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NATO opportunities in the MENA region in the context of the Russian threat

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Abstract

The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region represents a geopolitical space marked by instability, strategic competition and the influence of global actors, including the Russian Federation, which has strengthened its presence through economic and military partnerships, as well as information influence campaigns. In this context, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) can adopt new strategies to expand its engagement in the region, aiming to counter these dynamics and reduce Russia's ability to destabilize Euro-Atlantic security.

This study employs prospective analysis methods, specifically the RVAP-O framework (Risks, Vulnerabilities, Threats and Opportunities) to identify the main challenges and possible courses of action in the MENA region and the environmental scanning/horizon scanning (ES/HS) method to assess their short-term impact. Thus, the research examines the extent to which NATO's involvement in MENA can alter the balance of power and reshape the Russian Federation's strategic priorities, thereby limiting its operational capabilities in the Euro-Atlantic space.

Keywords:

NATO; MENA; Russian Federation; Euro-Atlantic security; prospective study.

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The Middle East and North Africa (MENA) represent an epicentre of global geopolitical dynamics, characterized by high strategic complexity and multiple challenges to international security. The region is marked by phenomena such as the expansion of extremist ideologies, the transnational terrorist threat, drug trafficking and risks associated with weapons of mass destruction. Simultaneously, political instability and internal fragmentation affect numerous states, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, while others, including Pakistan and Lebanon, are exposed to internal tensions that could escalate into civil conflicts. Even in states considered relatively stable, the persistence of ethnic and sectarian divisions constitutes vulnerability factors with destabilizing potential.

Against this backdrop, MENA remains a space where strategic competition among global powers such as the United States of America (USA), Russia and China is particularly intense, with each seeking to strengthen its influence in the region. The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), as a fundamental actor in the Euro-Atlantic security architecture, maintains its interest in regional stability, especially as the Russian threat to the European continent necessitates a reassessment of strategic priorities.

In this context, the present research aims to identify the opportunities that NATO can leverage in the MENA region, considering the evolution of security risks and challenges, as well as their impact on European security. The study employs qualitative analysis methods, specifically the RVAP-O framework (Risks, Vulnerabilities, Threats, Dangers and Opportunities), which enables a systematic assessment of regional security dynamics and the environmental scanning/horizon scanning (ES/HS) method, which explores the potential impact of NATO's actions in the region. This methodological approach will facilitate not only a deeper understanding of emerging risks but also the identification of possible strategic courses of action for NATO in MENA.

1. Geopolitical context

During the Cold War, various dominant political and ideological movements in the Arab world significantly contributed to shaping a negative perception of NATO among the states and populations of the region (Liteanu, Degeratu and Toma 2007, 162-167). The Arab nationalist movement, the Arab socialist movement, leftist and communist groups, along with Islamist organizations, have historically been and continue to be political forces strongly opposed to the West and, by extension, to NATO. Additionally, many of these groups developed ideological affinities with the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the member states of the Warsaw Pact, which were perceived as a counterbalance to Western influence in the region. These sympathies materialized through diplomatic, economic and military support provided by the Soviet Union to certain Arab regimes, including Gamal

Abdel Nasser's government in Egypt, Hafez al-Assad's administration in Syria and Ahmed Ben Bella's leadership in Algeria, as well as through the adoption of socialist-oriented policies in Arab states such as Iraq, Libya and Sudan.

Although NATO established itself as an organization with both political and military dimensions, its image during the Cold War was largely associated with Western interventions in former European colonies. For example, the Suez Crisis of 1956 ([US Department of State 2017b](#)), in which France and the United Kingdom, alongside Israel, launched a military intervention in Egypt to regain control of the Suez Canal, nationalized by Nasser's regime, was perceived in the Arab world as an imperialist action, despite NATO as an organization not being directly involved. Additionally, Western support for Israel in the Arab-Israeli conflicts, particularly during the Six-Day War in 1967 ([Lorch 2008, 1-8](#)), reinforced the perception that NATO and its member states supported Western hegemony in the Middle East to the detriment of Arab states. This perception was further amplified by the propaganda of socialist states and pan-Arab movements, which portrayed NATO as an instrument of Western imperialism and neocolonialism ([Droin, et al. 2024](#)).

