Chapter 3

The New Transregional Security Challenges

The End of Geography?

A key feature of the strategic environment in NATO's south is the extent to which traditionally separate European, Middle Eastern, and Eurasian security questions are increasingly interwoven. Indeed, one of the difficulties that NATO and the United States have had in addressing Mediterranean security in the past has been the bureaucratic and intellectual difficulty of treating problems that cut across established security theaters. Today's environment is characterized by security problems that transcend regional divisions, as well as new transregional perceptions and alignments. The result is not so much the "end of geography" but rather the enlargement of traditional conceptions of the European security space. This trend can be seen in key geopolitical, economic, and defense developments around the Mediterranean basin.


2 The North Atlantic Assembly has been particularly attuned to these trends. See reports of the Mediterranean Special Group, including Pedro Moya, "NATO's Role in the Mediterranean," North Atlantic Assembly (NAA), Brussels, October 1997.

3 I am grateful to Alvaro Vasconcelos of the Portuguese Institute for International and Strategic Studies for this intriguing formulation. His reference point was the changed role of the Azores in Western strategy as a result of technological and political developments.

The Geopolitical Dimension

The end of the Cold War and developments in Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East have encouraged new linkages between regions around the Mediterranean basin. Perceptions of the United States and NATO in the Islamic and Arab world have been strongly influenced by developments in Europe, especially in the Balkans where Muslim affinities are engaged. Governments and publics from North Africa to Turkey were critical of perceived European inaction in Bosnia. Russian actions in Chechnya raised similar concerns. NATO policy in Kosovo has been more positively received, although tempered with ambivalence about the potential for Western intervention elsewhere.

The status of Muslim and Arab immigrants in western Europe is another issue that commands attention on Europe’s periphery. States such as Morocco, Algeria, and even Turkey have come to view the treatment of their nationals abroad as part of their own diplomatic agenda—an issue that has acquired greater significance with the rise of anti-immigrant violence by far-right groups in France, Italy, Germany, and elsewhere.5

Lack of progress in the Middle East peace process, and Arab frustration with the direction of European and especially U.S. policy in this regard, has severely constrained north-south cooperation on security issues around the Mediterranean since the mid-1990s. The status of the peace process has made it difficult to engage Arab partners in NATO’s Mediterranean Initiative, particularly multilateral confidence-building measures that would include Israel. It has also limited the EU’s ability to develop the security aspects of the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. The May 1999 Israeli elections could transform this situation and open new avenues for security cooperation in the context of the peace process. Europe, for its part, worries about the spillover effect in Europe of political struggles in the Middle East. Algeria and the Kurdish problem provide leading examples.

In the eastern Mediterranean, new geopolitical alignments are changing the strategic environment, as well as the context for U.S. and allied power projection. The most significant development has been the

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These include Israeli upgrades to Turkish F-4s and F-5s, and likely Turkish involvement in Israel's Arrow ballistic-missile defense program. The Israeli-Turkish relationship is multidimensional and evidently "strategic," although both countries have been careful not to overstate this aspect. Politically, recent agreements codify a relationship that has existed in a less visible fashion for decades. Economically, the way is now open to greater cooperation in many areas, including joint ventures in Central Asia, the energy sector, and water. Militarily, the range of cooperative activity is large and spans intelligence cooperation, joint training and exercises, and defense-industrial projects. Air power cooperation has been a particular feature of the relationship, with Israeli aircraft gaining access to Turkish air space and a variety of ongoing and potential aerospace projects. Strategically, the relationship serves to pressure Syria—a common concern—and to provide reassurance against Iraqi and Iranian risks, especially in relation to WMD and terrorism.

Jordan, with its limited defense capabilities but shared concern about powerful Arab neighbors, is a much more ambivalent third partner in this new alignment. Limited air and ground force exchanges have already occurred between Turkey and Syria, and Jordanian observers have participated in trilateral Israeli-Turkish-U.S. naval exercises. These developments have, in turn, provoked a critical reaction from Arab states in the region, above all Syria and Egypt. In response, relations between Syria and Iraq, historically difficult, have grown closer. There has also been considerable speculation about closer security cooperation among Syria, Greece, and Cyprus as a (not very promising) counterweight to Turkish cooperation with Israel. To this might be added the possibility of Russian support, following on from the supply of military equipment to Cyprus.

