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Special Group (GSM)

SEMINAR REPORT

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This report is presented for information only and does not necessarily represent the official view of the Assembly. It was prepared by Ethan Corbin, Director of the Defence and Security Committee.

Executive Overview

1. NATO's near neighbourhood in the Middle East and North Africa is undergoing significant political, military, social, and economic upheaval. Many are already rushing to call the new wave of social protests and recent governmental shifts in Algeria and Sudan a second Arab Spring. Due to its geography and demography, but also its economic and political weight, Turkey is positioned to play a key role in the future of the region.
2. To discuss key issues impacting the region today, NATO lawmakers joined their peers from the Middle East and North Africa as well as other Alliance partner states in Antalya, Turkey from 12 to 14 April 2019 for a Joint meeting of the Rose-Roth Seminar series and the Mediterranean and Middle East Special Group (GSM). Over 120 parliamentarians from NATO member states and partner countries participated in the joint GSM-Rose-Roth seminar – the meeting marked the 99th meeting in the Rose-Roth format.
3. The complexity of the challenges facing the region marked the tenor of debate and discussion as all lawmakers sought to understand and weigh the causes of, as well as the possible solutions to, the many challenges that currently have an outsized impact on local populations, governments, throughout the broader region and beyond.
4. As NATO Parliamentary Assembly President Madeleine Moon (United Kingdom) stated in her opening remarks: “Our governments and parliaments have long recognised that the Euro-Atlantic community’s security, prosperity, and stability are directly linked to developments in the broader MENA region. This recognition of our shared destiny has been a principal driver of the important relationship we have forged with the parliaments in this very diverse region.”
5. Turkey is on the front lines of some of the region’s most challenging issues: large-scale migration, the devastating impact of the Syrian civil war; shifting power structures, great power competition, and new economic initiatives. As a result, Turkey continues to have an outsized impact on the direction and scale of many regional issues and initiatives. Turkish resolve to remain a leader in the discussion and the solutions to many complex issues, such as the Syrian conflict, was evident throughout the seminar.
6. Discussions about Turkey’s efforts to welcome over 3.6 million Syrian refugees since the beginning of the Syrian war were particularly emblematic of the kind of role Turkey wishes to play. Noting Turkey’s important role in the Syrian refugee crisis, President Moon noted: “It is sobering to consider how much more severe the international refugee crisis in Europe would be without the remarkable generosity and hospitality Turkey has shown to the Syrian people.”
7. The Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mevlut Cavusoglu, and Mustafa Sentop, the President of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, started the seminar’s discussions noting the importance of the NATO Alliance’s continued efforts to adapt its defence and deterrence posture to meet the demands of an increasingly complex international security environment. Minister Cavusoglu asked the assembled group of lawmakers to remain focused on how all NATO Allies and partners can move forward today with a common understanding of the threats they face, and with an understanding of their shared responsibilities to contribute to solutions that will have the greatest impact on lasting peace and security across their territories.
8. Issues central to Turkish as well as common Allied and Partner concern, Mr Cavusoglu stressed, are the scourge of modern terrorism, large-scale mixed migration, and the ongoing challenge of war and conflict tearing at the fabrics of the nations in the region. These issues and more were debated throughout the seminar as the legislators were briefed by international and Turkish government and NGO experts, as well as a host of invited academics.

9. A key outcome of the conference was the common resolve not only to remain focused on understanding the causes of instability and social upheaval, but also to work together to find the ways to assist the region's people in finding a way toward lasting peace and prosperity in the region. For many years Rose-Roth seminars have proven to be essential platforms for NATO and its partners to share their understandings and discuss constructive new approaches to common challenges.

10. The seminar was organised and led under the auspices of the Turkish parliament and the Head of the Turkish delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Mr Osman Bak. In addition to shepherding the delegation through discussions during the seminar, Mr Bak organised a friendly soccer match between parliamentarians and staff and Syrian refugee youth on the evening of Saturday, 13 April 2019. As Mr Bak noted of the event: "The power of sport is incredible – these young boys have been able to use soccer as a means to overcome many of the hardships they have experienced as a result of the war. I am glad my colleagues in the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and other partner nations were able to experience this by getting the chance to have some fun with the young Syrians." While the match was a draw, all sides were full of smiles and camaraderie for the couple of hours they spent together that evening.

I. SESSION 1 : THE SITUATION IN SYRIA

11. **Colonel (ret.) Richard Outzen**, a Senior Advisor for Syrian Engagement at the Department of State, opened his remarks by suggesting that US policy toward the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) is unambiguous. It sees that group as a terrorist organisation and shares Turkey's concerns about it. He also extended his government's thanks to all the coalition partner states that have participated in the fight against ISIS and its so-called caliphate. The defeat of the caliphate, however, does not mark the end of the ISIS and it will remain a shadowy threat. Syria, he added, will remain a problem. It is a dictatorial regime which has used chemical weapons, supported terrorism, and precipitated a humanitarian disaster. For all intents and purposes, the war in Syria is not over and will not be until a political resolution of the crisis can be found. Colonel Outzen noted that there are five militaries currently operating in the country: Russia, Iran, Turkey, the United States, and Syria itself.

12. He suggested that UN Resolution 2254 remains valid and offers a road map for peace in Syria. That resolution suggests that the Syrian people will decide the future of Syria and calls for formal negotiations on a political transition process facilitated by the UN that aims to establish credible, inclusive and non-sectarian governances and then begins a process for drafting a new constitution. It also calls for free and fair elections administered under UN supervision. The United States wants to ensure that Syria poses no threat to its neighbours, does not support terrorism, has no chemical weapons, is not subject to Iranian control, confronts the crimes of the past eight years, and facilitates the dignified return of refugees to their homes.

13. Colonel Outzen suggested that although President Assad now controls half of Syria, he cannot rebuild it and is unlikely to seize control of the other half. The United States is strongly opposed to the notion that he will lead a new state and does not want him to seize control of the rest of the country. It retains a presence in the country to ensure a degree of stability. It will provide aid, coordinate policy with allied partners, and apply diplomatic pressure on the regime. He noted that the United States has some common interest with some of the countries engaged in Syria, including even Russia. US officials are in talks with Turkey on a range of matters, and the United States also consults closely with Israel and Jordan.

