



NATO Parliamentary Assembly

MEDITERRANEAN AND MIDDLE EAST
SPECIAL GROUP (GSM)

SUB-COMMITTEE ON
TRANSATLANTIC DEFENCE AND
SECURITY COOPERATION (DSCTC)

MISSION REPORT

ROME, ITALY

23 – 25 NOVEMBER 2017

1. Coping with the complex security problems arising in the MENA region requires multi-faceted approaches for the simple reason that the challenges themselves are highly complex and resist simple solutions.

2. This was one of the central insights of a Joint Seminar of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly's Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM) and the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Cooperation (DSCTC) held in Rome, Italy on 23-25 November. The GSM Seminar, which the Assembly organised in conjunction with the Italian Delegation to the NATO PA, considered a range of topics including the situation in Libya and North Africa, the migration crisis, the situation in Syria and Iraq, the terrorist threat to Europe and the Western Balkans, and countering radicalisation and violent extremism. Participants also considered and adopted a report presented by Senator Andrea Manciuilli on the threat posed by ISIL/Daesh and Al Qaeda to Europe. That report is available on the [NATO PA website](#). One hundred members of parliament from 35 countries attended the Seminar, including MPs from NATO Member and Associate Member States, associated Mediterranean countries, Gulf states, and countries on the southern rim of the Mediterranean.

I. OPENING SESSION

3. **Laura Boldrini**, the President of the Chamber of Deputies opened the seminar by telling the audience that in meeting these challenges, NATO countries must be sure to uphold democratic values premised on the rule of law and human rights. She said the annual GSM meeting has become a priority for the Chamber as it is dealing with critical challenges Italy and its allies need to confront in the Mediterranean region including migration, Libya, Middle East conflicts, and terrorism. The GSM format allows these issues to be taken up with parliamentarians from the region adding great value to the process. She noted the defeat of ISIS in Iraq and Syria will now open a new set of challenges as the fighters scatter. She also said ISIS is operating in cyber space and this is an all-together new kind of strategic challenge requiring the engagement of non-traditional allies such as those companies running digital platforms, some of which have not been helpful in the past.

4. Speaker Boldrini also said migration poses an ongoing challenge to Italy and Europe has moral and juridical obligations to respond in a humane fashion to the crisis. Long-term solutions are also essential, and this means it is essential to address root causes. In Libya for example, reconciliation is needed to foster stability and to build a stronger state capable of contributing to regional security. The international community is not in a position to build democracies on behalf of recipient countries but rather to encourage these countries to move in this direction, she said.

5. The President of the Italian Senate, **Pietro Grasso**, suggested parliamentarians have unique responsibilities in overseeing foreign and security policy, so it is extraordinarily important to foster international parliamentary dialogue. He said hammering out strategies to prevent radicalisation represents one area where a great deal more could be done. He also said that while there are deep concerns about terrorism, this should not undermine the welcome extended to refugees who need international support and protection.

6. **Paolo Alli**, the President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly welcomed the parliamentarians to the Italian Chamber of Deputies and thanked Laura Boldrini and Pietro Grasso for their ongoing support of the annual GSM Seminar. He noted that as President he has sought to deepen the Assembly's ties with the MENA region and to identify points of common interest and areas in which closer collaboration is possible. He said the Special Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group has become a focal point of this work, but each of the Assembly's five committees have taken on topics of relevance to the MENA region and all of them have visited the region in recent years to gather information for their reports and to foster closer relations with these countries. By way of example, he mentioned a Presidential visit he conducted to Cairo, Egypt, in the framework of a regional workshop on the "Nexus of Parliamentarians and Criminal Justice

Actors in Counter Terrorism” organised by the Arab Parliament and the International Institute for Justice and the Rule of Law. At that meeting he met with the President of the House of Representatives of Egypt, Ali Abdel Aal, and Minister of Defence General Sedki Sobhi Sayyid Ahmed as well as with the Secretary General of the Arab League Ahmed Aboul-Gheit, and the President of the Arab Parliament Meshal Faham Alsulami. Those discussions focused on the opportunities offered by NATO’s Strategic Direction South – the Alliance’s new policy to project stability in its southern neighbourhood. He said the Hub for the South created at Allied Joint Forces Command Naples is much more than a tool for military cooperation. It offers an essential link between NATO and its partners in the South and will provide a vehicle to identify shared threats and to take proactive measures to cope with these. Paolo Alli underlined the Assembly’s interest in strengthening ties with parliaments in the region, the League of Arab States, and with the Arab Parliament.