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7 Turkey and Jordan have exchanged infantry companies and have begun to collaborate on exchanges of aircraft. The Prime Ministers of Jordan and Turkey have called for "comprehensive" security cooperation in the eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East. See "Jordan and Turkey Call for Security Plan," International Herald Tribune, September 7, 1998.

8 Jordan has announced that it will not participate in the next U.S.-Turkish-Israeli naval exercises.

9 The existing Greek-Syrian defense cooperation agreement does not appear to be as ambitious as some Turkish analysts have suggested. In any event, it is doubtful that the Greek air force is equipped to exploit advantages that might flow from access to Syrian bases in a crisis with Turkey over Cyprus or the Aegean. There have also been reports of Greek defense agreements with Iran and Armenia; their content, if any, is unclear.
These new “geometries” are encouraging a greater degree of interdependence in security terms among Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East. They also present new opportunities for U.S. strategy, particularly in relation to the projection of air power. Political acceptance and force protection problems may complicate the longer-term outlook for forward presence in the Gulf. The southern route for power projection from the Indian Ocean faces similar access constraints, and depends heavily on the predictable use of the Suez Canal. In this setting, an alternative northern approach to power projection for the Gulf may be attractive, logistically as well as politically. Baghdad is closer to the eastern Mediterranean coast than it is to the southern Persian Gulf (roughly 500 versus 1000 miles). A northern strategy for the Gulf would imply a more active role for Israel, Jordan, and Turkey as partners in expeditionary operations beyond the eastern Mediterranean. To be sure, formal, standing arrangements for U.S. access and overflight would face formidable political obstacles. Progress in the peace process—or other dramatic developments in the region, such as a conflict between Turkey and Iran, could change this equation.10

The Economic Dimension and Energy Security

Europe is the key economic partner for all of the southern Mediterranean states, especially in the energy sector. Much EU attention and funding (although far less than that given to central and eastern Europe) is devoted to encouraging development and investment in non-member Mediterranean states.11 The EU’s Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (the “Barcelona process”) envisions the establishment of a comprehensive Mediterranean free trade area by 2015. The EU has also negotiated a series of association agreements around the Mediterranean, of which the customs union agreement with Turkey is the most ambitious.12 The poor state of Turkish-EU relations in the wake

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11 The assistance to be given as part of the Barcelona process is a small fraction of the EU “cohesion funds” allocated to southern European members.
12 Other agreements have been concluded with Morocco, Tunisia, the Palestinian Authority, and Jordan. Agreements are pending with Algeria, Lebanon, Syria, and Egypt. The EU plans to open accession talks with Cyprus and, quite possibly, Malta.
of the Luxembourg, Cardiff, and Cologne summits was all the more disturbing because the relationship with Ankara is, in many respects, the cornerstone of the EU’s Mediterranean strategy. Although the EU’s Helsinki summit decision to include Turkey in the list of candidates for membership has put relations back on track, the long-term outlook for Turkish integration remains uncertain. The EU approach to the southern Mediterranean as a whole may be characterized—not unreasonably—as an attempt to subsidize political stability and dampen migration pressures in the south.

Energy and energy security are key transregional issues from Gibraltar to the Gulf and the Caspian. Protecting access to the energy resources of the Persian Gulf has imposed power projection requirements on the United States and on at least some NATO allies that have, in turn, shaped security relationships around the Mediterranean. More directly, the eastern Mediterranean has been a terminus for Turkish and Syrian pipelines, providing an alternative to shipment through the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Suez, although unsuitable for the largest crude carriers, also plays a role in the transport of Gulf oil to European markets.