During the Cold War, NATO focused primarily on defending the Euro-Atlantic territory and deterring the USSR, without significant involvement in strategic communication campaigns in Arab states. As a result, the Alliance's perception in the MENA region was shaped by external factors, and its image was often influenced by nationalist and anti-Western rhetoric ([Baban 2018, 351–357](#)) promoted by certain regimes and ideological movements.

Subsequently, NATO placed public diplomacy among its priorities, particularly after the September 11, 2001 attacks, amid intensified efforts to counter radicalization and negative perceptions associated with Western presence in the Middle East and North Africa. In this regard, the Alliance launched initiatives such as the Mediterranean Dialogue in 1994 ([NATO 2024b](#)) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative in 2004 ([NATO 2024a](#)), aimed at strengthening relations with countries in the region and fostering a better understanding of its strategic objectives. However, the impact of these initiatives remained limited, primarily due to the sensitive political context and persistent suspicions toward Western interventions in the Arab world.

NATO's perception in the MENA region is shaped by historical and geopolitical factors, often being associated with the strategic interests of the West, particularly those of the USA. Unlike other international alliances, where decisions are frequently dominated by the most powerful members, NATO operates through a collective decision-making mechanism, involving all its allies in the development of security policies and strategies ([NATO 2023](#)). However, in the Arab world, the perception persists that NATO serves as a tool for projecting American power, a viewpoint reinforced by the role the United States has played in military interventions in the region.

This perception is not exclusive to the MENA region but is also present within public opinion, where debates persist regarding the predominant influence of the USA over NATO's decision-making process ([Ivanov 2011, 242](#)). In Arab states, this view is further amplified by a climate of scepticism and a tendency to interpret international events through the lens of conspiracy theories.

Although ten member states of the Arab League have joined NATO's cooperation initiatives with the MENA region, their objectives and impact remain insufficiently understood both at the level of political elites and among the Arab public. The Mediterranean Dialogue, launched in 1994, includes seven partner states, six of which are members of the Arab League: Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia ([NATO 2024b](#)). The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, launched in 2004, was adopted by four Gulf Cooperation Council states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates ([NATO 2024a](#)). Despite this formal commitment, NATO has not managed to clearly communicate the tangible benefits of these partnerships ([Zara 2006, 146-148](#)), reinforcing the perception that the Alliance's involvement in the region remains limited and lacks a well-defined strategic direction.

NATO's lack of a clear direction in the MENA region generates uncertainty regarding its role and its ability to influence political and security developments. Additionally, concepts such as "dialogue," "initiative," and "partnership" are often perceived as vague in the absence of concrete results that demonstrate the impact of these collaborations on regional security. In this context, the European Union (EU) enjoys a more favourable perception among regional actors (EEAS 2021), due to its diplomatic approach and involvement in strategic negotiations, without being directly associated with military interventions. A relevant example is the EU's role in managing the Iranian nuclear dossier, where it acted as a mediator in the negotiations that led to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), signed in 2015 between Iran and the five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council ([US Department of State 2017a](#)).

In this process, the EU facilitated dialogue, implemented and later eased the economic sanctions imposed on Iran, while also monitoring compliance with the agreement alongside the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Following the USA's withdrawal from the JCPOA in 2018, the EU sought to maintain the agreement through alternative mechanisms, such as the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges (INSTEX) ([European Parliament 2023](#)), designed to facilitate trade with Iran without relying on the US dollar.

A key aspect of the research documentation is that the Gulf Cooperation Council states that have joined the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative – Bahrain ([Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs 2022](#)), Kuwait ([US Embassy in Kuwait 2025](#)), Qatar ([Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs 2020a](#)) and the United Arab Emirates ([Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs 2020b](#)) – already benefit from institutionalized security partnerships and

military cooperation with the USA. These bilateral agreements cover areas such as counterterrorism, the prevention of weapons of mass destruction proliferation, defence planning assistance, military training and exercises, border security and critical infrastructure protection. Given the overlap between these commitments and NATO's objectives in the region, the general perception is that the Alliance has yet to define a distinct and autonomous role in relation to US initiatives.

2. Methodological approach

The purpose of this research is to identify the opportunities that NATO can leverage in the MENA region in the context of the threat posed by the Russian Federation to Euro-Atlantic security and, subsequently, to assess its potential impact on the security landscape.