14. Although the United States has recently recognised the Golan Heights as part of Israel, he said during the discussion, this should be seen in a different light than the rest of the situation in that country. Golan has long been separated from Syria and so it is not likely to factor in on any eventual solution to the current crisis.

15. **Gulnur Aybet**, a Professor at the National Defence University and Senior Advisor to the President of the Republic of Turkey, noted that Turkish foreign policy is focused on three spheres: the transatlantic realm in which hard and soft power considerations shape policy; the humanitarian realm in which religious and ethnic considerations play a role; and a regional policy in which hard power again is an important factor. Syria touches on all three of these spheres and Turkey's approach is multilateral. It supports UN resolutions, and its intervention in 2016 was premised not only on hard power considerations but also humanitarian ones. She noted that in 2011 European officials asked why Turkey had not engaged in a humanitarian intervention, and the response from Turkey was why had Europe not done so. At the same time, Turkey has appreciated NATO's support for its security after it invoked Article 4 and NATO responded by deploying Patriot air defence batteries to the country. But this was not sufficient to protect the country from Daesh and the PKK-YPG.

16. Turkey has taken in 3.5 million Syrian refugees and spent an estimated USD35 billion to support them. The burden of the war, however, has also included the many terrorist attacks launched against Turkey, including the attacks at the Ankara train station, the Istanbul airport, and a tourist site in Istanbul among others. These attacks forced Turkey's hand, and this led to Operation Euphrates Shield to clear the border regions of Daesh fighters.

17. The PKK and its sister organisation, the YPG, constitute a second grave threat to Turkey from Syria, according to Ms Aybet. Turkey has worked to prevent it from entrenching in Syria along the border with Turkey. It moved troops into Syria in what she described as a legitimate self-defence operation. Turkey is now engaged in a dialogue with Russia and Iran in the so-called Astana process to search for longer-term solutions. Turkey opposed US cooperation with the YPG during the liberalation of Raqqa.

18. Ms Aybet noted as well that after a military operation, it is essential to achieve stabilisation. This failed to occur in Iraq and the region paid a high price as a result. In the Western Balkans, by contrast, a stabilisation effort followed the operation, and this has been critical in advancing security. She said there has been a tendency to see the Syrian conflict as a zero-sum game when a win approach is now needed. Deeper international cooperation will be essential. Turkey is working to create a secure zone which would facilitate refugee return and has had discussions about this with US representatives.

II. SESSION 2: PRESENTATION OF THE DRAFT GSM REPORT AND SESSION 3: NATO PARTNERSHIP TOOLS – NEW PARTNERS AND EXPERIENCE SHARING

19. **Nicola de Santis**, Head of the Middle East and North Africa Section, Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, NATO, opened his remarks by saying that the Mediterranean and the broader Middle East are fundamental to trans-atlantic security. There are myriad examples of this, but none more telling, perhaps than the 3.5 million Syrian refugees now residing in Turkey. Turkey's support for these people represents a major contribution to security and should be recognised.

20. Events in Syria, Iraq, and Libya have all shaken the region, as has the problem of terrorism. Mr de Santis suggested, however, that there is room for optimism and that NATO can contribute to ameliorating the security situation in the region. It has cooperated with partner states there for 25 years, and 15 years ago began to work with Gulf states through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. These efforts have helped NATO project a degree of stability and security to the region and it is doing so by closely cooperating with partners from the region. Mutual understanding has improved dramatically as a result of this practical cooperation. Kuwait is now hosting the Istanbul Cooperation Center to deepen these ties. Two NATO staff are now working in Kuwait to promote

deeper cooperation. Gulf partners have participated in operations in Bosnia, Libya, and Afghanistan. He noted that NATO now stands ready to provide support to Libya, but the situation at the current moment is too uncertain.

21. In the discussion, he noted that NATO has been deeply involved in defence capacity building in Iraq. NATO is not involved in the Palestinian-Israeli peace process and is not seeking to be involved in this. But at the Istanbul Summit in 2004, heads of government endorsed the notion of a two-state solution. This position has never changed. He noted the use of trust funds for specific projects in the region but said that expanding common funds represents a more efficient way to invest in security. Excessive use of trust funds could lead to a kind of privatisation of NATO and might undermine the kind of solidarity that shared funding and projects engender.

III. SESSION 4 : CENTRAL ASIA – STAKES AND CHALLENGES

22. **Dr Hélène Thibault**, assistant professor at Nazarbaiev University in Astana (Kazakhstan), began her presentation by noting that Central Asia is currently experiencing tremendous and broad-based economic development. Coupled with this, and likely a key driver of it, has been the region's growing geostrategic role in recent years. Dr Thibault focused on three key pillars of Central Asia's quickly evolving economic and geopolitical identity: the role of relative stability since independence; renewed economic and security cooperation regionally and globally; and the end of a period of division of labour between Russia and China.

23. Regarding regional stability since independence, Dr Thibault noted that only 18 terrorist attacks had taken place since 2008, which is relatively low when viewed in the light of the region. Nine of these attacks, she continued, were in Kazakhstan. She said the region had not witnessed the predicted spillover from the Afghan war. Further, past predictions of problems in Kyrgyzstan have not borne out to the level expected. She did note there had been a fair number of foreign fighters that left the area (approximately 400 left to join the wars in Syria or Afghanistan) but these have not really returned to cause problems. Simply put, she said, the challenge of regional instability and concerns about returning foreign fighters is just not as big a problem as some had assumed it would be.

24. Regarding regional and global security cooperation, she noted that the Central Asian states participate in a range of multilateral organisations, from the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the United Nations to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Focusing on Central Asia's cooperation within the framework of the SCO, the speaker noted the member states in the SCO account for approximately 40% of the world's population. The SCO proclaims its key areas of focus to be what they term the 'three evils' – terrorism, separatism, and extremism. Dr Thibault noted the SCO serves as a framework for joint military exercising, and expanded economic and cultural ties between members, but functions with a relatively light institutional structure.

