Intervention in Libya: NATO as a Middle Eastern security hub

Introduction

"Only a truly global alliance can address the global challenges of the day"¹

In 2006, former US Ambassador to NATO (2009-2013), Ivo Daalder, and co-writer James Goldgeier, praised the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) for going global in the years after the Cold War. But is ‘global NATO’ the best understanding of the Alliance after the Cold War? Contributing to the debate on what NATO is, this article seeks to understand how NATO thus far has managed security challenges in the Middle East and, by drawing lessons from NATO’s most recent military endeavor in the Middle East,² the 2011 intervention in Libya, argues that NATO is better understood as a Middle Eastern security hub. NATO is more likely to engage in the form of a security hub, creating coalitions between interested members and partners.

In March 2011, NATO reached political consensus on military intervention in Libya – Operation Unified Protector (OUP). OUP portrayed NATO as a crisis manager and cooperative security organ outside Article 5 area. Analyzing the intervention in Libya and the broader NATO history in the Middle East, it is obvious, however, that NATO is not as unified outside Article 5 area as might be expected from the fact that the 2010 Strategic Concept gave equal weight to three core tasks – collective defense, crisis management and cooperative security – of which two are extra-regional in scope. A more precise understanding of NATO in Libya is the Alliance as a security hub for cooperative crisis management more than a unified global alliance. Especially if ‘unified’ means a cohesive alliance in which members show alliance solidarity and contribute at least to some extend in engaging Middle Eastern security issues.

Compared to a global alliance, a security hub is a more loosely based security network of states, which allows for the equal participation by both NATO members and non-members

¹ (Daalder and Goldgeier, 2006)
² Many definitions of the Middle East exist. An exact definition of the region is not too important for the present purpose. Nevertheless, the Middle East, in this article, includes Afghanistan on its Eastern limits as well as the Maghreb countries in the West. This incorporates the two countries where NATO has been most heavily involved militarily over the past one and a half decade. For an elaborate discussion on the ambivalence of the term ‘Middle East’ see (Anderson et al., 2014: pp. 3-10)
with the capabilities and motivation to plug into the hub. Like non-members, members are not necessarily willing to contribute but may just as well opt out of the mission if they do not perceive any direct interests in the engagement. In Libya, once political consensus was reached, the majority of NATO’s member states opted completely out of the military operation while several non-member states – long-standing partnering countries – made important contributions to the operation. Drawing on the lessons from NATO’s intervention in Libya and the historical divisions between NATO members on Middle Eastern contingencies, this article argues that NATO is more appropriately understood as a security hub for both members and non-members in global contingencies, and that NATO engagement outside Article 5 area in the future is likely to be shaped in a similar fashion. In Brzezinski’s words, NATO “has the experience, the institutions, and the means to eventually become the hub of a global-spanning web of various regional cooperative-security undertakings among states with the growing power to act”.³

Addressing the question of NATO in the Middle East and the role of partners becomes even more acute, in light of President Obama’s foreign policy vision. On May 28, 2014 Obama delivered his West Point Graduation Ceremony address, outlining his vision for American leadership in the future. NATO continues to serve a purpose, outside Article 5 borders, “where our NATO allies must pull their weight to counter-terrorism, respond to failed states, and train a network of partners”.⁴ Obama pressures European allies to carry more of the burden, as we saw in Libya where the US adopted an approach qualitatively different from in Afghanistan and Iraq, by ‘leading from behind’. Nevertheless, only a few members contributed.

The military mission in Libya was widely viewed as a success, especially in terms of interoperability with partnership countries. Therefore, this article seeks to draw lessons from OUP on the issue of NATO’s Middle Eastern contingencies in the future. Owing to US hesitance on leading and insistence on more burden sharing beyond Europe’s borders, it is important to understand NATO as a foreign policy tool for managing Middle Eastern security threats.

The subject matter here is in terms of NATO’s role in military contingencies outside Article 5 area. It is in this area of operation that NATO is likely to remain a security hub more than a unified alliance. NATO may politically agree to going global – its unified approach to expanding partnerships around the globe, the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooper-

³ (Brzezinski, 2009: p. 20)
⁴ (Obama, 2014).
tion Initiative and partnerships with distant countries such as Australia and New Zealand serve as prime examples of political unity on global issues – but allied operations are likely to be carried out in a security hub format of inner-alliance coalitions and contributing partners. Differences between enthusiasm for political and military contributions along with widely different interests in the Middle East are likely to remain sources of conflict and thus the largest obstacles for going beyond NATO as a security hub.

To approach an understanding of the controversy within NATO on engagement in the Middle East, Kissinger’s framework of concepts of order for understanding international relations is applied. Kissinger understands international relations through an analysis of historical relations between states. In ‘Strains on the Alliance’, he argues, “The perspective of nations differs with their obligations, their geography, their history and their power. No alliance can perfectly reconcile the goals of all of its members, particularly if one ally has world-wide responsibilities while the others focus their attention on regional or national concerns” (Kissinger, 1963: p. 263). Through historical relations – affected by power, purpose and geography – with other states, a state creates a unique concept of order and interests in engagement with the Middle East. NATO members are driven by these concepts of order. Both historically as well as in the Libya case, member states’ willingness to involve NATO was considerably driven by the role that NATO plays in each member’s concept of order – i.e. the perceived role for NATO in creating order out-of-area. The focus is thus on the member states’ historical relations with each other within the Transatlantic Alliance as well as with the Middle East.

The broader history of NATO engagement in the Middle East, along with the review of current NATO literature, illustrated that the present cleavages among Alliance-members on NATO’s role in the Middle East are deeply ingrained in the historical relations between NATO and the Middle East, and thus not likely to disappear as if they were no more than a recent and insignificant controversies.

Several other potential cases of NATO in the Middle East exist: ISAF in Afghanistan, NATO’s naval anti-piracy and anti-terrorism endeavors, the training mission in Iraq etc. Libya is the most suitable case for illustrating NATO’s inherent difficulties in reaching unity on engagement in the Middle East. Not only is it the most recent military adventure by the Alliance, and thus incorporates some of the possible long term effects of the Afghan and Iraq engagements on members’ readiness to militarily engage. It also demonstrates many of the internal dynamics and disagreements on NATO’s perceived role in Middle Eastern contingencies.
NATO reached political consensus on involvement, but once the political green card was provided, the majority of members opted out, while several non-members plugged into the security hub and participated. Further, it illustrates how the Alliance works in military contingencies outside the Transatlantic Area in instances when the US is not willing to assume the leadership burden alone, a position that the US – in the wake of Afghanistan and Iraq – is likely to adopt in future Middle Eastern contingencies as well. Ceteris paribus, this makes the case relevant for addressing the issue of NATO in the Middle East.

The article first debates the relevant literature on NATO’s out-of-area history and relevant literature on OUP. To understand the inherent controversy over NATO’s Middle Eastern contingences, the section incorporates a brief historical overview NATO in the Middle East. Subsequently, the NATO debates on engagement in Libya are analyzed, demonstrating how Libya portrayed NATO as a de facto security hub more than a unified engager. The gap between political and military willingness to contribute is key in this section. The last segment draws lessons from NATO’s Libyan campaign, arguing that NATO is likely as a security hub for members and partners in Middle Eastern contingencies. This section also explores the positive and negative aspects of NATO as a Middle Eastern security hub. The conclusion summarizes the main arguments and makes some suggestions on how NATO should come to terms with its role as a security hub.