7. In his remarks, Italy’s Prime Minister **Paolo Gentiloni** said international solidarity was also an essential tool to building stability. He said that Italy has shouldered a great burden by responding with compassion to the ongoing migration across the Mediterranean, but that the response to challenges on this scale need to be European and transnational. Many of the region’s difficulties, he added, are not simply military in nature, and thus cannot be solved by military means alone.

8. Prime Minister Gentiloni said Italy has a great deal of experience in the MENA region and it has become a reliable partner, particularly as its broad strategic choices are very clear. NATO and the EU are critical elements of Italy’s international posture. The government has worked hard to share its perspective with allies and partners and it wants NATO to look to the south. The level of strategic risks would rise if it failed to do so, but fortunately NATO recognises the challenge. The outreach to the region it is conducting from Naples is emblematic of this approach. It is also from Naples that NATO plans its work in the Balkans which remains an area of critical concern and economic interest to Italy. JFC Naples is also overseeing NATO operations in the Mediterranean, Middle East and Africa and has helped provide one pillar of a broad and complex approach to the region. It is essential, he added, to deepen collaboration between the Alliance and the European Union because of the complementary roles they can play in the region. He also cited the OSCE as offering a potential model for deeper cooperation throughout the Mediterranean. That organisation has its roots in the Cold War but managed to foster dialogue, cooperation and reassurance by building contacts, recognising borders and fostering people-to-people exchanges. These kinds of bridges could serve the broader MENA region as well. Resolving the region’s myriad problems demands multilateral approaches, the Prime Minister suggested. People-to-people exchanges are needed to build trust throughout the Mediterranean and he suggested as an example that an Erasmus-like exchange programme for the region would foster new solidarities among young people that will be essential for long term stability.

II. SESSION I – ISIL/DAESH AND AL-QAEDA THREAT TO EUROPE

9. **Andrea Manciuilli**, Head of the Italian delegation to the NATO PA and GSM Rapporteur, opened the first session by presenting the final GSM report to the delegation. Manciuilli began by stressing the shared nature of the struggle against terrorism, underscoring any attempts to divide our societies along confessional or ethnic lines in this fight are false – the suffering is equal and our burdens in combating terrorism are shared.

10. Mr Manciuilli told the delegation that AQ/Daesh was principally a terrorism concern when it was founded, with a long-term ideological and political goal to restructure the geopolitical order in the Middle East and beyond. As the group evolved, and spawned offshoots such as Daesh, he continued, the nature of the threat changed fundamentally – these groups are no longer just terrorism threats, but now encapsulate the potential for a whole range of conflicts. Daesh’s efforts to create a quasi-state inspired and drew in global recruits to an organism seeking to employ extreme violence.

11. The dedicated efforts by regional states, in conjunction with coalition efforts, have been effective in undoing the territorial expression of Daesh's quasi-state. But this is only part of the challenge, he noted, as the group is able to move between both physical and cyber space – their message enduring beyond geographic constraints. The group remains a threat, he said, and has the will to continue to destabilise Middle Eastern and global politics.

12. While concerns about the return of foreign fighters are justified, Mr Manciuilli warned the delegation the threat is much broader still; they are not just seeking to come home, but are also on the lookout for new, fertile areas to sow their disruption. Mr Manciuilli also noted a changing character to international jihadists; not only are their numbers multiplying, but they are, on average, much younger when compared to the 'first generation' of the mujahideen fighting in Afghanistan – often even under 20 years old.