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, the prospect of oil and gas supplies from the Caspian Basin has emerged as a new factor affecting security perceptions and planning. The Byzantine politics of oil pipeline alternatives and the likelihood that choices will ultimately be driven more by private, economic decisionmaking than by geopolitical design complicate informed discussion of the security implications. Despite U.S. and Turkish interest, and commitments in principle, the outlook for construction of the Baku-Ceyhan pipeline across Turkey to a terminal on the eastern Mediterranean is uncertain. A route from Baku to Supsa on the Black Sea is more likely, with all that this implies for increased tanker flow through the Bosporus. Eventually, changes in Iranian relations with the West may result in much Caspian oil passing through Iran to the Gulf (increasing the dependence on unimpeded passage through the Strait of Hormuz). The consensus view suggests that Caspian resources will provide an important new long-term source of

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energy for world markets, although still less significant than other Middle Eastern sources and far from the transforming development that early analyses implied.  

Nonetheless, the development of Caspian resources and lines of communication to world markets will have the effect of tying Europe, Eurasia, and the Middle East more closely together in security terms. This tendency will be reinforced by the parallel development of new overland nonenergy lines of communication. New road and rail links, and the improvement of Black Sea ports, will make it possible for Caucasian and Central Asia states to bypass Russia in their trade with Europe and the Middle East. Regardless of whether Caspian oil itself emerges as a strategic stake warranting Western planning for its defense, the development of new resources in the region is likely to offer more opportunities for geopolitical friction touching on the interests of NATO allies. Turkey, adjacent to some 70 percent of the world’s proven oil reserves and some 40 percent of world gas reserves, will be in a position to affect—and be affected by—developments within the “strategic energy ellipse” formed by the Caspian and the Gulf.

The longstanding interest in Gulf oil and the fashionable interest in Caspian “great games” have obscured attention to another and perhaps equally important development in energy geopolitics on Europe’s periphery—growing European reliance on imported natural gas. Europe depends on North Africa for roughly 25 percent of its natural gas requirements. For southern European countries and France, the dependency is far higher. Algeria is the leading and increasingly influential supplier. Spain already depends on Algeria for some 70 percent of its supply, and this figure is set to increase substantially over the next decade as a result of fuel choices and new lines of communication for gas. Portugal is almost entirely reliant on Algerian gas supplies. Most of this supply reaches Europe through two pipelines—the Transmed system that connects North Africa with Italy and the new Trans-

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14 See unclassified CIA estimates cited in Sokolsky and Charlick-Paley.
15 See Abraham S. Becker, Russia and Caspian Oil: Moscow Loses Control, RAND, P-8022, 1998.
17 Gas import estimates compiled by RAND colleagues Nurith Bernstein and Richard Sokolsky from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other sources.
Maghreb pipeline that supplies Algerian gas to Spain and Portugal (as well as France, Belgium, and Germany) via Morocco. Additional pipelines are planned to expand the Libya-Italy link and to provide Libyan gas to Egypt, and through Israel with links to Qatari gas, onward to Turkey. New pipelines from the Caucasus and Central Asia, perhaps via Iran, will eventually provide gas to eastern and central Europe. As a result, by the early 21st century, “Europe will be profoundly tied into the Mediterranean region by its dependence on energy supplies through expensive fixed delivery infrastructure.” Moreover, unlike oil, the market for gas is regional, not global, and relatively inflexible in responding to specific interruptions.

At least one prominent observer has suggested that this trend makes the Middle East of “acute and growing interest to Europe for reasons that have nothing to do with American priorities.” The United States may, however, find itself sharing this energy security concern as a matter of Alliance interest and NATO strategy. There are also certain parallels with the growth of European dependence on Soviet gas in the 1980s, a development that disturbed many U.S. strategists but which most Europeans saw as useful and stabilizing interdependence. In the case of North African gas, the significant risks to access are likely to come from turmoil and anarchy rather than deliberate cutoffs by suppliers or transit states. With growing levels of European dependence on gas from the southern periphery, it would not be surprising if NATO in the 21st century is compelled to plan for operations to restore the flow of gas from far-flung and unstable regions. Such operations are every bit as likely as contingencies involving Caspian oil, and far more likely to find broad support within the Alliance.