The historical problem of unified out-of-area engagements

Cold War NATO

The scholarly debate on NATO relations with the Middle East is part of the broader literature on what NATO as an alliance is. The NATO-Middle East literature proliferated in the decades after the Cold War as NATO stepped up its engagement in that region. Throughout the Cold War, NATO was conceived primarily as a Euro-centric alliance which main raison d’être was to deter the Soviet Union from attacking Western Europe. Several scholars, however, have debated NATO in the Middle East during the Cold War. Rynning, in his 2007 article ‘NATO and the Broader Middle East, 1949–2007: The History and Lessons of Controversial Encounters’ demonstrates the almost irreconcilable differences between European members and the US through most of the Cold War in forging an alliance-wide approach. Not until the early
80s did NATO manage to forge a role as an informal enabler of inside-Alliance coalition building for individual allies' Middle Eastern endeavors.\(^5\)

Likewise, Stuart & Tow, in their excellent monograph *The Limits of Alliance: NATO Out-of-Area Problems since 1949*, published in 1990, demonstrate how Alliance policies in the Middle East, have always remained highly politicized and divisive among members.\(^6\) In *The Persian Gulf and the West: The Dilemmas of Security*, Kupchan demonstrates NATO’s out-of-area disagreements for the Middle East in a particular case, from 1979-1982.\(^7\) He expands the analysis in his 1988 Article ‘NATO and the Persian Gulf: Examining Intra-Alliance Behavior’,\(^8\) in which he argues that “Once again, Europeans were resentful at American attempts to dominate alliance policy, especially in areas outside NATO’s jurisdiction” (Kupchan, 1987: p. 182).

The perception of NATO as essentially Euro-centric and incapable of reaching consensus on out-of-area issues in the Middle East slowly changed in the late Cold War and Calleo’s 1988 article ‘NATO’s Middle Course’ made some cautious comments on what NATO has become: “NATO’s function is no longer to organize the dominion over others, nor to replace their strength with American strength, but to mobilize their forces for shared purposes [...] it is a channel through which a relatively weakened United States can continue to exert effective influence throughout the world”.\(^9\) This opened for a more active role for NATO outside Europe and a changed perception of NATO as a tool for influence out-of-area. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the road was paved for a full transition from Euro-centric to something else. As it turned out, besides the operations in the Balkans in the 90s, NATO became a Middle Eastern-centric alliance.

Turning to the empirical record of NATO in the Middle East during the Cold War, disunity over NATO-Middle East relations go back as far as to the first years of the Alliance. NATO did not manage to reach consensus on any form for contingency planning for the Middle East until 1982, which illustrates the deep divisions between members on NATO’s responsibilities outside the Transatlantic Area during the Cold War, identified in the literature. In the early 1950s, several members proposed to link NATO to some kind of collective security organization in the Middle East. Among the proposals were the Middle East Command, the Middle East

\(^5\) (Rynning, 2007: pp. 914-919)
\(^6\) (Stuart and Tow, 1990)
\(^7\) (Kupchan, 1987: pp. 160-209)
\(^8\) (Kupchan, 1988: p. 335)
\(^9\) (Calleo, 1988: p. 144)
Defense Organization, and the Baghdad Pact. The primary purpose of these initiatives would have been to contain Soviet influence in the Middle East, expanding NATO's raison d'etre of containing the Soviet Union within NATO-area. These attempts failed because of allied disagreements and local states’ opposition. Ironically, a Middle Eastern adventure by two NATO members – the 1956 Suez Crisis – caused a historical low point in Alliance unity. The crisis is very telling for the disunity in interests and concepts of order for Western states in the Middle East.

Through the 1960s and 70s, allies remained sharply divided on the Middle East. Members limited Alliance discussions to focus on the main raison d'etre, collective defense of member states within area, thus completely sidestepping out-of-area matters. Different understandings of the Arab-Israeli conflict and the 70s oil crises, caused many European members to distance themselves from US Middle Eastern policies, seeking better relations with Arab states vis-à-vis the US’ close relations with Israel. Additionally, European members, most notably France, sought to identify a unified European position as a counterweight to US dominance, but France never quite succeeded in this endeavor.

In 1979 things changed in light of the Iranian Revolution, and the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan. The two events combined to create enormous concerns, especially within the US, with the Middle Eastern balance of power and potential Soviet military endeavors further into the Middle East and led to the at that time “only known example of guidelines for NATO out-of-area contingency planning”. In reaction, the 1980 Carter Doctrine stated that “An attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force”. The US assumed intense pressure on NATO allies to assist in upholding the Middle Eastern balance. France and Germany were very outspoken in their opposition to NATO contingency planning for the Middle East and perceived the within-area balance of power as the primary purpose of NATO, not to be jeopardized by other tasks. Though members disagreed widely on the reality of the Soviet threats to the Middle East, the US managed to reach a compromise with allies in the shape of a consultation,

10 (Petersen, 2011)
11 (Kupchan, 1987: p. 289-290)
12 (Brzezinski, 2013)
13 (Minon, 1986: p. 5)
14 (Carter, 1980)
15 (Kupchan, 1988: p. 332)
facilitation, and compensation (CFC) formula, for future Middle East contingencies by individual allies, on a case-by-case basis. Consultation committed NATO members to consult on their Middle Eastern policies ahead of time. Facilitation committed members to facilitate bases and deployments of other allies’ forces in the Middle East. Compensation committed NATO members to compensate for the shortfall in forces within-area, if individual members deployed forces in the Middle East. More than anything, the loosely based CFC formula was a policy based on the lowest common denominator and it highlighted the deep controversy that NATO engagement in the Middle East presented. The informal CFC formula remained the framework of engagement throughout the Cold War and was activated in for example 1987, when individual members used the NATO framework as an enabler for a coordinated naval operation in the Persian Gulf.

Post-Cold War NATO

The post-Cold War debate on NATO’s role was promptly launched in 1993, when US Senator, Richard Lugar, famously argued that NATO has to “go out of area or out of business”. Contributing to the debate on what post-Cold War NATO has become, the contributions of for example Daalder & Goldgeier, Brzezinski and Rynning serve as good illustrations. Hailing a global NATO in 2006, Daalder & Goldgeier argue: “With little fanfare – and even less notice – the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has gone global [...] seeking to bring stability to other parts of the world [...] extending both its geographical reach and the range of its operations”. NATO went global and has gone from no or limited informal engagement to formal and even military engagement in the Middle East, particularly in the aftermath of 9/11, 2001.

Brzezinski urges caution, however: “To remain historically relevant, NATO cannot – as some have urged – simply expand itself into a global alliance or transform itself into a global alliance of democracies [...] a global NATO would dilute the centrality of the U.S.-European connection, and none of the rising powers would be likely to accept membership in a globally ex-

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16 (Stuart and Tow, 1990: p. 92)
17 (Rynning, 2007)
18 Important contributions, not covered here, on the post-Cold War NATO debate, include ‘NATO in Afghanistan: the Liberal Disconnect’ (Rynning, 2012); ‘NATO and the United States : the enduring alliance’ (Kaplan, 1994); ‘NATO divided, NATO united: the evolution of an alliance’ (Kaplan, 2004); ‘Pursuing strategy: NATO operations from the Gulf War to Gaddafi’ (Edström and Gyllensporre, 2012), ‘NATO and the Middle East: the geopolitical context post-9/11’, (Orfy, 2011).
19 (Good, 2012)
20 (Daalder and Goldgeier, 2006)
Brzezinski proposes a hub-function for NATO as a global provider of cooperative security. This is not far from Rynning’s view in ‘NATO renewed: the power of purpose of transatlantic cooperation’. NATO has continued to serve the interests of its member states after the Cold War because it provides them with an instrument of crisis management. Similarly, in ‘Coalitions, institutions and big tents: the new strategic reality of armed intervention’, Rynning argues that institutions “may serve as a hub for coalitions, as a kind of platform for preparing and training the force packages on which coalitions will rely. This can most easily be illustrated with reference to NATO”. This leads to a different understanding of NATO to the one Daalder & Goldgeier proposes.

The empirical record of post-Cold War NATO clearly supports the arguments that NATO has changed. Sidetracking NATO in the 1990-91 Gulf War, the first step towards formal engagement in the Middle East was the Mediterranean Dialogue in 1994, at that time a fairly loose discussion forum between NATO and six Middle Eastern countries bordering the Mediterranean. The initiative came in the wake of the Oslo Peace Accords between Israel and the Palestinians and was proposed particularly by southern NATO members as a tool to enhance security cooperation. In 2004, NATO elevated the MD to a genuine partnership program bearing close resemblance to the Partnership for Peace initiative. To broaden the geographic scope of its partnership initiatives in the region, NATO, also in 2004, created the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative with Qatar, the UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain. Both partnerships serve as ample evidence that NATO has been ramping up its engagement with the Middle East since the early days of the post-Cold War world, de facto setting in motion a transition away from Euro-centric NATO.