13. The character of radicalisation is taking on so many different forms today, he continued, it is very difficult to see how it will evolve in the near future. As such, he told the delegation, action must be taken now to pre-empt this kind of evolving threat among the young generation of all our nations. We must ask ourselves; how do we intervene to prevent such problems?

14. Mr Manciuilli concluded by admitting that coordination and cooperation with the countries all around the Mediterranean basin will be challenging. He stressed, however, that all assembled must remember that fighting international Islamic radicalism is not solely a military challenge, but also a legal, social one as well. As such, he concluded: "We must all make our parliaments aware of this and find a common approach."

15. **Marco Minniti**, Minister of Interior, took the floor next to present to the delegation the Italian Interior Ministry's understanding of the new challenges of the fight against terrorism.

16. Minister Minniti thanked Mr Manciuilli for the GSM report, noting its helpful role in understanding the evolution of the threat.

17. Mr Minniti began by discussing the impending military defeat of Daesh in its territorial strongholds. The quasi-state and all of its perversity, he said, will soon be extinguished. Daesh's territorial defeat, he warned, however, does not mean the end of the threat it poses at all. While Daesh is militarily weaker, Minister Minniti said the group would now shift to rely more heavily on its asymmetrical means to push its message.

18. Minister Minniti's central message noted a few fundamental challenges ahead. The first, he said, is the return of foreign fighters and how the respective governments to whose jurisdiction they would be returning would manage them – a key challenge being the ability to mitigate the spread of their radical ideas. He also discussed the need to be a part of the reconstruction of both Mosul and Raqqa, which have been largely destroyed in the past year's fighting. The needs of Mosul and Raqqa, he continued, can be added to the attention necessary to the development of the Maghreb, particularly Libya.

19. In the same vein as the challenge of stymieing the import of the returning foreign fighters' radical ideas, Minister Minniti noted the likelihood Daesh's cyber strategy would grow stronger as it continued to lose territory. Radicalisation in the cyber sphere will force all states to try to better manage public/private sector cooperation. Minister Minniti told the audience momentum for increased public-private cooperation in the cyber sector is gaining. By way of example, he recounted a recent meeting in the EU between Interior Ministers and large private sector service providers as a breakthrough as, prior to the meeting, the private sector had expressed little to no appetite for such meetings.

20. Minister Minniti concluded by telling the delegation that the only way forward was to maintain the strong international unity that had been successful in routing Daesh from its territories. Together, he said, the coalition of those states willing to do so can build a brighter future for all and drown out the root causes of Daesh's success.

21. **Professor Marco Lombardi** took the floor to address the complex challenge of the interweaving of hybrid warfare, terrorism, and communication. He told the audience the big picture is changing quickly – he noted he does not like the term hybrid warfare very much and simplified it by noting it could be understood as a group of teams from different sports trying to play on the same field together: All teams seek to compete to prevail, but share no tactics, system of rules, or values.

22. Professor Lombardi continued by saying Daesh is opportunistic, widespread, and global, but this is still paradoxical as the group is simultaneously anti-modern, post-modern, and anachronistic as well. He asked the audience to try to understand the motivations of a terrorist group, rather than just look at the consequences of their actions. Their ability to manipulate ever-changing communication means is key to their success – such as internet networks for advanced propaganda campaign, the sophistication of the propaganda campaign is in fact what we should focus on. If Daesh continues to communicate effectively, they achieve their goal by still being able to reach their target audience, he warned the delegation.

23. Daesh is adapting in the face of near constant attempts to disrupt its ability to communicate. Currently, all states are simply reacting to Daesh's constantly changing means of communicating. He concluded by telling the delegation: "We have to think like a terrorist in order to get ahead of them and disrupt them. We have to think like a terrorist to be effective disrupters; we have to learn to walk in the territory fed by better human intelligence."

