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The Ties that Bind?

A History of NATO's Academic Adventure with the Middle East

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On 6 December 2013, the NATO Defense College in Rome celebrated the graduation of the tenth NATO Regional Cooperation Course (NRCC). Born five years ago from lengthy diplomatic negotiations in Brussels, this ten-week academic programme brings together officers and diplomats from NATO countries with their counterparts in Arab States and in Israel. Meeting on a daily basis for lectures and seminars, participants include representatives of countries which, in some cases, barely speak to each other in normal international contacts. They exchange views - and sometimes disagree, or even argue – over critical issues such as the Israel-Palestine peace process, the Iranian nuclear programme, the Syrian conflict or Western policies in the Middle East.

The introduction of the NRCC marked an unprecedented new departure for NATO, an organization that scarcely looked outside continental Europe a mere two decades ago. Looking back at the inception and development of the NRCC programme thus means far more than an academic exercise in institutional history, nor is the interest of this story confined to a relatively restricted readership made up of NATO employees. The making of the NRCC sheds light on an internal struggle within the Atlantic Alliance regarding its diplomatic aims and means. More than this, the story of the NRCC illustrates the very difficulties of building ties with new partners, and shows how scholarship can contribute substantially to such ties. This paper is therefore of interest to both scholars and policy-makers. For scholars, it nurtures the ongoing debate over the challenges of education in a diplomatic and military environment.[2] For practitioners, it provides insights into what could become a primary instrument of NATO's diplomatic apparatus in the post-Afghanistan period. In other words, this story is a revealing case study of interactions between academe, diplomacy, and the military world.

Such is the subject matter that this research paper explores. The initial question that drove our investigation was how an academic course could fulfil a diplomatic vision. In other words, how could classes in international relations help NATO reach out to the Middle East, foster mutual understanding and, eventually, pave the way for practical cooperation? As the following sections show, the synergy of diplomatic and academic efforts was, in the event, based less on a seamless interface between the two than on a constant dialectic. In the end, the NRCC can be understood as a dynamic interface between NATO's evolving diplomatic agenda and an aca-

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[2] See, among others, Joan Johnson-Freese, *Educating America's Military*, New York, Routledge, 2012 and the controversial article by Jeff Dyche, "The US Air Force Academy: Elite Undergraduate College?", *AAUP Journal of Academic Freedom*, vol. 3, 2012.

demic environment.

Our research is based on various sources. It relies on consultation of NATO Defense College archives, as well as on extensive interviews with officials, both in Rome and in Brussels, who have been involved in the NRCC since its inception. The first section of the paper is a historical survey of how the NRCC was born. We then look at the various challenges which accompanied the venture, as witnessed by the people involved all along. Finally, in a third section, we look at the possible future evolution of the programme, and of NATO educational practices in general.

NATO goes to the Middle East: the making of the NATO Regional Cooperation Course

The idea of gathering soldiers and diplomats from NATO and its Middle East partners surfaced in the corridors of the Brussels Headquarters in early 2005. Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, momentum grew within the Alliance for an ambitious partnership with the Arab World. There was nevertheless reluctance – not only on the part of some Allies, but also among potential Middle Eastern partners who feared a NATO footprint in the region. In 2004, NATO created the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), a partnership with four Gulf monarchies (UAE, Kuwait, Qatar and Bahrain) which complemented the older Mediterranean Dialogue (MD).[3] At that time, with civil war escalating in Iraq and regional angst over Iranian nuclearization, NATO Allies saw a growing need for cooperation with local militaries. However, the forms of that cooperation still needed to be defined.[4]

The diplomatic phase. In 2005, the US delegation came to the Northern Atlantic Council to submit the proposal of a "training initiative" that would engage all NATO member countries with Middle Eastern partners through a tailored course. Specifically, the course would have to take place in the region. This initial proposal was met with fierce scepticism. Some Allies argued that the build-up of military and diplomatic ties with Arab countries was outside NATO's scope. In other words, NATO had neither the legitimacy nor the experience for such an endeavour. The biggest issue, however, was the apparent lack of clarity on the exact content the Americans envisioned for this "training" course. "For months, the US delegation was unable to provide us with clear answers on this proposal because there was not even a consensus between the State Department and the Pentagon on what should and should not be included!" explained an insider who took part in this round of talks.[5]

To complicate matters even more, the US suggestion of locating the training facility in the region itself encountered several drawbacks. Jordan expressed its willingness to host the centre, under the auspices of its own Police Academy, but then Kuwait and Qatar also declared that they would be ready to do so. At this stage, the question of where to locate the foreseen courses quickly turned into an unintended competition among the partners. The Jordanian option raised the issue of security, as some NATO countries feared that the centre could become the target of anti-Western groups. On the other hand, locating it in the Gulf states would have meant denying what was seen as an essential factor: Israeli participation.