From August 2003, NATO had been heavily engaged militarily on the Eastern borders of the Middle East, through its leadership of the ISAF mission in Afghanistan. This is the most visible indicator that NATO has truly gone global, working as an almost unified alliance with all members contributing to a mission, albeit at very different levels, in the Middle East. ISAF may constitute the exception rather than the rule, and it is worth remembering that it came in the aftermath of one member state being directly attacked, invoking Article 5 in an out-of-area

21 (Brzezinski, 2009: p. 20)
22 (Rynning, 2005)
23 (Rynning, 2013: p. 66)
25 (Orfy, 2011: p. 92)
26 (Jørgensen, 2014: p. 112)
mission, albeit the NATO mission ensued several years after the actual attacks. Afghanistan, because of the duration and magnitude of the intervention, may spark some reluctance among member states in rushing into Middle Eastern endeavors in the future.\textsuperscript{27}

NATO has also led a small training mission in Iraq, an anti-piracy mission off the Horn of Africa (Operation Ocean Shield) and anti-terrorism monitoring in the Mediterranean Sea (Operation Active Endeavour).\textsuperscript{28} These missions have been rather limited in scope and have been overshadowed by more direct military missions such as ISAF and OUP.

The ISAF mission and maritime missions may have somewhat vindicated the argument on NATO as a global alliance. Structural conditions after the Cold War – the Soviet threat diminished – created ample opportunity and breathing room for NATO to ramp up its security investments in the Middle East. Further, the events of September 11, 2001, facilitated a strategic shift away from territorial defense towards the Middle East.\textsuperscript{29} But at the same time, particularly NATO enlargements towards Eastern Europe and the newer members’ sustained concerns with Article 5 has ensured a continuance of the issue of out-of-area debates on key priorities of NATO. Whereas some members have emphasized global NATO and security tasks associated with the Middle East – prominent in the 2010 Strategic Concept are terrorism, proliferation of WMDs and instability beyond NATO borders – others still remain preoccupied with Russia in the east. Moreover, some members’ threat perception has been vindicated as a consequence of recent events in Ukraine. It is thus likely, that the historical divisions within NATO are bound to continue to hamper a truly unified approach to the Middle East, where even a majority of members would be willing to contribute beyond a tacit political consent.

**NATO in Libya**\textsuperscript{30}

\textsuperscript{27} An argument that is discussed by Hodge later in this article
\textsuperscript{28} (NATO, 2013)
\textsuperscript{29} (Daalder and Goldgeier, 2006)
\textsuperscript{30} Some literature on NATO in Libya is left out of the subsequent review. A good contribution to the NATO-in-Libya debate is the edited volume ‘The NATO Intervention in Libya: Lessons learned from the campaign’ the authors do an excellent job at analyzing lessons from OUP. Interestingly, Michaels describes NATO’s intervention in Libya as being conducted by a coalition formed within NATO arguing that the ‘NAC became only a secondary framework to where decisions were really discussed’. Instead, a common position would first be developed among those countries intent on pursuing more aggressive operations prior to it being presented to the Alliance as a whole’ (Michaels, p. 25). Michaels discusses the role of NATO partners, and how some of those were active military participants, particularly as a communications link between NATO and rebel forces with which NATO officially had no contact. Other books on NATO in Libya include: ‘Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya’ (Campbell, 2013); ‘The RAF’s Air War in Libya: New Conflicts in the Era of Austerity’ (Sloggett, 2012); ‘Destroying Libya and World Order: The Three-decade U.S. Campaign to Terminate the Qaddafi Revolution’ (Boyle,
The different understandings of NATO in the Middle East throughout its history, and different interpretations of what NATO is after the Cold War are central to thoroughly understand NATO today. It is within this body of literature that this article contributes by analyzing NATO’s Libya campaign – the most recent endeavor into the Middle East. The Libya campaign has been the subject of several academic books and articles, most of which debate the military campaign and the successes and failures. Analyzing the military campaign is beyond the scope of this article, which has a slightly different focus.

Of more relevance is Hodge’s article ‘Full Circle: Two Decades of NATO intervention’ arguing that since the Cold War, NATO has had a humanitarian decade (the 90s) and an expeditionary decade following the events of 9/11, 2001. Analyzing the cases of Afghanistan and Libya, he concludes that NATO’s intervention in Libya was the expression of “the cumulative impact of 20 years of expeditionary operations on the NATO alliance and a window on the likely future of such operations”.\(^{(31)}\) Despite much engagement outside NATO-area since the Cold War, NATO is likely, in the future, to embark on more restraint in such out-of-area endeavors, making Libya the exception to this rule. OUP was “the art of the possible, acting upon the lowest common denominator of political will among member-states”\(^{(32)}\) at a time when defense budgets are falling, and he defines the intervention as a coalition-of-the-willing with participating non-NATO members.\(^{(33)}\) The flexibility in member’s options on participating actively is slowly dissolving the multilateral philosophy of the Alliance. Hodge’s argument is not far from this article’s main thesis, that NATO has become a security hub for members and non-members. Different from this article, he perceives a larger future role for interventions by key European countries with the aid of US command-and-control, outside NATO frameworks.\(^{(34)}\)

Chivvis, in ‘Toppling Qaddafi: Libya and the Limits of Liberal Intervention’, demonstrates how members differed widely in their readiness to render control of the military operation to

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\(^{(31)}\) (Hodge, 2013: p. 364)

\(^{(32)}\) (Hodge, 2013: p. 350)

\(^{(33)}\) (Hodge, 2013: p. 362)

\(^{(34)}\) (Hodge, 2013: p. 363)
NATO. He also examines implications for the future, devoting some space for the issue of NATO after Libya.\textsuperscript{35} The analysis highlights the significance of capability shortfalls, non-American NATO members’ enthusiasm to carry the burden and the lack of allied cohesion.\textsuperscript{36} Chivvis concludes that despite the disunity, NATO managed to lead throughout the seven months long military campaign because: “Even though Germany and others objected to the operation, they did not block it. That flexibility should help keep the alliance relevant”.\textsuperscript{37} He does not go beyond this to debate the implications that this could have in for understanding NATO.

The Royal United Services Institute report ‘Short War, Long Shadow: The Political and Military Legacies of the 2011 Libya Campaign’, is relevant for the present discussion. The report cautions the drawing of lessons from Libya, “which provides little in the way of a widely applicable model” (RUSI: p. 4).\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, “NATO found itself operating in new ways that will change the alliance [...] this was not a good example of an alliance in natural unison” (RUSI: p.1).\textsuperscript{39} The report does not address the debate on what NATO has become after Libya and what it tells about NATO’s future role in the Middle East. Neither does it enter into deeper discussions on the lessons learned in Libya, and their influence on how NATO’s future in Middle East contingencies may be shaped.

Libya was no poster child of Allied unity in Middle Eastern engagement. The Libya intervention provides ample evidence that NATO member’s interests in and readiness to contribute anything besides political support in Middle Eastern endeavors differ widely. Key allies – most prominently Germany and Poland – declined to participate in the military operations while abstaining on vetoing NATO involvement. Meanwhile, non-members, perceiving it to be in their interest, proved much more eager and, importantly, able to plug into the NATO command and participate alongside members. Libya de facto demonstrated NATO as a security hub for members and non-members alike in the Middle East. Member states’ different positions on NATO involvement in Libya and differences in enthusiasm, among both members and non-members, for contributing military capabilities to the mission are critical for assessing what role NATO is likely to play in future global contingencies.

