NATO AND THE EU: FRAGMENTED SECURITY ACTORS IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

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Introduction

The Mediterranean is an important region in international relations. It has three strategic entry points, and connects the world's major economic, political and energy hubs (Krimi, 2021). It therefore attracts a number of regional, and out of area hegemons, that have often been responsible for proxy wars in the vicinity. This work attempts to examine the roles of NATO and the EU as key security actors in the region, where its members have utilised both traditional material power, and structural, discursive and normative soft power approaches in an effort to contribute to peace and security in the Southern Mediterranean region. The chapter focuses on Libya and Syria as case studies to illustrate European security dynamics in the region.

Understanding the operation of these security frameworks in the Southern Mediterranean is mired in controversy. In the 1990s a more positive Braudelian vision (Pamluk, 2010) of a unified Mediterranean was uppermost, reflected in the EU Barcelona process that focused on regional building. Today, Panebianco (2021) argues, that the concept of a unified Mediterranean has gone out of fashion, in favour of two distinct regions, Europe and the Middle East, with a Mediterranean global South seen as a critical juncture between a universal global North and South. Indeed, the Mediterranean characterised by a long standing fault line dating back millennia reminiscent of the crusades, is presently in the literature, increasingly characterised as fragmented, as one of difference, variety and conflict (Bicchi, 2018).

Fenko (2015) posits, that rather than two, there are currently three prevailing interpretations of international relations in the Mediterranean region, as an inter-regional space based on diverse sub-regions, as an area of autonomous

regionalisation processes, and finally and often uppermost; the Mediterranean as an EU foreign policy object. In the literature and the theory, it is in this context that security in the Mediterranean is often understood. Literature in the English language which has universal traction on the security needs of South periphery is sparse and often contextualised within the needs and biases of the EU. Indeed most of the literature focuses on migration and terrorist activity considered as the primary security threats to Europe. Here the focus is of a power dynamic between different Mediterranean peripheries, divided by blue borders where the Northern and Southern regions coexist in an asymmetrical relationship. With the North sustaining advanced industrial economies supporting a powerful core dynamic, while in the more agrarian South power tends to be more diffuse and therefore weakened. The result is borders that are often fuzzy, contentious and hide inequalities, uppermost being the unequal balance of power between the North and the South (Celata, & Coletti, 2017).

NATO and the European Union: Regional Security Actors

It is within the framework provided above, in conjunction with the changing demands emanating from adjacent regions and the global circuit, that one can understand European security in the Southern Mediterranean. In the current climate of security, Russia's war against Ukraine has led to a revived *raison d'etre* for NATO and enhanced prospects for effective EU security and defence cooperation. This echoed the objectives for which these institutions were established over seven decades ago when the United States and its European allies aligned themselves economically and politically against the Soviet Union. The Washington Treaty formalised their collective security through Article 5, which declared that "an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all" (NATO, 1947).

With the end of the Cold War, debate over the distribution of international order and the nature of security concerns in Europe once again emerged. NATO was retained and enlarged as a European collective security framework, leading to

ever-growing reservations on the part of Moscow (Goldgeier, & Itzkowitz Shifrinson, 2023). During the 1990s, NATO's strategic concept also pursued non-traditional security concerns and approaches, crisis management and conflict prevention, and adjusting its force posture (NATO, 1991). After the 2001 September 11th terrorist attacks on the United States, NATO's Article 5 would for the first (and only) time be invoked (Apps, 2024). This increased NATO's focus on counter-terrorism and counter-proliferation, and out of area operations, most notably in Afghanistan. With increased antagonism on Russia's part towards NATO's enlargement, Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and its war against Ukraine in 2022, the focus of NATO's strategic concept inevitably again became collective defence against Russia's aggression toward the transatlantic community (NATO, 2022).