Eventually, in the spring of 2006, ahead

[3] The Mediterranean Dialogue was launched in 1994 and includes Mauritania, Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco, Egypt, Jordan and Israel.

[4] For a comprehensive account of NATO Middle East policies during this period, see Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, *Un viaggio politico senza mappe: fra diversità e futuro nel grande Medio Oriente*, Rome, Rubbettino, 2013; and Florence Gaub, *Against All Odds: Relations between NATO and the MENA Region*, Carlisle, US Army War College, 2012.

[5] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

of the scheduled Summit of Heads of State and Government in Riga, the Allies reached a consensus. First, confronted with the ambiguity of the "training" idea, International Staff suggested rebranding the whole project and making it an educational initiative. This meant that diplomats and officers from both sides would convene to discuss international security issues, not operational or tactical considerations. In other words, the objective would be more diplomatically and strategically oriented. Second, as the search for a location proved to be much more difficult than expected, a compromise was found: the programme would temporarily be run in Europe, with a possible subsequent move to an unspecified location in the Middle East. Neither the timeframe for this process nor the future location were specified. Several places were suggested: Brussels, where the course could be close to decision-making circles; Oberammergau in Germany, where the NATO School had been operating since 1953; and, finally, the NATO Defense College in Rome.

After another series of talks, Rome was selected as the venue. It is argued by some representatives in Brussels that the Italian influence, in particular through its handling of the Middle East partnership portfolio at NATO Headquarters, played a decisive role in this decision. Although the Italian officials interviewed for our research downplayed the relevance of a national agenda on the topic, all key positions on NATO Middle East policies were at that time held by Italians: Ambassador Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, Deputy Secretary General; Mr Nicola de Santis, Head of the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative Countries Section in the Public Diplomacy Division; Dr Alberto Bin, Head of the Regional Affairs and Mediterranean Dialogue Section, NATO Political Affairs and Security Policy Division; and Colonel Giuseppe Clemente, responsible for the Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, Cooperation and Regional Security within the Military Committee.

The Riga Summit held in November 2006 was the very first time the idea of the course was officially mentioned. Paragraph 17 of the Summit Declaration states:

> […]Through an evolutionary and phased approach building on existing structures and programmes, we will set up to the benefit of our partners and NATO nations an expanding network of NATO training activities. An initial phase will include […] the establishment of a Middle East Faculty at the NATO Defense College. As a second phase, NATO could consider supporting the establishment of a Security Cooperation Centre in the region, to be owned by the MD and ICI countries, with regional funding and NATO assistance.[6]

The academic phase. The next step was to translate this diplomatic enterprise into concrete guidelines. This is where strategic matters met with bureaucratic constraints. The NATO Defense College certainly had considerable experience in military education, generations of NATO officers having attended its Senior Course in the half-century since its inception. But in Brussels, the team close to the Secretary General feared that the College lacked the diplomatic and cultural awareness to design and conduct an educational course for an extremely diverse target group - on the one hand, NATO nations like the US, France and Italy; on the other hand, MD and ICI members like Israel, Mauritania, Egypt and Bahrain. The result was the creation of a specific body called the "Middle East Faculty", to be staffed by civilian advisors with specific Middle East expertise who could

[6] Riga Summit Declaration, issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Riga on 29 November 2006. Available at: http://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2006/p06-150e.htm

fulfil this need for cultural awareness. In other words, the course would be conducted within the NATO Defense College, but would be strictly separated from its other activities.[7]

In 2007, while work on the logistic aspects of the project was in its very early stages, the North Atlantic Council and the Military Committee in Brussels decided to launch a "trial course" for what would become the NATO Regional Cooperation Course. This first two-week course was attended by a small group of ten participants: six from the MD and ICI, the other four from NATO. This ratio of 60:40 was to be retained as the target when the NRCC proper was born two years later, as a way of ensuring an appropriate balance of views. Although the trial course was designed by a team of officers from the NATO Defense College, it was closely overseen by officials in Brussels. The inauguration speech was given by Ambassador Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, then Deputy Secretary General, while graduation diplomas were awarded at the end of the course by the Chairman of the Military Committee, General Ray Henault.[8] Ambassador Minuto Rizzo came again for the second trial course in November 2007. In 2008, a further two trial courses were run and the format was extended, first to three weeks and then to four.

