

THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA (MENA)
AT THE TWILIGHT OF THE FATEFUL CENTURY 1918-2018
AND THE HAZY DAWN OF A NEW TIME OF UNCERTAINTIES:
INVITATION TO AN EXERCISE IN CONTEMPLATING, FROM
A CIVILIAN DECK, THE REGION'S MILITARY TAPESTRY,
FOCUSING ON ITS LARGEST AREA, NAMELY THE ARAB ARMY
*"Guiding Manual": author's glosses in tandem with takeaways
from some of the most recent scholarly studies
and press reports on the subject-matter*

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Abstract. For the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), including for its largest and most consequential area, namely THE ARABS, one of the main legacies of the just concluded "fateful Century" 1918-2018, implicitly the relay to be passed to the coming new time of uncertainties, is that of a particular "Centennial Portraying" of the region, one that incorporates so many "colors" and other constitutive signs proper to the military, in various guises. In other words, the military tapestry has become a landmark for the whole MENA region. In its binary expression – conceptually and pragmatically – this phrase has become a syntagma whose meaning goes far beyond the function of a mere metaphor. It is indicative that this very domain has not ceased to be a major, if not the main, actor in today's MENA & Arabs drama. And that with a panoply of consequential actions on the ground, from instilling an ever-stronger overdosing of authoritarianism in a society already marked by a contained space for the rule of law and freedom of expression, to what one can witness as openly violent and destructive conflicts, themselves in different manifestations, from intra-state civil wars, to ethnic cleansings or to inter-state wars, direct or proxy or hybrid. The paradigm is further complicated by outside forces jockeying for geopolitical influence and resources control in the MENA region, especially in the Arab realm: the external unrestrained involvement in the area's problems, directly or by proxy too, essentially military in nature and intrinsically interwoven with the national and local army dimensions, mostly with no less an unfortunate impact on the host territories and populations. Dealing now just with the "Arab sector" Cluster/ Constellation of MENA's contemporary Military Tapestry, from a general perspective (PART I) and from a national/ country perspective (PART II), the present paper has a dual purpose, first, to provide a structural taxonomy of the basic conceptual

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and pragmatic ways guiding in-roads into such a subject-matter of extreme ramifications, so that to reach a perception as holistic as possible, from a “civilian deck” and inherently personal, not ignoring the military dimensions of the involvement in MENA’s affairs by those outside powers having strong interests in the region – United States, Russia, Turkey, China, as well as the new military dimension of the region and the competing one with the “official” Military, namely the non-state armed actors, second, to deal more circumstantially with the Arabs’ armies, as peculiar contributors to the military tapestry of today’s MENA.

Keywords: *military tapestry, lessons (un)learned, Janus, Pleiades, country Military Power Ranking, Military Personnel/Active-Reserve, non-state armed actors/ groups, Hezbollah.*

Motto:

“More than any other region in the world, the Middle East is defined not by commercial ties, diplomatic interaction, or regional organizations, but by hard power and military might... The Middle East is the most militarized region in the world”¹ October 2018

*“...the Middle East (is) the fighting ring of the world...”² September 2018
“Leaders in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Saudi Arabia, (through) concerted efforts to introduce a militarized nationalism, are promoting militarization as a way to strengthen their rule.”³ February 2019
“The Egyptian Military: A Slumbering Giant Awakes”⁴ February 2019*

PART I

A Holistic View of the Arab Cluster as Main Part of the Overall MENA Military Tapestry, with An Adequate Toolkit to Guide the Journey of Observation

At the Start – Passing Through the Hermeneutical Gate

Janus as a consequential symbol for MENA/ Arab region’s MILITARY

At least for the last century, *Janus* feels “at home” in MENA and at least in a cousin-like pattern of relations with the Arab area. *“The ancient temple of Janus, an arched gateway in form, stood at the northeast end of the Roman marketplace.*

¹ Perry Cammack, Michele Dunne, *Fueling Middle East Conflicts – or Dousing the Flames*, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, October 23, 2018.

https://carnegieendowment.org/2018/10/23/fueling-middle-east-conflicts-or-dousing-flames-pub-77548?utm_source=carnegieemail&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=announcement&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiT0RBNE16TXIOR1V3WXpObSIsInQiOii3EpDTmIwTIVaR0NQdD4MHluRDdOOUNnUHptbjg2ZldMdUlrdk41aHBkSFb6b2ppeGiBMLpoM2ZJOVwvZzZrZEk5dytUdlExVVwvMXIYb2V5NUkwbmh6MTVFU0d4NYNvcXZOdEVMS2JPcElYWHJWHVmVFb4TjdsUEcwXC8xNmhdWSJ9

² Yuval Noah Harari, *21 Lessons for the 21st Century*, Penguin Random House, London, Jonathan Cape, 2018, p. 173.

³ ELEONORA ARDEMAGNI, *Gulf Monarchies’ Militarized Nationalism*, CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE, SADA - ANALYSIS, February 28, 2019. <https://carnegieendowment.org/sada/78472>

⁴ ROBERT SPRINGBORG, F. C. “PINK” WILLIAMS, *The Egyptian Military: A Slumbering Giant Awakes*, CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER, February 28, 2019.

<https://carnegie-mec.org/2019/02/28/egyptian-military-slumbering-giant-awakes-pub-78238>

The god it sheltered had two antipodal profiles, one facing east, the other west. His temple was closed to worshipers only in times of peace. Only four times in the seven and a half centuries before the birth of Christ was the temple of Janus shut. In mid-May 1948, in what had been the Eastern Roman Empire and what the West had christened the Middle East – (with the Arabs in its very core) – the gates were wedged firmly open. But the spirit of the region still looked in two directions.⁵

As such, *Janus, concomitantly an image, paradigm and mantra*, continues to epitomize the ancestral ostensibly *indestructible military-army-weapons compact* in MENA/Arab area up to these days and that for two fundamental patterns of Military existence and action:

(i). *The two faces of Janus from the Arab Army's functional point of view*: the NATIONAL/ OFFICIAL military/ army, generals & soldiers, haven't been ceasing to deliver, on the one hand, *useful "social, national and geopolitical services"*, before anything else the invaluable peace and stability – social, national, regional, and, on the other hand, the same "*structures*", NATIONAL/ OFFICIAL military/ army, generals & soldiers, apparently as *unbeatable*, as *inexhaustible* for the region in case, have been driven by *deconstruction and destructions purposes*, with results to disturb the eyes and minds of the region's people, of all humankind, and of *Janus'*.

Practically, all along this past Century 1918-2018, few, if any, of MENA's and the Arab's areas – actually those of reduced size, in territory and population – have been out of that *Janus* military and armies' realm, be they as *active agents, passive targets, or in the in-between role of proxy actors and instruments*. Maybe that should not sound strange for a region whose "*birth throes*" themselves were so much conditioned and impregnated by the actions, colors, smell, dust etc. of the real war, nothing other than *the First World War*, otherwise known as *the Great War*. And a Great War swept indeed over the area including the old regions of the Levant and Palestine, Mesopotamia and Persia and *Arabia Felix* – now *Arabia Mortis*, parts of North Africa and further to East Asia.

(ii). *The two faces of Janus from the Arab Army's institutional/ organizational point of view*: in particular during this second decade of the twenty-first century, the Arab Military realm was considerably enlarged. In parallel with the NATIONAL/ OFFICIAL military/ army, generals & soldiers, there came into being and operating *the non-state army actors (NSAAs)*. NSAAs, which refer to non-state organizations that have the capacity and means to deliver systematic violent action, have shattered state territorial orders across the Middle East with seemingly inexorable capacity to garner power following the so-called *Arab Spring*. They could be considered "*new territorial brokers*" that are re-making geopolitics, and biopolitics, from below across the region, changing contours of sovereignty, geopolitics and ideology, particularly in the Arab part of MENA. "*Among the characteristics and contradictions that share the NSAAs in their extreme diversity*

⁵ Desmond Stewart, *THE MIDDLE EAST Temple of Janus*, LONDON, HAMISH HAMILTON, 1972, p. 319.

– in terms of size, objectives, structure, leadership, command capabilities, mode of operations, resources and political discourses – it is worth underlining that, due to strategic as well as tactical reasons, they ought to simultaneously militarize various domestic and international audiences, with likely effects on the changing nature of sovereignty, violence, and regional security audience. As for operational settings, although the NSAs have been functional in the context of interstate conflict, the newly emerged NSAs are better understood as part and parcel of the intra-state and civil war contexts as well as numerous proxy wars which reflect the non-Westphalian features of the contemporary conflict patterns particularly in the Middle East” ... NSAs of the Middle East undergo a peculiar institutionalization process of military strategy and tactics, having different sets of foreign policy practices and decision-making processes.”⁶

Be they insurgent groups, militant groups, urban gangs and warlords, private militaries, private police forces and security groups, transnational groups, terrorists, or criminal organizations, “the NSAs are fined as armed groups which are able to exercise successful and sustained control over a territory to carry out concerted military operations in order to achieve political goals and military objectives, organized and operating outside state control, with an irregularity of military actions and semi-state structure to operationalize objectives, with different agenda – religious or ethnic, or be in hybrid forms ... by their actions, they might challenge or maintain the status quo, as they could conceptualize, securitize, and operationalize political and military settings vis-à-vis the conflict ... (practically) they are tied to the root causes of military or armed conflicts ... (a large array of) grievances, from ethno-sectarian tensions to civil war; from economic inequalities to historical, social and political injustices, all these being among the main forces behind the proliferation of the non-state armed actors such as Hamas, Hezbollah, al-Qaeda, PKK, YPG, and ISIS”⁷

Ultimately, the emergence and proliferation of NSAs have been intrinsically connected with domestic evolutions in the Arab realm, being in a mutually constitutive relationship with the weakness of the region’s states, generated by a factorial mix, of political, military, security, societal and economic nature. Against this backdrop, we should bring into discussion another MENA’s/Arabs’ Janus, which even is not military *per se* it has the capacity to ultimately influence the region’s Military, in both its dimensions – State & Non-state: “The Arab world is a region of two contrasting systems. One system features a dynamic private sector, digitally native youth and open economies. The other has a bloated public sector and closed, controlled economies. Most people in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) interact with both systems, facing a mixed reality. Wealth sits side-by-side with poverty; an exciting entrepreneurial culture struggles with leaden bureaucracy; and an insatiable appetite for the new is balanced with a reverence for tradition. How these two systems interact – and whether the

⁶ Murat Ye_ilta_ (Editor) and Tuncay Kardaş (Editor), *Non-State Armed Actors in the Middle East: Geopolitics, Ideology, and Strategy*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 3-21.

⁷ *Ibidem.*

dynamic, forward-looking system can thrive while respecting the traditions of the Arab world – is among the most important issues the region is facing today.”⁸ Two consequences are of particular interest: First, one of a more general nature, namely “In many Arab states, the army, as well as the public sector, also has a welfare function: it alleviates poverty and social unbalances, providing salaried employments, especially in less developed areas.”; Second, regarding the critical issues facing the youth, as a significant segment, in size and substance of the region’s population, we will continue to witness that at least one of “the easiest and most lucrative way for a young male with limited education to make a good living has been to join a private army (anon-state armed group/ actor). This has involved military training, drilling, the adoption of a code of discipline, and over time a creeping brutalization.”⁹ “In places like Iraq, Syria, Yemen, and Libya an entire generation of children has not received a formal education. They will be ripe recruits for militias, criminal networks, and transnational terror networks.”¹⁰

MENA’s Military Pleiades Constellations and a Sui Generis Planetarium

The military institutions and armed structures existing on the Arab region’s vast lands could be better perceived and analyzed as being integrated into a sort of *sui generis “constellation”*, especially given their permanent display of energy, fires and lights, with seemingly no end in view, if not of an almost infinite duration. If a birth-name were to be given to this “constellation”, “The Pleiades” would be a privileged choice. A denomination known for its fastidious resonance and which refers, in concrete terms, to an *open “star cluster”* situated among the nearest ones to Earth, meantime being the cluster most obvious to the naked eye (in the night sky), and up to 14 stars in the cluster being in good viewing conditions (Fig. 1)¹¹. Hence a kind of resemblance to the constellations included in MENA’s Military, with the bulk of the Arabs’ Armies, all rather visible with “naked eye”, but so far away from the daily destinies and yearnings of many of the region’s people.

It happens that, inspired by the *celestial realities*, our *terrestrial model*, conceived for studying purposes in the case of MENA’s present military landscape, contains also *14 states of primary military interest (TABLE 1)*, all but

⁸ Mirek Dusek, *5 key challenges facing the MENA region ahead of our global summit*, World Economic Forum on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), 04 Apr 2019. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/5-key-challenges-facing-the-mena-region-ahead-of-our-global-summit/>

⁹ Philip Robins, *The Middle East. A Beginner’s Guide*, ONE WORLD, Publications, London, 2016, p. 212.