Therefore, the main research objective is *determining the optimal course of action for NATO to strengthen its strategic position in MENA in order to counter the Russian threat to Euro-Atlantic security.*

This objective is supported by two specific research objectives:

- *Identifying the opportunities that NATO can exploit in MENA to consolidate its influence;*
- *Establishing the optimal course of action for NATO in MENA to counter the threat posed by the Russian Federation in the Euro-Atlantic space, while maintaining stable relations with regional partners.*

The research objectives will be addressed through the following research questions:

- *What opportunities can NATO leverage in the MENA region to expand its influence?*
- *What is the optimal course of action for NATO in the MENA region to limit Russia's capacity to project strategic influence in the Euro-Atlantic space?*

In this context, the research aims to identify the opportunities that NATO can leverage in the MENA region, considering the evolution of security risks and challenges, as well as the short-term impact on European security. The study employs qualitative analysis methods, specifically the RVAP-O framework (Risks, Vulnerabilities, Threats, Dangers and Opportunities), which will allow for a systematic assessment of regional security dynamics, and the environmental scanning method, which will explore the potential impact of NATO's actions in the region.

From a data collection standpoint, the analysis relies on official sources and institutionally validated strategic documents, including reports produced by NATO, the EU, and the US on emerging global trends and recent geopolitical developments in the MENA region. For a comprehensive perspective on the geostrategic context, these sources were complemented by academic analyses and open-source materials,

such as specialized articles and media reports, used strictly for contextualization and for verifying data correlations. To ensure that research remains relevant, the timeframe under examination is limited to the past five years (2019–2024), thus allowing for an assessment of recent trends and the short-term impact of NATO's strategies in the region.

The analysis of the relationship between MENA states and NATO or Russia is conducted across three dimensions: diplomatic, military, and economic. Each dimension is examined through a set of specific variables tied to relevant indicators.

Within the diplomatic dimension, the targeted indicator is the relation between MENA states and NATO or Russia, analyzed through two variables. The first variable, the effectiveness of regional cooperation mechanisms, is reflected in the capacity of regional structures to manage crises, the influence of internal rivalries on decision-making processes, and the coherence of regional organizations in relation to global actors. The second variable, the institutional relation with NATO and Russia, is analyzed in terms of the consistency of security commitments made to these two actors, the impact of foreign policy changes on how MENA states position themselves, and the general trends in their strategic orientation.

Within the military dimension, the targeted indicator is the dependence of MENA states on NATO or Russia for ensuring security and defence, examined through two variables. The first, the role of arms imports in defining strategic partnerships, considers the predominant direction of military equipment acquisitions, patterns of military cooperation, and technological transfer between MENA states and NATO or Russia. The second variable, the link between non-state actors and external military support, analyzes how the actions of these groups influence MENA states' reliance on external military assistance, as well as the support tendencies provided by NATO or Russia in contexts involving non-state actors.

From an economic standpoint, the targeted indicator is the degree of stability of internal economic markets in MENA states, assessed through two variables. The first, the level of economic dependence includes an examination of the structure of national economies in relation to key resources and dominant economic sectors, vulnerability to global economic factors, and the role of oil and gas resources in the economic framework of producer states. The second variable, economic support from NATO or Russia, addresses how reliance on external backing influences internal economic policies and considers the effects of strategic investments on the stability of local markets.

Building on the research methods employed, the analysis will be structured around two main directions. The first research direction focuses on the strategic assessment of the opportunities that NATO can leverage in the MENA region in the diplomatic, military and economic domains, based on the RVAP-O analytical framework developed by Deac and Grigoraş (2014, 62-70). This approach involves identifying

the key advantages that NATO can exploit to strengthen its position in relation to regional partners and to limit Russia's ability to maintain or expand its influence. In this context, the risks, vulnerabilities, threats and dangers stemming from the current status quo in the MENA region will be identified, followed by the determination of potential courses of action for NATO.