On 28 January 2008, during a conference jointly organized by the NATO Public Diplomacy Division and the Qatar Center for Military Strategic Studies in Doha, new Deputy Secretary General Claudio Bisogniero underlined "progress towards the establishment of a dedicated faculty at the NATO Defense College in Rome".[9] Like his predecessor, he highlighted the promising scope offered by education and training with a view to practical cooperation between ICI countries and NATO: "*NATO is keen to share more widely with interested ICI partners our unique expertise in training military forces – to help them to build forces that are more effective and more interoperable with those of the NATO Allies*."[10]

Again, the Italian footprint was important: for the next three years (2008-2011), the two most influential persons in Brussels dealing with development of the NRCC were Italians: Deputy Secretary General Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero, and Chairman of the Military Committee Admiral Giampaolo di Paola. This certainly contributed to the close coordination with the NATO Defense College.

Both in Brussels and in Rome, American officers and officials also played a major role. By request of NATO HQ, it was decided that the NRCC would be under the direct supervision of the Dean, a position created in 2001 and traditionally held by an American.[11] In addition, the first Director of the Middle East Faculty (with responsibility for the inaugural NRCC) was a US Marine Colonel, Sandy Guptill. During the period concerned, Italian and US commitment to the project provided all-important synergy, ensuring that the initiative received appropriate backing in terms of political will.

The Middle East Faculty, which was slowly taking form within the College, would be in charge of planning and running the NRCC. Following talks with Brussels, the programme was to be a 10-week course on the security challenges of the Middle East and North Africa region, with a curriculum geared to the interests of NATO, MD, and ICI nations. Western and Middle Eastern scholars would be invited to deliver lectures on strategic issues and run exercises for participants from the MD, ICI

7 Phone interviews with the authors, October 2013.

8 "The year in review", NDC *Annual Report 2007*, p. 10.

9 Speech by NATO Deputy Secretary General, Ambassador Claudio Bisogniero at the Conference on "NATO's Role for Stability and Peace", 28 January 2008. Available at: http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2008/s080128a.html

10 *Ibid*.

11 This situation changed in 2013 with the selection of a Dean from a European member state.

and NATO nations, whilst promoting the outreach objective of mutual understanding. In March 2009, the first official NRCC began.

The creation of the Middle East Faculty did not, however, mark the full achievement of the envisaged end state. In retrospect, the creation and consolidation of the programme depended upon the role of a few key decision-makers in Brussels and Rome, who involved themselves personally. "When you look back at the very beginning of the talks at the HQ, it is a real miracle that this programme exists today," explains a former high NATO representative.[12] For the leadership of the NATO Defense College, at that time Commandant Lieutenant General Wolf-Dieter Loeser and Dean Dr Grant Hammond, the priority became to promote the course, in particular in the Levant and the Gulf. Throughout that period, Hammond and Loeser travelled extensively to areas where the NATO Defense College had never been before, meeting officials who barely knew anything about the College in Rome. In less than twelve months, between 2008 and 2009, Hammond travelled to Tunis, Abu Dhabi, Amman (twice), Tel Aviv, Doha, Cairo, Kuwait, Manama and Casablanca. Loeser remembers vividly his trip to Kuwait: "I travelled to Kuwait in early 2010. We were struggling to get Kuwaiti Course Members to come to the College. I met with Sheikh Thamer Ali Al-Sabah [Deputy Director of Kuwait's National Security Bureau] and he was extremely candid, telling me that they needed to know personally the leadership of the College, to create ties."[13] Following Loeser's trip, Sheikh Thamer visited the College in March 2010 to deliver a keynote speech to the third NRCC. Since then, Kuwaiti officers and civil servants have regularly participated and relations with the NRCC are handled directly by the National Security Bureau in Kuwait.

The challenges of a diplomatic-academic enterprise

The NRCC was from the beginning the result of competing visions, both within the Alliance and among its partners. It was to be both an academic programme with lectures, workshops and political exercises, and a forum for stakeholders involved in a common military partnership. On the one hand, the course is - still today - meant to strengthen the Alliance's bonds with MD and ICI countries. On the other hand, it aims to develop in-house expertise within NATO on Middle Eastern affairs. In other words, the NRCC could not be simply assessed as an academic course run for solely educational purposes; it also had a diplomatic dimension, which would eventually define its success. This balance between education and policy understandably engendered challenges from the outset.