¹⁰ Samuel Helfont, “*Going Short*” In *The Middle East*, HOOVER INSTITUTION, March 26, 2019.

https://www.hoover.org/research/going-short-middle-east?utm_source=Hoover+Daily+Report&utm_campaign=74eb5b8b15-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_27_06_32&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_21b1edff3c-74eb5b8b15-72881821

¹¹ <https://www.constellation-guide.com/pleiades-the-seven-sisters-messier-45/>

two being Arab states, respectively those of *MENA's countries most militarily germane*: from the East – Iran, to the West – *Morocco, Algeria*, with in-between a strong North & Center – *Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Egypt*, Israel, coupled with a not less strong South/ Arab Gulf – *Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman*.

Fig. 1 *The Pleiades*



Source: http://www.pleiade.org/hubble_m45.html

Even if a number of other 4 other MENA nations from the same TABLE 1 could be less visible militarily – due to the reduced size of their military forces (Bahrain), small defense budget (Tunisia), or the woeful state of the military in the conditions of civil wars without a perspective to end, at least on the medium term (Libya and Yemen), they remain not less relevant for the “integrity” of the contemporary regional MENA/ Arab military tapestry.

Eventually, in our approach, *the sui generis “Military Pleiades”* and its corresponding *ad-hoc Planetarium* would render in a suggestive way the region’s contemporary *Military Tapestry*, including the Arabs’ clusters of military and armed forces of all kinds, both institutional and those less formal/ informal organizational human clusters with military functions, so close/ intimate to the region’s evolution and rather obvious with naked eye.

Seen even more in practical terms, the integrative components in this *ad-hoc Planetarium* are substantively distributed in a *tri-polar structure* corresponding to three categories of clusters of “military stars” and flashpoints, each of them being different but immanently incorporated into the compound of a fateful neighborhood – MENA: (i). *The Arabs’ pole* (a real cluster in itself), (ii). *The Israelis’ pole*, and, (iii). *The Iranians’ pole*.

What is particularly worth mentioning is that those three “poles” are separated not only in space, generally in a neighborly pattern, but are also distanced among them by fundamentally societal characteristics, which are coalescing up to a clear cut *enemy paradigm*, with varied degree of historical roots: *the Arabs vs. the Israelis, the Arabs vs. the Iranians, the Israelis vs. the Iranians*, all that implying a corresponding size and preparation of each pole’s Military, even if not directly used.

TABLE 1

**A TEMPLATE MILITARY SITUATION REPORT
FOR TODAY'S MENA COUNTRIES**

Country	Military Power	Land	Population	Military Personnel	Defense	Aircraft	Tanks	Armored
Rocket	Naval	(Sq. Km)	(Million)	Active/ Reserve	Budget	Strength		Vehicles
Projectors	Assets	Regional-World		(Billion \$)				
EGYPT 1,100	1 - 12 319	1,001,450	99,413,317	440,000/480,000	4.4	1,092	2,160	5,735
IRAN 1,900	2 - 14 398	1,648,195	83,024,745	523,000 /350,000	6.3	509	1,634	2,345
ISRAEL 150	3 - 16 65	20,770	8,424,904	170,000/445,000	19.6	595	2,760	6,541
S.ARABIA 122	4 - 25 55	2,149,690	33,091,113	230,000/0	70.0	848	1,062	11,000
ALGERIA 367	5 - 27 85	2,381,741	41,657,488	130,000/150,000	10.6	551	2,745	6,900
SYRIA 700	6 - 50 56	185,180	19,454,263	142,000/0	1.9	457	5,035	5,170
IRAQ 30	7 - 53 60	438,317	40,194,216	165,000/0	6.1	327	309	4,739
MOROCCO 72	8 - 61 121	445,550	34,314,130	196,000/150,000	3.4	291	1,109	2,720
U.A.E. 72	9 - 62 75	83,600	9,701,315	64,000/0	14.4	541	510	5,936
JORDAN 88	11 - 76 37	89,432	10,458,413	100,000/100,000	1.5	290	1,313	2,847
OMAN 12	14 - 82 16	309,500	3,494,116	42,500/0	6.7	175	117	735
LEBANON 30	18 - 118 57	10,400	6,100,075	75,000/0	1.7	63	276	2,330
KUWAIT 27	15 - 84 38	17,818	2,916,467	15,500/24,000	5.2	85	567	715
QATAR 17	17 - 106 80	11,856	2,363,569	12,000/0	1.9	100	95	465
TUNISIA 0	13 - 80 50	163,610	11,516,189	30,000/0	0.55	155	199	985
LIBYA 75	12 - 77 5	1,759,540	6,754,507	30,000est/30,000	3.0	118	300	530
YEMEN 267	10 - 73 30	527,968	28,667,230	30,000/0	1.4	169	826	615
BAHRAIN 17	16 - 98 39	760	1,422,659	8,200/0	0.73	107	180	850

Based on the data provided by 2019

<https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>, with a slight rearrangement for the last 4 countries given the reduced role of their armies, including their

small budget defense. Regional-World Military Power Ranking are those from 2019 <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing-middle-east.asp>

NOTE: “The Arab Cluster” from MENA’s “Military Tapestry” is further highlighted in a comprehensive analysis released, at the end of 2018, under the aegis of the same (CSIS), with the title ***The Arab Gulf States and Iran: Military Spending, Modernization, and the Shifting Military Balance***, authored by Anthony H. Cordesman with the Assistance of Nicholas Harrington (Second Working Draft December 12, 2018).¹²

And, gravitating around one or another of the three poles, sometimes tending to follow an independent movement, there are *smaller “satellites”, the non-state armed groups, of an ethnic or a religious nature*, defined and called as *proxies*, an enough ambiguous and challenging semantics and taxonomy. A relevant example is that of *the Kurds* with several military structures, starting with *Peshmerga* fighters known as some of the best warriors in the region (“terrorists”, would say the authorities in Ankara). Still unfolding is the case of the rekindling of what were supposed to be extinguishing *religious “satellites”, the Sunni “Islamic State”/ ISIS and, coming also back on the observers’ radars, Al-Qaeda, in addition of the myriad of Shi'a militias groups in Iraq, plus the mixture of armed religious groups still fighting in Libya, even Syria and so on.*

All these as a tangible testimony for a region where states have been, for some time, receding, “*where states are breaking down into regimes or are manifestly failing; they are replaced by other things, such as networks, caliphates, warlord kingdoms, wastelands; as states retreat, the vacuum of authority has bred endless war and suffering, harkening a return to the Middle Ages in some parts of the world. These wars are not fought conventionally. Terrorism, ethnic cleansing, and other forms of violence by nonstate actors have eclipsed conventional interstate wars*”¹³ Paraphrasing an adage by former General Paton, “*Today, bastards do not die for their country; they die for their religion, their ethnic group, their clan, money, or war itself. A few could say that they fight for their country, but the “country” in question is a metaphor and not a modern state*”¹⁴.

Ultimately, at the bottom line for the Arabs there seemingly exists the fairly simple equation of a “*dual duality*”, with its materialization “*on the ground*” a major source for the extreme complexity of MENA’s “*military tapestry*”:

First Duality, from the internal/ national perspective: (i). Arab state armies *versus* /but also, *nexus/* an array of Arab non-state militaries, militias and insurgencies, national or even transnational, Syria and Iraq representing relevant examples of the day, where *versus* and *nexus* are equally “at work”; (ii). the non-state actors could be found themselves in operational patterns involving both *versus* and *nexus*, as in Yemen, Libya, Gaza.

¹² https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/181212_Iran_GCC_Balance.Report.pdf
<https://www.csis.org/analysis/arab-gulf-states-and-iran-military-spending-modernization-and-shifting-military-balance>

¹³ Sean McFate, *NEW RULES OF WAR. VICTORY IN THE AGE OF DURABLE DISORDER*, New York, William Morrow, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2019, p. 32.

¹⁴ Sean McFate, *op. cit.*, p. 249.

Second Duality, from the regional and international perspective: (i). Arab “national” armies *versus* /but also, *nexus/* external military powers – the United States of America, first of all, then Russia, Turkey, and, coming from far behind, China, be they with army units deployed on the ground, in one or another of the MENA’s countries, or just delivering military assistance and arms to recipients, states and non-states, from the region; (ii). “national” armies *versus* /but also, *nexus/* a lot of proxies supported by and representing the same external foreign powers.

A seminal study by Eleonora Ardemagni and Umberto Profazio from *Research Division – NATO Defense College* in Rome shed light on “*three degrees of incremental relationship between the military and armed non-state actors (that) can be empirically identified, from the less pronounced to the more evident: coexistence, cooperation, hybridization.* Armies/élite forces and irregular forces are not always antithetical actors. After 2011/Revolutions/ Arab Spring, militaries and nonstate fighters increasingly experienced *coexistence and, in some areas, cooperation to achieve shared objectives.* Since *asymmetrical threats* monopolize the scenario, regimes often lean on irregular forces (though asymmetrical too) as devices to manage highly fragmented societies, divided along identity lines. Consequentially, *if the army is weak and internally divided, the relationship with irregular forces is strong and recurrent.*

– *In the case of coexistence*, the army and paramilitary forces are present on the same territory, can pursue the same goals, but do not work together on the ground, as occurs in Lebanon. *The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) and Hezbollah* separately contributed to defend Lebanon’s borders from jihadists and the Syrian war spillover: border security is a shared objective.

– *In case of cooperation*, the military and the armed non-state actors opt for ad hoc pragmatic cooperation, choosing to work together, in the same operative theatre, to better achieve a common goal, as testified by Iraq in the military campaign against the so-called Islamic State, the army, *the Iraqi Counterterrorism Service (“Golden Divisions28”) and the al-Hashd al-Shaabi (Popular Mobilization Forces, PMF)* managed to divide the job on the ground, taking into account local balance of forces and ethnic-sectarian concerns.

– *In the case of hybridization, trapped between pragmatic complementarity and enduring competition, armies/élite units and non-state actors are part of a scenario characterized by growing hybrid governance in the security domain;* as a matter of fact, militias often receive informal legitimacy due to their work alongside the army or in replacement of regular forces: they often turn into institutional actors, formally affiliated to the Interior Ministry or the army, as the PMF in Iraq and the Libyan National Army (LNA).”¹⁵

The intersection of national – regional – international perspectives has been materialized in various types of “*military coalitions*” with Arab participation, most notably:

¹⁵ Eleonora Ardemagni and Umberto Profazio, *New Armies for a New Era Decypting post-2011 Arab Military Reform Trends*, Research Division – NATO Defense College, Rome – No. 145 – March 2018.
http://www.natofoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/rp_145.pdf

– *The Global Coalition against Daesh/ ISIS/ Islamic State*: Perhaps counter-intuitively, the Middle East offered one of the most successful recent instances of transatlantic cooperation as embodied in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. Formed in September 2014 after the self-proclaimed Islamic State (ISIS) swept across large swathes of Iraq and Syria, the Global Coalition was anchored by strong U.S.-European cooperation at its core, with NATO as a key member. Its multifaceted mission addressed all aspects of the counter-ISIS campaign: beyond *the military campaign* in Iraq and Syria, the Coalition was committed to confronting Daesh's financing and economic infrastructure, preventing the flow of foreign terrorist fighters across borders, supporting stabilization and the restoration of essential public services to areas liberated from Daesh, and countering the group's propaganda. Most significantly, the effort offered a potential blueprint for sustained cooperation. Its architecture included burden sharing, regional involvement, and an efficient division of labor. Despite concerns over growing U.S. tension with NATO members, the launch of a new NATO-led training mission in Iraq was announced at the July 2018 NATO summit, underscoring the durability of cooperation in this area.¹⁶

– *The Arab coalition fighting in Yemen*: in 2015, Saudi Arabia launched an international coalition in a bid to reinstate President Hadi's government; along with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates has conducted airstrikes on Yemeni soil; Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Morocco, Sudan, Jordan and Egypt have also contributed to the operations. The United States and the United Kingdom have both provided logistical support and intelligence to the Saudi-led coalition; the armies of the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have been using in Yemen, among others, German weapons and technology for naval, ground and air operations.¹⁷

*Ubiquitous determinants and lessons “(un)learned”
with regard to the perennial quasi-omnipresence
of the military into MENA’s/ Arab’s framework,
at national and regional levels*

For MENA of our days and the Arab realm in particular – as a land of huge diversity and a population of extreme complexity – its unique five millennia legacy represents today a crucible made of both tangible human achievements and ethereal human experiences, some with compellingly positive connotations, others from the opposite register, or covered by the apparently neutral/ euphemistical phrase “*lessons (un)learned*”, of particular interest being those related to activities of a “pioneering” nature and strongly impacting on this region as an immanent part of the past, present and future global civilization. Against this backdrop, the major message from Walt Whitman’s famous poem *Pioneers! O pioneers!*, namely, “*We take up the task eternal, and the burden, and the lesson, Pioneers! O pioneers!*”,

¹⁶ *Transatlantic Aims Overlap in the Middle East*, COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS, August 15, 2018. <https://www.cfr.org/blog/transatlantic-aims-overlap-middle-east>

