

Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Foreword | ix |
| Acknowledgments | xi |
| Overview | xiv |
| | |
| PART ONE | 1 |
| A Changing Course for Arab History? | 3 |
| The Baghdad Fiasco | 9 |
| New Recipes, But the Same Cooks: George W. Bush's Greater Middle East Initiative | 15 |
| The Flight of the Phoenix | 19 |
| Finally on the Road South | 23 |
| From the Maghreb to the Levant | 33 |
| From the Mediterranean to the Sahara <i>Mauritania</i> | 43 |
| How to Learn to be Together | 51 |
| New Friends in the Gulf | 55 |
| The Istanbul Summit: NATO's Political Leaders at Work | 61 |
| The Challenge of Putting Political Commitments into Practice | 63 |
| A Weekend in the Gulf Region | 67 |
| Egypt: Always a Special Case | 79 |
| Saudi Arabia, the Core of the Gulf Region | 85 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| PART TWO | 91 |
| Israel at the Center of the Region | 93 |
| Oman, Between India and the Persian Gulf | 99 |
| The Hashemite Dynasty Rules Over a Country Seething with Problems | 103 |
| How Can We Get Along if We Speak Different Languages? <i>How to Make Progress Despite Differences</i> <i>The International Staff</i> | 107 |
| The Delights of Political Meetings | 115 |
| Impossible Iraq | 119 |
| The Green Olive Trees of Tel Aviv | 123 |
| One Does Not Speak If the King Does Not Ask | 127 |
| What Comes First, Policy or Communication? | 131 |
| Human Minds are Interoperable: The NATO Defense Col- lege Middle East Faculty | 137 |
| The Egyptians Remain Doubtful | 141 |
| Back to the Gulf, but Remember Ramadan | 145 |
| You Go to Riyadh Only if the King Signs Off on It | 151 |
| Opening up to New Players? <i>For All the Wrong Reasons, Syria is a Special Country</i> | 155 |
| The Battle for Libya | 161 |
| Qatar: The Smallest Superpower in the World | 165 |
| Lines in the Sand <i>The Key External Actors</i> <i>When the Men with the Beards Arrive</i> <i>A Look Beyond the Horizon</i> <i>And the economy?</i> <i>Conclusions</i> | 171 |
| Epilogue: The Concert of Nations in a Changing World. Where is Multilateralism Going? <i>The Transformation of the Alliance</i> <i>Europe's Telephone Number</i> | 187 |

Overview

History shows that we lived for millennia in isolated communities, having very little contact with one another. Although the passing of time saw the gradual formation of political entities, they initially had very little knowledge of each other and of the world in general. Today the situation is completely the reverse. Indeed, we have reached the point where, unless we jointly address the great challenges now facing us, our very survival is in jeopardy. The search for a wider base of consensus among the different regions of the world is the main theme and underlying reason for this book. It is an important subject for our times.

We are now living in a tightly knit interactive global society, in which it has become imperative to provide co-operative responses, and for which political stability is a decisive prerequisite. However, the world is far from enjoying a state of natural equilibrium, and is continually assailed not only by conflicting emotions and perceptions, but also by divergent interests. The awakening of peoples who were taken for granted until only very recently adds to the complexity. Moreover, we are aware that rational behavior by human beings, and also by governments, is not the rule.

Our starting point is that great area experts sometimes call the "arc of crisis," which extends from the Atlantic coast of North Africa to Central Asia and Pakistan, crossing Egypt, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Caucasus. This is the most difficult area in the world; its potential for destabilization far exceeds that found in any other part of the globe. However, any similarity ends there, because each country has its own characteristics, from Morocco to Egypt, to the Arabian Peninsula and the mountains of Yemen, the mythical kingdom of the Queen of Sheba.

It is a highly dangerous cocktail to handle and seems perpetually likely to explode. What is needed, and still lacking, is an international community able to manage the situation, with common objectives not motivated by seeking and concluding good business deals, securing oil, or containing the power of the Iranian ayatollahs. Many things come to mind, including perhaps a nostalgia that should not be confessed for the Cold War, which basically maintained a balance in world affairs and could easily be explained to everyone.

At the time this story begins, it was difficult to speak of any genuine cooperation that was beneficial for all parties concerned. These were times that saw car bombs continually exploding in the markets of Iraq, not to mention the war in Lebanon, Hamas, the Intifada, Gaza, and so on.

The natural conclusion is that, like the Balkans, this region has produced far more history than it has been able to consume. The Israeli-Palestinian crisis, for example, was an unavoidable theme in conversations held in any Arab capital, an irresolvable conflict that absorbed everyone's emotions, creating a sense of impotence and frustration, the cost of which was impossible to calculate.

