>52</sup>

Soviet penetration of the region was mostly the subject of the NAC Mediterranean reports. These continued to be more alarmist than the reports of the regional expert group. Thus, the NAC documents noted that the “consolidation” of Soviet influence continued. Despite the improvement in US-Egyptian relations and the suspension of Soviet arms deliveries to Egypt in 1974, the analysts cautioned that ties between Moscow and Cairo still existed. It was only in 1978-79, when the Soviets openly opposed Sadat’s peace policy, that the analysts appeared satisfied. These documents focused on Soviet naval presence: composition and strength of the Soviet squadron, its port facilities and anchorages. The amphibious component of the Soviet squadron puzzled the experts: it was not strong enough to make an opposed landing, and made little sense militarily. The reports suggested that it probably aimed to justify Soviet participation in the event of peacekeeping activities in the region. The new *Kiev*-class aircraft carriers were another major concern: these were capital ships which could

---

51. TNA/FCO 41/1160, minute (Williams), 08.10.1973; FCO 41/1439, Staples to McLaren, 16.01.1974, Williams to Roberts, 29.04.1974, Brooke (NATO) to Roberts, 15.05.1974; FCO 41/1440, Minute (Nixon), 11.11.1974.

52. Reports “The Situation in the Middle East and the Maghreb”, NATO/CM(74)21, 24.05.1974; CM(74)67, 16.10.1974; CM(75)17, 25.04.1975; CM(75)56, 27.10.1975; CM(76)37, 29.06.1976; CM(76)67, 19.11.1976; CM(77)72, 02.11.1977; CM(78)17, 14.03.1978; CM(78)60, 06.11.1978; CM(79)55, 23.10.1979. See also TNA/FCO 41/1416, Margetson (NATO) to McLaren (FCO), 31.10.1974; FCO 41/1480, Poles to Boyce (FCO), 18.11.1977.

significantly enhance Soviet capabilities and boost Soviet prestige in the region. The 1975-76 reports are not available, but the NAC discussions on them display a strong concern of the NATO authorities. In 1976, Turkey came under criticism in the NAC for allowing the *Kiev* to pass through the Straits: Ankara accepted the Soviets' description of the vessel as an "anti-submarine cruiser", whereas its configuration as an aircraft carrier would allow the Turks to refuse its passage according to the 1936 Convention. The experts monitored the *Kiev*'s short visit to the Mediterranean early in 1978, and were anxious when the *Kiev*, together with her sister ship, the *Minsk*, appeared again in the basin in early 1979.<sup>53</sup>

The 1979 Iranian revolution was a subject of the Middle East/Maghreb reports. The expert working group had often noted in previous years that the Shah was in full control of his country, but in late 1978 started expressing doubts: there was no evidence that the anti-Shah demonstrations were organized from outside (namely, the Soviets), but if the Iranian monarch did not succeed in devolving power, he would open the way "for an opposition which is ill-organized, divided and opposed to Westernization". In March 1979, after the collapse of the Shah's regime, the experts noted that Iran was lost to the Western powers, and repercussions would be severe on oil supplies and prices. Initially, early in 1979, they placed their hopes on the moderate Prime Minister, Mehdi Bazargan, but in October they were disappointed to note the prevalence of Ayatollah Khomeini. More importantly, they stressed that the revival of "Islamic consciousness" was an event of wider significance, and the West needed to gain a better understanding of its dynamics. Islamic revivalism involved disparate phenomena (from a genuine religious revival to the working of disparate causes for protest). In the October 1979 document, there was a separate section entitled "Islam as a political phenomenon", noting a greater confidence in the "indigenous social and cultural structures of Islamic society" in other Muslim countries besides Iran, namely, the prospect of proliferation of the upheaval. However, the experts held that it was difficult to imagine the ascent of an Islamic bloc, as these countries were too divided among themselves politically as well as religiously: Islam would not emerge as a "co-ordinated and global force". Moreover, Islam was not necessarily against dealings with the West, although it was opposed to Marxism. The Soviets were unable to take advantage of the crisis, and on the contrary appeared to be concerned about its impact on their own Muslim republics.<sup>54</sup>

This analysis should be seen in connection with NATO concepts on another level. In September 1979, NATO's Atlantic Policy Advisory Group (APAG) discussed the development of world balances. APAG was a group of high-level "planners", not

53. Reports "The Situation in the Mediterranean", NATO/CM(74)18final, 09.08.1974; CM(74)79revised, 05.12.1974; CM(77)77, 11.11.1977; CM(78)30, 29.04.1978; CM(79)29final, 23.05.1979; CR(76)36, 13.08.1976. See also TNA/FCO 93/976, Powles (FCO) to Wheeler (NATO), 05.05.1977, and Powell (FCO) to Margetson (NATO), 18.11.1977; FCO 93/1340, Cleghorn (NATO) to Powell, 19.10.1978, Cleghorn to Thompson, 26.10.1978, and Cleghorn to Boyce, 29.11.1978.