25. The March 2018 Central Asian Summit, which was the first regional summit in a decade, was only symbolic in real terms and served to demonstrate the low level of actual regional cooperation, which continues to hamper progress in the region across the political, economic, and security levels. Dr Thibault did note that the recent Caspian Sea Summit was somewhat more successful, but the focus of the summit ignored the most important regional issue; the delimitation of each nation's seabed, a challenging problem left to be worked out at the bi-lateral level.

26. Economically speaking, the speaker continued, regional development is a mixed bag. She highlighted the attempts of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) to bolster regional economic linkages. She also noted China's more than USD 40 billion flowing into the region, which has focused on transportation and energy linkages across Central Asia to Europe. But the region has also seen

a number of new Chinese military installations moving in as well. A relative degree of regional Sinophobia in the region, however, may block some of China's Belt and Road regional initiatives. Approximately 69% of Kazakhs, she said, are against Chinese infiltration.

27. Dr Thibault concluded her presentation by stating that regional cooperation is expanding quickly, often as a result of Russian and Chinese influence, which more often than not focuses on security and sharing authoritarian practices. Both Russia and China's interests are more convergent than divergent when it comes to the region. As a result of the Russian and Chinese footprint, Western influence remains almost totally absent in the region.

28. **Ambassador Riza Hakan Tekin**, Director General for Bilateral Political Affairs (South Asia) at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, then addressed the delegation on Turkey's perspective on the situation in Afghanistan and the prospects for stability. He started his presentation by noting that, while the last four decades of constant conflict have ravaged Afghanistan, 2018 was among the worst. Afghanistan's security environment is declining, something not helped by the relative marginalisation of the topic in international fora today. While fighting in the country used to be seasonal, principally taking place in spring and summer, it is now year-round. Corruption continues to be the principal disruptor of good governance. Another complicating variable is the rapidly increasing production of narcotics, which fuels criminal violence, challenges government revenue collection, and is hobbling a sizable percentage of the population as it succumbs to addiction.

29. As a result of these variables, the Afghan economy is in very bad shape. Over half of the government's budget is sourced from external sources such as international aid, and local poverty rates are rising quickly. The agricultural sector, a key component of the economy, continues to be hamstrung by a now decade-long drought.

30. Regarding the democratic process, Ambassador Tekin noted that while parliamentary elections were held in October 2018, the results have still not officially been announced. He also said that the upcoming presidential elections, which have been postponed three times, are due to happen by the end of September, but the planning and organisation of the elections is far behind schedule. In addition, he continued, the current government is being heavily criticised for not being inclusive.

31. Regarding peace initiatives, Ambassador Tekin noted the US initiative is the most prominent and has the most potential. He noted there were four main issues: the Taliban guaranteeing that it will not allow its own fighters or other groups to use Afghanistan as a launching pad for attacks outside of the country; the withdrawal of US and NATO forces; an intra-Afghan dialogue; and a permanent ceasefire. He noted that US President Trump's declaration last December regarding the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan was challenging for Allies and partners in Afghanistan, who continue to adhere to the 'in together, out together' policy toward the Afghanistan mission. The United States was able to reassure its allies and partners, Ambassador Tekin continued, that it is working for peace to benefit every player involved in Afghanistan, and that it is not just serving selfish interests.

32. Ambassador Tekin then endeavoured to cite positive developments in Afghanistan. He began by stating that, compared to 2001, adult and youth literacy rates moved from 35% to 57% and cited broad-based education reform as the reason. He also said conditions for women dramatically improved as well, and that improvements in health care have boosted life expectancy in the country. Importantly, he said, there is a new generation, representing about half the population, that have never lived through the Taliban. Further, the Taliban is also reported to have recognised the mistakes they made in the past, he said.

33. The speaker concluded by stating that Turkey has a long history with Afghanistan: Turkey was one of the first countries to recognise Afghanistan as an independent country. Turkey also supports the continuation of a unified Afghan state, working well within its region, he said. Turkey is among

the biggest financial aid donors and a perennial contributor to the NATO mission in Afghanistan. In addition, he said Turkey has trained a significant number of Afghan police as well, one half of which are women. He concluded by stating that Turkey is spearheading a trilateral initiative to bridge the political, economic, and security differences between Pakistan and Afghanistan to help foster greater regional stability.

IV. SESSION 5: MIGRATION: BETWEEN HUMANITARIAN AND SECURITY CHALLENGES

34. **Jean-Louis De Brouwer**, Director for Europe, Eastern Neighbourhood and Middle East at the Directorate-General European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO) of the European Commission, opened the fifth session with a presentation titled: *Europe, the International Community and the Refugee Crisis*. Mr De Brouwer told the delegation that one should be cautious about the narrative surrounding refugee and migrant movements. He said that migration and forced displacement are often portrayed as a security threat, rather than trying to understand the reality these populations are facing in their home countries. He said it is clear severe insecurity is driving them from their homes, and that immigrants and refugees very rarely pose a security threat.

35. Mr De Brouwer noted there are four main issues when considering mixed migration (both migrants and refugees) flows; First, assessing the drivers of the situation; second, a focus on stronger border management; third; the promotion of legal migration and integration, which can be a mutually-positive policy; and, fourth, the guarantee of protection and asylum, which necessitates ongoing reform of the EU asylum system.

36. Using Syria as an example, he noted that the recent (March 2019) Brussels Conference on Syria pledged EUR8.3 billion for 2019-2020 to be allocated to reconstruction, about EUR6.6 billion of which came from EU member states. The scale of the pledged amount, he continued, is very modest when compared to the size of the crisis. Syria is the worst urban destruction in conflict since WWII, with more than half of the population displaced as a result of the fighting. Attempts to deliver humanitarian assistance is still facing challenges; half of all assistance efforts go to emergency and life saving measures alone. Turkey is the largest host of Syrian refugees in the world, with about approximately 3.5 million. The EU-launched programme for refugees in Turkey (funded to about EUR6.6 billion) is working quite well, the speaker said. The programme provides a universal public safety net that is benefiting 1.7 million Syrian refugees in Turkey today. Within the programme, education is the priority of fund allocation.

37. The programme also has a presence in Greece and the Western Balkans, the speaker told the delegation, which is the first time an EU humanitarian aid programme is actually working inside the EU. He said the EU seeks to support the accommodation of refugee population in a humanitarian way, and the EU partners well with host countries and other international organisations. He concluded by telling the audience that domestic parliaments also have a key role due to their power of the purse to fund and maintain political support for these initiatives.