Therefore, though from its inception the EU envisaged a defence arm, its members became reliant on NATO (Koutrakos, 2013). This trend was facilitated by developments that ensured that security and defence remained under the aegis of the sovereign nation states. However, the end of the Cold War, fragmentation and instability in a number of European states, and the expansion of EU borders to the East and the South alerted the union to the need for an internal defence mechanism, and an increased external foreign policy voice (Puga, 2021). Since the 1990s the EU has established fledgling policies, organisations and security features including the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the European Border and Coast Guard Agency FRONTEX, battle groups, EU Naval Force Operations (EUNAVFOR), and the European Defence Agency (EDA). There has been a push at creating a defence Commissioner, establishing an EU defence budget, a common defence industrial strategy, and a genuine EU defence union, incorporating land, sea, cyber and air defences Besch (2024). The Strategic Compass approved in 2022 envisages a force of 5000 with strategic autonomy that ensures the standardization of products and interoperability of military instruments across the union. However, to date defence remains under intergovernmental

institutions, and reliant on NATO and therefore policy outcomes in terms of defence in Europe are primarily aligned with the needs of NATO.

However, an EU perspective towards foreign policy, security and defence issues dictated by functionalist dynamics has long been developing. This is driven by, a civilian approach, normative views, and an eclectic methodology that weaves together different territorial and institutional needs. It is also influenced by geographic position, one located adjacent to previous colonies now sporting major global fault lines. The result is that the EU adopts both traditional security in terms of the nation states, and new soft security measures as a Union, including cooperative measure, democratisation and peace theory, economic frameworks, and humanitarian support (Rieker, & Riddervoid, 2021). Consequently, despite its heavy reliance on NATO, the EU is still seen as offering a more nuanced, variegated, multilateral approach to that of the USA based on unilateralism and military measures (Berenskoetter, 2005).

NATO and the EU: Mediterranean Security Actors?

Whilst the geographical priority of NATO has been the transatlantic geopolitical space, the regions surrounding the alliance members have also been given fluctuating attention. The Mediterranean has always played an ever present, albeit at times peripheral and fragmented, role within NATO's evolving strategic agendas. In keeping with its broader strategic objectives during the Cold War, NATO's maritime presence within the Mediterranean during this time was to secure the southern periphery of the Alliance and to deter and counter any Soviet presence or aggression (Bergeron, 2024).

With the end of Cold War, NATO's maritime focus in the Mediterranean included countering cross border threats, maritime operations in support of the UN Security Council Resolutions, and missions and embargos in reaction to the war in Bosnia and later in Kosovo. The Alliance also pursued partnerships with other states on a collective and individual basis. The Mediterranean Dialogue was set up in 1994 and brought together a platform for cooperation between the allies and

Mediterranean countries. Other states within the Mediterranean and beyond were able to form individual partnerships, cooperation and capacity building with the alliance through the Partnership for Peace.

Following the September 11th attacks, the missions within the Mediterranean focused on counterterrorism, counter-proliferation, or ship inspections, reflecting the shifting focus and priorities of the alliance (Medcalf, 2024). In response to the attacks and the alliance's invocation of Article 5, Operation Active Endeavour oversaw the patrolling and monitoring of shipping within the Mediterranean with the objective of disrupting terrorist activity.

In 2011, the NATO members adopted a new Alliance Maritime Strategy (NATO, 2011). This reflected the new 2010 strategic concept (NATO, 2010) which placed a greater emphasis on alliance roles in deterrence and collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security between NATO and other partners. The role of maritime security in countering non-state actors was emphasised. Yet the onset of the Arab spring, and in particular, the escalation of tensions in both Libya and Syria, meant that NATO would play a more direct role in an attempt to bring stability within these countries, and in protection of their civilian populations (Apps, 2024).

Russia's presence in the Mediterranean increased after 2013, re-establishing a Mediterranean squadron and entrenching its support of the Assad regime. This, together with Russia's aggression against Ukraine, beginning in 2014 and escalating in 2022, meant that NATO's purpose more broadly, and also in the Mediterranean, would once again centre on countering and containing Russia: "Moscow's military build-up, including in the Baltic, Black and Mediterranean Sea regions, along with its military integration with Belarus, challenge our security and interests" (NATO, 2022). This was reiterated during the 2023 NATO Summit in Vilnius, where the allies noted: "Russia has increased its multi-domain military build-up and presence in the Baltic, Black, and Mediterranean Sea regions, and maintains significant military capabilities in the Arctic" (NATO, 2023).

