NATO Parliamentary Assembly

POLITICAL COMMITTEE

TACKLING THE CHALLENGES FROM THE SOUTH

REPORT

Julio MIRANDA CALHA (Portugal)
Rapporteur
Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships

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1.   Violent conflict and instability, particularly in Syria and Iraq, continue to destabilise the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. After six years of fighting, there is no end in sight for the civil war in Syria. Iraq is beset by sectarian violence, a weak central government and spill-over from the conflict in Syria. Although Daesh[1] has suffered a number of crushing defeats on the battlefield and its self-declared "Caliphate" appears close to collapse, the terror organisation continues to pose a significant security risk. In North Africa, political strife and infighting among rival militias in Libya have also created an opening for Daesh and other terrorist organisations. Thus, violence threatens to spread further throughout North Africa and even sub-Saharan countries. As a consequence of these conflicts, migration from the region has increased significantly, leading to humanitarian crises, political tensions and security risks. This instability and mounting transnational as well as multi-dimensional threats across the Middle East and North Africa have major negative repercussions for NATO member states.

2.   This report identifies the main challenges NATO faces from the south. It argues that military efforts are needed to degrade and eventually defeat terror organisations like Daesh, but that this alone is insufficient to stabilise the MENA region and to thwart the challenges posed by terrorist groups. NATO Allies and partners must stand firmly together to face this challenge. Building a stable MENA region can only be achieved through a comprehensive international effort. A shared overall strategy and a diplomatic consensus among the international community is necessary, particularly with regard to ending the civil war in Syria. NATO member countries can assist partners in the Mediterranean and Gulf to address the eminent security challenges by offering political dialogue, and by providing training and information sharing. However, stabilising the region requires MENA governments to address the root causes that give rise to terrorism.

3.   This report follows earlier reports of the Political Committee on the issue. It has been updated for the Assembly's 2017 Annual Session.

II.   SECURITY CHALLENGES IN THE MENA REGION

4.   The MENA region continues to be beset with violent conflict and instability, which has grave repercussions for the security of the Alliance and indeed for global security. The conflicts as well as the unprecedented numbers of internally displaced people and refugees foster political, social and economic instability in neighbouring countries as well as in Europe. Religious extremism and radicalisation, migration and terrorist groups' activities are some of the greatest security challenges from the South that directly affect NATO. Terrorist organisations like Daesh, al-Qaeda, Jabhat Al-Nusra and Boko Haram significantly exacerbate severe social and political conditions in the entire MENA region. Some of the terrorist groups, like Daesh, are actively building operational networks, including in NATO member countries. Daesh in particular is using propaganda to inspire Muslims who feel disenfranchised, especially in Europe, to conduct attacks. As its self-declared "caliphate" crumbles in Iraq and Syria Daesh has called for supporters to attack wherever and however they can. Moreover, the large number of returning foreign fighters is likely to be a considerable security issue, both in NATO member countries and in partner countries, particularly those in the MENA region as the large majority of foreign fighters are from there.

A.   THE SITUATION IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

5.   The civil war in Syria plays a central role for regional peace and stability and is a major factor that influences the development in other parts of the region. The spill over of conflict from Syria also threatens stability in North Africa, particularly in Libya, Tunisia and Egypt where the influx of migrants and influence of terrorist groups have a major impact on the security environment. The

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[1]   Arabic acronym of the terrorist organisation "Islamic State in Iraq and Syria"

devastating conflict has entered its sixth year in March 2017 and has become exceedingly complex, as various factions contest territory and pursue independent interests. The war has destroyed much of the country, destabilised its neighbours and heightened efforts from outside powers, particularly Russia and Iran, to increase their regional influence. Security challenges emanating from Syria also stem from massive flows of refugees. The persistent lack of a solution to the Syrian conflict is the greatest source of refugees in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey as well as in Europe. It is estimated that more than 400,000 Syrian civilians have been killed since the beginning of the hostilities. Approximately 6.5 million more have been internally displaced within Syria and almost 5 million Syrians have registered as refugees with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. The large majority of the Syrian refugees, more than 75%, are women and children. The UN estimates that more than 80% of Syria's children, approximately 8 million, have been affected by the conflict.

6.   The ongoing war in Syria directly affects the NATO Alliance. The conflict has already spilled over to Turkey, which is currently embroiled in a counter-insurgency campaign in its eastern regions.