The second research direction aims to determine the optimal course of action for NATO in the MENA region, based on the environmental scanning method, with the goal of assessing the potential impact of different strategies adopted by the Alliance. This approach will allow for an analysis of how NATO can engage in MENA while maintaining relations with regional partners and avoiding the escalation of geopolitical tensions, with the ultimate objective of countering the Russian Federation's influence in the Euro-Atlantic space and enhancing deterrence. Based on the identified opportunities, action plans will be developed, serving as potential events. Subsequently, possible consequences and their impact on the geopolitical landscape will be assessed.

The RVAP-O analytical framework ([Deac and Grigoraș 2014](#), 62-70) was developed to provide a coherent analytical structure for the concept of national security strategy. Thus, after identifying risks, vulnerabilities, threats and dangers, the authors propose establishing action opportunities, a key aspect that can facilitate the mitigation of the previously identified challenges. This instrument has proven effective in analyzing conflict dynamics and strategic planning, offering valuable insights for anticipating potential outcomes.

The environmental scanning method can be defined as "a process of collecting data and information about specific events and causal relationships that may influence the future of an organization" ([Grigoraș 2022](#), 38). It is classified as a prospective estimation method, with viable applicability in the short term (up to five years). Initially, this method was used in strategic planning ([Renfro 1993](#)) to identify indicators of change. Thus, after assessing the initial results (courses of action), key determinant factors can be developed to support planning processes.

The research approach is based on a theoretical framework grounded in the concepts adopted by the Romanian state regarding vulnerabilities, risks, threats and dangers, as defined in the National Defense Strategy Guide for the 2015-2019 period ([Administrația Prezidențială 2015](#), 7).

3. Assessing strategic opportunities

In this chapter, vulnerabilities, risks, threats and dangers in the MENA region will be analyzed from the diplomatic, military and economic perspectives. This analysis will be followed by a synthesis in tabular form, summarizing the main findings,

including NATO's potential opportunities, which could negatively impact Russia's ability to project power in the Euro-Atlantic space.

3.1. Vulnerabilities in the MENA Region

From a diplomatic perspective, the lack of an effective coordination mechanism undermines the diplomatic stability of MENA states. In the absence of functional cooperation structures, countries in the region fail to adopt unified positions in crisis management and their engagement with international actors ([Trobiani 2017](#), 25-30). Strategic orientations vary significantly, with some Gulf states maintaining close relations with the USA, while Algeria and Syria strengthen their partnerships with Russia and China, thereby weakening the effectiveness of regional diplomatic initiatives.

From a military perspective, the vulnerabilities of MENA states are shaped by their dependence on arms imports and limited domestic production capabilities. While Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates continue to invest in the modernization of their armed forces, countries such as Libya, Yemen and Syria remain affected by prolonged conflicts, which have significantly weakened their autonomous defence capabilities ([van den Bosch and Lindstaedt 2024](#), 376).

From an economic perspective, MENA states are vulnerable to fluctuations in oil and gas prices due to their dependence on hydrocarbon exports ([Mezni and Nesrine 2022](#), 7-10). Gulf states, despite their vast resources, are striving to diversify their economies to mitigate exposure to energy market shocks, North African countries, such as Algeria and Egypt, face persistent economic challenges driven by population growth and political instability.

3.2. Risks in the MENA Region

From a diplomatic perspective, the increase in interstate tensions represents a significant risk in the MENA region. Political and strategic divergences between states such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar or Turkey and Egypt fuel regional competition and hinder the establishment of functional cooperation frameworks ([Quero 2023](#), 114-116). These tensions weaken diplomatic mechanisms and heighten the risk of conflict escalation in the region.

From a military perspective, the arms race is an escalating trend in the MENA region, increasing the risk of conflict escalation. Gulf states, such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, have significantly increased their acquisitions of advanced weaponry ([Vieira and Eslami 2023](#)), while Iran continues to develop ballistic missile capabilities and electronic warfare systems.

Another significant military risk is the dependence on non-state actors in regional conflicts. Groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi movement in Yemen and paramilitary forces in Libya are used as instruments of influence by states engaged in conflict ([National Intelligence Council 2021](#), 86), and this weakens

central governments' control over internal security and facilitates the prolongation of conflicts.

From an economic perspective, the region faces significant risks, particularly due to its high dependence on external loans (Rustamov, Ozatac and Taspinar 2024, 107). The increasing pressure on national budgets restricts the ability of states to invest in development and security, which may further exacerbate social instability.