In this respect, the Alliance has increasingly approached the Mediterranean within the broader context of its southern flank. A recent report by an Independent Expert Group (2024) commissioned during the 2023 Vilnius Summit sought to reflect on "existing and emerging threats and challenges, and opportunities for engagement" in its Southern Neighbourhood(s), specifically the Middle East, North Africa and Sahel regions. It therefore does not consider the Mediterranean in a singular approach or as a singular region, yet as a maritime body that brings together separate and overlapping regions, challenges, as well as interests. The report acknowledges that NATO must improve its situational awareness of dynamics in the region. Seeking synergies and cooperation with other organisations that are active within these regions is recommended, including "deeper cooperation, coordination and complementarity" of its partnership with the EU (Independent Expert Group, 2024). Thus, the Alliance's perception of the Mediterranean evolves according to its threat perception, and the challenges or opportunities posed from a maritime or border perspective in this context.

In the context of EU security and defence needs, the importance of a cohesive policy towards the South and the Mediterranean had long been felt (Calleya, 1997). As early as 1975, this discussion took place at the crucial 1975 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) (Casa, 2008). From 1992 to 2000 a security dialogue between the Western European Union (WEU) and seven South Mediterranean states was facilitated (Calleya, 2011). The Barcelona process included a security and defence dialogue, and established EuroMeSCo (1996) a network of research centres and think tanks based in the Euro-Mediterranean area, which was adopted by the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and financed by the Commission. A key focus of ESDP was also to forge a common view of security in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean dialogue and the 5 + 5 incorporate EU states that all have blue borders on the Mediterranean (Vasconcelos, 2004). Indeed, a crucial element of defence in the region is shoring up these borders and a large percentage of their defence budget goes on their navies, with Mediterranean states having some of the most powerful

navies in the world: France 8th, Italy 11th, Egypt 13th, Algeria 15th, and Spain 17th (Global Naval Powers Ranking, 2024).

In the military sphere, NATO still has overwhelming supremacy in the Mediterranean, however the Mediterranean allies, including the European states, play a key role; France, Greece, Italy, UK, Spain and Turkey. In 1994, the Mediterranean Dialogue was launched to contribute to regional security and stability, and dispel any misconceptions about NATO. The initial members were Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Jordan joined in 1995 and Algeria in 2000. The United Kingdom has bases in Gibraltar (Beckett, 2021) and Cyprus (RAF AKROTIRI). NATO's assets in the Mediterranean include two important headquarters: in Izmir, Turkey and Naples, Italy maintaining a number of multinational naval groups at the ready. The principal mandate of the latter is to plan and conduct NATO military operations in the Mediterranean and beyond (Missirole, 2019). Important elements of NATO's ballistic missile defence systems are in Turkey and Spain (BMD 2021). The AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) surveillance aircraft use forward operating bases in Greece (Aktion), Italy (Trapani) and Turkey (Konya) (NATO AWACS). NATO's unique Alliance Ground Surveillance (AGS) system operates from the Sigonella base in Sicily where remotely-piloted RQ-4D aircraft are deployed (SHAPE AGS). NATO is currently carrying out Operation Sea Guardian (OSG) in the Mediterranean Sea. OSG maintains a safe and secure maritime environment through maritime security capacity-building, situational awareness and counter-terrorism (NATO OSG).