III. DISCUSSION OF THE GSM DRAFT REPORT *ISIL/DAESH AND AL-QAEDA THREAT TO EUROPE* [091 GSM 17 E rev.1] BY ANDREA MANCIULLI, HEAD OF THE ITALIAN DELEGATION TO THE NATO PA

24. The delegation discussed the GSM draft report. A delegate from Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM) spoke first. He told the delegation Central Asian countries must be brought in to the debate in order to work with them to counter the root causes of Daesh in their region. Next, a delegate from the United Kingdom noted the rapporteur should be careful with the use of some terminology in the report, particularly noting his discomfort with referring to the efforts to degrade and defeat Daesh as a war, which he said gives their actions unnecessary legitimacy. He told the audience: "They are criminals, we need to keep their acts in the criminal realm."

25. A delegate from the Netherlands expressed her disappointment the report does not discuss Islam itself as being a key variable in today's terrorism. She continued by stating Islam demands jihad and total submission, which is often misunderstood. She said the growing influence of Islam in Europe must be stopped. A delegate from Turkey later responded to this statement by saying seminars such as the GSM were precisely the type of fora to avoid cultural and civilisational stereotypes, he asked the delegation not to be neither essentialist nor lazy when interpreting Islam.

26. A delegate from the Palestinian National Council told the delegation terrorism is a global phenomenon, and that its main driver is perceived injustice. Attempts to alleviate injustice often look to extreme acts, he continued. He concluded by stating that continued occupation causes such feelings of injustice.

27. Another delegate from The Netherlands took the floor to remind the audience that a war is either won or lost and a war against a non-state actor is not really winnable, therefore, in the classic sense of victory. He noted that fighting against non-state armed groups should be pushed back to a manageable level – it needs to be criminalised. Strong multilateral cooperation can make

this possible. A delegate from Armenia then asked whether intelligence gathered during and after the military campaign against Daesh would be shared more widely, for instance, with NATO partners. A delegate from Bahrain then said he was calling for the establishment of an international counterterrorism centre to be established in the Kingdom of Bahrain.

28. A delegate from Pakistan reminded the delegation Daesh blowback can be felt in the West, North, as well as in the East – this is something forgotten all too often. A representative from Saudi Arabia told the delegation terrorism seeks to divide all humanity, no one group in particular.

29. Mr Manciuilli took the floor again to review a series of amendments to the report submitted by the Turkish delegation, which he had accepted. At the conclusion of the summary of the amendments, Mr Manciuilli asked for the assembly to vote to accept the report as amended. The report passed the vote with one abstention and only one vote against.

30. The members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly then voted for new officers of the GSM. Andrea Manciuilli was elected to be the new Chairperson of the GSM. There were two new Vice-Chairpersons elected: Ahmet Berat Conkar (Turkey) and Gilbert Roger (France). Carlos Costa Neves (Portugal) was elected Rapporteur.

IV. SESSION II: PREVENTING RADICALISM AND COUNTERING VIOLENT EXTREMISM

31. **Cosimo Maria Ferri**, the Italian Undersecretary for Justice, spoke on countering radicalisation and extremism in the prison system. Mr Ferri said the Italian government had a goal of fine-tuning and improving the available legal and social instruments to achieve this goal. Already, he said, the government has made several amendments to the criminal code and ratified a number of international conventions to combat terrorism.

32. Mr Ferri told the delegation the majority of the Italian prison population is Muslim, with 20% of those converted during their stay in prison. Mr Ferri also noted the potential value of increased study of the ends, ways, and means of prison radicalisation. Understanding how both the internet and prison systems have become such effective instruments of radicalisation is the key to breaking down these deleterious side effects. Mr Ferri said, in the case of the prison systems, his government was trying to understand how to balance such inherent rights as that of worship with the potential for certain susceptible individuals to be manipulated by extremist proponents.

33. He argued that sharing intelligence has become a particularly powerful tool for identifying threats and those individuals building terrorist networks. He concluded by noting a strong desire for increased sharing of best practices among allies and partners in countering the growing scourge of prison radicalisation.