\textsuperscript{35} (Chivvis, 2014, p. 190)
\textsuperscript{36} (Chivvis, 2014: pp. 189-191)
\textsuperscript{37} (Chivvis, 2014: p. 192)
\textsuperscript{38} RUSI!!!!!
\textsuperscript{39} RUSI!!!!
As demonstrated, existing literature has tended to focus on the campaign itself, the legal aspects of it, different member states’ military contributions, shortfalls, and to a lesser extend on the broader implications for understanding NATO as an alliance. This is not to argue that an analysis of what Libya means for understanding NATO is nowhere to be found already. Some have briefly touched upon themes of within-alliance dynamics, contributions of non-members and partners and implications for the future of NATO, but only a few have discussed the implications of the internal division that were demonstrated in Libya and how one might grasp the relationship between NATO and the Middle East in the future in the aftermath of Libya. The literature does not engage the debate on relations between members and non-members in the Libya campaign and what that means for a global unified NATO – both politically and militarily – vis-à-vis NATO as a security hub. This gap is filled in the present article.

**NATO in Libya: the gap between political and military unity**

The Military operations over Libya commenced on March 19, 2011, as France, Great Britain and the US initiated each their own military campaign in close coordination – Operation Harmattan, Operation Ellamy and Operation Odyssey Dawn, respectively. NATO reached the decision to assume command of all operations on March 24 (announced by the Secretary General on March 27), and on March 31, the transfer of command was a reality. Between March 19 and March 24, intense negotiations on NATO involvement commenced. Several large NATO members hesitated to politically support NATO leadership and many opted out of the military intervention. France continued until the last minute to favor a narrow coalition format with France and Great Britain at the helm, while others insisted upon NATO leadership. One member, Germany, abstained on politically supporting UNSCR 1973 authorizing the use of force in Libya, de facto voting along with the former NATO foes, Russia and China.

Three broad positions over NATO’s role in Libya can be identified. Understanding them is of key importance for insights into NATO and why it emerged as a security hub in Libya. Understanding Libya and the broader history of NATO out-of-area tells us much on how NATO can be expected to act in the future, if potential Middle East contingencies come on the agen-

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40 Rynning is one of the exceptions. In ‘Coalitions, institutions and big tents: the new strategic reality of armed intervention’ he examines NATO’s endeavors in Afghanistan and Libya. One of his main conclusions, presented in the introduction to this article, is exactly that NATO may be best understood as a hub for coalitions. But Rynning does not analyze what that means for the relationship between NATO and its partners, i.e. members and partners. The same could be argued for Hodge’s analysis of what NATO’s Afghanistan and Libya missions mean for NATO and its possibilities for going out-of-area in the future.

41 (Rasmussen, 2011)
The positions were: (1) those who favored engagement but opposed NATO leadership; (2) those who favored engagement and favored NATO leadership; (3) those who opposed engagement altogether and refused to participate actively. Kissinger’s approach to international relations as a product of different concepts of order, understood through an analysis of historical relations, is applied to understand individual NATO member states’ positions on political and military aspects of the campaign.

**Political and military contributors resisting NATO command**

France was the most vocal member state adopting the position of calling for engagement without involving NATO. French favored engagement through a narrow coalition led by themselves and Great Britain, outside NATO. Having hesitated in Tunisia and supported the recently ousted leader, Ben Ali, France was perceived to be on the wrong side of the Arab Spring, a perception that French President, Sarkozy, was eager to change. If a democratic election were to take place and France had supported the incumbent autocratic leader, future possibilities for French prestige and economic interests were likely to suffer a great deal because France did not support the transition. Sarkozy’s: “pleasure for the outcome of the campaign will be measured in terms of French jobs secured as a result of new contracts with the leadership in Tripoli”. Libya was also a case fit for demonstrating France’s ability to play an active leadership role in solving crises affecting the international community.

Support of intervention notwithstanding, France opposed NATO leadership. Important to this opposition is the unique French concept of order and the historical role that NATO occupies in this concept. Since de Gaulle withdrew from NATO’s integrated military command in 1966, France has had an uneasy relationship with the Alliance. In French perceptions, NATO was historically dominated by the US. By aligning too closely with NATO, giving it an out-of-area role, an independent French policy on out-of-area contingencies would become difficult.

This aversion of involving NATO in the Middle East has historically played a significant role in French concepts of order on NATO’s southern flank, leading France to seek out a more

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42 The sources of conflict between different member states are many. Detailing the motivations of all member states’ positions on the issue of NATO in Libya is beyond the scope of this article. Each of the three broad positions on NATO leadership in Libya is illustrated by analyzing one or a few key countries from each position. The relevant countries are chosen based on how active and important a role they had in the debates over NATO in Libya.

43 (Erlanger, 2011)

44 (Sloggett, 2012: p. 20)

45 (Hendricksen, 2010)
independent role for the Europeans in their own backyard: “For the French security establishment, the debate over closer ties to NATO, often seen as a proxy for an Anglo-American agenda, runs right up against decades of exceptionalist policies instituted by de Gaulle with the express purpose of preventing such intimacy”.

Four months prior to involvement in Libya, France signed a security and defense treaty with Great Britain. For Sarkozy, the Libya mission was a welcome opportunity for testing this new European approach to cooperation in crises on Europe’s own borders. The aversion towards NATO involvement in Middle Eastern contingencies led France to suggest several other schemes for limiting the role of NATO. Sarkozy was the main initiator of creating the ‘Contact Group’ as the key political governance tool during the Libya mission. The Contact Group consisted of officials from nations participating in the military operations, de facto circumventing the NAC in many political decisions during the mission, ranking it “only a secondary framework to where decisions were really discussed”. Because of Frances strained historical relations with the Alliance, the French concept of order remained essentially Eurocentric in its approach to out-of-area contingencies on Europe’s own borders, which is important for why the French have traditionally sought to keep NATO out of Middle Eastern contingencies if at all possible.

For France there was no gap between the political and military aspects of engagement in terms of support: France was the first NATO member to bomb targets inside Libya and Sarkozy remained committed both politically and militarily throughout the campaign. The most important point, though, is that even in a case where a member favors military engagement and proves ready to participate actively, there is no guarantee that NATO, with the NAC at the helm of political decisions, is perceived as the appropriate framework for engagement. Especially not if North Atlantic Council (NAC) leadership and consensus on all military aspects of a campaign was the way in which NATO would proceed. In the French case, a narrower coalition was favored, though the campaign actually did display how the inert consensus-making NAC could effectively be circumvented in many of the decisions during the campaign. France’s Libya experience should speak positively for France’s perception of NATO as a leader in military endeavors for the future.

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46 (Moran, 2009)
47 (Studies, 2011: p. 2)
48 (Hague, 2011)
49 (Cameron, 2012: p. 18)
The political and military contributors supporting NATO command

Great Britain and the US supported the second position: engagement and NATO leadership. Like Sarkozy, both favored the ousting of Gaddafi. US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton’s statements emphasized that: “I intend to convey strong support of the Obama Administration and the American people that we wish to be a partner in the important work that lies ahead, as they embark on a transition to a genuine democracy”\(^{50} \) Further, both placed importance on the fact that the international community had invoked, for the first time since its inception, the R2P norm in UNSCR 1973, authorizing the legal use of force to protect civilians. Carried through the UNSC by particularly France and Great Britain, Obama, along with Cameron, supported the implementation of this resolution, once it went through.

Unlike France, both the US and Great Britain insisted upon NATO leadership. Different concepts of order are important for understanding the different perceptions of NATO’s role in the Middle East and thus for why consensus on NATO’s role in Libya was difficult. Great Britain’s concept of order is essentially Atlanticist, caused by its close historical relations with both the US and continental Europe. For Great Britain, a transatlantic rather than a narrow European-led coalition should address Middle Eastern security challenges. Whereas Sarkozy “saw the Libyan operation as an excellent opportunity for the two major European military powers to engage in a joint operational and political leadership under a bilateral, ad-hoc command structure. This was a step too far for the instinctively Atlanticist British”\(^{51} \) Great Britain, despite the new security cooperation with France, sought for a transatlantic approach to Libya and NATO was the obvious choice with its tried and tested machinery.