Another emerging risk is the instability of financial and commercial markets in the region, driven by regulatory fragmentation and political uncertainties. Foreign investors are reluctant to engage in long-term projects in countries such as Libya, Iraq and Syria (Muhamad and Khayyat 2024, 77-80), which hinders economic recovery and limits improvements in living standards in these states.

3.3. Threats in the MENA Region

From a diplomatic perspective, a significant threat is the intervention of major powers in the internal affairs of MENA states, which generates diplomatic instability (Ipsos 2023, 117). USA, Russia and China are strengthening their influence by supporting rival regimes or groups, undermining the sovereignty of states in the region and intensifying the polarization of international alliances.

From a military perspective, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction still represents a major threat in the MENA region (National Intelligence Council 2008, 61-63). The expansion of nuclear capabilities and the development of armament programs by states such as Iran and Israel, along with the potential dissemination of nuclear technologies to non-state actors, escalate large-scale armed confrontation.

Additionally, the threat posed by extremist and paramilitary groups remains high. Dawla al-Islamiya fi al-Iraq wa al-Sham (Daesh), Hezbollah, the Houthi movement and other insurgent organizations continue to adapt (National Intelligence Council 2021, 107), utilizing modern technologies to carry out attacks and maintain control over unstable territories. The support provided to these groups further exacerbates conflicts and complicates their long-term resolution.

From an economic perspective, the threat posed by global competition for resources is increasing, driven by the involvement of major actors such as the Russian Federation, China and India, which are expanding their influence through the acquisition of strategic assets and investments in the region's energy infrastructure (Muhamad and Khayyat 2024, 75). This competition leads to market reconfiguration and economic pressure on MENA's producing states.

3.4. Dangers in the MENA Region

From a diplomatic perspective, a major danger is the increase in the number of unresolved conflicts (Moosa, Yasmin and Tamer 2024, 132), which hinders the

establishment of cooperation mechanisms and sustains diplomatic instability. As the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council remain affected by internal rivalries and external powers intensify their influence, the region's ability to act in a unified manner is severely compromised.

From a military perspective, the escalation of indirect confrontations represents a major danger in the MENA region (Vieira and Eslami 2023, 369). State rivalries are intensified by competition for military superiority and the dependence on non-state actors to project influence. Amid the expansion of nuclear capabilities and the development of armament programs by states such as Iran and Israel, indirect confrontations are becoming increasingly difficult to control.

From an economic perspective, a significant danger is the intensification of economic and humanitarian crises caused by reduced access to resources (National Intelligence Council 2021, 71). Egypt, Sudan, and Algeria are experiencing severe economic deterioration, driven by limited access to food and water, which exacerbates migration and intensifies resource control disputes.

TABEL NO. 1

RVAP-O analysis results

	Intent	Non-intent	Domain
	RISKS	VULNERABILITIES	
Internal environment	- increasing interstate tensions	- lack of an effective coordination mechanism	Diplomatic
	- arms race - dependence on non-state actors in regional conflicts	- dependence on arms imports	Military
	- dependence on external loans - financial market instability	- dependence on hydrocarbon exports for producer states	Economic
	OPPORTUNITIES		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strengthening strategic partnerships through multilateral cooperation initiatives - enhancing strategic communication through a digital platform in Arabic, building on the precedent of protecting Muslim communities - strengthening cooperation in nuclear security and non-proliferation 		
	THREATS	DANGERS	
External environment	- intervention of major powers	- increasing number of unresolved conflicts	Diplomatic
	- proliferation of weapons of mass destruction - intensification of extremist and paramilitary group activities	- escalation of indirect confrontations	Military
	- global competition for resources	- intensification of economic and humanitarian crises	Economic

As a result of the identified factors (see Table no. 1), one of the opportunities that NATO can leverage in MENA is strengthening strategic partnerships through multilateral cooperation initiatives, using the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative as main platforms. Given the fragmentation of regional alliances and the inability of MENA states to adopt unified positions in the face of regional crises, NATO can facilitate dialogue between Arab states and its global partners, providing a stable framework for coordinating diplomatic and security initiatives. The Alliance could expand the role of these platforms by organizing periodic diplomatic forums, where NATO member states and those in MENA collaborate to address regional issues, such as counterterrorism, conflict management, or maritime security cooperation. In this way, NATO not only consolidates its influence in the region but also contributes to reducing the influence of other actors, such as the Russian Federation, which is trying to expand its strategic partnerships in MENA.