34. **Luigi Soreca**, the Director for Security at the European Union's Directorate General for Home Affairs of the European Commission discussed the European Commission's approach to the challenge of radicalisation. He first noted that, within the EU, security is in large respects indivisible. In other words, security for one state adds a degree of security to all others – and the security of all states is affected by the weakness of any particular state. Over the past three years, the EU has become increasingly focused on security issues. This is largely due to the proliferation of new internal and external threats. The defeat of Daesh on the battlefield raises new challenges as its fighters disperse and some seek to return home.

35. To deal with the new security environment, the EU has adopted a range of legal and hard security measures but is also focused on prevention and counter-radicalisation and counterterrorism. The Commission has established a high-level group to deal with the challenges of radicalisation in European society and the results of its initial efforts will soon be made public. European officials have met with digital company executives like Google, Facebook and even a range of startup companies to cope with the problem of terrorist groups' abuse of online platforms

and systems to create security protocols for social networks. He mentioned that a significant amount of terrorist content has been taken down because of this effort. Mr. Soreca said it was important for NATO and the EU to coordinate their action in this area and he said that the EU was very open to sharing information with the Alliance.

36. **François Burgat**, Research Director at CNRS (French National Scientific Research Centre), said seeking to build resilience against terrorist attacks is important as is mustering ideological arguments to counter narratives undergirding growing regional radicalism. But the most important challenge lies in no longer producing terrorists, and this demands addressing root causes including economic and political marginalisation. He suggested the West tends to focus more on the ‘hows’ and less on the ‘whys’ and that this has led to an unbalanced approach to the problem of terrorism: More listening is needed. He noted that when 17 US soldiers were killed after the Cole attack in Yemen, President Clinton explained the reason was, “they hate us.” This kind of thinking is insufficient for coping with the challenges and can inspire responses that might make the situation worse.

37. Dr Burgat suggested that while making airports more secure and taking strong anti-terrorism policy positions are both important measures, they pale in comparison to addressing root causes of political extremism in the Middle East and North Africa. He said these relate to the dysfunction of political representation and broken mechanisms for distributing resources. He said Islamic societies are perfectly capable of conducting peaceful politics but not under current circumstances. Militarising the effort to cope with the problem is only breeding more despair, alienation, and extremism. This last point provoked a discussion with several participants pointing to faulty rule of law, institutionalised violence, and corruption as all feeding the problem of extremism. It was also suggested the ongoing marginalisation of Palestinians by Israel was a key source of regional extremism. This point was countered by several others who said that most conflicts in the region have little or nothing to do with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and that claiming otherwise distracts attention from the sources of those tensions.

V. SESSION III: THE SAHEL MIGRATION CRISIS AND THE SITUATION IN LIBYA

38. The following day’s session expanded upon several points made during the previous day. The idea of the indivisibility of security today from the local to the global was immediately carried forward in the context of ongoing tensions in Libya at the start of the third session. **Giuseppe Perrone**, Italy’s Ambassador to Libya told the delegation a stark contrast exists between progress in political reconciliation talks and the situation on the ground, largely because militia forces have not been brought into the process. As a result, Libya’s security situation remains highly fragmented. Ambassador Perrone noted, however, that some progress has been made in the struggle against human trafficking. More could be achieved, he continued, if government authority were unified within a single state apparatus.

39. Ambassador Perrone said there was an important evolution of the security situation after the establishment of a government of national unity. There are potential sources of stability, but the highly fragmented nature of security forces in the country makes it difficult to build peace and security. General Haftar has built a strong military force with a recognisable chain of command. His forces have demonstrated a capacity to control territory including the so-called oil crescent. In parallel, the National Liberation Army is focused on extending control to the South and to the East. A fragmented collection of forces continues to struggle for control of the West.

40. There is an urgent need both to unify the military and to place it under political control, the ambassador continued. There is currently a direct dialogue between military officers recognising the authority of both sides with the aim of building mutual trust; and, while this has been partially successful it has not been sufficient to advance the process sufficiently. As a result, the ongoing military conflict continues to block the political unification of the country.