The US concept of order\(^{52} \) has changed much over the past fifteen years of historical relations with the Middle East. The Afghanistan and Iraq quagmires have led to a slowly changing concept of order for the US in the Middle East. The US should no longer be the leading Western player. Obama expressed this throughout the debates on intervention, maintaining that the US would hand over military control at the first possible opportunity.\(^{53} \) But why support NATO command instead of a British/French coalition? By insisting on NATO command,

\(^{50} \) (Clinton, 2011)  
\(^{51} \) (Studies, 2011: p. 2)  
\(^{52} \) Several former high ranking US officials – both affiliated to NATO, some to the White House staff for former US presidents – were interviewed for background knowledge on this article.  
\(^{53} \) (Watt, 2011)
Obama could effectively adopt a leading-from-behind approach to Libya, maintaining considerable influence on the mission while insisting that it was a mission not by a few western states, but by the Alliance with significant contributions from long-standing local non-NATO partnership countries.\textsuperscript{54}

Insisting on NATO leadership, the US could more effectively assume a backseat role in a multilateral vis-à-vis an American-led intervention. By involving NATO, Obama would be assured that the highest command of the military mission remains under US command – Admiral Stavridis. Deputy Secretary of the Department of State, James Steinberg, expressed the US position on NATO engagement accordingly: “transition to NATO command gives us the best of both worlds, which is that we are able now to step back, to leave the principal responsibility for enforcing the no fly zone and the protection of civilians to other forces, both NATO and the associated forces that are working under NATO command and control” and by the same token reaping the “benefit of the well established, well oiled machine that can conduct effective military activities”, while ultimately maintaining US military personnel under US command.\textsuperscript{55} In short, NATO provided the perfect framework for the US to play a smaller role in the Middle East, utilizing NATO’s already tried and tested command and control structures in close coordination with partners already trained for interoperability within that structure.

In sum, the US and Great Britain proved willing to support engagement both politically and militarily. Furthermore, they were both eager to place command under the NATO umbrella. For the US that meant less leadership in yet another Middle Eastern endeavor and for both it meant that the tried and tested NATO machinery and its ability to plug in interoperable local and global partners could be utilized.

Historical relations, both with the Middle East region and with fellow allies, also drove Turkey’s position on NATO engagement. Since Prime Minister Erdogan assumed office in 2002, he has pursued a good neighbor policy towards his Middle Eastern neighbors. That meant close relations with incumbent regimes such as Gaddafi’s in order to secure economic and political openness to Turkish interests. Consequently, “these linkages have made Turkey into a status-quo power, unwilling to see dramatic change. And not surprisingly, first Libya, and

\textsuperscript{54} Several Pentagon officials have confirmed the US insistence on utilizing NATO for Libya. The US was not interested on going it alone but wanted NATO. More broadly a US view has formed that if US-European coalitions are to engage, the NATO framework should be the way forward.

\textsuperscript{55} (Affairs, 2011: p. 48)
now Syria, is creating serious headaches for Turkey. Once Arab League and GCC blessings occurred and Western engagement became inevitable – and thus Gaddafi’s chances of remaining in power – Turkey could not afford to sit this intervention out. Turkish hoped to demonstrate support of a common regional cause, demonstrating that Turkey could act as a leader in its own region, when the mood favored change. Historical relations with fellow allies, France in particular, were important for Turkish instance on NATO command. The two NATO members had quarreled several times on the Turkey-EU issue: “when France objected to Nato taking command, Turkey instinctively pushed the other way.” Further, by insisting on NATO leadership, Turkey could influence the mission more than under a narrow coalition format led by France and Great Britain. The insistence on NATO engagement was also partly driven by the fact that France had failed to invite Turkey to the March 19 Paris meeting on operations in Libya, immediately after which, France initiated its own air-campaign. Despite initial hesitation, Turkey eventually became convinced about the military option and insisted upon NATO command, much because of its recent history with fellow allies. Along with France, Great Britain and the US, Turkey was one of the active members militarily during the campaign. This was not the case for either Germany or Poland.

The opponents: Not willing to participate militarily or to veto against NATO command

Germany’s and Poland’s positions are key for why NATO may at best be understood as a security hub, more than a global alliance, in Libya. Germany and Poland were some, but by far not the only, of the odd men out, as they refused to become part of the military coalition while not vetoing against NATO command. These countries are important for understanding the relationship between political and military unity. Though the Alliance managed to create consensus on leadership just one week after bombings commenced, the “speed was hardly a sign of underlying allied unity. The fact was, the Germany and others continued to object to the operation, even as they let it move ahead”. Many scholars and policymakers have speculated as to why Germany abstained on politically supporting UNSCR 1973, providing the R2P mandate, authorizing the military missions in Libya. Foreign Minister, Westerwelle, emphasized “in view of the considerable foreign policy and military risks involved, the German Government

56 (Barkey, 2011)
57 (Head, 2011a)
58 (Head, 2011b)
59 (Chivvis, 2014: p. 97)
came to a different conclusion [than Allied partners, the EU, UN and Arab League] when the matter was examined in the Security Council. That’s why we were unable to agree to this part of the Resolution and thus the Resolution as a whole. We won’t send German troops to take part in a military operation of this kind”.

In part due to the considerable uncertainties on the ground in Libya, Germany proved unwilling to politically support military intervention. But as Westerwelle made clear, this did not mean that Germany was neutral or against its allies (Westerwelle, 2011b). According to US Department of State officials, Germany had made it very clear that it would not veto NATO leadership. This created a situation in which Germany de facto politically supported NATO engagement – or at least did not proceed to fully blocking it by veto – but refused to contribute any military capabilities to the Alliance intervention. On March 25, the Bundestag did vote for sending additional soldiers to Afghanistan, easing some of the burden on allies, but it remained fully committed to opting out of Libya, meaning that one of the strongest NATO allies did not join the intervention.

It is difficult to make a credible argument based on the German concept of order, for why Germany abstained on UNSCR1973 and refused to contribute to the military mission. Some have pointed to the stigma of World War II and the German Constitution that followed: “the wording of the German Constitution, which specifically forbids Germany from sending combat troops abroad, but Berlin, since 1999, has overcome the taboo over participation in armed interventions”.

Further, defending the German position and abstention on UNSCR 1973, Westerwelle maintained: “When we consider what stance to adopt on the international stage and whether and where we could participate in any operation, we always have to remember that there will be victims, civilian victims. I know we’ve discussed this often enough in the context of the Iraq or Afghanistan missions. I therefore remind you that we always have to take into account the lessons learned from our recent history, also from recent military operations, when we make decisions today” (Westerwelle, 2011a). This illustrates the effects of recent historical relations with the Middle East in member states’ concept of order for that region. Afghanistan and Iraq are important for understanding why Germany and others hesitated in their military support. The most important point about Germany’s opposition is that it illustrates beautifully, how differently the allies perceived Libya, and it this shaped their response. It is telling for the political and military unity for the future whenever a direct Article 5 threat is not present.

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60 (Westerwelle, 2011a)
61 (Rousseau, 2011)
The same situation occurred with Poland, not vetoing NATO leadership, but refusing to contribute military capabilities even when explicitly asked by allies. Poland insisted on its military opt-out, which “broke considerable with its past behavior within the alliance. Instead of following the lead of larger powers within NATO, Poland aligned itself with others in NATO who chose not to contribute”. The Polish position demonstrated how divided the Alliance had become on intervention. Why did Poland take this position on engagement? Poland had been keen to participate in Middle Eastern interventions such as it did in both Afghanistan and Iraq, and the Polish position on Libya is somewhat surprising given its past historical relations with the US and the Alliance. But just like the past decade and a half has changed the US concept of order for the Middle East, so may the past decade and a half have changed the Polish concept of order.