¹⁷ https://www.dw.com/en/saudi-coalition-uses-german-arms-in-yemen/a-47691879?maca=en-newsletter_en_bulletin-2097-html-newsletter

could function as a *sui generis* application in the MENA's case, that in the light of a number of defining "lessons" for this very region with core Arab area:

First "Lesson & determinant": "*in the Middle East weakness guarantee aggression*"¹⁸. This short but consequential assertion represents, in other words and first of all for its core area – the land of the Arabs, a haunting diagnosis in need for a radical therapy. With *the military/ armies* as indispensable ingredients for seemingly the one and only *prescription* whose efficiency has been proved here for a long time, the one of unremitting military's role and involvement, which in time had taken different "variants": "*a military junta that seizes power; a military hierarchy that wields political power indirectly from its institutional base; retired military officers who become politicians after retirement*"¹⁹. Fully in consonance and harmony with *the distinctive geopolitical brand for today's MENA/ Arab realm, one defined by an environment prevalently in short supply of effective rule of law, of functional democracy and productive diplomacy, being glutted instead in the toxic mix of hard to stop tensions, internal and regional disputes and conflicts of various types – sectarian, religious, geo-political, with seemingly unexhausted (re)sources of combatants of all sorts and unlimited weaponry reservoirs, with destructive, even deadly consequences*. A panoply of agents and their "tool-kits" in undertaking wars and strife, accompanied always by a highly emotional charge, with reverberations far beyond the region, equating with *MENA's/ Arabs' area perennial martial upbringing and its imprint on the lives of millions and millions of people*: "*When future historians write about the early 21st century, they are likely to single out the crisis in the Middle East as one of the major problems of our times. The crisis is fundamental, long-term and multifaceted. Its roots lie in widespread failure to achieve social, economic and political modernization (with only a few exceptions), in turn sowing the seeds for catastrophic civil wars, severe repression, surging migrations and the growth of jihadist terrorism. The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) crisis is also a global problem, with its repercussions being felt, directly or indirectly, through much of the world.*"²⁰

Undoubtedly, the "lesson" here is nurtured by a fundamental determinant with roots far deeper than that of MENA of *the twenty-first century*: practically, all along the 5000 years of documented *MENA's History*, this region's vast land had been trampled down by an infinite number of *armies and military inroads*, pursuing all imaginable goals and results, with a longer or shorter impact, but almost always confirming that grain of wisdom which has been known, for a long time, by the Romanians too: "*The land/ earth bears/ endures/ tolerates so many a thing*".

With a view to shortly illustrating here the amplitude for such a phenomenon, let's make a short journey deeper in the history of this region taking as an invaluable

¹⁸ Steven Carol, *Middle East Rules of Thumb: Understanding the Complexities of the Middle East*, Publisher iUniverse, Second Edition, 2008-2009, p. 38.

¹⁹ Philip Robins, *op. cit.*, p. 149.

²⁰ Andrei Kortunov and Malcolm Chalmers, *Upholding Stability in the Middle East: An Opportunity for Russia-Europe Cooperation?*, Commentary, 14 February 2019, The Royal United Services Institute (RUSI)

https://rusi.org/commentary/upholding-stability-middle-east-opportunity-russia%E2%80%93europe-cooperation?utm_source=RUSI+Newsletter&utm_campaign=37a7d6c976-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_11_23_04_44_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0c9bbb5ef0-37a7d6c976-47711521

guide *A History of the Ancient Near East, ca. 3000-323 BC*, the reference book authored by Marc Van De Mieroop (Blackwell History of the Ancient World, Third Edition, 2015).²¹

From the succession of the recurrent wars, hatreds, dictatorships, genocides and infamous new caliphates, all along the almost those three millennia BC, it could be considered extremely relevant for our subject-matter the apparently short arc of time between approximately 1500 and 1200 BC. That was the period of the “Territorial States” which at least at the beginning acted like “*The Club of the Great Powers*” interacting among them as equals, bat as rivals, as well. The exchange of diplomatic messages among their rulers/ kings, doubled by trade, couldn’t hide from view their permanent rivalry aimed at extending their territorial influence at the expense of neighbors. Hence, the chronicles of the time’s kings were in fact a list of wars and *military campaigns* unfolded in two ways: either by attacking the rival’s vassals, or by direct confrontation.

Consequently, permanent altercations had obliged all states of the region, without exception, to allocate important resources for *the army*. So that, eventually, for the societies in case, *the army attained a primary role*. The war technology had changed fundamentally comparatively with what there existed several centuries before. Against this backdrop, the societies witnessed the creation of *the military elites* tending towards the top of the social pyramid, getting the necessary social recognition; the men who build themselves a military career became also important from the political point of view. In a sense, as such, *the militarism* had become a matter of the day, which proved, on a longer term, deeply rooted in the evolution of the MENA region.

On an inscription left by the pharaoh Kamose, last king of the Seventeenth Dynasty of Egypt, one can read the following about his army and the final victorious battle against the Hyksos (called “Asiatics”), who had occupied and ruled Egypt for several centuries: “*I sailed north in my might to repel the Asiatics ... with my brave army before me like a flame of fire and the ... archers atop our fighting-tops to destroy their places. ... My army acted like lions with their spoil ... chattels, cattle, fat, honey ... dividing their things, their hearts joyful.*”²²

Later on, *the militarism* ingrained from now on in the region’s political and social tapestry, will know new dimensions, as with the emergence of the powerful Persian Empire – known also by *mercenaries usage* as a trade mark (when you think of today’s usage of mercenaries in the tragic and unjustified war in Yemen) – followed by other “new” foreign powers’ military campaigns, starting with the conquests of Alexander the Great, which transformed the ancient Near East, followed by those of the Romans, respectively the Byzantines Empires and so on. Not before long, we will witness the re-emergence of *local armies*, respectively the Muslim warriors who, following the Muhammad’s words, swarmed out of

²¹ The presentation following here was done based on the Romanian translation of the book in case: Marc Van De Mieroop, *O ISTORIE A ORIENTULUI APROPIAT ÎN ANTICHITATE (CCA 3000 – 323 î.Hr.)*, Bucureşti, POLIROM, 2016, pp. 147-164.

²² Eric H Cline, *1177 B.C. THE YEAR CIVILIZATION COLLAPSED*, Princeton University Press, Princeton and Oxford, 2014, pp. 16-17.

Arabia, by the middle of the seventh century, to begin, from the very heart of the Arab realm, an epic series of conquests that, with regard to MENA area, eventually reached as far west as Morocco, and Egypt, in the south, faithful to the classical Islamic jurisprudence *the house of Islam versus the house of war*. Only that, the armies of the Ottoman Empire would prove stronger than the local capabilities. And, most of the MENA's population had had to live under the Ottomans' army sway for several centuries. As for the British and French troops, they were in a hurry to occupy parts of the region even before the final defeat of the Ottomans during the Great War.

Essentially, it is with the second half of the twenty-century that *the national armies*, in the new MENA's geo-political configuration, would become the actors known today, playing first internal roles, some of them ambitioning to act regionally, too.

Second "Lesson & determinant": Here again one simple word has a paradigmatic power, namely *Geography*.

As expressed by a voice from the region: "*In the Middle East... there is a simple truth: There is no place for the weak. The weak crumble, are slaughtered and are erased from history while the strong, for good or for ill, survive. The strong are respected, and alliances are made with the strong, and in the end peace is made with the strong... This is our (Israeli) policy. It is backed by appropriate (military) deployment, equipment, preparedness and – in the hour of need – appropriate orders.*"²³

And a voice from outside the region: "*The Middle East is... a very different world, and you have to be strong here, there is no way to gain respect in this part of the world... you can't talk your way, you just have to be strong... Maybe it would be better if the world weren't like that but that's how it is.*"²⁴

Against this backdrop, even the most abridged books and studies on the region have not failed to mention for years, and further argue on what had become an almost stereotyped region's image: "*In the minds of most people, in Western countries at least, the Middle East is associated with wars, civil strife, revolutionary change, the military in politics, terrorism, human rights abuses, the maltreatment of women, and ethnic and religious minorities... Even when the images are more potentially positive, such as in the fertile business environment, of the oil – and gas-producing countries of the region, they are rarely perceived as being soft or benevolent*".²⁵ Only that, as Philip Robins rightly underlined in the same book, "*one has to ask whether it is merely an image problem from which the region suffers or whether it is actually more one of substance*", inviting his readers "*to take two examples: think wars and consider civil strife*".

²³ Excerpt from PM Netanyahu's Remarks at the Renaming Ceremony for the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center, 29/08/2018.
http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/MediaCenter/Events/Pages/event_peres290818.aspx

²⁴ U.S. Ambassador to Israel D. Friedman, 28 August 2018. <https://www.haaretz.com/us-news/you-have-to-be-strong-what-u-s-ambassador-thinks-about-mideast-1.6432546>

²⁵ Philip Robins, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

Third “Lesson & determinant”: is located at the intersection of *History* and *Geography*, seemingly being more ethereal in appearance, but not less tangible, up to dramatic consequences, on the ground, for the people so tragically sucked in – *the Culture* with the meaning that MENA, and first its Arab core, has remained one of the most conflict-prone regions of the Planet earth. In other words, it is the propensity to generate yet another national/ intra-regional dispute(s), up to open conflicts, even among “*Arab brothers*”, yet the solutions for older ones are still behind the horizon.

To exemplify: the six *Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)* member-states, namely Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which registered in 2018 six percent growth in *military expenditures*, are expected to hit a record \$100bn the following year. “*A major driving factor behind the increase in the defense procurement has been the involvement of GCC armies in conflicts in Iraq, Syria, Libya, and Yemen. These long-term operations have led to an increase in spending on military equipment, intelligence gathering and the bolstering of combat aircraft fleets.*”²⁶

And an unexpected “lateral in-roads” in the same area: the boycott imposed by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt on “*the brotherly*” *Qatar – Arabs vs. Arabs* – since June 2017, accused of “*backing terrorism and being too close to Iran*” (Qatar denying the allegations and accusing the Saudi-led bloc of aiming to incite regime change in Doha), has determined all the GCC countries to bolster their *military capabilities* (at the beginning of 2019, Qatar took delivery of the first of 36 Rafale multi-purpose fighter jets from France, which had already sold Mirage F1, Alpha Jets and Mirage 2000 fighters to the same Gulf country²⁷).

Even more relevant to the said *History & Geography* joining/ node, an in-depth study realized by the renowned international think tank *International Crisis Group* shed light on not less than five conflict clusters emerging in the region in the context of the trauma produced to it by WWI and the dismemberment of the Ottoman Empire: “(i). *the dysfunctional post-World War I state system (which evolved significantly over a hundred years but never overcame its troubled beginnings); (ii). The Israeli-Arab conflict, precipitated by the 1948 creation of the state of Israel; (iii). The rise of Iran and attendant Sunni-Shiite sectarian spiral, triggered by the 1979 Islamic Revolution; (iv). Sunni radicalization, given impetus first by the Arab armies’ defeat in the June 1967 war with Israel and then by the Saudi response to the 1979 siege of Mecca; (v). The 2011 Arab uprisings as region-wide popular challenges to the existing order/ disorder; and their collapse into either regime retrenchment or civil war (with Tunisia as an uncertain exception).*”²⁸

²⁶ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/09/gulf-states-defence-budgets-hit-100bn-2019-report-180906145210937.html>

²⁷ <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/02/qatar-takes-delivery-french-built-rafae-jet-fighter-190206135652110.html>

²⁸ *Tackling the MENA Region’s Intersecting Conflicts*, International Crisis Group, 22 December 2017, p. 3. <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/eastern-mediterranean/syria/tackling-mena-regions-intersecting-conflicts>

If need be to come out with more facts: “statistics have it that the Middle East constitutes 5.2 percent of the world population but has contributed over 17 percent of the globe’s violent conflict zones over the last ten years”²⁹ Since the end of World War II, the region has witnessed eleven inter-state wars, at least 23 types of intra-state conflicts including civil wars, terrorism, secession attempts and insurgencies as well as over 73 coup attempts. 12 of these conflict episodes lasted longer than 8 years, and the peace which followed around half of these conflicts lasted less than 10 years. Since 1946, the region has accounted for 40% of the estimated global total of battle-related deaths. Statistically, conflicts in the region are associated with a reduction in GDP growth of between 6 and 15 percentage points. In terms of cost, the region has lost over \$12 trillion since 1990 alone – including military expenditure and lost opportunities of economic development.³⁰

In each of the five “conflict clusters”, the military/ armies/ militias/ weaponry has been operating from the very beginning, in many instances continuing today, as agents and/or ferments of the evolutions on the ground, in a “tangled web of wars and proxy wars, sectarian splits, revolutions, and counter-revolutions that are convulsing the region”. From another perspective, “In a hundred years, the region experienced a gamut of political and ideological experiments, but almost invariably state systems, whatever their ideological veneer, were based on minority rule, militarized and repressive, and brooked no opposition to outside powers’ extractive hunger”³¹. Needless to say, that, “finding your way through this labyrinth is no easy task.”³²

The Syrian case constitutes a more recent example of a persistent “conflict culture” in MENA region: while the war that has ravaged Syria over almost a decade was coming to an end, “three new ones (wars) have started” against the backdrop of the country “settling into a twilight reality of de facto division, in which a variety of low-burning insurgencies continue to claim lives”³³, even if the Islamic State’s caliphate disappeared from Syria’s map. First, in the regime-controlled area, consisting of about 60 percent of the territory of the country, as of the spring of 2019, “a chaotic array of forces were holding power and influence, including Iran-aligned local and foreign militias, Russian military

²⁹ Bahgat Korany, *The Peacemakers’ War*, THE CAIRO REVIEW OF GLOBAL AFFAIRS, WINTER, 2019.