41. The international community, however, continues to support and push for unification. NATO, for example, is conducting an institution-building dialogue with the National Council. For its part, Italy has sought to promote peace and unification as well as governance and Libyan sovereignty. There has been strong support for the border guards and other security offices working to counter illegal migration and this has paid off. But greater progress will require a higher degree of national unification.

42. In his remarks on extremism in the Sahel, **Francesco Strazzari**, a Professor at the *Scuola Superiore Sant'Anna* in Pisa, suggested the primary catalyst for radicalisation is the faltering services extended to citizens and the sense of insecurity this nourishes. Climate change, corruption, and land ownership disputes have all contributed to a broader sense of alienation and helped foment social tensions. Western governments need to understand these fundamentally local issues, he warned, rather than focusing exclusively on international jihadism, as they are the primary drivers of rebellion in the Sahel and contribute both to radicalisation and migration.

43. **Dr Fransje Molenaar**, a Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' cautioned that current Western policies to stem migration could, in fact, be having the opposite impact insofar as these approaches are undermining local economies in places such as Agadez in Niger. A more holistic and helpful approach would be premised on finding ways to make local societies more economically viable and secure. A whole economy has been created around the movement of people in areas like Agadez and migration has long been an element of the local economy. The crackdown on migration including the confiscation of trucks has essentially led to the delegitimisation of local authorities, hurt the economy, given rise to banditry and other forms of violent criminality, undermined security and actually created conditions that are encouraging some to become migrants. Moreover, most of those arrested are not the key players in illegal migration.

VI. SESSION IV: EVOLVING NORTH AMERICAN AND EUROPEAN VIEWS ON THE MIDDLE EAST

44. **Dr Frederic Wehrey**, a Senior Fellow in the Middle East Programme at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, kicked off the fourth panel discussion with an overview of the Trump administration's approach to the Middle East. Dr Wehrey told the delegation the Trump administration views the Middle East through a state actor to state actor lens, rather than the more nuanced approach of the Obama administration which sought to combat non-state armed groups and the radical ideologies fueling them as well as dealing with the promotion of democracy and human rights in the region – both long-standing tenets of US foreign policy. The Trump administration, he continued, sees Iran as the principal regional threat and is seeking a dual policy of containment and rollback, meaning actively seeking to contain Iran's regional presence and impact, while simultaneously rolling back the U.S. presence in the region. As such, he said, the United States is increasingly relying on regional allies to accomplish its major objective of Iranian containment. Particularly evident in this is the virtual deputising of Saudi Arabia, which is evident in Yemen and Lebanon.

45. The Trump administration, however, is largely continuing the same Obama policies toward the region's problem with violent extremism. The US military has actually increased the number of air and drone strikes across the region. US efforts to train and equip combatants at the local level, in the conflict in Syria, for example, have been a relative failure. As a result, the United States continues to engage its Special Forces to execute missions on the ground.

46. The United States' regional development policy is now framed almost exclusively via an anti-terrorism lens. As a result, the focus on development is to bolster states' capacity to be more effective at counterterrorism, while previous US concerns with civil society, political, and economic development have been sidelined. As a result, he said, the notions of human rights or democracy promotion are now tertiary concerns at best. He concluded by stating that this is a pity as the

deeper root causes driving radicalisation continue to exist in the very same state structures the Trump administration is supporting. These models of governance with exclusionary oil patronage systems and authoritarianism, he said, will continue to be under mounting popular pressure to reform or they will bear the price of the violent extremism rending other regional states apart.

47. **Dr Rosemary Hollis**, Professor of Politics at City University of London, discussed the artificial division being created today between north and south – she rejected this idea and noted the Mediterranean has a shared history and unique culture. European disunity over a fear of an unknown future is giving rise to damaging populist, nationalist agendas, the example of the Brexit movement, she noted, is telling as it was a popular referendum fueled by both elitism and anti-intellectualism that shared a common view against immigration. The ‘success’ of the Brexit vote, she told the delegation, will not solve the problems that drove it. She said all of Europe and its neighbors must find a way to come to an understanding of identity that copes with a range of races and religions.