According to a former high-ranking US official in NATO, Poland’s decision to abstain was considerably affected by a grudge towards the US because the US had not paid sufficiently for Poland taking part in the War in Iraq. Poland felt that it was not fully appreciated for its contributions and wanted economic compensation in order to invest in its military in exchange for being one of the few countries that went into Iraq. To further emphasize the importance of the past fifteen years of engagement, Polish President, Komorowski, defended the decision not to participate, somewhat in line with Germany’s argument: “Today we know that in Iraq there were no weapons of mass destruction, which was the basis of decisions at the time. Our stay in Afghanistan was to be short but instead has lasted many years […] The scale of our involvement [in international missions] should be the result of a sober assessment of the situation”. Besides the changed concept of Poland’s role in Middle Eastern contingencies, public opinion also had a significant impact on the decision to opt out militarily. The polish population was strongly opposed to sending troops, with 88 percent against and only 8 percent in favor.

The German and Polish positions made it all but certain that NATO in Libya should be understood more appropriately as an engagement by a coalition-of-the-willing more than by a global NATO. Willing members and partners, perceiving a benefit from utilizing NATO’s tried and tested machinery provided the backbone of OUP. This, however, is qualitatively different.

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62 (Hendrickson, 2012: p. 154)
63 (Trudelle, 2011)
64 (Hendrickson, 2012: p. 156)
from if some members had vetoed the NATO leadership and the willing members had to form a coalition outside NATO framework. Besides representing NATO as a paralyzed security framework, not utilizing NATO, the key difference is the role that partners would be able to play. Several of NATO’s partners proved very willing and able to plug into the NATO machinery and Libya proved a success for NATO especially in regards to its several years of emphasis on interoperability with partners.

**Alliance partners: ready and willing to plug into NATO command**

Much can be said about the troubles of creating a common ownership among NATO members on the intervention in Libya. While some proved willing and ready, others opted out and only hesitantly supported the intervention politically. Nevertheless, all NATO members reached consensus at the end. Despite this inner-Alliance controversy between political and military unity, several partnership countries proved very ready and willing and were capable of plugging into the NATO command and participate actively in Libya.

The key NATO partners participating in Libya were Sweden, Qatar, the U.A.E. and Jordan. The Arab partners played a key role in gathering intelligence. Some, especially Qatar, also played an active role on the ground in Libya, providing the crucial connection link between intervention forces and Libyan rebels – a link that NATO officially could not provide due to its limited R2P mandate in UNSCR 1973.

Partners also played an active role in training and equipping rebels. With the knowledge of NATO allies, “Qatar provided anti-Gadhafi rebels with what Libyan officials now estimate are tens of millions of dollars in aid, military training and more than 20,000 tons of weapons”. The Arab partners proved important for the broader operation. Especially the aspect of linking the connection between rebels and coalition forces along with training on the ground made a decisive difference in resolving the conflict in favor of anti-Gaddafi forces. Further, along with participating actively in the intervention, especially the Arab partners were also fundamental for gathering broader political support from local Arab states, much important for the broader legitimacy of the entire operation. Besides the Arab partners, Sweden participated as the only non NATO-member and non-Arab state. Sweden mainly contributed planes for enforcing

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65 (Chivvis, 2014: p. 99)  
66 (Sam Dagher, 2011)  
67 (Chivvis, 2014: p. 99)
the no-fly zone. Suffice to argue that partners, given the limited military support from actual NATO members, played a considerable role both militarily and politically.

To briefly cover just one of the partners reasons for participating: Qatar’s concept of order for the Middle East is important for understanding why it had an interests in playing such an active role in the NATO intervention. Over the past years, just like Turkey, Qatar has bolstered its activities within the Middle East region, assuming a leading role in several regional conflicts (Reuters, 2011). Qatar, in contrast to Saudi Arabia, supports the modernization of the Middle East and visions a Middle Eastern order where Islamic ideals are married closely to modernity – a good example of which is the relatively free media and the Al-Jazeera network based in Doha, Qatar. “Libya presents the biggest test for the Qatar model. Whether Islamist political groups can be the guarantors of democracy in the Muslim world […] is being closely watched in Libya and beyond”68 Furthermore, close diplomatic and economic relations historically with France, the NATO member most bent on intervention69 are likely to have played into Qatar’s early support of and military participation in the intervention.

Just as interesting as partners’ willingness to contribute politically and militarily, is their capability to actually do so within the NATO framework. Without much difficulty, partners proved able to plug into the NATO command and control system by liaising officers to NATO Commander of OUP, Charles Bouchard’s, headquarters in Naples as well as officers to the Combined Air Operations Center in Poggio-Renatico.70 What was true for both Sweden and the Arab partners alike was that it would have been considerably more difficult to plug in and participate in the intervention if NATO had not assumed command.71 In other words, placing the intervention under NATO meant that partners were not only willing to participate; they were also immediately capable, much to the credit of NATO’s long-standing focus on interoperability with partners, which allowed for a smooth participation.

NATO’s heavy emphasis over the years on interoperability with partners has considerably eased the transaction costs for partners and for NATO of members plugging into the NATO command and participating in missions. Despite the considerable difficulties that NATO has had with deepening and strengthening the political aspects of its Middle Eastern partnership programmes – the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative –, NATO

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68 (Sam Dagher, 2011)
69 (Reuters, 2011)
70 (Chivvis, 2014: p. 98)
71 (Chivvis, 2014: pp. 192-193)
has had more success deepening the practical areas of cooperation.\textsuperscript{72} As the Libyan campaign demonstrates, NATO’s abundance of practical activities with partners as well as some partners’ participation in former and current NATO missions,\textsuperscript{73} has made the Alliance ready for the active military participation of partners. A coalition-of-the-willing outside NATO framework would have been a less structured leadership model, creating difficulties and uncertainties in plugging in and participate with such short notice.

**Understanding NATO in the aftermath of Libya: a hub for willing members and partners**

The Libya operation is both something old and something new for NATO. The intervention in Libya once again displayed the historical difficulties for NATO in remaining unified both politically and militarily in the Middle East, a difficulty that has considerably distorted equality in burden sharing. In line with Hodge’s argument, the likely hood of overcoming this problem has not been eased by NATO’s experiences in Afghanistan (or Iraq). If we look at the broader history of the alliance, NATO’s CFC policy from 1982 in which Middle Eastern endeavors would be left to willing members who had interests in the relevant mission at hand displays some similarities to the Libya intervention: the political consensus was reached, while the military contributions remained uncertain. Libya, however, also diverged from other endeavors, such as Afghanistan where all members participated, albeit to very different extents. Thus, NATO in Libya was different from NATO in Afghanistan. The way NATO operated in Libya was a product of the past 20 years of heavy engagement in that region, displaying a more limited out-of-area NATO, likely to be exercised in the future. This is key for an understanding of the shape of Middle Eastern-centric NATO today. What is interesting for the present purposes is what we can learn from the Libya intervention and the internal NATO controversies in terms understanding NATO and its engagement in the Middle East.

Three lessons seem appropriate to analyze, all of which touch upon the theme of understanding NATO in relation to its out-of-area role: (1) NATO as a security hub for Middle Eastern contingencies; (2) the lines between being a member and a partner are becoming more

\footnote{\textsuperscript{72} (Jørgensen, 2014: pp. 112-113)}

\footnote{\textsuperscript{73} Despite not being in neither of the two Middle Eastern partnership programmes, Sweden has played an important part in NATO’s ISAF mission in Afghanistan, which means that the interoperability between Sweden and NATO forces has continuously been strengthened over the last decade. As suggested by Doeser, "Despite not being a member of the alliance, it is easier for Sweden to take part within a NATO-led effort, as its military is familiar with procedures following previous cooperation" (Doeser, 2014).}
blurred, and; (3) the positive and negative consequences of NATO’s evolution into an out-of-area security hub.