54. Reports "The Situation in the Middle East and the Maghreb", NATO/CM(78)60, 06.11.1978; CM(79)11, 15.03.1979; CM(79)55, 23.10.1979. See also the discussions in the NAC: NATO/CR(78)40, 18.12.1978; CR(79)14, 09.05.1979; CR(79)34, 27.12.1979.

merely “experts”, and was meant to provide thought-provoking analysis on specific major questions. Its documents were not agreed minutes, but rather the chairman’s report on the discussion. Thus, the reports were not binding on governments, and this allowed APAG to be bolder than the other NATO bodies.<sup>55</sup> Meeting in Athens, APAG discussed the “diffusion of power”, namely the perceived process of moving from bipolarity to multipolarity. Half of the meeting dealt with the obvious case of China, and the remainder with the Third World. The analysts noted that decolonization had produced not only a “Third” World, but also a fourth and a fifth; the latter included the states which would never become viable, but had “to be kept afloat”. The rise of the Third World showed that “nationalism remains one of the great motors of our time”. The West needed to learn to cope with the expressions of Third World nationalism. The balance of opinion was that, although the diffusion of power was accompanied by instability and thus presented opportunities to the Soviets, it would eventually benefit the West, which was “philosophically” more ready to welcome the new prospects. Thus, the West should support the revival of the North-South dialogue. At the same time, a process of this magnitude also entailed a challenge for existing international institutions, including the UN:

“In the future we may see the paradox of states behaving like rapacious corporations and corporations behaving like responsible states [...] the relevance of the UN system – although not the basic value of its existence – is increasingly being questioned”.<sup>56</sup>

### One crisis after another, 1980-82

During the next three years, Afghanistan was invaded, Iran was in chaos, the Iran-Iraq War started, Sadat was assassinated, and Israel invaded Lebanon. In this atmosphere of breath-taking developments, the NATO reports often appeared out of date from the time of their drafting until their discussion in the NAC. Indeed, in 1981-82 the chairmen of the expert groups had to fill such gaps by making oral updates to the Council.<sup>57</sup> The focus of attention now shifted to the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, while the Maghreb was being dealt more summarily. By late 1982, the Belgians even suggested transferring the Maghreb to the African reports, but the other delegations disagreed, as the whole of the South Mediterranean coast was of obvious strategic importance for NATO.<sup>58</sup>

The NAC Mediterranean reports were now combined with a new series of documents, monitoring the facilities available to the Soviet Mediterranean squadron. These reports noted that the Soviets aimed to secure access to warm seas, provide for

55. For the creation and early work of APAG, see E. HATZIVASSILIOU, *NATO and Western Perceptions* ..., op.cit., pp.108-111.

56. NATO/CM(79)84, “Diffusion of Power”, 21.12.1979.

57. NATO/CR(81)42, 04.01.1982; CR(81)47, 01.12.1981; CR(82)55, 30.11.1982.

58. NATO/CR(82)55, 30.11.1982.

the forward defence of their territories, restrict Western political and military options, and establish their right to participate in a comprehensive Middle Eastern settlement. However, the expulsion of the Soviet Union from Egypt in 1972 had led to the loss of an important airfield for the Soviet air force, and thus the squadron lacked air cover and reconnaissance capabilities. Moreover, the abrogation by Egypt, in 1976, of the Soviet-Egyptian Treaty of Friendship entailed the loss of maintenance facilities in Alexandria. The Soviets tried to compensate by raising the number of auxiliary ships, but there was a limit to what this could accomplish. Thus, for operational reasons, the number of Soviet diesel-powered submarines in the Mediterranean (the component that NATO feared most) was reduced. The Soviets enjoyed naval facilities in Yugoslavia, Algeria, Tunisia and Syria (Tartus and Latakia), and used various anchorages. The Soviet squadron now had no amphibious capabilities.<sup>59</sup> By 1980, it was the Greeks' turn to arouse adverse reactions, when they provided docking facilities in the Syros shipyard to the Soviet squadron. The Americans wanted to raise this issue, but the British discouraged them with the argument that there was little point "at the prospect of a battle in the ditches over wording in the group's report".<sup>60</sup>