<https://www.thecairoreview.com/essays/the-peacemakers-war/>

³⁰ Florence Gaub and Zoe Stanley-Lockman, *DEFENCE INDUSTRIES IN ARAB STATES: PLAYERS AND STRATEGIES*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, CHAILLOT PAPERS, March 2017.

https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUSSIFiles/CP_141_Arab_Defence.pdf

³¹ Joost Hiltermann, *THE MIDDLE EAST IN CHAOS: OF ORDERS AND BORDERS*, ALSHARQ FORUM/ ANALYSIS SERIES 2018. p. 9. <http://www.sharqforum.org/2018/05/23/the-middle-east-in-chaos-of-orders-and-borders/>

³² M. E. McMillan, *From the First World War to the Arab Spring. What’s Really Going On in the Middle East?*, New York, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2016, p. 1.

³³ Jonathan Spyer, *Syria’s Civil War Is Now 3 Civil Wars*, The Middle East Forum, March 18, 2019.

https://www.meforum.org/58013/syria-civil-war-now-three?utm_source=Middle+East+Forum&utm_campaign=a602436443-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_20_05_59_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_086cf423c-a602436443-33709473&mc_cid=a602436443&mc_eid=f2e37c301a

police, Lebanese Hezbollah, and, of course, various competing security structures of the Syrian state. These forces had cooperated on behalf of keeping Assad in power, but their interests were not otherwise entirely aligned”, and, what’s more, the military dimension had been the name of the game practically for all of them. A second “new war/ armed confrontation” was unfolding in the area east of the Euphrates River controlled by the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), primarily composed of Kurdish fighters protected by the United States and Western air power, only that, in the given juncture, “it had been witnessing the stirrings of internal insurgency directed from outside”. Normally, the SDF blamed “Turkey for these actions..., as other plausible suspects within Syria included the Assad regime (or its Iranian allies) or the Islamic State, all of which enemies of the U.S.-supported Kurds”. Finally, “the third new Syrian war” was substantiated by “the military component of a Turkish project to turn a corner of northwest Syria into a Turkish client entity”, where right then the southern part was ruled in its entirety by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, an outgrowth of the Syrian (Sunni) al Qaeda franchise, while further north, the Turks and their allies were facing an emergent, though underreported, insurgency supported by the Kurdish People’s Protection Units, known as the YPG (notably, the Turkish military were “working” with allied factions from the Free Syrian Army).

Fourth “Lesson & determinant”: “The Middle East has a knack for sucking external powers into its conflicts”³⁴ and that could sound as an assertion tempered at least metaphorically too much but it does mirror the very essence of a never ending reality marking MENA’s evolution and is people destiny: the interests and actions of foreign powers from outside the region represent yet another factor in intensifying the military dye of MENA’s profile, and that in serious substantive manner given how the external players understood to act in the defense of their interests with regard to MENA region, frequently in an inverted logic, i.e. partnering local actors: “since the days of the Ottoman Empire, leaders in the Middle East have often relied on overseas partners, allies, protectors and supporters for various forms of military assistance, security guarantees and development aid. This dependence has offered external players significant bargaining power... Competition between the major powers, especially in relation to the provision of military support, has often intensified the destructiveness of conflicts in the region, allowing them to continue long after the resources of the warring parties would otherwise have been depleted (Syria is a case study of this). ”³⁵

Meanwhile, one cannot underestimate the major powers’ temptations of seeing the Middle East as an arena through which to score points against each other in a global struggle, whatever their potential common interest, if any, in preventing further destructive wars in the region, with their negative consequences (terrorism, economic disruption, migration) for them all.

All these with the very practical/ material interest: *North America and Europe*

³⁴ James Dorsey, *China Steps into the Maelstrom of the Middle East*, International Policy Digest, 18 FEB 2018. https://intpolicydigest.org/2018/02/18/china-steps-into-the-maelstrom-of-the-middle-east/?utm_source=International+Policy+Digest+Newsletter&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=46b7d84dfc-5

³⁵ Andrei Kortunov and Malcolm Chalmers, *op. cit.*

provide about 95 percent of all defense equipment acquired by the Gulf states, with the United States alone accounting for about half of all the exports in the last five years.

This is too important a factor not to request a separate paper. Until then, here there are the synthetically defined profile of the main foreign powers actively promoting, including through military means, their interests in the MENA region, with *the Arabs as a principal theater which have become akin to communicating vessels*, in the sense that, a possible vacuum created by a retreat, even partial, at a given time, of one of the major foreign powers – the US, as we will immediately see – would be quickly filled by other state/non-state actors, so that *the regional strategic and geopolitical play remains a positive-sum game.*

– *The Americans:* “*MENA region has been a focal point with regard to the application of military force as perhaps the most visible manifestation of U.S. engagement abroad...*”³⁶. With Obama Administration, and more accentuated with President Donald Trump, elements of ambiguities were induced in the US policy with regard to MENA, leading to a *seemingly dwindling military presence in MENA, Syria being its epitome*. Otherwise, “*the region bristles with American air and naval bases and major deployments in Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, among others, manned by 55,000 troops and civilians (plus 3,200 in Iraq).*”³⁷ All this in relation to a critical mass of ideas coalescing a firm answer to the legitimate interrogation “*Why America Can’t Quit The Middle East*”³⁸, whatever the acknowledgement that this is the one region in which Washington has strategically overinvested. A former US career diplomat, Eric Edelman, now with HOOVER INSTITUTION, presented recently a comprehensive and coherent set of points on the objective need, for the US, to remain committed in the MENA regions, with troops and not only.³⁹

– *The Russian Federation: The (Re) expanding “Military Star” in the MENA Region.* Illustrating Moscow’s return to great power status, its intervention in Syria has highlighted the advances in Russia’s military modernization since the 2008 conflict with Georgia. It has outperformed the expectations of many skeptical observers with its air campaign and advise-and-support mission in Syria, while unveiling new capabilities, like standoff cruise missile strikes, for the first time

³⁶ Ali Wyne, *Taking Stock of a Shifting World Order*, RAND Corporation, August 31, 2018.

<https://www.rand.org/blog/2018/08/taking-stock-of-a-shifting-world-order.html>

³⁷ JESSICA TUCHMAN MATHEWS, *Russia Replaces America as the Power Player in the Middle East*, CARNEGIE, March 06, 2018. http://carnegieendowment.org/2018/03/06/russia-replaces-america-as-power-player-in-middle-east-pub-75726?utm_source=ctw&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=20180308&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTldaalIUSmlOMIUwW

³⁸ Hal Brands, *Why America Can’t Quit The Middle East*, HOOVER INSTITUTION, March 21, 2019. https://www.hoover.org/research/why-america-can't-quit-middle-east?utm_source=Hoover+Daily+Report&utm_campaign=2683b48691-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_03_21_06_22&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_21b1edff3c-2683b48691-72881821

³⁹ Eric Edelman, *The US Role In The Middle East In An Era Of Renewed Great Power Competition*, HOOVER INSTITUTION, April 2, 2019. https://www.hoover.org/research/us-role-middle-east-era-renewed-great-power-competition?utm_source=Hoover+Daily+Report&utm_campaign=135e79dda4-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_02_05_11&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_21b1edff3c-135e79dda4-72881821

in a conflict zone. A dimension of Russia's global strategy on the MENA platform has been creating and protecting markets for arms sales, negotiating arms sales with the Qataris, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Morocco, and Bahrain. Already Moscow recaptured a growing share of the regional arms trade, with annual sales rising from \$9 billion in 2009 to \$21.4 billion in 2016. That's why Moscow is attempting to return to Libya and, more importantly, why it protects Assad. Notably, the Russians are selling here weapons at a reduced cost in parallel with showing no interest in a MENA's country human rights record. Simple means, but which are paying off: in Syria, while Assad is not only surviving but seemingly is continuing to govern, the Russian direct involvement accomplished ensuring Russia's continued access to the Mediterranean port of Tartous and the air base near Lattakia, giving it an important strategic placement in the Eastern Mediterranean. Eventually, "*these manifestations of Russia's presence, therefore, highlight the comprehensive, even multi-dimensional engagement of Russian power in all of its forms – military, diplomatic, informational and economic – with the entire Middle East*"⁴⁰. Meanwhile, if Western powers are normally keen to stress that their overseas military interventions will be distinctly finite, Russia's President Vladimir Putin, as Rod Thornton shows, "*has made it clear that the commitment of Russian forces to the Eastern Mediterranean region is very much for the long haul.*"⁴¹ The fact that the Kremlin has mapped out plans for a long-term military presence in Syria is illustrated by the open-ended naval basing arrangement concluded with the Syrian regime in mid-2017, as well as upgrades – underway as of this writing – to that facility and to the new airbase at Khmeimim, north of Damascus, that will make both installations capable of hosting expanded numbers of Russian forces and materiel. Simultaneously, the Kremlin has begun a significant reconfiguration of the nature of its deployed forces in Syria to better achieve its strategic objectives. These include not only strengthening the Syrian regime and maintaining military freedom of action in the Levant, but also maintaining a forward presence that allows the Kremlin to carry out anti-terrorist operations at a distance.⁴² Syria until now, generally Arab realm for the future, has been the theater for two other important military goals: using Private Military Companies (PMC), respectively testing different types of new military equipment.

As Syria gradually falls from the top of Russia's political agenda in the Middle East over the coming years, Moscow will be looking for new ways to stay relevant in the region. Russia's permanent military bases in Syria have the potential to

⁴⁰ Stephen Blank, *Russia in the Middle East: Introduction*, The JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION, November 20, 2018
<https://jamestown.org/program/russia-in-the-middle-east-introduction/>

⁴¹ Rod Thornton, *The Russian Military Commitment in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean*, RUSI, 17 October 2018.
https://rusi.org/publication/russian-military-commitment-syria-and-eastern-mediterranean?utm_source=RUSI+Newsletter&utm_campaign=37b03bd2ee-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2018_10_12_03_00_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_0c9bb5cef0-37b03bd2ee-47711521

⁴² Ilan Berman, *Demography's Pull on Russian Mideast Policy*, The JAMESTOWN FOUNDATION, March 8, 2018.
<https://jamestown.org/program/demographys-pull-russian-mideast-policy/>

change the power balance in the Mediterranean. Moscow has created a heavily guarded perimeter in the Eastern Mediterranean by deploying air-defense capabilities to Syria, which complemented its permanent naval force in these waters. Together, these deployments and growing capabilities will become a challenge for NATO as Moscow spreads its presence into the Alliance's naval underbelly in the Mediterranean. Down the line, Russia is managing to expand military cooperation with Egypt and the future government in Libya, and is expanding its naval presence in the Red Sea.⁴³

China: At the gate of MENA – tool kit with a proportionate/measured military. Against the backdrop of the increasing competition between the US and China and the corresponding tension in their bilateral relations, some analysts are noticing that “*China is indicating its intent to shape the Middle East’s regional and military landscape through trade relationships with regional states as well as through projection of its own military might.*”⁴⁴

Militarily, the Chinese have also recently increased naval patrols near the Gulfs of Oman and Aden. Beijing has established a base in Djibouti with an eye to protecting business and trade interests in the area and perhaps a longer-term military buildup, hence analysts’ dilemma: “*China’s Djibouti military base: ‘logistics facility’, or platform for geopolitical ambitions overseas?*”⁴⁵

However, Beijing’s willingness to deal with Tehran may prove problematic for cooperation in the security sphere with the Arab Gulf, even as China ramps up its regional military presence. *Facts on the ground show that China is seeking a bigger role in the Middle East arms trade*, with a major state-owned shipbuilder opening an office there and exporters showing hi-tech weapons – including an advanced killer robot ship – presented recently at a regional defense expo. Military analysts say the move means China will be tailor-making more weapons for the Middle East, where the market has been growing because of widespread conflict. Against this backdrop, China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC) on Wednesday had set up a representative office in Dubai to expand sales across the Gulf region, pursuing both military and civilian business opportunities. Generally, the Chinese know that one of the world’s biggest arms markets, the Middle East accounted for 32 per cent of global weapons imports in the 2013-17 period, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Already, China’s arms exports to the Middle East jumped 38 per cent in the 2013-17 period from the previous five years. Since 2014, China has sold more than 30 CH-4 drones to countries such as Saudi Arabia, though its arms exports to the kingdom in 2017 totaled about US\$20 million – compared to US\$3.4 billion from the United

⁴³ <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-middle-east-2024-hard-power-sustainable-influence/>

⁴⁴ Owen Daniels, *How China Is Trying to Dominate the Middle East. But will it work?*, THE NATIONAL INTEREST, August 28, 2018 . <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/how-china-trying-dominate-middle-east-29922?page=0%2C1>

⁴⁵ South China Morning Post, 01 Oct 2017.