7.   The Russian military intervention that began in September 2015 has tipped the military balance in favour of the Assad regime, which is also supported by Iran and Hezbollah. By contrast, Syrian opposition groups are even less united than before and many rebel groups are now aligned with extremist groups like al-Qaeda. Moscow's indiscriminate air strikes facilitate further radicalisation and exacerbate the humanitarian crisis. Moreover, it makes the eventual post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation between the warring factions even more difficult. However, in contrast to the active role it has taken on in the battlefield, Russia has signalled that it is not willing to contribute to the reconstruction of the country. Russia and Iran's interests in Syria clash with those of the Global Coalition against Daesh, and the Arab Gulf states in particular. Russia's policies, and the decline in relations between NATO Allies and Russia in the context of the annexation of Crimea hamper any progress in advancing a political solution to end the Syrian civil war. It remains to be seen if the agreement on a ceasefire in southwestern Syria that US President Donald Trump reached with Russian President Vladimir Putin at the fringes of the G-20 Summit in Hamburg, Germany, in early July 2017 will pave the way to a comprehensive diplomatic settlement. The agreement leaves open many questions about implementation. In any case, Russia's military involvement in Syria has helped the Assad regime consolidate power and increased its leverage, also on the diplomatic front, among others by pursuing its own diplomatic dialogue over negotiations in Syria, the "Astana Process".

8.   Defeating Daesh militarily limits the terror organisation's ability to attract and recruit foreign fighters as it undermines its narrative built on expanding its territorial reach. However, battlefield victories against the terror organisation will not solve the underlying problems of extremism, underdevelopment and sectarian conflicts in Syria and in the wider region. Indeed, the continuing military operations in Syria facilitate the expansion of radicalism as the war mainly affects the civilian population. Furthermore, the continuing supply of arms and military equipment and the presence of proxy forces threaten to prolong the conflict and expand it to adjacent countries.

9.   At the time of writing, Raqqa, the headquarters of Daesh, has become the main focus of the fight against the terror group in Syria. While the capture of Raqqa will go a long way toward ending Daesh's control over territory in Syria and Iraq, it will not end the ability of the terror organisation to launch terrorist attacks and spread propaganda over the Internet. Moreover, although Daesh has suffered significant losses in Syria, too, the overall situation remains largely unchanged. The solution to the conflict can only be a political one, which is very difficult to achieve. The Assad regime is not interested in a transition process which is the key demand of the opposition. Moreover, tribal dynamics in the eastern part of the country, which have an important impact on the developing situation in Syria, are changing. The war has undermined tribal solidarities and created opportunities for new actors, among them radical Islamic groups, to exploit existing divisions and advance their own interests. This situation could have a significant impact on a post-conflict

settlement process and might be a source of new conflicts in the future. In fact, the volatile situation in Syria has strengthened al-Qaeda, which exploits vulnerable Sunni populations and is poised to capitalise on Daesh's setbacks on the battlefield. Al-Qaeda, which still poses a significant threat, could also take advantage of Daesh's losses and strengthen its own influence in other parts of the MENA region. In this context, your Rapporteur wants to emphasise that the Assad regime has helped to create the environment which allowed radical groups to thrive. Allowing Assad to remain in power is therefore likely to delay a sustainable solution to the Syrian crisis – with negative repercussions for regional stability.

10.   In Iraq, too, Daesh is on the defensive. According to estimates, Daesh lost most of the territory it held in Iraq in 2014. Currently, the terror organisation controls about 7% of Iraq's territory, a significant decrease compared to 2014, when the group controlled 40% of Iraq's territory at the height of its power. With the lost territory, Daesh is losing control of strategic supply routes and resources, as well as losing its leaders, fighters, and followers.

11.   After almost nine months of fighting, the Iraqi Security Forces (ISF) have retaken Mosul, Iraq's second largest city. While Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi formally declared victory over Daesh on July 10, the terror group is likely to resort to guerrilla attacks on military and government positions and terrorist attacks on civilian targets. Moreover, the human and material costs of the fight against Daesh are immense. For example, initial estimate to rebuild Mosul's basic infrastructure will cost more than USD1 billion. The ongoing military operations in Iraq have aggravated the humanitarian situation and continue to prompt large-scale displacement. The International Organisation for Migration (IOM), estimated in late July 2017 that more than 800,000 individuals remain displaced from the fighting of Mosul alone.