38. **Mehmet Gulluoglu**, then delivered a presentation to overview Turkey's refugee and asylum policies. He began by telling the delegation that about 258 million people are living as migrants worldwide today. The biggest migrant outflows come from South Sudan, Afghanistan, and Syria in terms of internationally displaced persons. The balance of the rest are principally economic migrants.

39. Turkey has a long history of receiving migrants, the speaker continued, but the Syrian crisis has changed everything as there are an estimated 3.63 million Syrian refugees currently in Turkey. In some cities, the Syrians outnumber the total of the entire city's population, he said. He used the city of Kiris as an example: the city had about 100,000 inhabitants prior to the Syrian civil war, while it is now hosting approximately 116,000 Syrians. Istanbul has over 500,000 refugees within city limits.

40. Mr Gulluoglu said the Turkish government is working hard to provide health care, education, social, and technical services to all the refugees. The numbers are significant when taken into account: there is a total of over 700,000 students among the population; outpatient services are being provided for 4.5 million; another 1.6 million remain hospitalised; and there have been a total of 406,000 babies delivered among the refugee population. He told the audience that the world largely diverted its attention from the problem until the 'Aylan incident' – which featured the picture of the dead young Syrian boy washed up on Turkish shores, which subsequently drew global focus and concern.

41. He then told the audience there are five common myths about refugees: refugees are economically isolated; they are a burden on the host country; they present an economically homogenous group; they are largely ignorant about modern technologies; and they are totally dependent on humanitarian aid. These myths, he said, are being proven false by the example of the Syrians in Turkey, which has seen a vibrant and dynamic community form among the Syrian refugees working, learning, and living alongside their Turkish hosts. He closed his remarks by reminding Turkey is also helping with many other refugee crises across the world, citing Yemen, Myanmar, and Palestine as key examples.

42. **Mehmet Kasapoglu**, Minister of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Turkey, then took the floor to address the issue of the convergence of sports, education, and social integration in Turkey. Minister Kasapoglu began by asking the audience how the minister of youth and sports can help deal with the unprecedented tragedy in Syria. He then presented an overview of the tragedy in Syria and then told participants that Turkey opened its doors to the Syrians as a humanitarian obligation to alleviate human suffering.

43. He then said sports are an excellent means to bring people together, as team sports and athletic engagement fosters unity and integration among participants. He also noted the power sports can have as youths seek to overcome the trauma of their past to find something positive today. He told the audience that the nation-wide sporting club investment to help Syrian refugee children has been strongly supported by President Erdogan. At its core, he said, the sports programme for Syrian refugee children aims “to ignite spark of social change and open positive paths forward for young people.”

44. Mr Kasapoglu concluded his remarks by noting that 75,000 Syrian youths participated in sports events between 2017-2018 in 300 youth centres across Turkey. These centres are open 24 hours a day, seven days a week to Turkish citizens and Syrian refugees alike, with no policy discriminating on age or race. He said new projects were constantly being worked on and implemented to round out the concept of further engagement with Syrian youths.

V. SESSION 6: LIBYA AND THE SAHEL

45. **Tarek Megerisi**, Policy Fellow, North Africa and Middle East Programme, at the European Council on Foreign Affairs, opened the sixth session on Libya and the Sahel with a presentation on the ongoing security challenges in Libya and the Sahel. A key problem of the international policy toward Libya, Mr Megerisi told the delegation, is the continued effort to try to treat the symptoms of the ongoing Libyan conflict rather than treating the root causes. The original idea by the UN, he said, was to build a Libyan capacity to deal with the problems. This led international officials in Libya to miss dealing with the real, immediate problems, as they tried to focus too much on larger structural issues, such as institutional rebuilding. The international community's initial failures in Libya has protracted the problems we are witnessing today.

46. Mr Megerisi told the delegation that Libyan National Army General Haftar's recent actions have made clear the strategic importance of the region. General Haftar, he continued, believes he is protected by the international community and can therefore mobilise his forces on Tripoli with

impunity. There is, however, a mobilisation in western Libya to counter the Haftar threat. As a result of these two new mobilisations, Libya is falling back into civil war. The speaker noted that accommodating the strong man in Libya, as he said the West is wont to do in the region, does not work today – “Doing it in the 1970s may have worked,” he said, “but it only sowed the seeds of circular failure and instability we are witnessing today in Libya.”

47. The speaker told the delegation that General Haftar has been stuck in the south, due to stretched supply lines, but a lack of manpower on the part of the counter mobilisation against him has frozen the conflict where it is. He said that General Haftar has superior weaponry and external support, however, which means if there is no political solution soon, this could reignite a terrible civil war across the country. Renewed conflict will reverse any benefit gained since 2014, he warned, and it could make conditions worse than previously seen. The key outcomes, he told the delegation, will be the rise of ISIS and other jihadist groups in the country, which will further fuel the challenges of people and arms trafficking across Libya to get to Europe.

48. He concluded his remarks by noting Russia is playing and increasing its role in the country: This is a new variable, he said, as Russia had been mostly distracted by Syria until the beginning of 2019. Today, Russia is supporting General Haftar, he said, and there is evidence that suggests Russia has been training and advising General Haftar’s forces on tactics, which Mr Megerisi noted is borne out in the advance of Libyan National Army forces.

49. **Leonardo Villalon**, Dean of the International Center and Professor of Political Science and African Studies at the University of Florida, then delivered a presentation titled – “High Stakes in the Sahel: Crisis and Challenges.” He said in the francophone Sahel the stakes are clear: there is a widespread humanitarian crisis, the region is plagued by violent extremism, and its societies and economies are disrupted by significant migration and displacement.