48. The lack of European unity will carry big consequences, Dr Hollis told the audience. First, United States’ unwillingness to take the lead in the Middle East is now reaping the costs of the Trump administration’s mismanagement of conflicts, allies, and the peace process. She continued by saying the lack of a common European voice will also mean that Russia, Turkey, and Iran will shape post-conflict Syria, not Europe. Second, she continued, the growing lack of European unity to deal with the migration challenge has led to an increasingly negative atmosphere, which will only be further exploited by ISIS/Daesh. Europe must engage all citizens on a common vision for an inclusive European future – one that proposes a positive vision for everyone. Continued fear mongering will only play into the hands of radical ideologies and a continued focus on only responding with force to terrorism will not deal with the threat to the communities.

VII. SESSION V: THE SITUATION IN SYRIA AND IRAQ

49. **Dr Myriam Benraad**, Assistant Professor in Security Studies at Leiden University, began the final panel’s discussion with a presentation on Iraq after the Islamic State, focusing on the remaining challenges and the prospects for stability. Dr Benraad began by discussing the persistence of fragmentation in Iraq. The ISIS crisis is a long-term destabilising force, reaching back to 2003. The country has been so destabilised, she told the delegation, that violence is the new norm in Iraq. Even worse, she continued, the size and scope of any reconstruction projects are impossible to predict. She told the audience that it is impossible to think of the militia-isation of the state and the growing trend of radicalisation if you do not start by understanding the failure of institutions. The Iraqi state is still in crisis – the past fifteen years have produced no stable government capable of offering a stable state for its citizens.

50. Dr Benraad also told the audience the impending defeat of ISIS on the ground would leave a political vacuum, as local leaders will rise to challenge the legitimacy of a state that is not fulfilling its obligations vis-à-vis its people. Without a focus on rebuilding strong state institutions, Iraq will continue to be a failed state prone to fragmentation and radical ideologies.

51. Dr Benraad also told the audience a key challenge to achieving any form of enduring stability would be to overcome the sectarian resentment at the community level. The post-ISIS Iraq is a patchwork of communities, often guarded by their own ethnic militias, who are filled with distrust and hatred for each other. Further, many of the militias on the ground also have allegiances beyond their local remits to either the government in Bagdad, Erbil, or Tehran. Rebuilding a unified state in the ruin of such protracted violence will be a significant challenge. There is a constellation of actors, however, she continued, that continue to call for maintaining a loose federation in Iraq’s current geopolitical form. This will be the subject of both parliamentary debates and in national news sources for some time to come.

52. Dr Benraad closed by saying the defeat of the territorial manifestation of ISIS will clearly not mean the end of the group as some segments of Iraqi society still support it, particularly among younger Iraqis. This means, she said, there will be continued use of terrorist attacks to disrupt attempts to move back toward national political cohesion. She lamented the fact that local, regional, and international political leaders have yet to find a way to develop a wide-reaching, effective counterinsurgency strategy that addresses the deep root causes of such violent radicalism. She concluded by saying the Iraqi state today still has very little to offer a youth population that is both marginalised and very angry. Such a reality does not bode well for future peace and stability.

53. **Robin Wright**, a Fellow at both the Wilson Center and US Institute of Peace, followed Dr Benraad and told the audience that Syria is arguably the most important conflict in the world, and, that when we speak of Syria, we are really speaking of two broader conflicts. The first is the struggle for the control of Syria, which, she noted, President Assad has won. President Assad controls over 60 % of the country's territory, the majority of the population, and, therefore, the more coherent picture. Notable holdouts exist, she said, particularly in the east where Syria's oil reserves lie, in the north around Idlib, and in the south in Daraa.