12.   Although the ISF managed to score a number of successes on the battlefield, the country suffers from a number of internal challenges, which have serious security implications. The unity of the country would be threatened if the semi-autonomous region of Kurdistan would declare independence, a prospect that neighbouring countries Turkey and Iran view with considerable concern. Relations between the central government in Baghdad and Iraqi Kurdistan remain tense primarily due to economic and territorial issues. Other key challenges facing Iraq are rampant corruption and sectarian tensions which have created fertile soil for extremist organisations like Daesh to exploit. What is more, Iraq faces daunting economic challenges relating to the huge costs of the fight against Daesh and the related costs regarding humanitarian work and reconstruction. Low energy prices have a serious impact on the economic situation in Iraq while the country's financial resources are stretched ever thinner.

13.   Further, post-war reconstruction of Iraq remains jeopardised by deep divisions along sectarian lines. The defeat and expulsion of Daesh from Iraq is unlikely to decrease the potential for violence and future conflicts. Years of Daesh's occupation and targeting of Christians, Kurds, Shiites, Sunnis and other minorities have exacerbated sectarian division in the country. By all accounts the government of Prime Minister Haider al-Abadi already has engaged in efforts to reverse the sectarian decisions of his predecessor, Nouri Al-Maliki, who consolidated power among Shiite elites. The Iraqi government must continue this approach and allow for greater Sunni representation.

B.   DEVELOPMENTS IN NORTH AFRICA

14.   As it is losing territory in Syria and Iraq, Daesh has increasingly shifted its focus towards North Africa, where it has established footholds in Libya, Egypt and Tunisia. Tunisia has the largest number of foreign fighters per capita participating in armed jihad in Syria and Iraq.

15.   The persistent civil conflict and disorder in Libya is causing much concern for neighbouring countries and NATO Allies. The current situation in Libya is mainly determined by the conflict between the Libyan National Army (LNA) based in the eastern parts of the country, and the

UN supported Government of National Accord (GNA) based in Tripoli. Despite diplomatic efforts, military clashes between both groups are frequent. Multiple militias and fractured relationships between factions in eastern and western Libya exacerbate the security situation. There are spill over effects into neighbouring countries, in particular into Tunisia and Egypt and the Sahel zone, as foreign fighters move relatively freely. This dangerous situation is compounded by the presence of Daesh, which made significant gains in Libya in 2015, and the ongoing instability there. However, Daesh lost its stronghold of Sirte and now almost all Islamist groups have been driven out of Benghazi.

16.   The situation in Libya remains serious for the entire region. The continued destabilisation and militarisation of the country is making Libya an exporter of terrorism, illicit arms, drugs, and war refugees. The problematic flow of arms through the region is largely the result of the lack of concrete planning for continued humanitarian and state-building support after the 2011 international aerial campaign, led by NATO member states. The large ungoverned space that developed in its wake allowed militias and criminal networks to exploit the large weapons depots amassed by the Gaddafi regime. Due to the geographical proximity and the difficulties in securing the long borders, continued instability in Libya is having an impact on domestic stability in neighbouring countries. Militias and rebel groups are also exacerbating further humanitarian issues. In August 2017, armed groups were reported to be stopping migrants from leaving Libya, even locking up those captured trying to flee the country.

17.   A unified government and a strong unified Libyan military is necessary to defeat and disarm all militia groups as soon as possible. The international community is facilitating dialogue between the Libyans themselves to find a lasting political solution in the country. NATO supports the UN and Libyan-led efforts, which have led to the Libyan political agreement of December 2015. However, implementation of the agreement is still incomplete. A positive development is the cease-fire agreement between the GNA and the LNA that has been reached on 25 July, 2017.

18.   In Egypt, the conflicts in neighbouring Syria, Libya and Yemen have increased a sense of insecurity among the Egyptian people. Moreover, ongoing tensions in the Sinai also attracted Daesh, which created terrorist cells on the peninsula. The menace posed by terrorist groups remains of concern, though the Egyptian security forces appear, for the time being, capable of tackling the challenges to their security. Still, the overall security situation remains volatile. Daesh has also claimed responsibility for the attacks in early April 2017 on two Coptic churches which marked the deadliest attacks against the beleaguered Christian minority group in decades. In response to the attacks, Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi announced a three-month countrywide state of emergency. Human rights groups have criticised indiscriminate actions of the Egyptian army and security services, and warned that harsh measures could radicalise parts of the local population.