50. Regarding the humanitarian situation in the region, he told the delegation to remember the nations in the Sahel are the least developed countries on earth. As such, he continued, the human condition is extremely fragile, health indicators are terrible, and climate change is changing the region quickly. This is seeing longstanding tensions between settled farmers and herders intensifying. Added to this, he said, is the rise of violent extremism. He told the audience that contrary to what they may think today, the Sahel has history of peaceful religious tolerance, but this all changed due to spillover effects of the Algerian civil war. The first group with a widespread impact, he said, was Boko Haram across the Lake Chad basin, which was enabled by the collapse of the regional economy. He then used the “Azawad State” as an example. The Azawad State is a self-declared Tuareg state in the north of Mali. The Tuareg efforts to break away from the Malian government failed, but the region fell into disarray. As a result, there is now a proliferation of Islamist groups in northern Mali, which is fostering a continued spate of local conflicts. As a result of this, he said, there is a new extreme militarisation of the region – with extensive external intervention forces from countries like France, the United States, and now Russia.

51. Mr. Villalon then told the delegation that the Sahara has always been a zone of traffic and mobility. Niger is at the centre of the trans-Saharan migration route traditionally, a role which has been intensified today by the rise of the migration crisis. A factor that will further exacerbate this problem, he warned, is the coming demographic boom in Africa: there will be approximately 1.3 billion people added to the population of Africa by 2050, he stated. He then delved into the key causes of the current migration crisis affecting the region: the Libyan collapse was a trigger, which was then taken advantage of by AQIM and other regional and global jihadist groups. The long-term causes, he said, are essentially the weakened states of the region – there is a significant regional capacity deficit and a state-level legitimacy deficit of the ruling powers, he said, which is at the root of the problem.

52. The speaker warned the audience that current external efforts in the region are now only dealing with symptoms, not the root causes. This makes sense as these are short-term needs, he said, and it is clearly harder to deal with long-term causes. Still, Mr Villalon said a path forward for

the international community is to think of a new regional Marshall Plan. He concluded by stating that re-establishing security in the region is a necessary precondition to any real viable programme in the region, but the long-term solutions require dealing with challenging political issues on the ground.

VI. SESSION 7: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY IN THE GULF

53. **Emile Hokayem**, Senior Fellow for Middle East Security at the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), then took the floor to present on regional politics and competition in the Gulf. Mr Hokayem began his presentation by noting the growing strategic importance of the Gulf. He said he sees 2011 as a turning point, with the United States dramatically reducing its involvement in the region. As a result, he said, the region's powerful, relatively wealthy states with very different visions for the region clearly diverged not only on how they should interact regionally, but also on how they should cooperate with external powers to seek an acceptable new balance of power. The fault lines along which they are competing, he continued, are clear: between States and societies, ethnic groups, secularism and extremism, and, by extension, along the Sunni-Shi'a divide.

54. There is no real agreement, Mr Hokayem stated, about how the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) should be organised. He asked rhetorically whether they should be aligned with the United States, or whether Saudi hegemony shape the direction of the GCC alone. The Gulf States have looked to places like Syria, Lebanon, and Libya as opportunistic areas they could intervene to shape and expand their regional interests and positions, he said. The city states of the UAE have important security concerns, he continued, but food and water security are more pressing concerns. Facing a powerful close competitor in Iran, Gulf states have sought to build alliances well beyond their immediate neighbourhood for strategic depth.

55. Three competing axes predominate today in the state-to-state rivalry, Mr Hokayem said: Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states; Turkey and Qatar; and then Iran and its allies (principally in the form of regional armed groups). All three would like to lead along the economic, ideological, and security dimensions of the region going forward, he said, and all three have to rely on external armed groups to project force into the region's conflicts. Also, he continued, each axis is seeking to corner great power support and use it to the maximum benefit possible.

56. The speaker noted a strategic outreach and branding campaign by the Gulf states to win regional and global sympathy, while Iran has chosen a totally different strategy, as it seeks to change regional dynamics in a covert manner. These two strategies clash, he warned. Gulf competition is brutal, which is borne out in myriad ways today across the region and beyond – in Yemen, in the Levant, in Sudan, across the Horn of Africa, throughout the Sahel, and in Afghanistan.

57. Turning his attention to the United States' policies today in the region, Mr Hokayem said that while the Obama administration's policy may have been "we still support you, but we are not going to be as present", President Trump is quite clear in his support for the Gulf Arab states, and they have embraced him back. Such a policy, he noted, may hurt the Gulf states in either 2020 or 2024. He concluded his presentation by stating that Gulf states' economic interests have shifted to the East, while their security future lies with the West. The key question for Gulf leaders, he concluded, is: how do you keep the West tied to regional security going forward?

58. **Adam Baron**, visiting Fellow, International Security Program, European Council on Foreign Relations, then took the floor to present on the war in Yemen. He began by stating the war in Yemen is a widely misunderstood and often simplified conflict. He noted there are three broad levels to look at the conflict: the international level, with the Iran-back Houthi rebels fighting a mix of Yemeni National Forces supported by Saudi Arabian forces; the national level where focus is on the Houthi struggle against the followers of President Hadi; and, finally, the local level, with the impact and rapid evolution of fighting on the ground.

59. Mr Baron said the relative chaos of the 2011-2014 transition period in Yemen paved the way for the Houthi insurgent forces to move to take power. The momentum of the Houthi insurgency set the path toward Saudi Arabia's intervention in the conflict, particularly as Houthi rebel forces opened a direct channel to Iran and accepted material support from Teheran. The key players in the war today he continued, are the Saudi coalition, the UAE, and Iran. Other important external actors adding to the complexity of the conflict, he noted, are Oman, Kuwait, Qatar, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the EU, as they all seek pathways to have a say in the ultimate peace settlement.

60. Mr. Baron noted the Yemen conflict is the result of a long-standing crisis: the country had been without elections for years, and the population had largely lost faith in a divided, weakened government and its institutions. He concluded his remarks by stating the Stockholm peace initiative is the best agreement to date to have a chance to bring about a ceasefire, and perhaps even peace, since the start of the conflict, but he noted the extreme precarity of the deal due to the complex variables which could easily bring the situation back to fighting.

61. **Volkan Bozkir**, Chairperson of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey, then took the floor to give a Turkish perspective on the situation in the Gulf. Mr Bozkir began his presentation by noting the dispute between Qatar and Gulf Arab states is undercutting the potential for the region to move forward along clear lines of common interest. He told the delegation that Turkey views a strong Gulf as tied to its own security, as such, Ankara places great importance on developments in the region.