The diplomatic-academic balance. Academic standards frequently conflict with policy purposes. The gap between scholarly security studies and public policy agendas is all too familiar, and the NRCC is no exception to this phenomenon. Inside departments of international relations, theoretical discussions usually prevail over practical recommendations. This has sometimes been depicted as the "cult of irrelevance" inside the academic world.[14] Although the idea of the course was conceived at NATO Headquarters in Brussels, its content was designed in Rome by scholars. Interestingly, both parties (practitioners and scholars) told us in interviews that NATO HQ never specified any guidance in terms of content. "I did see the first curriculum that was brought to me, but I did not want to

[12] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

[13] Phone interview with the authors, October 2013.

[14] See Michael Desch, *"If, When, and How Social Science Can Contribute to National Security Policy"*, Paper presented during Security Studies Program Seminar, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 17 March 2010.

interfere and only emphasized the need to be as rigorous and ambitious as possible at academic level," explains former Deputy Secretary General Minuto Rizzo.[15]

An overview of the syllabus supports this claim. The first NRCC curriculum provided a broad introduction to the world of international affairs: actors, dynamics and global issues. Each week, the participants were required not only to make a critical reading of classic articles by such authors as Samuel Huntington, Francis Fukuyama or Joseph Nye, but also to focus on questions related to NATO and relevant strategic concepts. Participants discussed topics like prejudice, misconceptions and culture in international affairs. In addition, the history and dynamics of institutions such as the European Union, the United Nations, the African Union, multinational corporations, and non-governmental organizations were examined throughout the course. Topics included the values and political systems of the MD and ICI countries, as well as the religious and cultural differences within the region. An entire week was dedicated to understanding NATO. Participants learned about the Alliance's history, its engagements, its structure, its partnerships, and its transformation. The course also addressed global challenges: climate change, national identity, pluralism, resource scarcity, demography, terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction. Regional challenges in the Maghreb, the Mashreq, and the Gulf were also covered. The course ended with exercises in asymmetric warfare, multilateral decision-making, and crisis management. Through this ten-week course, participants became familiar with NATO and its concerns, and learned how to detect the elements that constitute a crisis, differentiate the symptoms from the causes, distinguish the stakeholders and their respective interests and goals, and communicate their strategy.

The principle of academic freedom, often cited by the interviewees whose comments were collected for this article, admittedly had predictable consequences. To organize a course on Middle Eastern affairs for an audience that did not systematically share the same view of history proved demanding. How was it possible to discuss Israel's wars with its Arab neighbours in an objective and open way, bearing in mind that Course Members' lives and careers had often been shaped by these conflicts? How could the Gulf War of 1990 be mentioned, without generating heated exchanges between Iraqi and Kuwaiti participants? All ten courses to date have involved clashes, with Course Members interrupting (or even screaming at) lecturers and occasionally walking out of the auditorium to make their position clear. One participant even threatened to write to the NATO Secretary General and demand the resignation of a Faculty Advisor. For NATO personnel, this emphasized a simple reality: mutual understanding did not automatically portend mutual agreement. When exchanges became heated, there was a real possibility of a diplomatic incident. This actually occurred once, when Morocco expressed its discontent following a lecturer's reference to "Western Sahara". In this case, the Moroccan representation in Brussels allegedly met Deputy Secretary General Bisogniero and threatened to withdraw their forces from all partnership activities with NATO. In such a scenario, the balance between the NRCC's twin priorities is obviously under severe pressure, with diplomacy outweighing scholarship. When all is said and done, the NRCC's five-year history has taught us that academic freedom ends when (real) diplomatic crises start.