Despite the overwhelming presence of NATO, the EU continues to support the idea of developing its own security tools in the Mediterranean. Operation Sophia and operation Irini both naval military operations in the Mediterranean Sea are two such cases (EEAS, 2020). A new Commissioner for security and defence signals the new emphasis on hard security measures to enable better defence protocols for the Union. A new Commissioner for the Mediterranean as part of the EU Commission also signals the increasing importance being given to the Mediterranean region by the Union (PRIMA, 2024). However, although Security

and defence dialogue remains central, it is a failed objective. There is confusion over the terms security and defence and what exactly are the long term objectives of the Union. The South of the Mediterranean, unlike the North, is not a homogenous or uniform reality. The EU does attempt to assert its views in the region but uses it primarily to further its own end, for instance, with regard to migration. The key focus of ESDP was to forge a common view of security in the Mediterranean, but this view is still absent. We need to ask if there is a security culture specific to the Euro-Med. The EU attempts to create a distinct image here based on the concept of Security by rule of law, but it has failed and as the threat perception on both sides of the Mediterranean grows deeper, chances of success become less likely. Differences between the member states hamper their ability to develop a constant and clear strategy. Europe's southern flank is now open to all types of conflict and the EU has attempted to offer assistance in a number of areas where conflict persists: Israel and Palestine, (since 2000 more than 1.1 billion) the Sahel (2024: 201 M), Libya, Syria, and Tunisia (2021-24: 620 M) (European Council). However the EU's ineffective policies towards Israel and Gaza (Philippe, 2024), the funding of governments with poor human rights records in Libya, Syria and Tunisia, its migration pacts with the South Mediterranean states deemed inimical to furthering human rights, and its failed policy in the Sahel has resulted in the EU's reputation in the south Mediterranean being tarnished (Lynch, 2021; Tocci, 2023).

Libya and Syria: NATO & EU Attempts at Traditional and Soft Security

Thus, despite the resources available to them, both the American and the European approach towards the entire South Mediterranean region tends to be indecisive, fragmented and piecemeal. US foreign policy in the area is regarded as ambiguous and incoherent, a result of naivety, inexperience and an inability to think outside Western constructs (Oualaalou, 2016). European foreign and security decisions are taken both at the EU and national level resulting in numerous and at

times conflicting outcomes (Lehne, 2022). Military decisions in the South Mediterranean are taken by the US or under the NATO umbrella, and the EU tends to follow suit, lacking both the military resources and gravitas to do otherwise. However the policy of NATO and the EU in the region is also influenced by foreign policy manoeuvres predicated on peace theory and democratisation utilising social economic and political tools to facilitate conflict resolution, security and stability in the region (Alcaro, 2024). The case studies on Libya and Syria attempt to illustrate this eclectic approach incorporating hard and soft security measures and to assess their effectiveness.

Libya

2011 saw the spread of the Arab Spring across North African states, with popular uprisings against authoritarian governments and demands for reform and democratisation. When protests began in Libya in February 2011, the Gaddafi regime quickly turned against the protesters and unravelled any recent progress in relations with the West. On February 26, 2011, the Security Council adopted Resolution UNSC 1970 which condemned Libya's use of force against civilians, called for restraint, and imposed arms embargoes, asset freezes and travel bans (United Nations Security Council, 2011). On March 17th, 2011, the Security Council adopted Resolution 1973 which in effect applied the "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) principle through the implementation of a no-fly zone (United Nations Security Council, 2011b). NATO assumed the command of the air and maritime operations that were required to implement these UN Security Council Resolutions under Operation Unified Protector (Bergeron, 2024).

During the first weeks, the campaign was welcomed by regional and international actors. While the UN Security Council resolution provided a mandate and international legitimacy, reservations and mixed positions remained amongst NATO members states. The intervention in Libya took place at a time when the alliance appeared to be adrift, particularly in the context of the intervention in Iraq, and the continued role that NATO was playing in Afghanistan (Apps, 2024). Nonetheless, the alliance members pursued compromise amongst

themselves (Michaels, 2011). Some member states, such as France, UK and US, together with Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Italy and Norway participated in all aspects of the operation, while others, namely Spain and the Netherlands, only contributed to the enforcement of the no-fly zone. Greece provided the use of its airbases, Turkey participated in the arms embargo, and others provided limited support (Gaub, 2024). Most notably, Germany abstained during the UN Security Council vote and did not participate in the operation (Westerwelle, 2011). NATO's mission formally ended on 31 October 2011, following the capture and killing of Gaddafi by rebels.