62. He continued by stating that the regional crisis has evolved into a frozen dispute. As a result, he warned, the GCC is now at risk of losing credibility, and the whole region has perhaps done irreparable damage to its ability to cooperate in mutually beneficial way. He noted that Turkey calls for sanctions on Qatar to be lifted immediately, and for a concerted effort to align interests among GCC states and to negotiate a way forward together.

63. Raising the issue of the civil war in Yemen, he said he felt the peace process appears to have stalled. He told the delegation that the Stockholm plan should only be viewed as a first, preparatory step toward a longer-term peace process. A major reason for the stalemate, he continued, is a lack of trust, principally over who will control the ports, citing the example of Hudaydah Port. Mr. Bozkir reminded the audience that the tension between Iran and the Gulf countries has ramifications in Yemen. He also noted a desire by the broader international community to get Iran to use its influence in Yemen constructively and to facilitate an eventual peace settlement.

64. Mr Bozkir then discussed the Gulf region more broadly, stating that after the recent oil crisis, Saudi Arabia is a main pillar of decision making in the region, moving away from its past use of more silent diplomacy. He said Saudi Arabia's more determined and outward diplomacy is having a large impact on the region; its post-Arab Spring efforts have been to realign the regional balance of power. Along the way, he said, Saudi Arabia has made many missteps in its burgeoning new foreign policy. He cited the damage done to Saudi Arabia's reputation due to its role in the murder of Jamal Khasoggi by way of example.

VII. SESSION 8: THE SECURITY SITUATION IN IRAQ

65. **Major General Dany Fortin**, Commander, NATO Mission in Iraq (NMI), took the floor to brief the delegation about the evolving situation in Iraq, with a consideration of the impact the Alliance's train and advise mission in the country is having. He started his presentation by stating that with the retreat and defeat of ISIS on the battlefield, the group is transitioning into an insurgent force. As such, Iraqi forces are working to block the ability for the group to find its way back into controlling territory in the country. NATO Allies agreed last July to assume a larger training and advisory role for Iraqi

forces, with the goal being to help build a stronger, more capable force, but also to foster longer-term, normalised political relations with the government in Iraq.

66. Commander Fortin said NATO's mission is modest in size, working exclusively in the Baghdad area. The mission, he stated, strives to meet the needs of the Iraqi government. NATO has significant experience in helping to oversee significant defence sector reforms in a state, he told the delegation, and the goal of NATO's mission in Iraq is no different: a transparent and effective national security force. Ultimately, General Fortin said, the mission seeks to transition from foreigners training Iraqis to Iraqis training Iraqis. In addition, he said there is attention to broader issues of the democratic control of armed forces, which he noted will help make the Iraqi national forces more representative of the nation they seek to protect. He said he is working alongside his Iraqi counterparts to understand strategic decision-making processes and then plan down to tactical level execution of these policies.

67. Through the mission's work with the Iraqi Ministry of Defence on force structure and defence planning, General Fortin said there is a transition of Iraqi defence forces to be able to take over all of these functions. General Fortin also noted efforts to make the Iraqi national security strategy into a sustainable, effective national security strategy. Iraqi security forces have a large range of tasks to perform, from national defence to crisis response to counterinsurrection, he told the audience, which is challenging for any force. To help the Iraqi forces meet these challenges, he continued, NATO is matching resources and assistance measures where needed.

68. General Fortin also spoke of broader outreach efforts working to expand the skills of the Iraqi forces to be more capable for today's security challenges – from cyber to other new technologies, etc. The NMI is also, therefore, working to build the professional military educational capacity of the National Defence University as a result.

69. General Fortin concluded his remarks by stating the NATO mission is complimentary to and partnered with the global mission against ISIS, the EU mission in Iraq, as well as other bi-lateral and multinational efforts working in Baghdad. He said by working together, Allied and partner efforts in Iraq try to ensure they do not duplicate while covering the range of needed training and advice. He said it is important for the NATO PA audience to know that the mission exists only at the invitation of the Iraqi government, and that there are no NATO bases in Iraq, but, rather, the mission is totally embedded in existing Iraqi institutions.

70. **Renad Mansour**, research Fellow, Middle East and North Africa Programme, Chatham House, then took the floor to give an assessment of the fight against terrorism in Iraq. He began by highlighting the cyclical nature of conflict in Iraq, which would lead to expectations of a return of violence in the future. He told the delegation that the situation today in Iraq is better than a few years ago, but he noted the root causes of the cycle of conflict remain unaddressed for the most part.

71. Mr Mansour warned that there were indications that Iraq would be heading back into conflict in the not too distant future. He told the delegation that security is necessarily connected to the political and economic situation in the country and that: "Fundamentally, the weakness of the state in Iraq engenders the constant cycle of violence." He told the delegation that there is a myth of Iraq being post-sectarian but warned against thinking this is the case. He admitted that, to some extent things have changed, as protests are now focused against people's own local leaders, rather than the more nebulous variables of sectarian differences. The key political problem in Iraq today, he continued, is how to bring citizens into the political process. Regrettably, he noted, Iraqis are increasingly expressing a real nostalgia for the days of Saddam Hussein.

72. He then used reconstruction efforts in the country to support his argument. He told the delegation that the United States had spent USD60 billion since 2003 to rebuild Iraq, with nothing really to show for the investment. He said the sum represented an investment larger than that of the

Marshall plan. Recurrent political and civil challenges remain and conflict has undone any investment benefits, he lamented.

73. A key problem, Mr Mansour stressed, is that security sector reform is hamstrung by the existence of strong ethnic militias, which are security, economic, and political actors on the ground. He concluded by stating that the idea of the Weberian state does not work in the Middle East and it will not. He said the idea of integration of the population into an Iraqi central government needs to be totally revisited in order for there to be a sustainable government solution in the country.

VIII. SESSION 9: RUSSIA AND CHINA IN THE MIDDLE EAST

74. **Anna Borshchevskaya**, Senior Fellow at The Washington Institute, suggested that President Vladimir Putin is too often characterised as merely a tactician with a low capacity for strategic decision making. This is misleading. For example, he has worked systematically and consistently to bring Russia into the strategic picture in the Middle East. Under President Putin, Russia has slowly and consistently gained political and economic leverage there. It is interesting to note that although English is the first language of Russia's propaganda news service RT, Arabic is the second, followed by Spanish. This points to the priorities of the Kremlin.