[15] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

The civil-military balance. Usually, war colleges tend - with varying degrees of success - to emulate the model of civilian academic institutions.[16] In the case of the NATO Defense College, however, civilians remained marginal in the structure until the 2000s. The College reports to the Military Committee, not to the International Staff. Its main course does not rely on in-house scholars who teach in the classic sense of the term, but on military advisors who facilitate discussions among Course Members. The civilian position of Dean was introduced only in 2001. Within such an institution, the very creation of a faculty with its own scholars understandably created a clash of cultures. In addition, our interviews show that the involvement of the NATO International Staff and its push for a uniquely autonomous Faculty were clearly perceived as interference in the College's business. A former member of the Middle East Faculty explained to us bitterly that, when discussing financial issues at a College meeting, his comment to the effect that "We are in the same boat" prompted the following reply from one representative of the managerial team: "No, we are definitely not in the same boat."[17]

Institutional transformation and resistance to change are classic concepts in the sociology of organizations.[18] In the context of the NRCC, however, these became mixed up with the perception of a "civilian and politician [sic] inception."[19] In addition, it has already been mentioned that the initial idea suggested by the US was a training course as the precursor of a fully fledged educational programme, and that the intellectual content of the NRCC was the result of a compromise between scholarly discussion and demands from the military for concrete findings. The fact that the NRCC was included in the 2006 NATO Training Cooperation Initiative did not dissipate the ambiguities over its pedagogical purpose.[20] In her studies on military education, Joan Johnson-Freese shows how conflicting are the notions of education and training: "*Education, then as now, requires thinking and reflection, which takes time. Training has right and wrong answers which allow immediate progress measurement; education is incremental and involves grappling with ambiguity.*"[21]

While an academic discussion on Iran and the Gulf would mean exploring the perception, history, and distribution of alliances to evaluate any patterns involved, officers (whether from NATO or from partner countries) tend to look directly for solutions to the problem. Whereas academics like to highlight complexities and paradoxes, officers are in need of clear assessments and options. Within the NRCC, a classic illustration of this gap has repeatedly been seen in discussions over the drivers of conflict: with many Course Members of the opinion that religion plays a primary role in Middle Eastern conflicts, officers find themselves at odds with scholars who argue that Sunni-Shia tensions are essentially a political narrative and that religion as itself is only an instrument.[22]

But again, mutual understanding being the initial objective, education is a means rather than an end. This became even more salient following the Arab upheavals of 2011, as these confronted officers and diplomats attending the course with new realities to

[16] See John Hattendorf, *Sailors and Scholars: The Centennial History of the US Naval War College*, Rhodes Island, Naval War College Press, 1984.

[17] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

[18] See the seminal study, Michel Crozier, Erhard Friedberg, *Actors and Systems: The Politics of Collective Action*, Chicago, Chicago University Press, 1980.

[19] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

[20] Fritz Rademacher, "The NATO Training Cooperation Initiative", *NATO Review*, Spring 2007.

[21] Joan Johnson-Freese, "The Reform of Military Education: Twenty-Five Years Later", *Orbis*, Winter 2012, p. 138.

[22] On this issue, see the analysis by Emile Hokayem, "A simplistic sectarian lens magnifies extremist agenda", *The National*, 30 July 2012.

address. The case of Egypt is emblematic here. From a Western perspective, the evolution of discussions with Egyptian officials in the committees was fascinating, reflecting as it did the initial disarray when the Mubarak regime was toppled, the climate of suspicion after Morsi's election, and the subsequent support for the "second revolution" of July 2013. In these exchanges, what really mattered for NATO was not to deliver a perfect appraisal of Egyptian events, but to understand the way potential local partners perceived them.

Lessons learned from the NRCC experience

After five years and ten courses, what seemed at first to be an odd adventure for NATO - into academic cooperation with Middle Eastern partners - seems to have consolidated itself as a stable, institutionalized enterprise. At a human level, the whole of the management team that built up the course is now gone, and the seamless nature of the transition is proof that the NRCC is now a routine part of the NATO partnership programme. However, this organizational achievement should not overshadow the importance of assessing the successes and shortcomings of the initiative rigorously.

The paradox of participation. Early on, it was decided that an average of 25 participants should attend each course. The initial concern to attract delegates from Middle Eastern partner states led to frequent travel by the College leadership, as well as intensive promotion of the programme by officials in Brussels during diplomatic meetings. The challenge varied from country to country. Specifically, six out of the seven members of the MD (all but Israel) were granted subsidization for the duration of the course. The real problem, therefore, was to attract Course Members from Israel and the Gulf countries. In both cases, a look at the evolution of participation shows no clear pattern. For instance, after declining to send students, Saudi Arabia sent six Course Members in the fall of 2012