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20 Ibid.
21 NATO’s new Strategic Concept refers to “disruption of the flow of vital resources” as one of several new challenges. See NATO press release NAL-S(99)65, paragraph 24.
The Defense Dimension

Two prominent security challenges emanating from Europe’s southern periphery—proliferation and terrorism—are emblematic of the emerging transregional environment. Some additional, “soft” security problems—refugees, drugs, and crime—are also worth noting in this context.

Despite some resistance to debate on this topic in NATO circles, analysts now recognize that the Southern Region is increasingly exposed to proliferation risks as a result of the growing reach of ballistic missile systems deployed in the Middle East and potentially deployable in North Africa and elsewhere around the Mediterranean. Cruise missile risks have received less attention in this setting, but probably should be taken more seriously in the Southern Region. Turkish population centers are already within reach of missiles deployed by Iran, Iraq, and Syria. Libya or Algeria could acquire systems from diverse suppliers (e.g., China, North Korea, and Pakistan) that could easily reach southern European capitals. The 1998 test of a medium-range ballistic missile by Iran, and planned tests of a new multistage missile with a 2600-mile plus range, point to the possibility that, within the next decade, not only Southern Region capitals but Paris, London, Berlin (and possibly Moscow) will be within range of systems deployed on Europe’s periphery. The attention to proliferation risks within NATO, especially in NATO’s south, has been sporadic but is growing since the Gulf War. The prospect of much broader, Alliance-wide vulnerability to these risks suggests that this challenge is set to receive more serious attention in the future.

The leading motivations for the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the means for their delivery at longer ranges are, arguably, regional rather than transregional—that is, largely south-south rather than north-south. The most likely victims of WMD and ballistic missile use are in the south, as the Iran-Iraq war, the use of Scud missiles in Yemen, and even the Gulf experience suggest. But the prolifer-
Missile proliferation in the Middle East can affect European security in another, less-direct fashion. Many of the world’s leading WMD and missile proliferators are arrayed along an arc from Libya to South Asia. As these states acquire more destructive capacity and advanced delivery systems, there is the potential for allies such as Turkey to respond by developing deterrent capabilities of their own. The prospects for such reaction are reduced if there is sufficient confidence in the NATO security guarantee, including its nuclear dimension. But under certain conditions (including a marked increase in tensions with Syria, Iraq, or Iran), Ankara might well decide to develop sovereign capabilities. The strategic dilemma would be even more pronounced in the event of a nuclear Iran or Iraq. Proliferation pressure on Turkey could in turn fuel a missile race in the Balkans and the Aegean, threatening already unstable relationships in southeastern Europe.

U.S. freedom of action across the Mediterranean and in Europe could also be affected by proliferation trends. Increased European security exposure to Middle Eastern crises may have operational as well as diplomatic consequences. A more vulnerable Europe will demand a more active role in Middle Eastern diplomacy, and in ways that could affect NATO’s ability to address extra-European problems. At the same time, the potential exposure of European population centers to retaliation could complicate the prospects for U.S. access to southern European and Turkish facilities for expeditionary operations in North

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24 This concern has been raised in relation to Serbia with its rudimentary missile capability.
Africa and the Middle East—and perhaps even in the Balkans. Under these conditions, the United States and its allies might not enjoy the luxury of a secure rear area from which to project military power outside Europe. The prospects for access might then depend, in part, on the ability to provide a reasonably effective area defense against missile attack.

Leaving aside the technical problems of missile defense in the Southern Region, efforts to address missile risks around the Mediterranean face significant obstacles. To the extent that NATO concentrates more heavily on proliferation challenges, these obstacles will likely loom larger, especially from the perspective of AFSOUTH. First, Southern Region allies tend to assume that the United States will eventually provide some form of mobile theater missile defense (TMD) for the region, either afloat or readily deployable by air. The costliness of such systems deters most southern allies from participation in the development of theater ballistic missile defense (TBMD) systems [Italy through the Medium Extended Air Defense System (MEADS) and possibly Turkey through the Israeli Arrow program are partial exceptions]. Second, the relative lack of modern communications links in the Southern Region severely complicates the task of addressing missile and WMD risks, especially in relation to warning time and civil defense. Third, Southern Region allies—with the exception of Turkey—are uncomfortable with counterproliferation strategies, preferring political approaches to proliferation dynamics, which they regard, with some reason, as largely south-south in nature.