The EU attempted to adopt a soft power role in the aftermath of the Gaddafi regime's collapse, and the attempts to transition towards democracy. It has provided funding towards humanitarian assistance, Libya's response to Covid-19, migration, border assistance, as well as naval operations such as Sophia and Irini. Unfortunately, the efforts at stabilization and democratization in Libya failed over the years, while the influence of external players, such as Turkey and Russia, has increased at the expense of the EU's (Marcuzzi, 2022b). Mixed and diverging objectives, prioritization and positions within the EU, particularly on the part of Italy and France, in relation to Libya's domestic political blocs, would weaken and discredited the role and influence of individual member states and the Union as a whole.

As Florence Gaub (2024) points out in her assessment of NATO's operation in Libya, the conventional wisdom and assumptions are that this mission was a failure, that its impact was a negative one. Davis (2011) examines the various motivations and contradictions behind the intervention, such as, responsibility to protect, versus self-interest due to a variety of reasons, including proximity to the country and the impact of instability there for Europe, be it in the form of migration and political violence, or economic interests and the impact on oil prices and access to favourable oil contracts. It is therefore seen to have discredited the notion of R2P and contributed to the subsequent instability, civil conflict and divided governance in the country (Gaub, 2024). Moreover, NATO faced

increasing criticism as it was seen to have overstepped the R2P mandate that it was given and contributed to regime change. Marcuzzi (2022) notes the NATO and EU member states sought to contribute to and support stability and democratization, yet since 2011, Libya has been characterised by civil conflict, as well as the increasing influence of other competing regional powers.

Nonetheless, certain aspects of the mandate and operation are worth noting. The international community were able to mobilise on a position on Libya and NATO's operation in Libya was put into effect faster than previous operations in Bosnia and Kosovo. It should also be noted that the United States was not at the forefront or centre stage, but that the operation was primarily led by France and the United Kingdom. Gaub (2024) also notes that whilst NATO faced criticism due to civilians' casualties during to NATO airstrikes, NATO did in fact succeed in protecting civilians. It was deemed to be a precise campaign that sought to minimise civilian deaths. Bergeron (2024) also notes that the operation was carried out "with extreme caution given concerns about injury to civilians and set a new standard for precision".

It appears that it was not the implementation and objectives of the mandate that were a failure or problematic, but the long-term results of the revolution, the collapse of the regime and the protracted civil conflict that ensued. In fact, Marcuzzi (2022) has argued that shortfalls on the part of NATO and the EU in Libya are essentially a result of what he describes as a strategy dilemma. In this respect, he argues that both the EU and NATO prioritised the legitimacy of the intervention, rather than the strategic dimensions and repercussions once the intervention took place. Gaub (2024) posits that perhaps the greater failure on NATO's part was that it did not pursue a post-conflict role in NATO that may have contributed to the maintenance of stability and state building in the country in the wake of Gaddafi's death.

Syria

The Syrian case study illustrates a form of principled pragmatism in the conduct of foreign relations, defence and security. The US and the EU intervened

in the Syrian civil war for a number of reasons including a democratization agenda triggered by the Arab spring, and the need to reintroduce order in a territory now being viewed as a dangerous transit zone for terrorist militias.