19.   The threat Egypt faces from violent extremist groups is compounded by a host of other challenges. A major problem is the state of its economy, which has taken a serious hit after 2011. Tourism remains a major source of income for Egypt, generating around USD14 billion annually. However, the number of tourists visiting Egypt had significantly declined after 2011. The country's economic problems are aggravated by Egypt's demographic development. Each year the country's population of approximately 90 million increases by approximately 2.5 million, thus putting additional strain on scarce resources. The Egyptian economy is not in a position to harness the potential of this demographic growth.

20.   In the Western part of the MENA region, Mali is a key nation for stability in the Sahel region. The collapse of the state following a jihadist uprising alerted the world to the fragility of the Sahel region. Demographic challenges including rapid population growth and high unemployment contribute to internal instability that in turn makes the region particularly vulnerable to external risk factors such as armed groups based in Libya, the Central African Republic and elsewhere. Although the French-led intervention at the beginning of 2013, Operation Serval, managed to push

back the rebel insurgency, it brought only a modicum of stability to the area. Despite the presence of MINUSMA - the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali - the country continues to be shaken by attacks. Among other reasons, the northern part of Mali remains unstable, which poses a constant threat to the country due to the weakness of government institutions.

21. NATO Allies, particularly France and the United States, which conduct counterterrorist operations, are undertaking efforts to stabilise the Sahel and there are regional efforts to coordinate the fight against Boko Haram and al-Qaeda's regional presence. However, a protracted presence by foreign troops will cause problems. NATO Allies are also engaged in capacity building partnerships with African countries.

C. MIGRATION

22. Ongoing conflicts in the MENA region and the lack of economic opportunities are forcing an unprecedented number of people to migrate and seek refuge in safer places, particularly in Europe but also in the Middle East. Mass migration across the MENA region contributes to continuing crises in NATO's southern neighbourhood. In Lebanon and Jordan, which currently host the highest number of refugees per capita in the world, the influx of migrants has a significant impact on the domestic security environment, particularly in border areas.

23. Mass migration constitutes one of the greatest security challenges to NATO's southern flank. The influx of migrants from the MENA region to Europe exposed difficulties in securing the Alliance's southern borders and accommodating the incoming refugees. Furthermore, the migration crisis has given rise to radical populist sentiments across Europe and quickly brought wider support for anti-Muslim political and public figures. This has a detrimental effect on the security environment within the Alliance, particularly given the presence of large Muslim communities in Europe.

24. The March 2016 agreement between the European Union and Turkey has significantly reduced the number of refugees entering the EU irregularly. At the same time, the flow of refugees and migrants from the MENA region has been redirected to Egypt and Libya as a result. Egypt hosts about 500,000 Syrian refugees and many more migrants from its African neighbours to the south. It is important to note that the instability of the MENA region is also closely interconnected with the political, economic, and security evolution of other parts of Africa and that developments in both impact the security of NATO Allies. For example, the threat posed by Boko Haram – an Islamist terrorist group based in north-eastern Nigeria and also active in Chad, Niger and northern Cameroon   has spill over effects into neighbouring parts of Africa. Three years of civil war in South Sudan have created Africa's largest migrant crisis with some 1.8 million refugees, almost two thirds of whom are children. The UN expects that by July 2017 some 5.5 million people in South Sudan, almost half the population, were without a reliable source of food and will face starvation. The interconnected security of the MENA region with other parts of Africa only underline the need for improved situational awareness.

III. UNDERLYING CAUSES AND DRIVERS OF CONFLICT

25. The main drivers behind the security challenges to NATO's southern flank result from a perpetual state of armed conflict, radicalisation, religious extremism, and an unprecedented degradation of state structures. A lack of economic opportunities, social inequality, and high levels of corruption are also drivers of instability throughout the MENA region.

26. A majority of MENA countries have weak state institutions, which cannot uphold the rule of law domestically and in many cases struggle to maintain territorial integrity. Corruption remains a serious challenge in the countries of the MENA region, diverting significant public funds away from

infrastructure, reforms processes, security and development according to Transparency International's 2016 Corruption Perception Index. Although several countries of the region have begun to engage in governance reforms, there are still many institutional or procedural challenges in place which limit further progress in this area.

27.   Moreover, most MENA governments are unable to meet basic needs of their societies, particularly with respect to medical services, education and career opportunities. This situation particularly affects young people of ages 15 to 24, who constitute 20% of the MENA population. According to recent figures, 30% of young people in the MENA region are unemployed. This situation is compounded by a youth bulge and a hyper urbanisation in most states which has often broken up traditional tribal and regional patterns and exacerbated sectarian divisions.