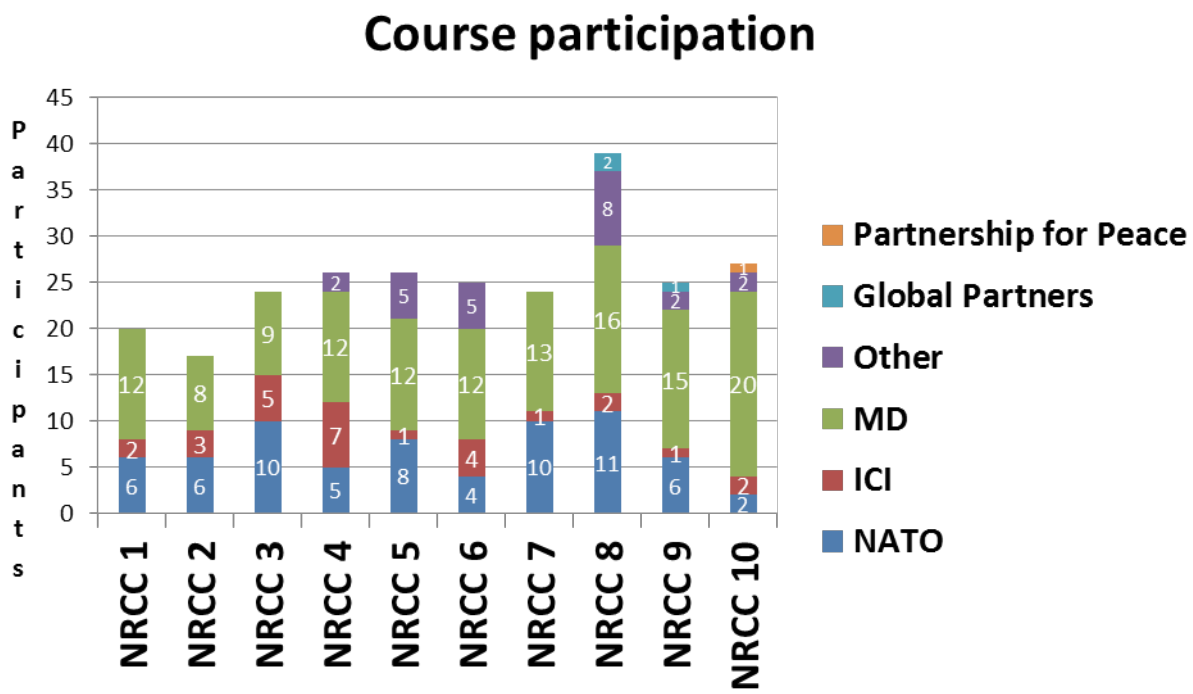

Fig. 1

NRCC participation from Course 1 to Course 10.

and then stopped again in 2013.[23] On the whole, though, partners' level of participation has grown steadily and, in some countries, the programme has become a widely acknowledged initiative which is now integrated into the career path of officers.

The real issue has actually been participation from NATO itself: the average NATO participation rate in the NRCC for the past 10 courses has been 27%. This means that only two out of ten NRCCs have achieved the desired 60:40 ratio between MD/ICI and NATO countries (NRCC-3 in 2010, and NRCC-7 in 2012). This problem was identified at the very outset by those planning the trial course. In the subsequent annual reports of the NATO Defense College, it was made clear to the authorities in Brussels that such a limited NATO footprint was at variance with the Alliance's stated commitment to educational cooperation with partners in the regions it is engaged in.[24] The problem is sometimes attributed to budget constraints or, in some cases, an explicit lack of interest. "It is an endless process: the course needs to be promoted to all NATO nations all the time," insists Ambassador Minuto Rizzo.[25] "There has always been a kind of prejudice on the NATO side that we were offering it to the Middle East, not the other way around," adds Guptill, first Director of the Middle East Faculty.[26]

Another explanatory factor might be the problem of finding the right target audience. Let us take the case of the French military. France is among the most active European NATO members in the region, with historical ties with most of the MD and ICI Partners. Every year, half a dozen