In 2011 the authoritarian Syrian government was challenged by rebel opposition forces demanding democratic change, and the US and European states stepped in. The French government immediately felt obliged to provide support for the Syrian rebel forces (Chulov, 2012), though in reality the UK provided the largest contingent to the upcoming American initiative (Loft, 2023). The US administration placed sanctions on said government and the CIA became involved in training the free Syrian army (US Department of State Syria Sanctions). In 2012, the UK provided opposition forces with non-lethal military aid, including communications equipment and medical supplies, and provided intelligence from its Cyprus bases (Parikiaki, 2012). In August 2013, when the Assad government was accused of using chemical weapons, France called for military intervention but the US president, Barack Obama refused (Black, 2015). In 2014 the US officially supported the Syrian rebels, and the Kurdish led Syrian forces battling both Islamic State and Assad. In the same year, a US led coalition that included UK and France launched an air campaign, however direct missile strikes against the Syrian regime did not take place till 2017 (Laub, 2023; Britannica, 2024). In August 2014 French President François Hollande confirmed that France had delivered arms to Syrian rebels and in September 2015, France began airstrikes in Syria. In mid-November, France drafted a UN Security Council resolution urging UN members to "take all necessary measures" in the fight against ISIL and the al-Nusra Front (Caglayan, 2015). A German intervention was authorized on December 4, 2015. This initially was targeted at the Islamic state (codenamed Operation Counter Daesh) however it involved military operations in Syria (Tactics Institute, 2024). In August 2016 British Special Forces were guarding the perimeter of the New Syrian Army's base at al-Tanf (Al Waleed).

However, measures taken by NATO members and European countries in the region triggered a counter offensive, as Russia facilitated military operations in

Syria at the request of the Syrian government. Russian forces provided air support and equipment, while ground assaults were led by the Syrian Arab Army, and Iranian-backed militia including the Lebanese militia Hezbollah, and North Korean Special Forces (Grajewski, 2021). With this support the Syrian government resisted military defeat and gained back much of its lost territory. In 2019 ISIS lost much of the territory it had taken from Syria, and Turkish troops moved into the region. Consequently Trump acquiesced to the withdrawal of the majority of US forces (over 2000) (Borger, 2019).

Though as recent as August 2024 ground and aerial attacks against the government with the support of US led coalition forces that include French and UK units continue to take place (France24, 2024), and the US continues to maintain a force of circa a thousand in Syria that cooperates with the Kurdish free forces (Secen, 2024), the Assad regime is likely to remain in power for the foreseeable future. As a result the US is rethinking it indefinite military presence in Syria (Secen, 2024), and European states following the US lead are also envisaging the removal of their troops (Sofuoglu, 2019).

The case study does illustrate that in defence initiatives in the Mediterranean South, European states do attempt to play a role. France has long considered Syria her sphere of influence, and was seen as the diplomatic leader, with a special relationship with Russia and with deep knowledge and ties with Syria and the region (Yircali, N.D). However, division among the EU member states was rampant. Denmark, Sweden, Germany and France supported the opposition; Cyprus, Greece and the Czech Republic however were reluctant to extend support because of historical links with Syria (Yircali, N.D). Support to the opposition in the final analysis remained primarily diplomatic and financial, serving organizational and training aims, rather than military, since the European states ultimately remain dependent on the US that calls the shots (Mccullough, 2021).

However, the EU in the region remains a leading organisation in terms of facilitating peace making and peace building, and is expected to take on this role

between the parties in Syria (Tejero, 2022). Throughout the conflict this perspective was already evident. Germany prioritized the refugee crisis; France and the UK were concerned with countering terrorism. The UK focused on humanitarian and non-humanitarian aid to Syria and neighbouring countries, and coordinating policy alignments between the US, Europe and regional actors. The EU is also a leading donor and since 2011, they have contributed more than €33.3 billion (European Council, 2024). In this regard, the EU applies a tried and tested formula based on conditionality, consent, contagion used when shoring up security and stability within and outside of its borders (Whitehead, 2001). This is facilitated by the long term relations it has fostered in its adjacent regions, Syria being a case in point. The 1977 EU-Syria Co-operation agreement governed relations between the two and Syria was a full participant in the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership. An EU-Syria Association Agreement (never signed) was meant to lead eventually to Syria's full participation in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). The Syrian government used the agreement as a reference for developing its reform agenda. Although the EU remained very critical of the political system, it still concluded that genuine democratic participation remained a possibility, as a new multi-party law was announced in May 2011 (Qayum, 2016).