[www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/ article/2113300/chinas-djibouti-military-base-logistics-facility-or](http://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2113300/chinas-djibouti-military-base-logistics-facility-or)

States. China has also sold its Wing Loong II drone to the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar has bought its ballistic missiles.⁴⁶

Of course, in comparison with the amplitude of the economic relations, firstly between China and the Gulf states – which have already developed with Beijing “*a more mature strategic geo-economic phase (which) might be dubbed Eastward Shift 2.0.*” – the military and security dimension of the Chinese goals towards MENA remains still modest. “*We are not yet in Eastward Shift 3.0, where security and military cooperation will be added to the mix, but we may be in the early stages. China remains a free rider on the American security umbrella over the Persian Gulf. The United States has, contrary to headlines, hardly been addicted to Middle East oil over the past decade (only two or three Middle East countries consistently make the top ten of import sources), and yet it still remains the paramount policeman of the Gulf. In the usual litany of US Middle East interests, Persian Gulf security always stands alongside support for Israel and protection against terrorism. This poses three key questions for U.S policy-makers: Is the US willing or interested in burden sharing on Persian Gulf security with China? Is China interested? More importantly, are Gulf Arab leaders interested? On the latter, thus far, most Gulf Arab leaders have been content with the existing arrangement: the United States underwrites their security, while Asia underwrites their prosperity. This arrangement is unlikely to change soon, but is the carrier ship shifting ever so slightly?*”⁴⁷

Turkey seen through Churchillian lens: “*a country with MENA but not of it*” (a paraphrase to Churchill’s adage with reference to Europe⁴⁸). When Turkey’s interior minister declared, in March 2019, and not 3-4 centuries ago, that: “*We are not only just Turkey, but also Damascus, Aleppo, Kirkuk, Jerusalem, Palestine, Mecca, and Medina*”⁴⁹, he let clearly understood that his country has got specific goals, in military terms too, with regard to the vast area including the former Levant and the Arabian Peninsula. For the time being, the most visible Turkish military operations are evolving in both North Syria and North Iraq, targeting several Kurds’ organizations, known as possessing valiant armed groups, some of them US/ Western allies in the fight against ISIS. Also, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has long been enthused by the idea of joint military operations with Iran against the Kurds.

⁴⁶ *China eyes bigger role in growing Middle East arms trade*, SOUTH CHINA MORNING POST 24 Feb, 2019.

<https://www.scmp.com/news/china/military/article/2187436/china-eyes-bigger-role-growing-middle-east-arms-trade>

⁴⁷ Afshin Molavi, *U.S Middle East Policy Must Contend With The New Power On The Block*, HOOVER, April 4, 2019.

https://www.hoover.org/research/us-middle-east-policy-must-contend-new-power-block?utm_source=Hoover+Daily+Report&utm_campaign=45f3b810dd-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_05_06_45&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_21b1edff3c-45f3b810dd-72881821

⁴⁸ “*We are with Europe, but not of it*”, a Saturday Evening Post article Churchill wrote in 1930, in which he also first advanced his support for the idea of a “*United States of Europe*”.

<https://theconversation.com/what-churchill-really-thought-about-britains-place-in-europe-36613>

⁴⁹ *Statement by the Turkish Interior Minister*, AL ARABIYA, March 2019.

<https://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2019/03/03/Turkish-interior-minister-says-Turkey-spans-from-Damascus-to-Medina.html>

NOTE: This author remains consistent in the position that Turkey could not be considered a part per se of MENA. That is not denying in any way the strong Turkish interests, including of military nature, in a region which used to be an integral part of the Ottoman Empire. Rather, paraphrasing a famous Churchill's adage (which was referring to Europe), we would say that Turkey is "a country with MENA but not of it".

Fifth "Lesson & determinant": Substantiated by the relatively recent emergence of the non-state armed groups, with an effectively mushrooming evolution region-wide in MENA, it could be considered the freshest in the panoply of "Lessons & determinants" outlining the contemporary military tapestry of MENA: the new reality where non-state armed actors have shattered state territorial orders across the Middle East, following a seemingly inexorable capacity to garner power following the so-called Arab Spring. They could be considered new territorial brokers here, re-making geopolitics, and bio-politics, from below across the region based on how they are and their particular beliefs and strategies.

*"In the Middle East of today, the era of the classic state actor has been in decline for some time, and the power of the non-state actor (or the sub-state actor, depending on how one looks at it) is on the rise. The problem is that these newer actors are able to exert full control over the territories they govern yet make themselves nearly invisible when they choose to do so."⁵⁰ For instance, in the concrete case of Israel, the days when the Israeli military could keep track of conventional enemy militaries – when it could count the other side's tanks and monitor its air force – are long gone. Today, Israel's senior military commanders speak of the need to deal with "*the modern invisible enemies*": these are highly organized guerilla-terrorist armies lurking in built-up areas. They are made up of infantry forces; arsenals of rockets, mortar launchers, and drones; anti-tank missiles; combat tunnels; and massed quantities of automatic firearms.*

If one shares the assertion that "*the democratization of military technologies is rendering the distinctions between great powers, regional powers, multinational corporations, and non-state actors vague*"⁵¹ one should also be careful not to ignore the reality that in pursuing their interests in the region, the very *great powers & regional powers* go to use, in sense, "hire" the non-state armed groups to do "*the dirty work*". Eventually, there could be a mutually advantageous deal, given that such groups, called now *proxies*, do pursue their own goals and interests: "*Just as states exploit proxies for their own ends, so too do proxies exploit states*". Practically, "*despite the power asymmetry, proxies almost invariably act according to their own interests and impulses*".⁵²

Undoubtedly, MENA's experiences during the last few years show that, for the patron-powers, appealing to *proxies* could incur enough advantages, factors

⁵⁰ Yaakov Lappin, *Israel's Invisible Enemies*, Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) Center Perspectives Paper No. 846, May 27, 2018, <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/israel-non-state-enemies/>

⁵¹ Zachery Tyson Brown, *UNMASKING WAR'S CHANGING CHARACTER*, The Modern War Institute at West Point, March 12, 2019. <https://mwi.usma.edu/unmasking-wars-changing-character/>

⁵² Daniel L. Byman, *Why engage in proxy war? A state's perspective*, BROOKINGS, May 21, 2018. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/05/21/why-engage-in-proxy-war-a-states-perspective/>

as cost and fighting power coming into play. There are other aspects too: “*some of Iran’s proxies, such as the Lebanese Hezbollah, are ideological soulmates and advancing them helps advance Iran’s broader revolutionary agenda*”.⁵³

A recent comprehensive book dealing with the apparent inefficiency of the Arab (state) military during the last decades – *Armies of Sand: The Past, Present and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness*, authored by Kenneth Pollack – shed light on the fact that, “*the inability of Arab society to compete in a globalizing world would undermine the political stability of Arab states along with their economic welfare – and their military capabilities. In Syria, Yemen, Libya, Egypt, Bahrain, and Iraq, the governments either collapsed or severely weakened, creating complete or partial security vacuums that led to the spontaneous generation of militias, insurgencies against what was left of the government, and terrorist groups... What is important about this history is that some Arab insurgencies and militias have proven unexpectedly capable, handing notable defeats to seemingly more powerful adversaries, like Hezbollah in Lebanon versus Israel or Al-Qa’ida in Iraq, Houthis, in Yemen and, for a period, the now “defunct” ISIS in Syria and Iraq... these non-state militaries achieved greater battlefield success – and in some cases demonstrated greater combat effectiveness – the virtually any of the armed forces of the Arab states themselves... (Anyway, the vast majority of non-state Arab militaries have not been this good or this successful).*”⁵⁴ “*The Houthis are formidable fighters and, in the north, (of Yemen) they have run circles around the Saudis*”.⁵⁵

In a binary approach, it’s worth noticing the different “character” of the region’s non-state armed groups: those of ethnic nature, the Kurdish ones, before anything else, with their military branch called *Peshmerga* (“those who face death”) the epitome, which have proved structurally determined and fearless, one the one hand, and the sub-state armed groups of religious nature, which have been vacillating in their existence, whatever their resources at a certain moment, as the so-called Islamic State which reached the status of a virtual state, but finally unsustainable given their mainly heavenly “roots”. Hence the pendulum movement between *vanishing and rekindling* for MENA’s two most (in)famous Sub-state “Stellar” Armed Groups – *ISIS* and *Al-Qaeda*. The latter has already been for some time exercising lessons in survival, starting with a kind of “*split personality and identity*”: *Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP)* and *Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)*, in addition to a cluster of smaller less invisible satellites spread almost everywhere in the vast MENA’s territory. As for “*the late*” IS/

⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁵⁴ Kenneth Pollack, *Armies of Sand: The Past, Present and Future of Arab Military Effectiveness*, New York, OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2019, pp. 476-509.

⁵⁵ MICHAEL YOUNG AND EXPERTS, *Is the Arab Coalition Really Containing Iranian Influence in Yemen?*, CARNEGIE MIDDLE EAST CENTER, March 28, 2019.

https://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/78683?utm_source=rssemail&utm_medium=email&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTkdkKbFl6VTNZbUZtT0dKbSIInQiOjPdjZ6NGlQMWDhMIBISWxqNnUyVmdIWkdJYTBzeDhleG9aUXo4T0lDSFBTbF15TmV2VEhRNkk0SFMwc1dRHI1Q1lvZnB3T252alRmSWldFhOVFV2WUNDd3V0dmFBN1E4VlIzZHUMzRsTktSYIQyUDVCWDhyYmpBVGJZbIVzaCJ9

ISIS/ISIL/Daesh, after the self-declared *Caliphate* practically lost all territories, in Irak (2017) and Syria (spring of 2019), it is expected to enter itself a phase of exercise in survival under the new circumstances, with a lot of *lessons* to be learned by its remnants leadership and militants, not less *lessons* to be learned by the people and leaders from the Arab fold, together with foreign powers, their leaders and militaries included, who let, in the first instance, IS appear and develop into a monstrosity in full anti-thesis with the humankind civilization of the twenty-first century.

In the shadow of the celebration – in Arabs' capitals, in Washington and in Moscow – on the IS' demise, the spring of 2019 was notable by the titles of studies and media reports relevant for the threats and dangers still related to ISIS in its “*life after death*”: “*Islamic State Fighters Regroup in Iraq, Rebuild Support and Smuggling Networks*” (March 12, 2019), “*Despite Territorial Defeat, Islamist Terrorism Will Continue to be a Threat*” (14 March 2019), “*Washington's Worst Kept Secret: The Islamic State Isn't Defeated*” (March 26, 2019), “*No, Islamic State Isn't Defeated. In many ways, the group's loss of territory makes it more dangerous.*” (April 1, 2019), “*Where Will the Next Islamic State Rise? As the group loses territory, other terrorists will likely try creating states of their own*” (April 1, 2019), “*ISIS Has Not Been Defeated. It's Alive and Well in Southern Syria*” (April 3, 2019).

In the case of AQAP, a statement from the U.S. Central Command (Centcom) at the beginning of April 2019 was referring the eight airstrikes against the al Qaeda affiliate in Yemen conducted by the U.S. military since the start of the year, the U.S. military operations against AQAP and ISIS in Yemen being separate from the U.S. support for the Saudi-led military coalition in Yemen's civil war against Houthi rebels. “*In coordination with the government of Yemen, U.S. forces continue to support ongoing counterterrorism operations against AQAP and ISIS-[Yemen] to disrupt and destroy militants' attack-plotting efforts, networks, and freedom of maneuver within the region,*” Centcom spokesman said in the statement.

Concluding at this very point: *the Arabs' Military* has had to tackle numerous non-state armed groups acting on their national territories, some in a kind of *sui-generis* alliance with the official army, others as roguish enemies; *the Iranians' Military* could be considered as true “masters” in appealing to, using of and manipulating an array of sub-state armed groups, located outside its territory and acting over there as *proxies*, alone or in partnership with Iranians army and security outfits, in promoting the Teheran government's interests and objectives in the region; *the Israelis*, who are known of possessing and operating “*the most powerful and technologically advanced military in the Middle East*”⁵⁶, sustained by a nuclear arsenal, they are not less interested in dealing with the sub-state armed groups and *proxies* effectively mushrooming in the neighborhood – Syria, Lebanon, Gaza.

⁵⁶ Sean McFate, *NEW RULES OF WAR. VICTORY IN THE AGE OF DURABLE DISORDER*, New York, William Morrow, an Imprint of HarperCollins Publishers, 2019, p. 242.