The NAC reports on the Mediterranean noted that the Soviet Union now failed to make new inroads in the Middle East, not least because its invasion of Afghanistan had offended all Arab countries, even the pro-Soviet ones. Sadat offered asylum to the Shah, and by September 1981, at the time when he was cracking down on the opposition, also expelled the Soviet Ambassador. However, the 1980 Treaty of Friendship with Syria, and the agreements with Malta for the repair and refuelling of Soviet merchant vessels (which could also supply the Soviet squadron) were seen as major successes of Moscow. Libya was closely monitored and resented for all aspects of its policy, but Algeria's insistence on neutrality was seen as a pillar of stability in the Western Mediterranean. The Soviet proposals to turn the Mediterranean into a "zone of peace", to denuclearize it and to initiate confidence-building measures in the seas, including the Mediterranean, were considered as harmful for the alliance and were rejected. However, the Foreign Minister of the new Greek socialist government, Ioannis Haralambopoulos, made a rather confused reservation on the latter point, noting that the Alliance should consider this aim in the long term. The experts noted that the 1982 Lebanon War dealt another blow to Soviet prestige, since Moscow failed to give effective support to the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO).<sup>61</sup> Thus, the NAC's Mediterranean reports continued to focus on the subject which interested NATO most (Soviet penetration and military presence), but failed to assess the dynamic of regional developments at a time of important transitions. They saw regional developments only in relation to the main subject, Soviet penetration.

59. See the reports "SOVMEDRON Naval Facilities", NATO/CM(80)7, 21.02.1980; CM(80)56, 14.10.1980; CM(81)26, 23.04.1981; CM(81)45, 10.08.1981; CM(82)28, 15.04.1982.

60. TNA/FCO 93/2298, Cleghorn to Smith, 18.04.1980, and Jenner to Bannermann, 13.10.1980.

61. Reports, "The Situation in the Mediterranean", NATO/CM(80)22, 22.05.1980; CM(80)68, 13.11.1980; CM(81)68final, 05.11.1981; CM(82)21final, 13.04.1982; CM(82)81final, 12.11.1982.

See also NATO/CR(81)14, 04.05.1981; CR(81)47, 01.12.1981; CVR(82)27, 18.05.1982.

Although also susceptible to the Cold War lens, the reports on the Middle East and the Maghreb dealt more extensively with developments in the regional states. According to these documents, the sources of the major problems could increasingly be found in regional pressures rather than in Cold War developments. The experts now shifted their attention to the Eastern part of the region; on the Maghreb they mostly praised Algerian neutrality and lamented the lack of prospects for peace in the Western Sahara. The documents noted repeatedly that the main problem for the West was the absence of a settlement of the Arab-Israeli dispute. Even the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan “underlies the urgent need for a solution to the Arab-Israeli problem” (February 1980). Although the experts stressed that the Soviets had suffered a setback among the Arabs because of the invasion of Afghanistan, a new turn for the worse occurred with the eruption of the Iran-Iraq War in September 1980, which diverted attention from Afghanistan, and again added to the need for a solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Thus, the experts warmly welcomed the EC’s Venice Declaration of June 1980, which signalled its effort to facilitate a settlement of that problem. The Iran-Iraq War posed an insoluble problem. Following the stalemate in the Gulf, the experts closely monitored the situation in the Gulf States, and expressed relief at the fact that there had been no escalation of the conflict. An Iraqi victory was initially considered as more probable, but it could spread Baathism in the Middle East (and would destroy the moderate Abolhassan Bani Sadr in Iran); still, an Iranian victory would allow Tehran to export the revolution. Thus the West hoped for a compromise (“a sufficient balance”) between Iran and Iraq, or (implicitly) for a situation where both countries would lose. Soon it was noted with interest that the war made Iraq dependent for its supplies and for its finance on Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrein. The autumn 1981 report was drafted before Sadat’s assassination (and thus the chairman of the expert group made an oral update to the NAC), but in the following reports the experts noted the continuity of Egyptian policy.<sup>62</sup> The 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon did not come as a surprise (previous reports had pointed to dangers in that area, and Luns had spoken in the NAC about the “explosive situation” there). Once more the experts noted that the war, the evacuation of the PLO from Beirut and the massacres of Palestinian civilians proved “the insusceptibility of the Palestinian problem to solution by force”. They stressed, very perceptively, that the Israelis had succeeded in eliminating the PLO as an immediate military threat, but had failed to destroy it as a political force.<sup>63</sup>