54. The second conflict, she said, is the fight against ISIS. After over three years of controlling various parts of both Syria and Iraq, she said, the proto-state of ISIS is soon to be defeated. The real question, she cautioned, is what this defeat will in fact resemble. This is difficult to define in the Syrian context, she continued. One means would be the death or capture of ISIS leader al-Baghdadi, which would be far more significant to ISIS than the death of Bin Laden was to Al Qaeda. The fight against ISIS has killed significant numbers of the group's fighters: she noted that while approximately 40,000 fighters went to both Syria and Iraq to join the group's ranks, as many as 60,000 have been killed. The biggest story, however, is not the casualties, but rather the group's ability to 'swarm' – meaning grow their ranks so quickly to as many as 70,000. This was the fastest mobilisation of a radical Islamic fighting force in history – largely accomplished via the internet. She questioned whether radical fighters would now flock to the Al Nosra Front, which continues to thrive in the Syrian combat theater, or to another group still operating in the region.

55. To win the war for Syria, she continued, international assistance from Iran and Russia was essential for Assad. Russia provided air and technical support to the regime and kept it supplied with arms. While Washington worked to develop some local resistance forces on the ground and gave a degree of air support in the campaigns, it was not as effective as Russia's intervention. As a result, while both Washington and Russia agreed on maintaining the territorial integrity of Syria, Russia's desired political outcome for the war – Assad's maintenance of power – clearly won and Russia's influence in the country remains high. She told the audience that Washington's influence has never been as low in Damascus as it is today.

56. This broader political reality, she continued, will have a long-term impact on the parallel peace processes underway to lay the groundwork for a 'post-conflict' Syria. The first peace process is the UN-driven Geneva talks, while the second is driven by Russia on its own terms. Ms Wright told the audience that Russia's peace process will have more impact. Ms Wright also highlighted the stark differences between the principle of peace and the reality of peace: After more than half a million dead and a generation lost, the West wants Assad out, but it does not have the necessary leverage to accomplish this outcome. Making matters worse is the continued divided nature of the exiled political opposition to Assad, which carries no credibility on the ground inside of Syria.

57. Ms Wright concluded by stating Syria will remain in a form of low-level conflict for the coming years, at least through the next elections, which are due 4 years from now. Syria will remain politically volatile and its border regions ripe for continued fighting as well. Any notion of Assad reforming, she concluded, should be dismissed, as it would be his undoing. As such, many of the root causes of violent extremism in the state and region will persist.

58. After the discussion following the presentations by Myriam Benraad and Robin Wright, **General Claudio Graziano**, Chief of Staff of the Italian Armed Forces, addressed the delegation on the contribution of the Italian Armed Forces to the fight against Daesh. General Graziano told the delegation not to link migration with terrorism and called for a three-dimensional approach dealing with illegal trafficking, terrorism, and instability – the means to get there, he noted, require a whole-of-government approach from all states in Europe.

59. To deal with the broader evolving global security challenges, he said, NATO's out-of-area actions and continued adaptation are steps in the right direction – specifically mentioning the local capacity building mission in Iraq as a good example. General Graziano said only through local ownership would there be any chance of creating lasting stability. Overseeing all of NATO's broader efforts to understand the complex security challenges emanating from the south, he continued, is the new Hub for the South established in Naples.

60. Citing specific Italian contributions, General Graziano told the delegation Italy has been responsible for the training of 30% of Iraqi personnel to date. He also mentioned Italian engagement in other ongoing operations as well. He noted the results of international efforts to help create the conditions for stability in the Middle East and Africa are evident, but much more remains to be done. He concluded by stating the only way forward is via a comprehensive approach based on stability, reconstruction, a focus on the root causes of regional conflicts and continued, deepened multilateral cooperation.

61. Andrea Manciuilli took the floor to close the GSM seminar. Mr Manciuilli told the audience the terrorism theme around which the seminar has centred is not only an attack on the West, but on Islam as well. Today's terrorist attacks are on a common Mediterranean people, he continued, that should not allow such violence to sow division. In reference to that same day's attacks in Sinai, Egypt, he said that when such an event occurs all nations must behave as one to condemn such acts.

62. Mr Manciuilli noted his pride in the growth of the GSM seminar, which has become a large assembly capable of debating and discussing complex challenges. He also reminded the audience that NATO is an alliance created to defend democracy and liberty and to help project peace and stability. Mr Manciuilli's message of solidarity among the assembled delegation was well received.