As I experienced frequently in the period described here, from Morocco to Oman it was difficult to promote political projects on security issues and have them accepted. Opening doors and windows that have been closed for so long is a complex business. Yet we must move forward with the tools available, not those we dream of having if the world were different.

Here I may add, however, that as a result of my travelling along many roads from the Maghreb to Israel, and as far as the countries of the Gulf, I realized there also were facts pointing to a new arc of opportunities. Before our very eyes we could see an arduous search for reconciliation between tradition and modernity, via a process of change that, until the Arab Spring, admittedly was far too slow, and then suddenly took us by surprise. At the end of 2010, the Arab world appeared to have awakened and to be surging forward. Some years later, however, the hopes raised by what the ubiquitous Al Jazeera news service actually termed the "Arab Revolt" have been to a significant degree disappointed. Events seem to have moved far faster than our ability to chronicle them in books.

It is no accident that I mention Al Jazeera. It is the means by which we have seen the crowds marching in the streets of the Yemen, Tahrir Square at the height of tension, the population of Benghazi in jubilation for the choices they had made, and the bloody repression in Syrian cities and towns. I hesitate in fact to refer to these events as a “spring,” suggesting an impersonal changing of the seasons, when in most cases we witnessed power systems being challenged by their own people.

Comparisons have been made to the fall of communism and of the Soviet Union, but here we are talking about situations for which no clear parallel to those events can be made. What instantly come to my mind are the protests that swept over Europe in 1848. These were popular movements calling for constitutions and the end of the absolute power of monarchies.

Whatever the precise definition, though, we know that some things have changed profoundly. Even in the field of global strategy, important things have taken place, although with less fanfare than one might have expected, given the convergence of many disparate events. In Libya in 2011, for example, the Atlantic Alliance was given the task of implementing a UN Security Council resolution: the very first NATO operation to be carried out on Arab soil. Another great novelty was that this took place with the express approval of the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. Qatar, the United Arab Emirates, Jordan, and Morocco actively took part, the first two using Italian military bases. The North Atlantic Council, the Alliance’s highest decision-making body, was enlarged on this occasion to include these four countries, an unprecedented step.

But perhaps, for some perspective, we should take a step back and describe the international scene before September 2001. At that time, the Alliance was at the apex of its prestige, having won the Cold War, a clash of civilizations, in which the Warsaw Pact collapsed like a house of sand in March 1991. Then NATO successfully dealt with three serious crises in the Balkans — Bosnia, Kosovo, and Macedonia — where the United Nations and a united Europe had visibly failed. Indeed, while this was going on, the European Union’s institutions were almost invisible. As a result, however, of the 1999 Kosovo campaign, which exposed their technological

weakness, there was an attempt on the part of the EU leadership to put together some form of common defense policy. Another view was expressed by some well-known writers, such as Francis Fukuyama, according to whom History with a capital “H” was over and done with, and we were entering an indefinite period of peace.

These writers were abruptly silenced when, on live television, millions of people witnessed planes head towards the two most beautiful skyscrapers in New York and raze them to the ground. There was even greater surprise when it became known that the entire mission had been planned from distant highlands in south-central Asia, areas that were still unfamiliar in most Western capitals. This brought about a kind of death of geography: we no longer felt protected, as we had in the past, by distance, seas, and mountains. Consequently, 9/11 marked a historic watershed.

The US responded forcefully with every means it had. Considered a “war on terror,” so began the hunt for Osama bin Laden that was to end ten years later. At the same time, misunderstandings and stereotypes started to appear, including that of all too often equating Islam with terrorism. The Afghan crisis continues to this day, and prospects for a peaceful conclusion appear dim. It seems like a sort of bad dream, but it is all too real. It is also an example of problems that can afflict other weak, failing, or failed states, and how daunting the challenges of creating security in such places can be.

This sets the stage for our story of NATO’s response to the drama of September 2001, which included establishing a partnership between the Euro-Atlantic community and the countries of the Southern Mediterranean and the Persian Gulf. This was intended to extend collective security to these areas of the world. But why these countries in particular? Basically, because it was believed that only by engaging core Islamic countries could international security be guaranteed. The Atlantic Alliance, therefore, set out along the path of cooperative security. In other words, creating links among diverse and distant players, facing shared threats and with common interests. With what concrete objective? To put it simply, to bring these countries on board in an attempt to design a more equally shared world architecture. Obviously, this was not an easy goal, success was by no means assured, and even the final objectives were not fully defined.

Therefore, this is a story that has the Middle East, with its intermittent crises, as its stage, seen through the optic of NATO, the quintessentially Western institution, Euro-American at its core, that specializes in foreign and defense policy, which by their very nature are difficult as well as controversial. What makes this story interesting also is the novelty of the approach, and the effort made in those years to find, not without difficulty, a way to square the circle. This was an experiment I considered an important cause to which to dedicate myself.