75. One difference between President Putin and his Soviet predecessors is that he is seeking to forge good relations with all actors in the region and even with selected opposition groups. This gives him more flexibility than other outside actors. The approach has had some payback. Egypt is edging closer to Moscow, and Turkey is deepening energy ties with Russia. It is now purchasing important Russian weapon systems despite concerns from some of its NATO Allies. But Russia does have a zero-sum outlook insofar as it sees its success as a loss for the West and vice versa, and President Putin is actively enhancing his leverage through the region despite Russia's innate weakness. It has proven capable of projecting power without incurring great costs. This suggests that it will remain very active in the Middle East for the foreseeable future.

76. Syria has been a crucial test case for Russia and its intervention in that conflict proved decisive. This was not an element of a grand master plan but rather a continuation of Russia's long support for Mr al-Assad. Mr Putin was able to capitalise on the West's retreat from the region. The goal in Syria was to protect Russia's immediate interests, weaken the West, and flood it with refugees, in part as pay back for its isolation of Russia after it illegally annexed Crimea. All of this is at least partly designed to distract the Russian public from the country's serious domestic problems. President Putin is very concerned about disturbances in Russia and sees both the colour revolutions and the Arab uprisings as events ultimately inspired and even driven by Western governments. He worries that the United States wants to orchestrate a similar uprising in Russia and this logic, in part, inspires his policy in the Middle East.

77. The Syrian conflict has provided the Russian military with a training opportunity, a chance to develop confidence, and a means to advertise Russian weapons to international buyers. About 63,000 Russian troops have rotated through the country. Russia has also sought to create an A2/D2 bubble in the Eastern Mediterranean and has partially succeeded. The conflict has also secured Russia a warm water port in the region.

78. There is also an energy dimension to Russian policy. Syria now needs to rebuild its energy infrastructure. Currently, it is not even energy independent, although it has the basic endowments to meet its own energy supplies. Russia wants to be Syria's key energy partner, and this will enhance Russia's own energy leverage. Russia's significant presence in Syria also provides it with an excellent intelligence gathering opportunity.

79. Libya presents new opportunities for Russia. Western policy toward Libya has been incoherent, Ms Borshchevskaya argued, while Russia has been clear in its support for General Hafta

and his militia. If Russia gains greater access to Libya, it will have another important strategic foothold in the Mediterranean.

80. Domestically Russia continues to decline. It is increasingly reliant on authoritarian repression to quell dissent. It plays up the notion that Russia is under siege and this inspires further militarisation and repression. President Putin remains resilient, however, and there is little chance that he will be pushed out of power. President Putin continues to promote low level conflicts in contested regions as the resultant instability means that Russia can be needed, and it can sell arms. In so doing, it continues to make itself a relevant player even if there is a high cost for its neighbours. In the face of this challenge, Allied countries need to be strong.

81. **Lanxin Xiang**, Director, Centre of One Belt and One Road Studies, first suggested that it was misleading to understand China's policy as simply an expression of national commercial interests. He described China's no enemies and all friends' approach to the Middle East and said that this was a key element of a multi-dimensional strategy. China's foreign policy is not simply pragmatic, it is rooted in long held traditions about foreign policy. It has never wavered from its policy of non-intervention in the internal affairs of other countries. China has never held that external powers can successfully conduct state-building operations through regime change and occupation. It sees this as an expression of colonialist of Anglo-American notions of global order. It is also not convinced by the related conceptions of balance of power. He challenged Edward Gibbons' notion that the rising power must inevitably challenge the reigning power through military conflict. China conceives of power more in terms of controlling water. Dams are less effective than allowing water to find its natural course. China's approach to international relations is non-architectural and is premised on local balances constructed by local operators not outside powers. As for China's view of the South China Sea, he noted in the discussion that China has no intention of blocking navigation in those waters. Two thirds of its trade goes through the China Sea. It wants open waters, and Mr Xiang challenged the claims that the American government has made about China's ambitions there.

82. He suggested that China panicked during the so-called Arab spring, but virtually none of those uprisings worked. Libya is perhaps a perfect example, Mr Xiang suggested. China has no interest in involving itself in these conflicts and believes, for example, that outsiders cannot shape the dynamic of Sunni-Shia rivalries.

83. The One Belt, One Road initiative is a key Chinese project to build links to this region and several others. It could contribute to building a more coherent and integrated region, but it is also a reflection of China's approach to international affairs. It is non-military, Mr Xiang argued, and is focused on connectivity in the Eurasian space. This connectivity concept has become a central tenet of China's approach to international affairs. China has also changed its views on multilateralism. It was once very sceptical of this approach to international affairs, but it has now begun to embrace it and believes that it can benefit from it. China has also seen a greater plurality in international affairs and on some matters have been part of coalitions engaging Paris, Berlin, and Moscow. He noted that in the 19th century, grand infrastructure projects were linked to colonial policies and ambitions. China, he argued, does not conceive of these projects in the same way. It has no territorial or colonial ambitions.

84. China has unique relations with Iran, Israel, and the Gulf countries, and its Belt and Road initiative helps link up these relations in a coherent package. Beijing now sees the Middle East as a more promising partner for this project than Africa and it is adjusting its sights accordingly. The war in Syria has not been welcomed in Beijing and has complicated its plans.

IX. SESSION 10 : RECENT EVOLUTION IN THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

85. **Ufuk Ulutas**, Chairman of the Centre for Strategic Research at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs discussed Turkey's view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. He noted that Turkey had recognised Israel in 1949 but has also historically sided with the Palestinian desire for statehood. It sees the two-state solution as the only viable solution to the conflict but recognises that there are many obstacles to achieving this goal. Turkey has also always supported the peace process. It has pursued dialogue with both sides of the conflict over the decades.

86. He argued that US policy has now become an important obstacle, as it has so clearly sided with the Netanyahu government and continues to approach the conflict in a unilateral fashion. Officially recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel, moving its embassy to that city and recognising Israel's annexation of the Golan Heights point to the blank check approach Washington has now adopted. While there are domestic political reasons for these policies, they have undermined the peace process, international norms and institutions, and international law outlawing the acquisition of territory through military means.