As An Ultimate “Lesson & determinant “: Maybe there couldn’t be found a better expression for this point than a simple phrase from an inspired press report⁵⁷: “MENA’s “High and Unconcealed Appetite” with Regard to Maintaining and Using Armed Forces”. Borrowing it here is meant to highlight that in the MENA region, as it is entering a new Century after the fateful one 1918-2018, whose start had been marked by the earth-shattering Great War, many of its areas, the Arab one before anything else, including some of its most relevant countries, continue to display the same “high and unconcealed appetite” with regard to maintaining and using armed forces, with the accompanying “thirst for weapons”, as the respective states account for a good share of the global imports of weapons, with Saudi Arabia the world’s second biggest importer.⁵⁸ Against this backdrop, contributions by the Carnegie Middle East Program and dozens of experts from the region to a recently comprehensive and multi-layered study couldn’t but underline the position and role of the “hard power and military might” in today’s MENA:

(i). “More than any other region in the world, the Middle East is defined not by commercial ties, diplomatic interaction, or regional organizations, but by hard power and military might. This has been the case for the region’s modern history and will remain so for the foreseeable future. But not since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire a century ago has the Middle East been so convulsed by regional turbulence and internal conflict.”⁵⁹

(ii). “In the Middle East, hard power and military might prevail. Ongoing civil wars in Syria and Yemen, as well as in Libya and Iraq, seem intractable. Regional power struggles, such as the rivalry between Saudi Arabia and Iran, are widely understood to be complicating factors. But there are also broader dynamics at work. The regional balance of power has become highly uncertain following the 2011 uprisings and perceptions of U.S. disengagement. Local disputes have become the stage on which regional rivalries are fought. Arms imports to the region have skyrocketed, further fueling conflict.”⁶⁰

(iii). “In comparison with almost every other geographical region, the Middle East suffers from a lack of both regional dispute resolution mechanisms and diplomatic protocols that might reduce the scope for regional conflict. The absence of any such mechanisms or organizations, particularly amid proliferating military conflicts, feeds security dilemmas across multiple vectors, so that steps justified by one state as necessary to its security-military intervention, arms procurement, alliance formation, and so on are perceived by its rivals as threatening... Across the region, states are intervening in neighbors’ affairs at an unprecedented rate-politically, economically, and militarily... (on the other hand) from the United States in Iraq, to Russia and Iran in Syria, to Saudi Arabia and the UAE in Yemen, military interventions in the Middle East tend to

⁵⁷ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/apr/23/the-18bn-arms-race-middle-east-russia-iran-iraq-un>

⁵⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/mar/12/nearly-half-of-us-arms-exports-go-to-the-middle-east>

⁵⁹ Perry Cammack, Michelle Dunne, Op. cit.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

*begin as short-term operations with limited military objectives and evolve into open-ended commitments with broad political aims.*⁶¹

In practical terms, the region has been convulsed by numerously unrelenting flashpoints amassing practically all over MENA, with ground and air manifestations. Symbolically, they could be equated with the (otherwise absent) fireworks on MENA's sky supposedly to be occasioned by the Centenary's 1918-2018 (non-celebratory here) commemoration.⁶² If "normal" firecrackers do have a limited extension, in time and space, these metaphorical pyrotechnics in relation to MENA, at the end of a fateful Century and the passage to a new Century not less *militarily germane*, are evolving on a particular scale, in time and space spread, as well as in "radiance" intensity.

The Arabs' Pole/ Sub-Clusters of MENA's Military Tapestry: a mosaic of national (official) armies and non-state (informal) military groups

The Overall View

First, the semantics: "*Between skyrocketing defense budgets, increased arms imports, more emphasis on military training and exercises – as well as involvement in ongoing conflicts across the region – there is no doubt that Arab states are militarizing;... another important feature of militarisation in Arab states being represented by new and renewed efforts to develop national defense technological and industrial bases (DTIBs).*"⁶³

Second, and most important, the practical context: "*the Arab upheavals (started in 2011) and (following) reactions to them have resulted in a profound militarization of the Arab world*"⁶⁴ and that on two main directions:

(i). *In the republics*, this has taken the form of remilitarizing Egypt, further entrenching the power of Algeria's military and possibly preparing the Tunisian military for an unaccustomed role in the future; in the other republics, "*a Hegelian dialectic has pitted the kataib of regime supporting militaries against militias emerging from protest movements, with both sides attracting external support, including additional militias*"⁶⁵;

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² "The centenary of the Great War attracted little commemoration in the Middle East, (giving way) to more pressing contemporary concerns. Revolutionary turmoil in Egypt, civil war in Syria and Iraq, and enduring violence between Israelis and Palestinians preoccupied the Middle East on the hundredth anniversary of the Great War... And in the Middle East, more than in any other part of the world, the legacies of the Great War continue to be felt down to the present day." (Eugene Rogan, *THE FALL of the OTTOMANS. THE GREAT WAR IN THE MIDDLE EAST*, BASIC BOOKS, New York, 2015, p. 406.)

⁶³ Florence Gaub and Zoe Stanley-Lockman, Op. cit.

⁶⁴ Robert Springborg, *The role of militaries in the Arab Thermidor*, A memo prepared for "The Arab Thermidor: The Resurgence of the Security State" workshop held at the London School of Economics and Political Science Middle East Centre, October 10, 2014. <https://pomeps.org/2014/12/12/the-role-of-militaries-in-the-arab-thermidor/>

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

(ii). *In the monarchies*, ruling families have bolstered their militaries by increasing their capabilities and by roping them together in collective commands, reminding us that, “... every ruling family since the Umayyads ruled through an alliance of monarchy and military”⁶⁶. In the modern time, they have done so primarily to confront and put down further upheavals, wherever in the Arab world they might occur, but probably also as part of intensifying intra-family power struggles.

Four years after these considerations were published, an inciting book signed by David D. Kirkpatrick and entitled it *Into the Hands of the Soldiers: Freedom and Chaos in Egypt and the Middle East* (London, BLOOMSBURY CIRCUS, 2018), came out. It is indeed a “a rare non-fiction” book where assessments further confirming the military’s role and influence in today’s MENA are nourished and sustained by the author’s direct experience on the ground as The New York Times correspondent in Egypt during the critical years’ of 2011 popular upheavals and their aftermath, as unfolded in that country and beyond it.

The word “*the Soldiers*” was privileged as part of the title, probably for its more martial resonance against the regional background. Instead, along the almost 400 pages narrative, the semantics will be enlarged: “*the Generals/ the Military/ the Armed Forces*” (with the particular the structure initiated, in Egypt, after Mubarak was forced to leave: the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces/ SCAF), as *the locus* of both brains and hands for the heartbreaking events in the modern history of Egypt and a good other part of the Arab world. With corresponding diplomacy echoes: the unconcealed option of the US Administration to focus on “*the (Egyptian) Generals’ positions/ attitudes/ etc., when Washington was scrutinizing the new developments in Egypt. That up to acquiescing, at least implicitly, with those military views: the (US) administration was more quietly embracing the SCAF as the best guarantee that the “revolution” would not go against American interests... The de facto American policy was to hug SCAF as closely as possible*”; a line of reasoning on which, later on, in Washington it would become noticeable “*a sense of inevitability about the military resuming control*”.⁶⁷

All that in consonance with an older entrenched position of “*the American military*” – shared by civilian institutions too – which had seen Egypt “as uniquely vital: the guarantor of the peace with Israel, the gatekeeper of the Sues Canal and strategic flights routes, the crossroads of three continents, and the regional bellwether.”⁶⁸

Against this backdrop, one can speak about a durable “*brotherhood*” between the American and Egyptian militaries, continuing up to these days, with the \$1.3 billion annual military assistance delivered by Washington even if sometimes internal evolutions in Egypt, as those on the situation of human rights, would contradict the basic tenets professed by Washington. And, when commentators would be inclined to place such a “*brotherhood*” in a rather negative light –

⁶⁶ M. E. McMillan, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁶⁷ David D. Kirkpatrick, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 244.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

“Washington’s cynical complicity”, due to its possible impact on the ground with regard to the supposedly *dashing the Egyptians’ hopes in the Revolution* – one should not overlook the prevailing lynchpin: the US national vital interests have been a priority for the American military too.

And Egypt should not be seen as a singular case. Exploring the depth, breadth, and scope of the more general military US-MENA countries reciprocal relationship, Micah Zenko reveals that they are not at all “*simply transactional and temporary, built upon decades of close personal contacts between U.S. military leaders and their (Middle Eastern) regional interlocutors, these relationships extend beyond the Americans’ active-duty service and have allowed Middle Eastern governing regimes to receive a pass from human and political rights concerns.*”⁶⁹

It is exactly in this light that we share Robert Springborg’s idea that, “*Lying atop this (Arab) militarization is the U.S. presence in various forms, included as primary supplier and trainer, operator of autonomous bases, or orchestrator of counter-terrorist campaigns.*”

Given a more wide-ranging sense to this relatively new development of *the Arab militarization*, we have also been witnessing, for some time, even if more in rhetorical than in practical terms, a drive toward a larger and more intense *regional military cooperation*. Beyond a series of joint military drills, *an Arab Military Alliance*, with a joint military force, has been on the agenda for several years.⁷⁰ President Donald Trump himself announced the support for the creation of an *Arab NATO*, provisionally named *the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA)*. The organization’s leading member would be Saudi Arabia (even if that would threaten to drag the other members into multiple conflicts orchestrated by Riyadh for... Riyadh’s benefit). A spokesman for the US National Security Council declared that the alliance “*will serve as a bulwark against Iranian aggression, terrorism, extremism, and will bring stability to the Middle East.*”

Ultimately, the progress toward MESA being endorsed as a firm political and military pan-Arab project will depend on the goals and effective evolution for each of the components inside *the Arab military’s three “sub-clusters”, an issue to be dealt with in PART II*. Here we will only review the core military identity for the “sub-clusters” and their national/ countries components:

The First Arab Military Sub-cluster: the Arab Gulf countries – plenty of money, plenty of weapons and plenty of military ambitions

Saudi Arabia: “The country is rich but weak. It owns massive amounts of modern military equipment but has almost no military might”

⁶⁹ MICAH ZENKO, *The Pentagon Loves Saudi Arabia, in Sickness and in Health. America’s unbreakable relationship with Riyadh is fueled less by the White House than the military*, FOREIGN POLICY, OCTOBER 24, 2018.

https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/24/the-pentagon-loves-saudi-arabia-in-sickness-and-in-health/?wpmm=1&wpisrc=nl_todayworld

⁷⁰ OMAR ASHOUR, *What Good Is an Arab Military Alliance?*, PROJECT SYNDICATE, Apr 13, 2015. <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/joint-arab-military-force-by-omar-ashour-2015-04>

*The United Arab Emirates (UAE): the “Little Sparta” of the Arab Gulf
 Kuwait: “lessons learned”, including in the military sector, on one’s own
 Qatar: “the Smallest Superpower in the World” but it hosts the Al Udeid Air Base, the largest U.S. military facility in the Middle East and houses more than 11,000 personnel from the US and its allies; the host of US Central Command (CENTCOM) forward headquarters, the forward headquarters of US Air Forces Central Command, the US Combined Air and Space Operations Center, and the 379th Air Expeditionary Wing*

Bahrain: the smallest country in the Gulf, as population, territory and army, but with two “Big Brothers” (US and Saudi Arabia) and a “Black Swan” (Iran); Besides hosting the U.S. Naval Support Activity with the U.S. Naval Forces Central Command and Fifth Fleet Headquarters, Bahrain has received preferential status for arms procurement from the United States since 1987, and the United States officially designated Bahrain a major ally in March 2002

Oman: “a different face of the Arab Gulf’s Military”

The Second Arab Military Sub-cluster – The Patchy Levant and North Africa: “major stars” in the MENA/ Arabs’ military Pleiades & relatively “minors”, but not irrelevant

Egypt: always “the special case” – now “A Slumbering Military Giant that Awakes”, generally vast horizons for a “national” military tapestry, not less for the duo/ apparently redundant military institutions at the Government level: “The Ministry of Defense and Military Production” and... “The Ministry of Military Production”

Algeria: on the verge, in the spring of 2019, of turning a page in the nation’s history, with seemingly the Military on the right side of the “barricade”, at least at the beginning, remaining to see its eventual “repositioning” during both the transition process and the finally new political Algerian dispensation

Lebanon, “the lessons” of a dual military – a National Army & a Non-State Armed Group Equally Powerful if not Stronger

Morocco: proud of a soft power too

Tunisia: the transformation-friendly Military, yet to catch the country’s full democratic drive

Jordan: powerful military but not without dangerous cracks inside; special forces – special attention

The Palestinians: the “in-between” Military

The Third Arab Military Sub-cluster – a Special Military Quartet: playing the score of civil war in four different variants, where, once again, nonstate armed groups have been major “soloists”

Iraq: a recovering national military, but also flourishing sub-state Shi'a armed group, whose symbiotic alliance with Iran could further impede both the

decisive Iraqi national coalescence and a sustainable fusion of the Iraqi Army; some 5,200 American troops are still stationed in Iraq

Syria, in the spring of 2019 – three wars, five armies and a Matryoshka’s shell; some 2,000 American troops are still stationed in Syria

Libya, a myriad of armed groups as the “the name of the game”; some American troops have been deployed in Libya in the context of fighting Islamic terrorists, a part of them being withdrawn in April 2019

Yemen: weaponization of misery – a “bonus” for war with traditional weapons

Contextual commonalities in the overall MENA’s Arab Area/Cluster Military Fabric

These days, beyond the particular evolutions and present status for each of the Arab national militaries, one can speak about several major common characteristics.