Another opportunity that NATO can leverage in the MENA region is enhancing strategic communication to consolidate its diplomatic position and counter the influence of global competitors. The creation of an official digital platform in Arabic, which would provide clear information about the Alliance's missions and objectives, would allow NATO to combat misinformation and correct negative perceptions, especially in a context where the Russian Federation is intensifying its efforts to influence public opinion in the region. By promoting a clear and transparent message, this initiative would facilitate dialogue with academic elites, security experts, and the media in MENA, contributing to the creation of a favourable framework for diplomatic cooperation. Strengthening NATO's presence in the regional information space could reduce the influence of other powers and support the consolidation of strategic partnerships.

Another opportunity that NATO can leverage in the MENA region is strengthening cooperation in nuclear security and non-proliferation, given the danger of the expansion of weapons of mass destruction programs and the risk of the dissemination of nuclear technologies to non-state actors. By enhancing monitoring and control mechanisms for nuclear materials and collaborating with regional partners, using the necessity of protecting Muslim communities as a favourable precedent – demonstrated through interventions in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo province, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and Afghanistan – NATO could contribute to reducing emerging threats. These initiatives would diminish the Russian Federation's influence over Arab states, reducing their dependence on Russia in terms of security and military technology, thereby reinforcing NATO's position as a strategic partner in the region.

4. Evaluation of strategies' impact

According to the second research direction, this chapter will evaluate the short-term impact of the implemented strategies and the opportunities previously identified using the RVAP-O framework.

The first step in evaluating the impact of NATO's strategies in the MENA region is identifying potential events, which, in this analysis, are represented by the strategic opportunities identified. This process is crucial for environmental scanning, as it allows the formulation of realistic scenarios based on the actions the Alliance might implement. In this regard, three major directions are identified as having significant potential for NATO's influence in the region.

Strengthening strategic partnerships through the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative could facilitate a more effective consultation mechanism between MENA states and NATO, offering an alternative to their dependence on external actors such as the Russian Federation. In the short term, such an initiative could encourage certain Arab states to explore security options aligned with NATO, thereby reducing the need for military and technological support from Moscow. This would force Russia to intensify its efforts to maintain influence in MENA, potentially diminishing its ability to focus resources on projecting power in the Euro-Atlantic space. However, this strategy may face opposition from certain NATO member states, particularly the USA, which could view an expanded NATO engagement in MENA as conflicting with its own bilateral security partnerships, especially with Gulf states. In this scenario, the success of this strategy would depend on the balance between European support for an extended engagement in MENA and any reservations expressed by Washington, which might prefer maintaining direct control over its relationships with regional partners.

Improving strategic communication through a NATO digital platform in Arabic could have an immediate impact on the Alliance's perception in the region, helping to combat misinformation and build a more balanced image. Direct access to verified information about NATO's objectives and commitments could limit the effect of the information campaigns carried out by the Russian Federation and reduce the influence exerted by Moscow in the regional environment. In the short term, this initiative could prompt Russia to reorient its strategic resources towards maintaining influence in MENA, thereby reducing its ability to project power in the Euro-Atlantic space. However, such a project might be met with scepticism by some NATO member states, which could perceive the initiative as likely to provoke hostile reactions from MENA state actors with close ties to the Russian Federation.

Strengthening cooperation in nuclear security and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction could contribute to limiting non-state actors' access to nuclear technologies and reducing emerging risks associated with the development of autonomous strategic capabilities by states in the MENA region. This initiative could compel Russia to intensify its efforts to maintain influence over states seeking technological support in this field, which could benefit Euro-Atlantic security. However, the success of this initiative would depend not only on the receptiveness of MENA states to such cooperation but also on the position of certain NATO members, who may view extensive involvement in this area as posing significant

diplomatic risks. For example, Turkey, which has expressed interest in developing its own nuclear program and is collaborating with Russia on the construction of the Akkuyu Nuclear Power Plant (Nuclear Regulatory Authority 2024), may demonstrate reluctance.