28.   Environmental factors also contribute to instability in the MENA region. Water and food shortages in the Middle East, already the most water scarce region in the world[2], compound pressure from conflict and related humanitarian crisis and internal displacement. Conversely, the increasing severity and frequency of droughts in the MENA region can cause internal displacement, shift populations, magnify the effects of low agricultural productivity, and increase competition for resources. These secondary effects are also cited as underlying causes of conflict. Many countries in the region also rely on or share the same river basins or water sources. For example, Iraq, Syria, and southern Turkey rely on access to water from various parts of the Euphrates and Tigris River. Some of the conflict in the Syrian war has been for control of cities along these rivers. Drought in southern Syria has also more severely affected populations displaced by the conflict. Experts also point to the extreme drought in Syria between 2006 and 2009 as a likely cause, or having created conditions for conflict.[3]

29.   These factors facilitate radicalisation and religious extremism, particularly among the young population of the MENA region. Significant shortcomings in MENA states' judicial and penal systems further contribute to radicalisation and religious extremism. Inhumane conditions in prisons provide a fertile ground for extremist movements. Indeed, prisons across the MENA region are notorious breeding grounds for extremism and terrorism. Further, terror organisations are increasingly interconnected. For example, Daesh is now also active in Afghanistan and Boko Haram, which emerged in Nigeria in 2002 has also been active in Niger. Despite government efforts to eradicate the organisation, it is estimated to have sent over one thousand militants to fight with Daesh in Syria (Stanford, 2017).

IV.   NATO AND INSTABILITY IN THE MENA REGION – NATO'S ROLE IN COMBATTING TERRORISM

30.   The deteriorating security situation in the MENA region poses an even more unnerving challenge to allied countries than does Russia. The nature of the Russian threat is relatively clear as is the proper response to that threat. For many citizens in Allied countries daily life is affected by what is transpiring on NATO's southern flank, particularly in light of the burgeoning refugee crisis. What is more, Europe's migration predicament has become so serious that it is recasting politics in many allied countries. This, too, could impinge on how security policy is conceived and formulated within NATO itself.

31.   The situation on NATO's southern flank is particularly complex and many, if not most, of the root causes that drive insecurity do not fall into NATO's remit. The challenges the Alliance

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[2]   The World Resources Institute defines drought as a continuous period when soil moisture remains below the 20th percentile, and evaluates its severity by estimating the average times of dryness of drought from 1901 to 2008.

[3]   The NATO PA Science and Technology Committee also published a report titled "Food and Water Security in the Middle East and North Africa" for the 2017 Session.

confronts in the MENA region are multifarious. Apart from NATO's emphasis on partnerships, the role of the Alliance in that region is defined only in general terms. Moreover, on some important issues, (e.g., how to tackle the Syrian civil war) there is no consensus within NATO. However, as regional security deteriorates, NATO can ill afford to stand on the side-lines especially where NATO has the mandate and military expertise to contribute to international efforts.

32.   NATO's partnerships with the countries of the region have had only a limited impact even as threats to security have multiplied. NATO's approach to the region has been predicated on the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). MD and ICI are unique frameworks that bring together NATO partners: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, Tunisia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates, respectively. Regular political consultations are held with the aim of improving mutual understanding and situational awareness. NATO has also developed tailor-made Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programmes with all MD and ICI partners, and continues to enhance practical cooperation, including through further support in the areas of counter-terrorism, preventing the spread of small arms and light weapons, counter-improvised explosive devices, and military border security. However, operational substance to these partnerships remains limited for the time being. What is more, political relationships with many countries in the region are often problematic, and the region as a whole is beset with internal political tensions and open conflicts. The challenge now is to find a way to make these partnerships more substantive.

33.   The situation is compounded by the diplomatic crisis that broke out in early June 2017 and has pitted a Saudi-led coalition that includes Bahrain, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen against Qatar. Doha is accused of supporting terrorism and destabilising regional neighbours, including Libya; the allegations have been rejected by the Qatari government. On 5 June, Saudi Arabia and the four other countries severed diplomatic relations with Doha and also halted air, sea, and land transportation to Qatar. The crisis has considerable negative effect on the region and also impacts the fight against Daesh. Qatar hosts the largest US military facility in the Middle East which is instrumental in combating Daesh. What is more, the crisis disrupts policy cooperation among the GCC member states and hampers NATO's cooperation within the context of the ICI.