87. Another problem, according to Mr Ulutas, has been the radicalisation of Israeli politics. The political centre has shifted significantly and whereas a figure like Mr Netanyahu might once have occupied the right wing of the political spectrum, now his brand of politics is at the center and the right wing is far more extreme. Mr Ulutas suggested that this has made peace making all the more difficult. Making matters worse is that the international community itself has lost its focus on this issue while the region itself has been consumed by a great deal of instability and ideological and sectarian turmoil. These developments have effectively shelved the peace process and the situation is thus likely to grow more tense and difficult over time as a result. The EU alone is not in a position to mediate and although the Trump Administration has promised to pull off a so-called Deal of the Century, there is very little indication that this is about to transpire, particularly as the Palestinians have been removed from any discussions and the Trump Administration has essentially adopted the outlook of the settlers in the West Bank. Given the very difficult situation, it might make sense to work on capacity building and efforts to relieve Palestinians of suffering to make the current situation at least tolerable to those communities that are suffering most from the lack of movement. At the end of the day, the speaker suggested, there is no alternative to the two-state solution.

X. SESSION 11: THE CHALLENGES OF POLITICAL AND INSTITUTIONAL REFORM IN THE MENA REGION

88. **Robert WATKINS**, Assistant Director and Head of the Middle East and North Africa Division at the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), began his remarks by describing how geopolitics in the Middle East has evolved since the end of the Cold War. In that period, there was a certain interplay between domestic institutions and global politics. Selected elites and even minority groups were favoured and elevated because of external links they maintained to great powers. Political systems were either imported or forced on countries of the region. The basic regime typologies included traditional, secular, military, oligarchy, and colonial state. U.S. policy was conditioned both by the dynamic of the Cold War and concern about access to petroleum resources. It looked for regimes whose world view mirrored its own. Russia was looking for partners interested in Socialism. As the countries of the region aligned with the great powers, they also marginalised or eliminated opposition political forces. This helped shaped the mindset of young people throughout the region, Mr Watkins argued.

89. The so-called War on Terror launched in 2003 had echoes of this neo-colonial dynamic and began a new phase of Western intervention in the region. Western forces participated in wars both in Iraq and Libya, and now Russia and the United States have deployed forces in Syria. Old methods of economic policy making no longer work. Citizens were once reassured by the possibilities of working for the state even if they did not enjoy basic political rights. Today the state cannot generate

enough jobs, and this has ratcheted up economic and political tensions. These economic developments factored into the uprisings that began in 2011. Although many analysts mistakenly suggest that the Arab Spring represents a grand political failure and the phenomenon is now over, in fact, Mr. Watkins suggested, it is ongoing. Moreover, it is too early to assess what this instability means for the region. One could argue that today's political volatility in Algeria and the overthrow of President Bashir in Sudan represent a continuation of this phase in the region's history.

90. Four trends have been apparent, however. The status quo persisted initially in Algeria, Lebanon, and the Gulf. In these countries there were few reforms and little changed. The regimes sought to maintain social peace by improving the social contract.

91. Tunisia, by contrast, has undergone a continued a reform process. It is not perfect, but it should be seen as a so-far successful work in progress. A third outcome is evident in Morocco and Jordan, both of which responded to new demands with important constitutional reforms. This process is not a revolutionary, but rather evolutionary and relatively stable. Finally, Libya, Syria, and Yemen have had the worse outcomes and have been beset by war and humanitarian catastrophes.

92. DCAF has looked closely at this situation and outlined several guidelines based on these observations. First and foremost, true political and institutional reform requires some kind of social consensus and basic agreements on the direction of institutional change. Secondly, there must be a determined political will for change in order to have successful change. Thirdly, there must be an oversight system that ensures accountability. If there is no oversight—in other words a process by which the state is held accountable—then the reform process will not succeed. Reform and democratic oversight must be institutionalised. It is not enough simply to have demonstrations.

93. **Brahim OUMANSOUR**, associate research Fellow at the French Institute for International and Strategic Affairs (IRIS) discussed the current political situation in Algeria, which had been rocked by demonstrations demanding the ouster of the President Bouteflika and enduring political, economic, and institutional change. In February, hundreds of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets, and this triggered a defection from Bouteflika with the President's entourage essentially abandoning him. The National Liberation Front, business leaders, and the Chief of the Army urged the Constitutional Council to apply Article 102 to announce the vacancy of the Presidency. On 2 April, the President resigned, and Presidential elections are slated for 4 July 2019.

94. Continued protests have maintained pressure on the governing elite, and there is public dissatisfaction with signs that many of the old elites are determined to maintain their hold on power. There is a very evident crisis of trust in political leaders and the public does not want to compromise on its democratic aspirations, Mr Oumansour said. The demonstrations have been highly disciplined and focused and have demonstrated a high degree of political maturity of those aspiring for political change.

95. The Algerian crisis has been driven, in part, by economic failure. Despite the huge sums invested to modernise the country, a productive private sector has not emerged, and youth unemployment has soared in this young country. Austerity measures applied after the fall in oil prices in 2014 exacerbated the situation, and price inflation was particularly harmful to the working and middle classes, which and fomented the high degree of social discontent.

96. Fortunately, so far, the demonstrations have not threatened social stability in Algeria. Algerian institutions are fairly resilient, and there seems to be a shared sense of risk. The parties are seeking solutions with the country's constitutional boundaries in order to avoid any deterioration of the situation. The Libyan situation has shaped the thinking of many of the key actors and nobody wants to see this kind of chaos in Algeria. Algerians have learned from the failure of their neighbours. The army is also generally respected and it, in turn, has sought to avoid any conflict with the protestors. It does not aspire to political power and has an important role to play in ensuring stability and facilitating a peaceful transition.

97. The real dilemma is that a successful transition will likely take time and many on the streets are eager for rapid change. This dynamic must be managed, and it will require communication and dialogue. Approximately 70% of the national budget is funded by energy sales, and a dramatic fall in energy prices could trigger instability. The very uncertain situation in Libya is another risk factor, as that instability could draw terrorist organisations into the region.

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