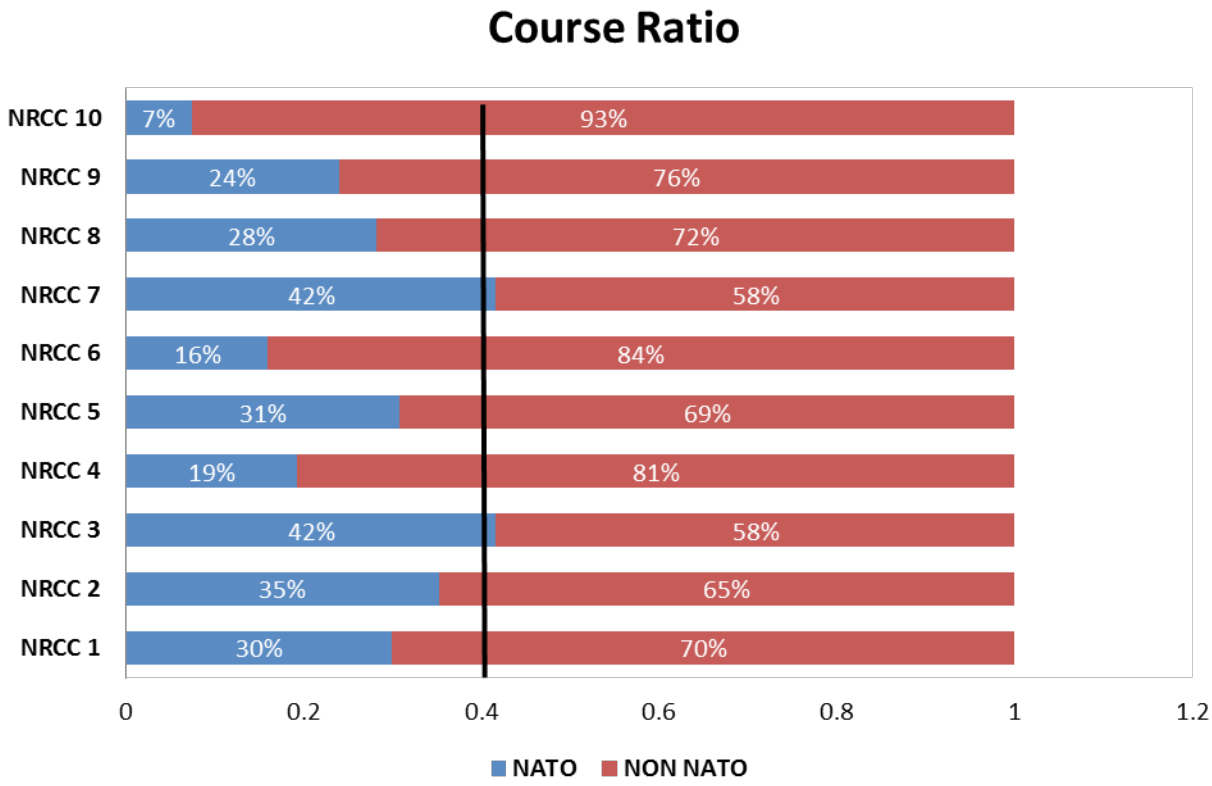

Fig. 2
NATO and non-NATO participation (NRCC 1 to NRCC10)

[23] See Annex II on details of participation.

[24] "Statistics on course participation", *NDC Annual Reports,* from 2009 to 2012.

[25] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

[26] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

French officers are trained in Arabic and then go to war colleges in the Gulf or the Middle East. However, conversations with several of these officers indicate that they have never heard of the programme. "I am not a NATO guy, I am seen as an Orientalist," specified one interviewee, as if the course's target audience within NATO were limited to those set to take on responsibilities at Alliance level.[27]

The low level of NATO participation seems paradoxical, since it was taken almost for granted that a NATO initiative like this would attract participants from within NATO. This leads some observers to portray the course as a "catastrophic success," meaning that the objective of reaching out to the Middle East has been achieved, but without the envisaged commitment on the NATO side. In the long term, serious thought should be given to this issue, as it might affect Arab countries' willingness to engage in a NATO initiative on which NATO itself is present only to a limited extent.

Extending the NRCC model to other regions? Over the five years of its existence, the NRCC has focused almost exclusively on NATO partnerships in the Middle East. However, it is worth noting that that Course Members from Pakistan and Moldova have attended the course, while potential participation from Afghanistan and India has also been envisaged. Issues such as South Asian security and Gulf-Asia relations have been introduced into the curriculum in recent years. In his speech for the 60th anniversary of the NATO Defense College, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen stated, "I could even imagine a new generation of officers from a democratic, post-Gaddafi Libya, attending courses on civil-military cooperation."[28] This led to a question, on that occasion, regarding the future of the programme. As the official title "NATO Regional Cooperation Course" does not circumscribe the course geographically to the Middle East and North Africa, it could be enlarged to include other partners.