34.   NATO's most tangible contribution to tackling the security challenges from the South has been its support to the fight against terrorism. At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, Allied leaders augmented NATO's contribution to tackling the challenges from the South as well as to projecting stability beyond NATO's borders by stepping up cooperation with other nations and organisations. In response to the complex challenges emanating from the south, Allies decided to provide direct NATO AWACS support for the campaign conducted by the Global Coalition Against Daesh. The first NATO AWACS flights started on 20 October 2016, the purpose of which was to improve the Coalition's aerial surveillance. This initiative demonstrates NATO's resolve to fight terrorism and project stability. All NATO Allies and many NATO partners are contributing to the Global Coalition. At the Brussels Summit at the end of May 2017 Heads of State and Government of NATO member states decided to increase NATO's role in the fight against terrorism by formally joining the Global Coalition fighting Daesh. As a result, the flight time of NATO AWACS surveillance aircraft supporting the Coalition has increased and a NATO Senior Civilian Representative has taken up office in Baghdad. Moreover, the Deputy Secretary General has been appointed to coordinate the Alliance's efforts in the fight against terrorism at NATO Headquarters. In addition, a new Terrorism Intelligence Cell is now operational within NATO's Intelligence Division.

35.   Moreover, at the Warsaw Summit, NATO agreed, in principle, on a possible NATO role to complement the EU's Operation Sophia through the provision of a range of capabilities including Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance, and logistics support. NATO has also agreed, in principle, to contribute to capacity building of the Libyan coastguard and navy, if requested by the legitimate Libyan authorities and/or the EU. Furthermore, NATO stands ready to provide Libya with advice in the field of defence and security institution building, following a request by the

Government of National Accord, and to develop a long-term partnership, possibly leading to Libya's membership in the Mediterranean Dialogue.

36.   At Warsaw, Allied Heads of State and Government also decided to launch a new maritime security operation in the Mediterranean and the Aegean Sea, Operation Sea Guardian, which supports the activities of the EU to address the migration challenge, among others by contributing to situational awareness, and terrorist threats. Operation Sea Guardian also facilitates maritime security capacity building. Furthermore, in the Aegean Sea, NATO's Standing Maritime Group 2 works closely with EU agency Frontex and other international actors to counter human trafficking and illegal migration. Moreover, NATO actively supports the EU in training the Libyan coast guard and building their capacities to counter irregular migration and smuggling.

37.   In Iraq, NATO is working to help bolster the capabilities of local forces to provide security. The Alliance leads training for the Iraqi army on countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs), de-mining, military development, civil-military planning, cyber defence, and civilian-military preparedness.

38.   NATO is also supporting Jordan in the context of the Defence and Related Security Capacity Building (DCB) assistance. Key priority areas of the programme focus on information protection; cyber defence; military exercises; counter-improvised explosive devices (IEDs); communication, command and control; harbour protection; and border security. Jordan also hosts NATO's DCB training activities for the ISF. NATO also remains committed to strengthening NATO-Jordan relations through enhanced political dialogue.

39.   In Tunisia, NATO has announced the establishment of intelligence 'Fusion Centre' to provide support for Tunisian Special Operations Forces. NATO is also cooperating with Mauritania on the exchange of intelligence. NATO is also providing support for Egypt with respect to de-mining activities and in 2016 the Alliance incorporated Morocco into its Interoperability Platform, which provides training support for the Moroccan armed forces.

40.   In addition to its operations in the MENA region, NATO has established a number of Centres of Excellence, which are addressing terrorist threats from the South, particularly in terms of unconventional warfare techniques and technologies (i.e. IEDs, drones). In this respect, NATO has launched a Defence Against Terrorism Programme of Work (DAT POW) aimed at preventing non-conventional attacks, such as suicide attacks with IEDs, and mitigate other challenges, such as attacks on critical infrastructure.

41.   Furthermore, NATO is developing its cooperation with the African Union (AU). NATO's support for the AU aims at building up the latter's security architecture in accordance with AU requirements. In this context, NATO provides operational, logistic and capacity building support, as well as support for the operationalisation of the African Standby Force, including through exercises, and tailor-made training, in accordance with the AU's requests to NATO. NATO also continues to support AU peacekeeping missions on the African continent. For example, NATO has assisted the AU Mission in Darfur since July 2005 by providing airlift for troop rotations and training and the AU Mission in Somalia (AMISOM) since June 2007 by providing airlift support for AU peacekeepers. NATO's support for the AU mission in Darfur is closely coordinated with the European Union, which is also supporting AU mission in Darfur.