**NATO as a Middle Eastern security hub**

In the foreseeable future, NATO is likely to remain a security hub for Middle Eastern contingencies more than a unified alliance. Especially two factors are important in this regard. First are the deeply rooted differences in members’ concepts of order for the role of the Alliance in Middle Eastern contingencies. As demonstrated throughout the previous sections in this article, this makes it is unlikely that NATO members become aligned on NATO’s role in the Middle East. No less likely is it that a majority is ready to contribute militarily to such NATO endeavors, in case political consensus is formed. The analysis above demonstrates exactly this point: historical differences between members on NATO’s role means that some members likely will have greater concerns elsewhere and naturally lack deep commitment to joining military endeavors outside Article 5 area. The tendency is reinforced by the Afghan and Iraq quagmires, and maybe even by the fact that Libya took longer than initially presumed.

As far back as 1957, Kissinger addressed this inherent problem for alliances. The acid test of an alliance is to reach agreement on two issues: first, whether a challenge represents aggression, and; second, if so, what should the response be. Given the differences between allies in geographic position, history, power and domestic structure – i.e. factors that determine a country’s concept of order – reaching consensus on these two issues is almost only possible if a threat arises that is so grave as to obliterate all differences between members of the alliance: “Against any other danger, united action is almost inevitably reduced to the lowest common denominator” (Kissinger, 1957: p. 247). Thus, united military action in the Middle East is bound to be determined on a case by case basis with members that see an interest in it participating, while others opt out because they do not perceive it in their interest, given the different concepts of order and their perceived role for NATO. That is to argue, the military campaign is determined by the lowest common denominator, in line with Hodge’s argument. Given the historically deeply rooted different interests and concerns of NATO members in the Middle East, the Alliance is bound to at best remain a security hub with coalitions forming on a case-by-case basis: willing members contribute while the rest opt out because of the lack of national interest rating higher than allied solidarity as we saw in Libya. Unless some security
challenge emerges in the Middle East, that obliterates the different concepts of order for that region, NATO members are not likely to suddenly overcome their historical disagreements about handling Middle Eastern security.

Even though Daalder and Goldgeier praised NATO for going global back in 2006, the Alliance remains disunited in truly going global both politically and militarily. Only some members proved willing to support such a role for NATO, while others only provide the political approval, leaving it to inner-Alliance coalitions of members and non-members alike to engage in these out-of-area contingencies. No recent developments either within the Alliance or in the Middle East region suggest that NATO is about to overcome its historical difficulties of reaching both political and military consensus in Middle Eastern endeavors. This seems to fit well with Rynning’s assertion that NATO is a good example that institutions may serve a purpose as hubs for coalitions.

The second factor contributing to NATO remaining a security hub in out-of-area contingencies is the spring 2014 quarrel with Russia over Ukraine. As Libya demonstrates, even at the time before the crisis in Ukraine – before Putin began playing the ideas of a renewed revisionism for Russia – NATO proved unable to overcome differences in member states understandings of NATO in the Middle East. After Ukraine, many members are bound to become even more preoccupied with the primary role of NATO as Article 5 alliance vis-à-vis global contingencies. Consequently, the challenges of creating unity on actual military operations outside NATO area are not likely to become easier.74

The blurred distinction between members and partners in Middle Eastern endeavors

The lesson about blurred lines between being member or partner is also important to address. As Libya demonstrated, NATO proved able to incorporate partners into the equation, when engaging out-of-area. As Michaels states: “Their participation also represented a ‘return of investment’ demonstrating the value of NATO’s partnership programmes”.75 This was also the case in ISAF and the tendency for NATO to utilize partners, the best evidence that NATO in some ways has gone global, is unlikely to stop. As long as both NATO and partners perceive an

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74 There is a caveat, however: the situation in Ukraine could have have the opposite effect. Because of European fears of abandonment from the US at a time where they would fear it the most, could mean that they may become more ready to contribute to Middle Eastern contingencies and ease their fears of entrapment in global members’ endeavors, simply because they want to signal a continued relevance of NATO to the US.
75 (Michaels, 2014: p. 31)
interest in the mission at hand, the plug-and-play ability, built since the end of the Cold War is a function that all benefit from. NATO’s heavy emphasis on cooperative security in the 2010 Strategic Concept, and its complete overhaul of the partnership-structure at the Berlin, 2011, summit both serve as good indicators that NATO remains committed to draw in partners whenever possible.

President Obama, in his West Point speech, argued for a larger role of the European allies and the active participation of partners in countering security challenges on Europe’s own borders. This view closely resembled what we saw during the Libya campaign: the stronger European powers played a large role, the same did partners, while the US was keen to play a drawn back role, leading from behind. Given the recent experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, the US is likely to sustain its backseat role in the Middle East and let NATO allies but also partners carry more of the burden. Consequently, the US is keen to utilize the NATO framework for future Middle Eastern interventions and during these interventions have Europeans and partners play a leading role. NATO leadership is the most optimal coalition framework for drawing on the military capabilities and legitimacy those local partners can provide because of the past decade’s large emphasis on military interoperability. Given the reluctance by many NATO members to participate and the greater emphasis placed by the US on partners, the clear distinction between being a NATO member or a partner becomes less obvious in Middle Eastern contingencies where Article 5 securities is not the main issue. This serves the NATO-as-a-security-hub function well.

The distinction between member and partner remains in terms of Article 5 guarantees, but outside NATO area, membership or partnership will not tell us very much about who will eventually join an actual military mission. The intervention in Libya thoroughly demonstrated this trend. Of course this is case-by-case, but it was thoroughly demonstrated that some partners were willing to do things militarily that members were unwilling to do: while countries such as Germany pulled its ships from the Libyan coast, in order not to get caught in firefights, Qatar and the U.A.E. provided trainers and advisers on the ground in Libya. Members and partners alike, as long as they perceive an interest in the operation, can join and partners opportunities for doing so are equal to those of members.77

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76 (Obama, 2014)
77 Interview with former US official to NATO
Positive and negative consequences of NATO as an out-of-area security hub

NATO as a security hub is not necessarily a bad thing by default, even though it does have negative consequences, especially on alliance solidarity and thus credibility. It could enable NATO, in the future, to play a larger role because the political consensus, combined with the military opt-out solution and NATO’s focus on interoperability with partners, creates opportunities for applying the established NATO machinery in global security contingencies despite widely different interests among members on military aspects of such an intervention. This also speaks to Obama’s concerns that allies need to be more active in addressing security matters outside NATO borders because NATO may become more widely utilized. As Weitsman observes about NATO’s Operation Allied Force in Kosovo: “NATO struggled mightily with cohesion [...] The decision-making mechanism requiring consensus paralyzed the organization and was the opposite of what a flexible fighting force requires. The challenges associated with maintaining the cohesion of the alliance provided critical lessons for the institutional design constructed for future operations”. In contrast to Kosovo, a more flexible security hub format, circumventing much of the ineffectiveness of consensus decision-making, may enable NATO to more effectively address security challenges outside NATO area. A fact that, as noted, may lead members, such as France, to perceive NATO command and control more positively than in the past.

In Libya, NATO effectively overcame the problem of keeping a coalition of states with different aims and interests together. The Alliance avoided the problem of maintaining a constant consensus over operations by “holding the vast majority of Brussels meetings in OUP-format – meaning that troop contributions rather than Alliance membership determined access”. We have an alliance that would probably never act outside its Article 5 area – not even politically – if it demanded that all members agreed to both ends and means and had to commit resources. It might be ideal but it is not realistic. As the case of Libya illustrates: allies’ interests are simply too far apart outside NATO area and so they have been throughout NATO history. An alliance that acts only when all members are ready to participate may be optimal but it is not relevant, since it is unlikely to happen. An alliance that is an enabler in creating and leading ad-hoc alliances and even utilize ready and willing partners to make up for some

78 (Weitsman, 2013: p. 93)
79 (Egnell, 2014: p. 224)
80 (Chivvis, 2014: p. 192)
of the opting-out members is likely the future of global NATO and may be the solution to keeping NATO relevant. As OUP demonstrated: "The operation might have been conducted in a coalition-of-the-willing format, without drawing on NATO command structures, but it would have been more difficult. Further, integrating the Gulf partners and Sweden would have been more problematic". This ability alone makes NATO unique and more optimal than any other command and control format currently available for coalitions-of-the-willing when some Western states are in favor of engaging outside NATO area.