However, two months after the uprising the EU took actions against the Syrian government. Suspending the bilateral cooperation programmes under the ENP, freezing the draft EU-Syrian Association Agreement, suspending the participation of Syrian authorities in EU's regional programmes and loan operations and technical assistance by the European Investment Bank and imposing sanctions later expanded (European Commission Syria, n.d.). These actions culminated in the EU asking Assad to resign and assigning legitimacy to the opposition (Vogel, 2011). Most EU states cut diplomatic relations, and established diplomatic relations with the Opposition. The Syrian foreign minister responded in June 2011 by promising in a statement to the media that "We will forget that there is Europe on the map" (Rappaport, 2011). As a result the union was seen as having lost leverage in the region including Syria. It was argued

"sanctions worsened the condition of ordinary people and accelerated the development of the predatory war economy" (Turkmani, & Haid, 2016). The EU pact with Turkey in terms of; migration and shoring up security, some argue has sullied the EU's human rights record and led to a political and defence vacuum, allowing regional security to deteriorate, and the Assad regime to recover once more.

The EU and the member states somewhat erratic approach towards Syria raises a number of questions; 1. Should the EU attempt to assist the Southern Mediterranean by using both hard and soft security measures, or would the latter be more propitious and suffice. 2. EU states are criticized for supporting authoritarian states with a poor human rights record. However it may be argued that more can be achieved by working with authoritarian states to nudge them in the right direction, rather than using unilateral measures which may result in encouraging the extremists in the regime and a loss of influence. 3. EU states are pushed to take a uniform view towards the region however different approaches such as those sponsored by the member states in Syria may leave greater room for manoeuvre, allowing the EU to work with NATO, support the opposition and yet retain some influence with Russia and the Syrian government. 4. The EU in hard security issues continues to act under the umbrella of NATO; this is seen as weakening the EU position. However, others may argue that it leaves the union free to adopt a more normative and civilian approach towards the South Mediterranean.

Conclusion

While NATO has provided the overwhelming and overarching collective security role for Europe since its foundation in 1949, the EU has nonetheless sought, since its inception, to develop a security dimension that would both complement NATO, but also simultaneously contribute to burden sharing for its members with the United States and enhance its own strategic autonomy should the need arise (Cassar, 2020).

As a key region at the southern border of the European continent, the Mediterranean represents an interesting case study that demonstrates the challenges that these institutions face as overlapping security actors and the impact that they have in their immediate neighbourhoods. The broader approach towards the Mediterranean, as well as the experiences and operations in Libya and Syria, reflect a consistent problematic. The presence of NATO and the EU within the Mediterranean is not sufficiently prioritized or coordinated, resulting in their role being reactionary, piecemeal and fragmented. The region tends to be framed and approached within the context of the broader strategic objectives and evolving self-interests of their member states, rather than in its own right, in the current literature referred to as principled pragmatism (Rieker, & Riddervoid, 2021). Moreover, the EU and NATO – separately, collectively or as individual member states – have not played successful leadership roles in resolving or stabilizing regional conflicts that have greatly impacted the European continent. They have lacked the military power and political will to be decision makers in the region, while other actors have sought to fill the power vacuum in their stead.

NATO members have recognized the need to strengthen its presence and posture within the Mediterranean and at its broader southern flank. However, the increasing role played by Russia, and the concerns of reluctant role for the United States has meant that the European Union must continue to develop its own security tools, more broadly and more specifically within the Mediterranean. An EU Commissioner for Security and Defence signals the new emphasis on hard security measures to enable better defence protocols for the Union. A new Commissioner for the Mediterranean also signals the increasing importance being given to the Mediterranean region by the Union. However, there remains confusion over the terms of such security and defence and the long term objectives of the Union. Furthermore, the EU and NATO members must acknowledge the diverse realities and security concerns, develop a coherent view of the immediate and long-term security objectives, and must work in better coordination with other

Mediterranean states, and move beyond furthering their own ends and interests in the region. Only then will they be effective in contributing to security and stability.

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