If WMD and missile proliferation are the dominant concerns at one end of the “hard” security spectrum, terrorism and spillovers of political violence are equally prominent at the low-intensity end. Political struggles and anarchic violence in Algeria have already produced spillovers of terrorism in France and Belgium, and officials on both sides of the Atlantic are concerned about the potential for wider terrorism carried out by networks sympathetic to the Armed Islamic Group (GIA) or simply by alienated North African immigrants. The Kurdish issue, including its violent component, has also been imported

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into Europe through the activities of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK). Germany, with some two million Turkish residents, at least a third of whom are Kurds, has been particularly exposed to spillovers from this ongoing struggle. Italy and Greece were forced to contend with the diplomatic embarrassment of having the PKK leader, Abdullah Ocalan, as an asylum seeker, giving rise to friction in relations with Ankara. The capture of Ocalan and the ensuing Kurdish protests across Europe have put the Kurdish issue and its transnational character in sharp relief. There is also an important nexus among Mediterranean terrorist activities, drug trafficking, and transnational crime. The PKK is a leading example in this regard.\textsuperscript{26}

Conflicts in the southern Balkans and the possibility of further anarchy in Albania, Kosovo, or Macedonia, can spill over into NATO Europe to affect the security of Greece and Italy. Both countries would be profoundly affected by the arms smuggling, crime, refugee movements, and potential terrorism associated with zones of chaos across the Adriatic. Over the last decade, Athens and Rome have had to confront the political, social, and internal security problems posed by Balkan and Kurdish refugees. In the same period, Turkey has had to address the arrival of roughly 100,000 ethnic Turks from Bulgaria and could face disastrous new flows as a result of further Balkan upheavals or conflict in northern Iraq. Spain and Portugal confront on a smaller scale illegal migration from Morocco, but they worry that turmoil across the Mediterranean could produce more extensive movements of people.

These and other low-intensity, transregional risks are blurring the distinction between internal and external security in a European context. With the implementation of the EU’s Schengen Agreement facilitating cross-border travel, southern Europe is in an increasingly uncomfortable position of responsibility for controlling the movement of people into the EU as a whole. There is a natural southern European interest in multilateralizing this problem, along with other cross-border challenges such as drug trafficking and international crime. Cooperation on such “third pillar” issues within EU institutions is one ap-

\textsuperscript{26} See Ian O. Lesser, Bruce Hoffman, John Arquilla, David Ronfeldt, and Michele Zanini, Countering the New Terrorism, RAND, MR-989-AF, 1999.
A tour d’horizon would include potential conflicts between Spain and Morocco, Morocco and Algeria, Libya and Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, Israel and its Arab neighbors, Turkey and Syria/Iraq/Iran, Greece and Turkey, and the complex of rivalries and flashpoints in the Balkans.

The Mediterranean basin contains many crises and potential crises capable of producing conventional, cross-border conflicts. Very few pose the risk of a direct military clash between north and south. Beyond the ongoing potential for conflict with “rogue” states such as Libya, only two scenarios stand out. In the western Mediterranean, there is a potential for conflict between Spain and Morocco over the Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla. Apart from participation in multinational peacekeeping operations, this remains the leading contingency for Spanish military planners and is technically outside the NATO treaty area. The outlook for this potential flashpoint depends critically on the character of post-Hassan Morocco. At the other end of the Mediterranean, Turkish-Syrian and Turkish-Iranian relations constitute flashpoints, with the potential for direct NATO involvement (this issue is taken up in the next chapter).

Overall, south-south risks predominate along Europe’s southern periphery, but there are many possibilities for transregional spillovers. Europe, and the United States as a European power, will be exposed to the consequences of developments over the horizon—in North Africa, the Middle East, and Eurasia. Challenges emanating from the European periphery, from proliferation to migration, also suggest that the “new” NATO has important new consumers of security in its Southern Region. These security challenges are harder, more direct, and more likely to involve the use of force in the eastern Mediterranean, especially on Turkey’s borders.

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