The positive aspects of NATO as a flexible security hub notwithstanding, there are some negative consequences as well. OUP demonstrated to all allies the easiness with which they can completely opt out of a NATO operation, leaving the entire burden to the participating members and partners. In fact the easiness with which some members separated political and military unity as two different entities of solidarity, created legitimacy in adopting the opt out position. Even when explicitly asked, members prove willing to refuse any contributions. Though this creates flexibility in reaching the political consensus and utilizing NATO control and command, it could considerably and permanently damage alliance solidarity, fundamental for the alliance to remain credible. Consequently a two-tiered alliance – participating and non-participating members – may eventually render NATO as an alliance an outdated relic which has failed in transforming its unity on the Cold War raison d’être within-area into a post-Cold War raison d’être out-of-area. If solidarity in burden sharing is lost in out-of-area contingencies, the broader unity of the Alliance is damaged. The strongest ally may not perceive the same importance of an alliance where other members carry no burden. At the same time, elaborating on the entrapment vs. abandonment problem, some European members, particularly in the wake of the Ukrainian crisis, may fear abandonment. If members are not willing to participate in security outside NATO-area until a crisis, such as the one in Ukraine, arises, the genuine solidarity, vital for alliance credibility, among members, must be questioned. Further, repairing solidarity only during or in the aftermath of within-area challenges, does not add to solve the problem. In a way it is like buying insurance: you have to buy it before your house catches on fire and not when the roof is already in flames. Otherwise no one will insure you.

81 (Chivvis, 2014: pp. 192-193)
A related negative consequence of NATO as a security hub is the problem of an easier road to consensus when NATO members are aware that it does not create great expectations of them in the actual mission. In the words of a former US official to NATO: “It makes it cheap. Countries are happy to say, ‘NATO can do that, but that does not mean me’. Who is going to do it?”, concluding that it completely destroys NATO’s credibility. No one, despite the political consensus, may have the intention of carrying out the political decision. This undermines the idea of what an alliance is. This is especially the case for NATO in the post-Cold War world in which the threat to members’ territorial integrity is much less obvious. For a Middle Eastern-centric NATO, members should be more preoccupied with threats such as instability and crisis in that region. But if only a few are willing to carry the burden, then NATO as an alliance may be in trouble in the long run: no one wants to offer you an insurance policy, if you never pay the bill.

**Conclusion: how to improve NATO’s ability as a security hub**

The analysis of NATO in Libya continues the debate on understanding NATO in the post-Cold War and its transformation from Euro-centric to Middle Eastern-centric. Scrutinizing both the Libya campaign and the broader NATO history before and after the Cold War, it would seem that though Daalder & Goldgeier praised NATO for going global, a more appropriate understanding is in line with Brzezinski and Rynning’s perceptions of post-Cold War NATO. NATO is not truly Middle Eastern-centric and its relations with that region are better understood by seeing NATO as a security hub in Middle Eastern contingencies. More to the point, NATO’s engagement in the region is reduced to the lowest common denominator in which members contribute only if they perceive an interest in it, disregarding alliance solidarity.

There is the enduring problem within NATO on going global, namely that different concepts of order co-exist. These have persisted throughout NATO history and are not likely to disappear anytime soon. On the contrary, Afghanistan and Iraq may have only reinforced reluctance on the part of members’ military contributions, just like OUP demonstrated. For NATO to truly be global there should be a common belief and understanding of NATO’s role in
out-of-area missions, which does not exist. As long as it is not Article 5 challenges, NATO seems destined as a security hub for willing members and partners.  

The negative consequences notwithstanding, NATO-as-a-hub may have some benefits. It increases political willingness among members in activating its tried and tested command-and-control structure, which is the most optimal framework for drawing on the support of local partners. If NATO can settle on remaining such a hub, several important tasks lie ahead. The remainder of this conclusion is dedicated to some suggestions on how to improve the hub-function.

First, NATO members should address the problem of the legitimacy in separating political and military unity in out-of-area engagements and its consequences for alliance credibility. If the problem of a two-tiered global alliance is not addressed by a genuine debated because of fears that such a debate would tear the alliance apart, the problem with members agreeing politically and only a few committing afterwards is going to become exacerbated and the credibility of NATO may be dealt a fatal blow. Finding a solution to the problem requires the constant attention not only of the US (which has traditionally been the most vocal member in creating more equal burden sharing) but also of other key allies such as Great Britain and France, willing to assume a share of the burden in Middle Eastern contingencies, as the Libyan campaign illustrated. But not only member states should remain vocal, the Secretary General also has an important function in pressing allies to remain committed to securing NATO’s credibility. NATO Secretary General, Fogh Rasmusen, played an active part in this regard during the Libya campaign, asking for contributions, though his success was rather limited. By appointing Jens Stoltenberg, another former head of state, as the new Sec. Gen., instead of a foreign minister, the new Sec. Gen. may carry more weight in solving the burden-sharing problem.

The problem of securing military commitments to NATO missions may become even more acute after Libya. As demonstrated by the US’ leading from behind role, even the US is

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82 Arguably an important distinction in whether NATO is united both politically and militarily is the perceived risks involved in participating in a potential mission. As such, in limited missions with limited costs, NATO may remain unified in Middle Eastern endeavors, but still, none of the missions besides ISAF has had all members contributing. Both Operation Ocean Shield and Operation Active Endeavour had only about half of the members contributing while in both instances, a wide variety of non-members and partnering countries have actively participated. The more cost heavy and risky a mission is expected to be, the more likely NATO remains a security hub because members will be more reluctant to join the intervention. If a mission is perceived to involve low costs and risks, members may be more willing to contribute both politically and militarily, de facto transforming NATO into a truly global alliance. The two limited maritime missions lend support to the main argument of this article that in most cases, NATO remains a security hub.
slowly embarking on a withdrawn role in Middle Eastern contingencies. Consequently, the US may even adopt a similar approach to Germany in which it is not willing to participate in some future military contingencies. A NATO, in which the US is not willing to participate militarily, is not credible – the Libya mission was inconceivable without the military contributions of the US – and this problem needs more attention from NATO members.

Second, NATO should continue its focus on military interoperability, a focus that becomes even more acute, if NATO wants to remain an effective security hub after the ISAF mission ends in 2014. After Afghanistan, if NATO is to remain capable of drawing in willing partners, it needs to constantly train with these partners because no military missions will be playing that function any longer. Rynning argues that NATO needs to game the future to “test future scenarios of conflict more thoroughly and with greater effect”.83 As part of potential wargaming, NATO should draw in relevant partners so that they, if time comes, remain capable of plugging into the security hub if they perceive such an interest. For the Middle East, NATO should continue to invest in its partnerships and in dialogue with its partners, aim to remain highly interoperable. The past two decades of partnerships in the region has thoroughly demonstrated how the practical areas of cooperation run more smoothly than the political.84 In order to get the most out of the partnerships in the hub-format, NATO should thus place its attention on interoperability.

The NATO out-of-area debate is likely to continue and whether a truly global NATO emerges is uncertain. In light of the inherent historical differences between NATO members’ concepts of order for the Middle East, it is unlikely that NATO goes beyond the security hub status, which was in effect the role of NATO in Libya. This does not render NATO in the Middle East irrelevant, as NATO still has an important role to play. The contrary is true. The alliance remains the most feasible Western institution for collaborating on Middle Eastern security challenges and its decades of emphasis on interoperability has created an opportunity for non-members to plug in and carry parts of the defense burden, compensating for non-contributing members. If NATO can resolve some of the problems that ‘NATO as a security hub’ creates in terms of failing credibility and unity in burden sharing, then NATO remains as a relevant alliance for members with extra-regional concerns in addressing the global challenges of the day, despite it not being truly global.

83 (Rynning, 2013: p. 66)
84 (Jørgensen, 2014: pp. 112-113)
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