V.   CONCLUSIONS

42.   NATO provides valuable assistance in the military effort to degrade and eventually defeat Daesh. NATO supports counterterrorism efforts of the Global Coalition against Daesh and provides training as well as practical support, including in counterterrorism and border security, to MD and ICI partners. Moreover, regular political consultations between NATO and MD and ICI partners help to improve mutual understanding and situational awareness.

43.   Continuing the military fight against Daesh will be important to deprive Daesh and other terrorist groups of its safe havens in Syria, Iraq and elsewhere. Daesh needs to be simultaneously on all fronts, so that it cannot resurface in another country after it has been defeated in one country. To ensure Daesh's lasting defeat, NATO Allies and partners need to sustain the momentum and support the Global Coalition against Daesh, while deepening cooperation among NATO partner countries, particularly those in the Gulf and in the Mediterranean, in order to ensure a broad unity of purpose in this campaign. The diplomatic crisis between Saudi Arabia and Qatar is a serious blow to this cooperation. This is why it is important that the GCC member states overcome their current crisis quickly. NATO should assist in diplomatic efforts to de-escalate the situation. However, even though Daesh is facing defeat in Iraq and in Syria, its appeal among its supporters is not necessarily dissipating with its territorial losses. The terrorist organisation remains a powerful magnet that attracts violence and a sense of belonging to its supporters in the MENA region and throughout the world. In order to achieve a significant and durable reduction of the terrorist threat, efforts to curb the spread of radical ideologies are essential.

44.   As far as NATO is concerned, the decisions taken by Allied Heads of State and Government in Warsaw strengthen the contribution of the Alliance to efforts aimed at increasing stability in the south, and in particular to defeating terrorist organisations. The Alliance is in fact expanding its footprint in the counter terrorism field by, among others, establishing a regional centre in Kuwait and an anti-terrorism hub in Naples, Italy, that enhances information exchanges and analysis of intelligence. Moreover, the Alliance is also prioritising higher levels of cooperation with the EU and UN to better engage in these out-of-area stability operations. The additional assistance that NATO has pledged to MENA partners are welcome, but more could be done. In the view of your Rapporteur, NATO could enhance intelligence gathering and information sharing between NATO member states and partners. This is important as both will be critical for combatting the sustained threat of terrorism.

45.   However, practical assistance and cooperation is in itself insufficient. A political solution that is supported by all shareholders is needed to foster lasting regional stability. Only an inclusive agreement can deliver lasting peace. Therefore, any settlement that will be reached must not exclude or marginalise opposition groups. What is more, the MENA region will only be stabilised when the conditions that allow the terrorist organisations to flourish have been changed fundamentally. This requires a sustained and comprehensive approach that addresses the needs of the societies in the MENA region. More specifically, increased humanitarian aid will alleviate the immediate suffering of refugees and people in besieged areas. Financial assistance should be targeted to help countries in the MENA region improve the living conditions of its people. In addition, reconciliation processes will be crucial in helping those affected overcoming the horrors of war. Only when regional governments are committed to the rule of law and allow for political participation can trust in the political process be generated among the population.

46.   A lasting solution to the extremist problem rests on the strength of societies in the region and their ability to build peace. This is first and foremost the responsibility of the governments in the MENA region. NATO Allies and NATO as an organisation should maintain and, where possible, increase their support to partner countries in the MENA region. However, this assistance should be conditioned on respect for the principles of liberty, democracy, and human rights that underpin the North Atlantic Alliance. That said, NATO Allies should pursue a realistic course. It would be unrealistic, and possibly counterproductive, to expect that autocratic regimes turn into democracies

overnight. Progress on human rights and civil liberties need to be underpinned by improvements in living conditions for the populations. NATO Allies need to be consistent in their support of democratic and inclusive, participatory arrangements in the region.

47.   Nonetheless, governments of MENA countries need to make progress with reforms, including towards the rule of law and human rights. To that end, NATO Allies should encourage partner countries to work to foster inter-ethnic and inter-sectarian reconciliation and pursue inclusive policies that allow all segments of that society to participate fully in the political process. This is particularly relevant in Iraq and Syria, but also in Libya.

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