The Iranian parts of these reports are particularly valuable, as they allow the researcher to study NATO’s perceptions of an ongoing revolution, and indeed one not directly connected with the main Cold War conflict between capitalism and communism. The analysts noted that there was no effective moderate opposition to the Khomeini regime. Still, the country was in chaos, faced huge economic problems,

62. Reports “The Situation in the Middle East and the Maghreb”, NATO/CM(80)6, 22.02.1980; CM(80)54, 10.10.1980; CM(81)3, 20.02.1981; CR(80)11, 04.04.1980; CR(81)42, 04.01.1982; CR(82)19, 14.05.1982.

63. NATO/CM(82)68, “The Situation in the Middle East and the Maghreb”, 12.10.1982; CR(82)19, 14.05.1982.

and was torn by conflict between extremist groups: “it was unclear to what extent even he [Ruhollah Khomeini] could control events”. The release of the American Embassy hostages did not change the situation.<sup>64</sup> In October 1981, the expert group made another notable effort to put forward a comprehensive assessment of the Iranian revolution. The “post-revolutionary chaos” was getting worse and extremists were eliminating their moderate rivals, but support for the revolution from the urban population was still strong. The Islamic Republican Party was now the main tool of the revolution, and Tudeh, the Communist party, was side-lined. There was no prospect of change while Khomeini was alive (in the next report it was noted that even after Khomeini’s death no radical change was expected). The Soviets were glad to see the West losing Iran, and probably hoped to influence Tehran’s anti-Western policy (in a subsequent report the experts appeared afraid of a Soviet-Iranian anti-Western entente, but this was obviously an exaggeration). More importantly, the analysts noted that Islamic fundamentalism spread in various communities over the Middle East and the Maghreb. These communities disagreed over the use of violence, but posed a threat to regional regimes,

“owing to the attractiveness of fundamentalist ideas for the Moslem populations, particularly young people, to say nothing of the possible role of mosques as rallying points and propaganda centres and, on the other, because these movements provide a natural centre of resistance for all disaffected elements and opponents of the regimes, whether their initial motives are claimed to be economic or political”.

The experts went out of their way to stress that the West should not overreact to these developments. The Western powers still had means to influence events, such as the traditional distrust of the Muslim world for Marxism, or trade.<sup>65</sup> However, it is telling that when this report was discussed in the NAC, the Permanent Representatives focused on Sadat’s assassination (which had occurred after the drafting of the report and did not appear in it).<sup>66</sup> Major political events always proved more pressing than medium-term analysis.

The 1979-82 documents, especially the assessments about the Islamic revival, are extremely interesting. The NATO studies involved the role of the region in the context of the Cold War. The experts perceptively pointed to some salient trends of the Muslim world, but tried to detect the repercussions of the Iranian revolution on a traditional level of blocs and high politics. They saw that the international system would be challenged, but could not imagine the extent and ferocity of the phenomenon. They made no reference to anti-systemic, “asymmetrical” threats by non-state actors, although we now know that this was the era when these tendencies started asserting themselves. This is also evident in the NAC discussion of the 1979 APAG report on the diffusion of power. The discussion, predictably, focused on China and the Soviet

64. Reports “The Situation in the Middle East and the Maghreb”, NATO/CM(80)6, 22.02.1980; CM(81)3, 20.02.1981.

65. NATO/CM(81)59, “The Situation in the Middle East and the Maghreb”, 20.10.1981. See also the similar report CM(82)9, 04.03.1982.

66. NATO/CR(81)42, 04.01.1982.

invasion of Afghanistan, while the Third World aspects were largely ignored. The French representative, Claude Arnaud, said that the second part of the paper, dealing with the Third World, “was more academic in nature and as a general principle, it might be better if APAG were to avoid consideration of excessively broad fields”.<sup>67</sup> Even in 1981-82, the NATO experts continued to interpret the rise of Islamic fundamentalism as a regional event, which could threaten the Middle Eastern or North African regimes, and not as a phenomenon with global repercussions. In other words, the traditional “states system” approach, and the Cold War lens continued to dominate perceptions. But perhaps it was too early to expect anything else. A terrorism of unforeseen proportions – first witnessed in the bombing of the US Embassy in Mediterranean Beirut in 1983 – shocked the more systemic international actors. Later on, such tactics would acquire even more extreme forms. The Mediterranean was a breeding ground for these emerging cleavages, and was now becoming dangerous.