Evaluating the impact of NATO's strategies in MENA cannot be done without considering the balance between the costs and benefits of these initiatives for Euro-Atlantic security. If these strategies lead the Russian Federation to reorient its resources towards maintaining its influence in MENA, instead of focusing on expanding its presence in the Euro-Atlantic area, this could be considered a strategic advantage. In this scenario, NATO could gain an indirect benefit by reducing Russia's ability to exert pressure on the eastern flank of the Alliance, which could be one of the positive effects of these strategies in the short term.

Of the three scenarios analyzed, the most beneficial strategy for NATO is enhancing strategic communication through a digital NATO platform in Arabic.

This scenario offers the advantage of maximizing NATO's influence in MENA without direct military involvement, reducing the Russian Federation's ability to control public discourse and consolidate its influence in the region. Such an initiative would allow NATO to combat Russian propaganda, clarify its commitments, and support regional partnerships by creating a direct, accessible communication channel for both the local population and decision-makers. Furthermore, this strategy would not generate significant opposition within NATO member states, as it is a non-military approach that does not interfere with US bilateral interests in the region or the positions of other members.

The most important aspect of this scenario is its impact on the Russian Federation's influence in the region. Russia actively employs disinformation strategies in MENA to strengthen its geopolitical position, undermine trust in Western partnerships, and maintain access to arms and energy markets. By implementing a NATO digital platform in Arabic, the Alliance could reduce the region's informational dependence on Russian sources, thereby forcing Moscow to redirect its resources to maintain dominance over the strategic discourse in MENA. This effort would implicitly reduce Russia's capacity to focus its attention on the Euro-Atlantic space, representing a strategic gain for NATO's security.

To implement this strategy, NATO must adopt a set of concrete measures. In this regard, the first course of action involves creating and launching a NATO digital platform in Arabic, which will provide updated information about the Alliance's commitments in MENA and clarify its positions in relation to regional partners. The platform could be managed by a specialized strategic communication centre, composed of regional policy experts and specialists in combating disinformation, ensuring that the messages are tailored to the cultural and political context of the target audience.

A second essential element of the strategy is the establishment of a partnership with local experts and academic institutions in MENA states, to enhance the platform's credibility and integrate it into the regional information landscape. Involving local personnel would help reduce the perception that this initiative is an external influence tool and would facilitate the acceptance of NATO's messages among decision-makers.

For this initiative to achieve its objectives, it is necessary to combat misinformation through a proactive strategy, which includes the constant monitoring of influence campaigns carried out by the Russian Federation and the development of counter-narratives based on verified information. Integrating interactive approaches, such as detailed analyses of geopolitical events and Q&A sessions with NATO experts, could facilitate the understanding of the Alliance's positions and counter hostile messages.

Another course of action focuses on integrating the platform into a broader framework of regional cooperation so that it can support the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. In this way, the platform would not only serve as an informative tool, but also as a complementary mechanism for strengthening NATO's relationships with MENA states in the field of security.

To ensure the effectiveness of this strategy, it is essential to evaluate the impact of the platform on NATO's perception in the region through periodic surveys and data analysis, so that messages can be adjusted based on public reactions and geopolitical dynamics. Constant monitoring would allow for the adaptation of content to regional developments and more precise calibration of messages in relation to the specific interests of MENA states.

Conclusions

In conclusion, NATO's involvement in MENA should be observed not just as a regional strategy, but as a crucial tool for diminishing the Russian Federation's ability to project power in the Euro-Atlantic space. Reducing Moscow's influence in the region could require the redistribution of Russian strategic resources, thus limiting the pressure on NATO's eastern flank and strengthening regional security.

Of the scenarios analyzed, improving strategic communication through a NATO digital platform in Arabic emerges as the most feasible short-term solution, with the potential to counter Russian disinformation and offer MENA states a credible alternative in terms of security. By implementing this strategy, NATO can weaken the Russian Federation's influence without generating significant internal opposition within the Alliance, making it a viable and sustainable option.

Therefore, strengthening NATO's presence in MENA not only improves relations with regional partners but also directly contributes to balancing the power dynamics between the Alliance and the Russian Federation, reducing strategic pressure on Europe and granting NATO more freedom of action in addressing Euro-Atlantic security challenges.

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