The reform of NATO partnership policy introduced after the 2010 Lisbon Summit emphasized the idea of opening all activities to all partners.[29] In that perspective, over the next few years the NRCC could become a meeting place for representatives of NATO nations and their Partners across the Globe. However, such an evolution might dilute the initial aim into too broad a scope. "You need time to understand each other, ten weeks is already a period too short to better apprehend the Middle East. If you add Asia, Africa, you suddenly lose touch with all regions," argues a former representative at NATO HQ.[30]

But if the NRCC itself is unlikely to turn into a global regional course, its experience might be worth contemplating for other initiatives. As the US announced its pivot toward Asia during the first Obama presidency, it may be tempting to envision a NATO-Asia cooperation framework that could rely on similar instruments. In recent years, NATO has developed relations with Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, and Australia in the field of military cooperation. These ties were primarily born out of the Partners across the Globe initiative in the wake of the September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States. At the 2006 NATO Summit in Riga, some Allies tried to institutionalize these relations through the framework of a "global partnership forum," but it was opposed by other NATO nations which considered that the relationship should be limited to practical

[27] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

[28] Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the NATO Defense College for the 60th anniversary meeting, 20 May 2011. Available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_74535.htm

[29] Heidi Reisinger, "Rearranging Family Life and a Large Circle of Friends: Reforming NATO's Partnership Programmes", NATO Defense College, *Research Paper n. 72*, January 2012, p. 4.

[30] Interview with the authors, October 2013.

cooperation. Depending on future political resolve, the NRCC experience could be a relevant source of inspiration for a first step towards closer relations between the Atlantic Alliance and Asian Partners. It would help build personal ties and enhance awareness within NATO on Asian security issues.

Another potential use of the NRCC experience could be in Africa. The African continent matters for NATO, for two main reasons. The first is the enduring presence of terrorist cells of organizations such as Al-Qaeda or Al-Shabaab, that regularly target Western interests (tourist locations, foreign companies). The second security challenge is the piracy phenomenon along the shores of the continent, mostly in the Gulf of Aden, because of the collapse of Somalia.[31] In both cases, piracy and terrorism, one of the root causes appears to be the weakness of statehood in Africa, and more specifically the inability of the authorities to contain such criminal activities. Any NATO role here is likely to be limited to training initiatives, through its cooperation with the African Union (AU). In fact, NATO's relationship with the AU has been on the rise in recent years. Since 2005, at the request of the AU, the Alliance has been providing support for AU missions and capacity building: provision of airlift for the AU Mission in Sudan, strategic airlift, sealift and subject matter expertise for the AU Mission in Somalia, assessments of the operational readiness of the African Standby Force brigades.[32] As NATO assists the AU in the operational realm, it might make sense in the future to see this cooperation extended to the strategic level. Under these circumstances, a NATO-Africa programme inspired by the NRCC model could prove relevant.

Conclusion

The history of an academic initiative like the NATO Regional Cooperation Course gives texture to some key questions for NATO partnership policy - for example, how best to use education as an instrument to promote greater cooperation, and how to strike the right balance between educational and diplomatic priorities. As explained above, this learning process is still in its preliminary stages. Five years and ten courses afford a sufficient basis for an appraisal, but it is still too early for a definitive evaluation. It is, however, time for a deeper and broader discussion of NATO's partnership policies and of the role to be played by education in developing them to best effect. At the Chicago Summit in 2012, NATO Heads of State stressed the importance of expanding education and training, especially within the context of the Connected Forces Initiative. Indeed, the educational role of NATO is increasing substantially, as shown by the growth in recent years of the Alliance's Defence Enhancement Education Programme for its Partners across the Globe.[33] With the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan in 2014, this trend is likely to become the key pillar of NATO's relations with partners. In such a perspective, the experience gained by the Alliance through its Middle Eastern adventure is - and will continue to be - precious.

[31] Jonathan Stevenson, "Jihad and Piracy in Somalia", *Survival* 52 (1), 2010.

[32] Brooke Smith-Windsor (Ed.), AU-NATO Collaboration: Implications and Prospects, Rome, NATO Defense College, *Forum Paper n. 22*, February 2012, p. 18.

[33] Aaron Willschick, "In Too 'DEEP.' NATO as an Institutional Educator", Atlantic Council of Canada, 22 February 2013.

Fig. 3

NRCC: Timeline