## Conclusions

By their terms of reference, established by the NAC, the NATO experts had to focus primarily on Cold War pressures rather than on the actual situation in the Southern Mediterranean coast. Thus, their analysis left much to be desired. Still, it was an interesting process through which the West tried to understand developments south of the ‘area’. The impact of these reports raises another interesting question. The documents were being submitted to the ministerial NACs, but it was clear that the Ministers had little time to discuss them. However, these documents proved extremely helpful on other levels. First, they were useful to the smaller NATO members, who lacked the intelligence resources to form a comprehensive picture of Mediterranean developments. Secondly, the officials of the member-states welcomed this lower-level consultation process, which was instrumental in allowing for a convergence of national views, and provided for early warning about possible disagreements.<sup>68</sup> Moreover, as the British noted for one of the meetings in 1975: “As is often the way, the corridor discussions were more instructive than those in the Group itself”.<sup>69</sup> In the complex process of adjusting Western attitudes in the uncertain 1970s, this regular contact of officials was crucial.

Discussing the Cold War lens, however, is a complicated affair. Although we can point to the problems of European/Western policies of the 1970s and 1980s, we must not allow hindsight to cloud our understanding of the factors which motivated them. Unlike us, who “now know”, the Western statesmen of that time did not, and they naturally saw the Cold War as their major challenge. It is also important to take into

67. NATO/CR(80)4, 29.02.1980.

68. For more on the role of NATO reports, see E. HATZIVASSILIOU, *NATO and Western Perceptions* ..., op.cit., pp.200-203.

69. TNA/FCO 41/1656, Minute (Wheeler), 17.10.1975.

account the internal difficulties of the West, including intra-European competition in the Mediterranean, by states which aspired to an elevated status within the West.<sup>70</sup> This was a period of breath-taking transitions, and the Western powers, engaged in ground-breaking forms of integration (and in a difficult political and security venture in NATO), needed to find their own pace before undertaking regional initiatives.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, matters became even more complicated. The Soviet naval presence was a major challenge which complemented the Soviet political ties in the region. NATO's attempts to address the many opportunities and challenges in the Mediterranean were hindered (and even, at times, defeated) by the region's tremendous size, varied topography, cultural complexity and diversity, and by the sharp disagreements among NATO members, including the evolving transatlantic differences of a transitional era. The triumph of South European democracy was promising: the EC played a major stabilizing role through the negotiations for the accession of Greece, Spain and Portugal; Greece's and Portugal's place within NATO was eventually secured, and Spain joined the alliance in 1982. However, the stabilization of these Southern European countries within Western institutions again widened the cleavage between the Northern and the Southern littorals. The oil shocks destroyed the feeble economies of many Third World countries, and led to a collapse of the hopes that its emergence had sparked since the Bandung conference. The Iranian revolution testified to the emergence of completely novel forces in the Third World, which resented an intensifying Western cultural interdiction, and believed that the international system was unable to accommodate their anxieties. This pointed to a new tendency in world affairs. The concepts of the Third World and the NAM were meant to allow the global South to work from within the international system in order to achieve its aims. Their failure, which was becoming evident in the 1980s, drove some forces in the Third World to opt to work from outside the system. Although the magnitude of the more unpleasant surprises could not be fully predicted in the early 1980s, it was clear that the Mediterranean cleavage needed to be healed in some way.

Thus, the end of the Cold War opened the road for the novel experiment of the EU-Mediterranean venture (but also for the NATO Mediterranean dialogue, initiated in 1994). The EU needed to show to the Southern Mediterranean peoples that they could still work from within the system. However, there were two problems regarding this initiative. First, the Mediterranean cleavage was not a creation of the Cold War: it had deeper historical roots. As a result, its healing would not necessarily become easier because of the fall of the Wall. The EU-Mediterranean venture needed to redress social trends which were going back many years – perhaps centuries – and had specific, regional causes, not necessarily affected by the end of the Cold War. Second, the model for the EU's intervention was the successful CSCE precedent, which was (again) a Cold War experience and institution, not necessarily applicable in the particular social circumstances of late-20<sup>th</sup> century Mediterranean. Yet, this was the time

70. A. BROGI, "Competing Missions". France, Italy, and the Rise of American Hegemony in the Mediterranean, in: *Diplomatic History*, 30(2006), pp.741-770.

when the EU, struggling through its own evolution and economic challenges, could act. And in the end of the day, the CSCE model was the only available procedure of its time. The EU needed to find its way through the process as it went along. This is a usual phenomenon in ground-breaking initiatives.