First, one should acknowledge that, eight years after the Arab Spring, “*the military forces of the region are much more active than they were before. As a result, they had to change.*”⁷¹ With the exception of Algeria, and some extent Egypt, Arab armed forces did not have the operational experience and capability to deal with an asymmetric threat in an urban, mountainous or desert landscape. Now, the intensity of combat of that nature triggered “*the necessary changes*” in the military patterns, the result being more adaptable and more operational forces.

In spite of a quasi-overall drive for change, there has remained as a uninterrupted common characteristic marking the Arab military what in Western scholarly papers has been rather neatly named: *a relative lack of effectiveness*. By hazard, or not, the beginning of 2019 has come with a reference book (almost 700 pages) on the subject-matter, authored by Kenneth Pollack⁷², a former military analyst on the Persian Gulf at the CIA and the US National Security Council, presently a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute, a book which offers “*a necessary examination of the militaries of the region, which have played an outsized role in almost every country in the Middle East*”.⁷³

Starting from “*a critical issue for the Middle East, namely the puzzling weakness of the Armed forces (that) has driven the military balance in the Middle East since the Second World War, (so That) every other aspect of the international relations of the region rests on this balance*”⁷⁴ Kenneth Pollack charts the history of Arab armies and seeks to diagnose how they came to be what they are, advancing a set of legitimate questions and reasonable answers on *the poor performance of Arab armed forces during the last century, especially of the State/official/ national militaries, while the non-state forces, like Hezbollah and*

⁷¹ Florence Gaub, *op. cit.*

⁷² Kenneth Pollack, *op. cit.*

⁷³ Seth Frantzman, *Arab Armies Under the Microscope*, The Middle East Forum, February 2019. https://www.meforum.org/57802/arab-armies-under-microscope?utm_source=Middle+East+Forum&utm_campaign=a2ae5697c2-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_02_20_07_38_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_086cf423c-a2ae5697c2-33709473&mc_cid=a2ae5697c2&mc_eid=f2e37c301a

⁷⁴ Kenneth Pollack, *op. cit.*, p. ix.

ISIS, seemingly did better. Practically, the origins and consequences of the complex issue under examination are suggestively structured, along the last few decades, in just four areas: “*Soviet Doctrine*” (*Arab Militaries and Soviet Doctrine*), “*Politicization*” (*Arab militaries and Politicization*, the degree to which high-ranking officers all had to be connected to the regime), “*Underdevelopment*” (*Economic Development and Arab Military Effectiveness*), “*Culture*” (*Arab Culture/ Civilization as an Explanation for Military Ineffectiveness*), the latter being the main “*culprit*”: “*I believe that the most important problems that Arab militaries have experienced in battle since 1945 derive from behavioral patterns associated with Arab culture...* (and that up to the mundane aspects of the Military functions): *Just as a number of traits combine to explain Arab difficulties in maneuver war, so do a number of the traits of the dominant Arab culture help explain why Arab armies enjoyed somewhat better performance in static, defensive operations*”.⁷⁵ “*In Arab society, to do something wrong generally is much worse than to do nothing at all*“: the dominant culture therefore created a disincentive for taking initiative or action.

To the four categories of factors reviewed by Pollack as having a major impact on the Arab Military’s effectiveness, one could add some more recent considerations, for instance those related to the army’s “labor”. An evaluation by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington DC⁷⁶, “*military conscription has faded in much of the world, but it is on the rise across the Middle East and North Africa*”. Morocco became the eleventh country in the region to impose a draft in February 2019, with the first conscripts to report in the fall of that year. Governments have mixed motives. While cheap labor is sometimes a factor – Egyptian conscripts earn just \$22/month – *Arab governments are also looking to ease youth unemployment, improve job readiness, and cultivate a stronger sense of citizenship*. Yet, many states are struggling to get young men to report for duty. In 2018, only 506 of the 31,000 Tunisians summoned for service showed up. Newspapers periodically report on *the strategies young men employ to avoid conscription*. Some stay in school for a decade, while others become intentionally obese. Some claim various birth defects, while others feign homosexuality. One young man reportedly grew his hair long and took up the study of Christian theology to win a religious exemption, while another had his father report him as kidnapped while he was home on leave. Many potential draftees object to the miserable conditions for conscripts, and many also worry about the danger of entering war zones. Arab Governments have jailed draft dodgers and digitized the conscription process to close loopholes. When shirking national duty is a cause for celebration and not shame, it is clear states have their work cut out for them.

Undoubtedly, one shouldn’t misjudge the geopolitical dimensions of actions and inaction by the relatively inefficient Arab Military, with tangible consequences on the ground: the army’s reduced efficiency not only has prevented the Arabs,

⁷⁵ Kenneth Pollack, *op. cit.*, pp. 344, 399.

⁷⁶ MIDDLE EAST NOTES AND COMMENT, The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), March 25, 2019. <https://mail.yahoo.com/d/folders/l/messages/137089?.intl=ro&.lang=ro-RO&.partner=none&.src=fp>

at least for more than half a century, of winning battles, if not entire wars *per se* (example: Syria vs. Israel, the Six Day War of 1967), but has also led to losing physically territories, sometimes essential areas of unitary states (as the Syrian Golan Heights). Obviously, the “winner” in such cases it has been the region’s country with a stronger army, the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). More, such unfavorably verdicts, for the defeated, could have consolidated in time, with further “non-military” strikes, but not less harming even decades later: after the occupation of Golan, in 1967, Israel decided, in 1981, to annex it (Knesset, the Israeli parliament, adopted in 1981 the *Golan Heights Law*, passed by 63 votes to 21, which effectively acknowledged that the law, jurisdiction, and administration of Israel would be duly extended into the territory) and, after further “*bullying its way into recognition*”, i.e. intensive Israeli lobbying especially toward the US Administration, president Donald Trump signed, on March 25, 2019, a decree recognizing Israeli sovereignty over Golan Heights, overturning decades of U.S. policy and drawing global condemnation, with a strong UN echo: “*status of Golan has not changed*”.

Practically, the evolution of the Golan case has come as a confirmation of the simple paradigm that maintaining “*boots of the ground*” (by Israel) without being opposed, in time, by similarly (Syrian) robust forces would, at least as a tactical non-combative pressure, would make the difference. More generally, “*any measure of annexation is based on the extension of military’s boots. Diplomats tend to be silenced before the noise of tanks, weaponry, and garrisons. Countries may claim to possess territory but can only dream in the absence of military weight.*”⁷⁷ Hence, the head of the American diplomacy, Mike Pompeo, couldn’t but assert that the Golan Heights, being from now on considered “*an appropriate sovereign part of the State of Israel*”, will make also the Israelis “*know (that) the battles they fought, the lives that they lost on that very ground, were worthy and meaningful*”, in other words, a reward for “*the boots on the ground*”. Even if all this would make the exit from the present MENA’s maze more difficult: “*It will also further muddy the waters with the Assad regime, ever keen to restore order as the bloody civil war painstakingly ends. And as for the issue of Arab-Israeli peace? Forget it. Boots, construction and missiles are proving far more effective than diplomatic advances.*”⁷⁸ As for the American side, the issue gets even more bellicose: the Trump administration’s recent recognition of Israeli sovereignty over the contested Golan Heights territory is part of a larger effort by the White House “*to open new fronts in efforts to combat Iranian militants and terror proxies in the region*”, according to U.S. officials familiar with the decision.⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, the relative weakness of the Arab military’s fabric has been a historical process, function to a factorial dynamics which hasn’t excluded

⁷⁷ Binoy Kampmark, *The Logic of Annexation: Israel and the Golan Heights*, International Policy Digest, 29 MAR 2019. <https://intpolicydigest.org/2019/03/29/the-logic-of-annexation-israel-and-the-golan-heights/>

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ U.S. Eyes New Front to Combat Iran in Golan Heights. U.S. officials say recognition of territory is key to fight against Iran terror, April 1, 2019. https://freebeacon.com/national-security/u-s-eyes-new-front-to-combat-iran-in-golan-heights/?utm_source=Freedom+Mail&utm_campaign=6838e8bb8f-EMAIL_CAMPAIGN_2019_04_01_08_41_COPY_01&utm_medium=email&utm_term=0_b5e6e0e9ea-6838e8bb8f-46144717

some degree of progress. The same thing for the future: “*The future of Arab military power will be determined by how well its new political, economic, and cultural systems mesh with the new, dominant mode of warfare. As the information age transforms Arab society and warfare alike, it may reshape Arab military power – and everyone else’s too*”.⁸⁰

Only that, as Pollock acknowledges, “*predicting the future of Arab military power is complicated by another unknown variable: changes in the dominant mode of warfare*”⁸¹ And profound changes in war-making are already unfolding as it’s been convincingly demonstrated by an outstanding military expert, Sean McFate, in his seminal book already quoted in this paper, dealing with *the new rules for the future of military engagement, the ways one can fight and win in an age of entropy, where corporations, mercenaries, and rogue states have more power and ‘nation states’ have less, where destitute, untrained, low-tech militias armed with primitive weaponry have foiled military juggernauts routinely, where “the best weapons do not fire bullets” and mercenaries return.*

Hence the legitimate interrogation-dilemma if the Arab Military, whatever the reform and change it has been/ will continue going through, could face “*the festering systemic threats like durable disorder which will shake global security in the twenty-first century, as evidenced by the increased number of armed conflicts in our lifetime*”⁸², with an implicit new political, social and strategic landscape at the world regions’ level, MENA before anything else.

The Arab military would be called to adapt and find solutions to many of the new profile of the world warfare in the future, as reviewed by Sean McFate: “*Future wars will not begin and end; instead, they will hibernate and smolder. Occasionally they will explode. This trend is already emerging, as can be seen by the increasing number of ‘neither war, nor peace’ situations and ‘forever wars’ around the world. ... In the future, wars will move further into the shadows. In the information age, anonymity is the weapon of choice. Strategic subversion will win wars, not battlefield victory. Conventional military forces will be replaced by masked ones that offer plausible deniability, and nonkinetic weapons like deception and influence will prove decisive. ... Mercenaries will once again roam the battlefields, breeding war as their profit motive dictates. International law, cannot stop them, while the demand for their services rises each year. Things once thought to be inherently governmental are now available in the marketplace, from special forces teams to attack helicopters.*”

Consequently, with the inherent warfare evolution and change, one should expect also “*changes in the nations’ militaries, political leaders, intelligence agencies, national security experts, media, academic institutions, think tanks, and members of civil society who care about armed conflict. ... This begins by transforming militaries from conventional forces to postconventional ones, and by upgrading our strategic education*”.

Apparently all these are presented as a prescription supposedly answering the needs of the Western part of the world in relation to which, “*over the last seventy*

⁸⁰ Kenneth Pollack, *op. cit.*, p. 522.

⁸¹ Ibidem, p. 521.

⁸² Sean McFate, *op. cit.*, p.245.

years, a disturbing trend has emerged: the West has forgotten how to win wars. ... in a military-centric vision of global politics" in need of radical reformulation and restructuring. Or, the Arab Military have practically offered a similar picture, even if they could have started to resonate with requirements of future war. Indeed, it is in direct relation with this core region of MENA, that (i). "*The future of war, in contrast to the cockamamie visions of Western futurists (has already been) showed to us by Syria, a disorderly battleground replete with clashing nonstate actors and mercenaries*"; (ii). "*The Israel-Hezbollah conflict (has already) illustrated war's new rules. It it had been an old-fashioned conventional war, Israel would have won. It captures more land, killed more people, destroyed more critical infrastructure, and flew its flag over the enemy's territory. But it didn't win, because the conventional war is dead, rendering Israel's superior firepower and combat technology irrelevant. ... (eventually) the conflict was between Israel and a nonstate actor*"⁸³.

There are also other elements illustrating that the MENA region has proved a useful "resonance box" for future characteristics of warfare, as there still remain many others to be fulfilled, a perspective which could not be dealt with outside the general trends of the Arab nations, generally of the Arab society. It is worth mentioning in this regard that "*an unexpected outburst of popular opposition to the regime long in power in Algeria has stimulated a renewed conversation about the dramatic tidal wave of change in the Middle East in 2011 known as the Arab Spring. The conventional view has been that cascading protests toppled autocrats in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, but then fizzled out. ... But the surprise developments in Algeria in recent weeks have inspired many regional experts to take a fresh look. Is Algeria new evidence that the march continues for opening up political affairs in the Arab world? Or will angry crowds in the streets of Algiers meet the same fate of their Egyptian and Syrian counterparts—with the breakthroughs they facilitate only strengthening the hands of strongmen and their cliques?*"⁸⁴

Or, the experience accumulated since the Arab Spring started, with the Tunisian outburst, in December 2010, doesn't seem too encouraging. The transition to a more representative system, and the process of opening up ossified institutions – Arab Military including – to more public scrutiny and oversight, appears a long, slow slog: "*It would be naive and misleading to interpret recent developments as evidence of a new wave of peaceful change in the Middle East. ... it's important to look for small successes, the modest incremental changes that are still happening in several countries in the region, from Tunisia to Iraq. The region's autocrats can take some encouragement from anti-democracy trends around the world, and from the poor performance of democratic institutions and practices in established democracies*".

Economic issues also make it exceedingly hard for more democratically inclined forces to demonstrate that their approach will produce much-needed

⁸³ Sean McFate, Op. cit. pp. 2-3, 243-251.

⁸⁴ Ellen Laipson, *Taking the Long View on the Arab Spring, After Bouteflika's Resignation in Algeria*, WORLD POLITICS REVIEW, April 5, 2019. <https://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/27732/taking-the-long-view-on-the-arab-spring-after-bouteflika-s-resignation-in-algeria>

peace and prosperity. Structural and historical realities are working against any easy return to the more egalitarian environment that Arab states enjoyed in the early years of their post-colonial independence.

In the Arab states, *military reform faces traditional, persistent obstacles, centered on politicization and factionalism* (such as a lack of accountability and regime allegiance) and, especially in post-colonial military-building, on conflicting interests among external partners. Given the evolving regional scenario, Arab armies' military reform attempts are also increasingly challenged by *new obstacles, such as the waning of the counterbalancing relationship with the élite forces (especially in the Gulf), coexistence, cooperation or hybridization with armed non-state actors (with regard to land forces), and growing dependence on foreign military donors*, which inevitably affects states' foreign policy.

Arab armies are coping with challenges related to military reform: not only they are increasingly called on to perform internal security duties (the case of the intervention of the Tunisian Armed Forces in Tataouine in May 2017 perhaps reflects a return to law enforcement tasks), but they have lost their "primacy role" in the military domain, due to the shrinking of conventional wars and the surge of élite forces and security services. As a matter of fact, armies accomplish new tasks, such as police operations (for Tunisia), military interventions abroad (for the UAE), counterterrorism and protection of oil/gas facilities (for Tunisia and the UAE in Yemen).

Therefore, armed forces' involvement in daily life is increased, as testified by the army's most recent intervention to protect critical infrastructure in Tunisia or the impact of conscription in the UAE. This promotes the recalibration of consolidated civil-military relation models, whose political consequences have still to be assessed. In perspective, we see the gradual convergence of the monarchical military model with the republican one: the armies have been acquiring a prominent role within the system of power and in foreign policy-making, as tools of interventionist regional policies, also shaping the sense of national identity and belonging.

The region now suffers from severe income inequality that makes politics all the more bitter and polarized. All this do not seem to diminish, at least, "*the arms race*" in the Arab area. Arab countries continue to be among the world's largest arms importers. According to recent updates to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute's (SIPRI) database, *half of the world's top 10 arms importers are Arab states – Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Algeria, the UAE and Iraq*. Taking also into account the illegal traffic in weaponry, benefitting the many non-state Arab armed actors, one can say that "*the arms race*" in the Arab area represents the most serious inertial factor impeding any real future drive in the reform of the Arab Army, as the main segment of the MENA Military tapestry.

And further strengthening that very inertial system seemingly entrenching for long the Arab Army, there are *the huge financial interests on the side of the military-industrial complexes*, from America to Russia, and from China to Western Europe: the United States is the largest arms supplier to Saudi Arabia and the UAE, two lucrative customers of the U.S. defense industry. Saudi Arabia was the largest importer of U.S. arms, having purchased \$112 billion in weapons from

2013 through 2017. The UAE was the second-largest importer of U.S. arms in the same time span. Since 2009, over \$27 billion in weapons have been offered to the UAE in thirty-two separate deals under the Pentagon's Foreign Military Sales program.

These arms sales continue, despite both countries' history of diverting arms to favored militias. Saudi Arabia has been purchasing weapons from third parties to pass on to allied governments and groups at least since the 1970s, sometimes on behalf of the U.S. government. A CNN investigation provided further evidence that U.S. military equipment has been transferred from Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to a variety of militias, including some linked to al-Qaeda. And even if it looks marginal for the "*the arms race*" in the Arab region, one should not undervalue "the innovations" in matter of arms "born" in MENA or just "successfully" applied over there: from famine and misery weaponization, to the refugee issue weaponization, to incendiary and explosive kites and balloons (already "implemented" by launching them from Gaza toward the Israelis communities just over the border) to what "the Syrian war has become increasingly saturated with, namely unmanned aerial drones and now with remote-controlled vehicles"⁸⁵.

Plus, a vast assortment of elements pertaining to "*the cognitive dissonance*": on the occasion of the 2017 edition of the International Defence Exhibition and Conference (IDEX), one of the largest arms fairs in the Middle East, held every two years in the Emirates capital, Abu Dhabi, the UAE signed contracts worth a total of more than \$5bn for weapons⁸⁶. Just three months later, the US government approved a \$2 billion arms sale to the same country⁸⁷. While all these arms deals were discussed and concluded, the UN was launching a call for aid to avoid the specter of starvation related to the largest humanitarian crisis in 70 years in a country situated in the neighborhood of the UAE – Yemen, where "more than seven million people are hungry and did not know where their next meal would come from". In fact, UAE proved an active, if not the most active component of the regional & international alliance in fighting the Yemeni Houthi rebels, with the result of the dramatic humanitarian situation.

Among the few "brighter" areas in the overall context related to the present state of the Arab Military one should refer to the Arab military relations and cooperation with NATO⁸⁸. NATO's contribution is acknowledged as having become more and more critical to support the *adaptation of the Arab armies to changing requirements and contexts, preserving and maximizing armies' military role*. For this reason, security partnership and practical cooperation are fundamental ways to shape Arab armed forces' new resilience. This is why NATO can play a prominent and dynamic role in this sensitive juncture, deepening education and training initiatives with Arab partners, contributing to learning

⁸⁵ Future of warfare determined in Syria, THE ARAB WEEKLY, 30/09/2018.

<https://theiarabweekly.com/future-warfare-determined-syria>

⁸⁶ <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/uae-buys-5bn-weapons-during-four-day-arms-exhibition-691509101>

⁸⁷ <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/11/politics/us-2-billion-arms-sale-uae/index.html>

⁸⁸ <http://natoassociation.ca/interviewing-nicola-de-santis-head-of-middle-east-and-north-africa-section/>.

activities and military doctrine, and stressing the importance of accountability and civilian oversight in military reform. This would *help Arab armies to re-invent themselves in a new geopolitical era, thus building concrete paths towards mutual understanding, and then military interoperability.*

There are two frameworks of Arab nations – NATO military cooperation each demonstrating its added-value for the two participating parties: (i). *NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)*, launched in December 1994, has functioned as an avenue for partnership programs between the NATO Alliance and seven countries in North Africa and the Middle East. The partner countries include six Arab nations – Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, plus Israel. The initiation of the Dialogue reflected the need to converge and address emerging security challenges as priorities on both side of the Mediterranean have become gradually connected. Moreover, the Mediterranean Dialogue has three main aims. This includes, “*contribute to regional security and stability, achieve better mutual understanding, dispel any misconceptions about NATO among Dialogue countries*”; (ii). *The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)*, launched in June 2004, following NATO consultations with four partner countries in the Arab Gulf region: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, each being individual members of the Gulf Cooperation Council. This has been a new transatlantic engagement between NATO and invited Gulf countries, “*through practical activities where NATO can add value to develop the ability of countries' forces to operate with those of the Alliance including by contributing to NATO-led operations, fight against terrorism, stem the flow of WMD materials and illegal trafficking in arms, and improve countries' capabilities to address common challenges and threats with NATO*”.

The Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative are complementary and yet distinct partnership frameworks. Both are founded upon *two pillars: political dialogue and practical cooperation* which manifest in a number of high-level political consultations, practical activities in *the fields of modernization of the armed forces, civil emergency planning, crisis management, border security, small arms & light weapons, public diplomacy, scientific and environmental cooperation, providing training, defense reform expertise and opportunities for military cooperation*. This cooperation is structured through tailored programs officially titled “*Individual Partnership Cooperation Programs*” between NATO and each MD and ICI country.

At their June 2018 NATO Summit in Brussels, NATO’s Heads of State and Government decided to develop *a more strategic, focused and coherent approach toward the Middle East and North Africa*, because the security of NATO countries and of its regional partners are inextricably linked. They approved a tailored “*Package for the South*”, which includes the enhancement of NATO’s engagement with its regional partners in the MENA, a set of more focused measures to assist the Arab partners to become more resilient against the security threats they face and which are common to NATO countries. NATO and its regional partners share, indeed, *common security challenges and threats: international terrorism, conflict spill over from failing and failed states, the trafficking of small arms and light weapons, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and*

their delivery means, maritime security, the protection of sea lanes of communication and energy supply routes, especially chock points; to name just a few.

Three examples of concrete new cooperation programmes by NATO with Arab partners: *launching a non-combat training and capacity building mission in Iraq*, at the request of the Government of Iraq, for additional support in its efforts to stabilize the country and fight terrorism, building on the training activities already developed for the Iraqi officers, for example in Jordan. This new NATO training mission in Iraq, will assist this country to develop its capacity to build more effective national security structures and professional military education institutions; through the Defense Capacity Building Initiative NATO is now *assisting Jordan in areas such as cyber defense; counter-improvised explosive devices; and civil preparedness and crisis management*, similarly *assisting Tunisia in the areas of cyber defense, counter-improvised explosive devices, and the promotion of transparency in resource management, through education and training activities and the exchange of expertise and best practices, in line with NATO standards*.

NATO official underline that the North-Atlantic Alliance has been able to build successfully *a new culture of cooperation in the security field, with 11 regional partner countries – 10 Arab states plus Israel – having different security backgrounds*. These partners are adopting NATO standards and promoting interoperability with the Alliance, while modernizing their defense and security sectors. And in spite of difficult regional circumstances and the major political changes they underwent following the Arab Awakening, none of these partners has walked out of the MD and ICI partnerships. On the contrary: all have and are currently enhancing political dialogue and practical cooperation with NATO. They all are asking for more cooperation with NATO and not less. These facts show clearly that they believe that cooperation with NATO adds value to the cooperation they have with other international actors and it is useful to these countries, to improve the security of their people.

NATO representatives acknowledge also that *the MD and ICI partners have not only been security users but over the years have taken a more active role, also becoming real security providers* through political and military contribution, alongside NATO member countries, to the successful management of the UN mandated and NATO-led operations in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan and Libya. Not to mention *the contribution of NATO's MD and ICI countries to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIL, alongside NATO and its individual member countries*.

For the future cooperation, if the Bilateral Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programmes will continue to be the best tool in implementing the duality underlying the NATO-Arab military dialogue and cooperation, namely *preventive and operational functions*, for partners requiring urgent assistance, it is *NATO Defense Capacity Building Initiative* which can be also an important instrument, to provide them with additional support.

A very important role will be played in the future for NATO's cooperation with Arab Gulf states, by *the NATO-ICI Regional Center*, which has been built and generously offered by the State of Kuwait. Through a NATO-Kuwait developed programme, during its first year of existence, this Center has trained 478 officials

from ICI countries, Saudi Arabia, Oman and the Gulf Cooperation Council. While 149 experts and instructors from NATO countries travelled to Kuwait to deliver these training courses. The NATO-ICI Regional Center in Kuwait will certainly play a major role in NATO's future cooperation with our ICI partners but *it will also allow to reach out to Saudi Arabia, Oman, the other two member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), as well as to the GCC Secretariat.*

Developing political dialogue aimed at identifying possible practical cooperation of mutual interest between *the NATO Secretariat and the Secretariat of the Gulf Cooperation and with the Secretariat of League of Arab States*, will also be priority areas for NATO's future regional outreach and cooperation. Also, *the recently established Hub for the South, at the NATO Joint Force Command in Naples*, will further contribute to the enhancement of NATO cooperation with its MD and ICI partners, by *factoring in their contribution of ideas, experience and information, for a better situational awareness and understanding of regional challenges, threats, and opportunities, inspired by the principles of two-way dialogue and joint ownerships.*

Alessandro Minuto-Rizzo, a former Deputy Secretary General of NATO from 2001 to the end of 2007, putting his “inside” experience in building NATO-Arab partnership rightly underlines: *“This is the way of the future for managing global stability. The world is becoming increasingly complex, and there is no longer a dominant power. Productive dialogue among different peoples and cultures is essential, especially because never before in human history has interaction been as great as it is today. This change was inevitable, given that today’s world is larger, colonialism is a thing of the past, pure power politics no longer pay off, and so-called coalitions of the willing are short-lived. The best way to advance international governance is by dialogue among and between regions. We can call such “cooperative security” a key factor in tomorrow’s world. This dialogue should be a top priority and tirelessly pursued.”*⁸⁹

À bon entendeur, salut!

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