However, this is the way of the future for managing global stability. The world is becoming increasingly complex, and there is no longer a dominant power. Productive dialogue among different peoples and cultures is essential, especially because never before in human history has interaction been as great as it is today. This change was inevitable, given that today's world is larger, colonialism is a thing of the past, pure power politics no longer pay off, and so-called coalitions of the willing are short-lived.

This book is based on the perspective of an organization that acts through consensus; in other words, it only takes decisions if the governments that comprise it are in agreement. This is why it is a political story, written in the modest hope of better explaining the complex nature of international action in our times.

Why write in the first person? As Deputy Secretary General of the Atlantic Alliance, for several years I was charged with initiating and promoting dialogue with the Arab countries of the Mediterranean and the Gulf, plus Israel. I could not have had a better assignment. It gave me great personal and professional satisfaction, enabling me to broaden my knowledge, not only of issues, but also of people, through experiences that otherwise would have been impossible. The events that have taken place since a young Tunisian fruit vendor, Mohammed Bouazizi, set himself on fire in December 2010 have reminded us of how enhanced dialogue and mutual understanding are extremely important for today, and given us a sense of the complexity of the issues, while raising many questions about the past and the future.

I recognize that it is impossible to recount THE history of something! In politics, as in personal life, there is never just one version. All depends on one's point of view, and the way you personally

experience the situation. It is an undefined sum of factors that everyone views in a different light.

It is thus not easy to give a unified interpretation of the many episodes that gradually did form a path, each having its own weight. The number of players between the Atlantic and the Persian (or Arabian) Gulf is very large, and the political and environmental frameworks equally varied. I hope that the reader understands the reasons for this unavoidable fragmentation, and hope to be able to share my thoughts and impressions. This work first and foremost is about my personal experiences in the field. I consider myself to have been a privileged observer, as it is very rare to have the fortune to enjoy extensive personal autonomy in dealing with governments and important players, as I was able to do in North Africa and the Middle East. Admittedly, dealing with unexpected situations sometimes can lead one to perceive an “exotic” dimension, which may unintentionally receive an overly “literary” treatment in the telling.

The goal of these initiatives was to gradually create a common culture. In other words, to work with the aim that the West and the Arab world might share at least some basic ideas with regard to the great geo-political scenario that surrounds us. In this plan, squaring the circle meant including Israel, an objective that was energetically pursued.

To bring us closer together, serious committed dialogue is required in order to shape what might be called a “common sentiment.” In this regard, I can say that some common points of interest were rapidly identified on issues that at the beginning seemed intractable.

A further objective in writing this book was to explain the central role played by the collaboration between the Atlantic Alliance and Arab countries in events such as the war in Libya. It is difficult, though, to fully grasp the continuing influence of events in the years chronicled here (2003-2007).

Finally, the book emphasizes the importance of multilateralism as a methodology, and as the most advanced form of international relations. Today, many international players turn up their nose at multilateralism, preferring exclusive traditional relationships between individual governments. In this way, only each country’s national “egotism” is cultivated.

Obviously, it is difficult to make important decisions quickly within the European Union, the United Nations, or NATO. However, negotiation among diverse viewpoints is the best approach for consolidating different interests and values. Even if it is difficult and slow, only in this way can major projects be developed, such as the rapprochement, described here, among highly diverse regions of the world, regions that are in fact already permanently interconnected in other ways.

In the conclusions, I point out that Europeans must believe in themselves, and in their cooperation with the peoples of other world regions, who are pursuing challenging paths. In this way, Europeans also achieve their own interests. This is another way of saying that those who remain absent from the table are always wrong.

To help make this book more comprehensible, I divided it into two parts. It opens with the political situation in the Middle East following September 11, 2001 and the invasion of Iraq. At this time, two parallel initiatives were launched concerning the Mediterranean and the Gulf, and ratified by the summit of NATO's heads of state and government in Istanbul in June 2004. I describe the first exploratory missions to Arab countries in the Mediterranean and the Gulf, and to Israel, highlighting our main objectives in the political-strategic field and the reactions of the countries involved.

The initial political framework was naturally a little confusing on all sides and only gradually became clearer. What emerged was an unexpectedly great interest in dialogue on the part of various governments. There was a growing belief that there was much more in common than initially thought, including with regard to the strategic issues where military and foreign policy intersect.

The second part deals with a series of missions in the region that went beyond the stage of initial approaches and proposed ideas for building a common architecture. This is followed by a number of historical-political analyses that explain how the most important moments of this process are related to current international dynamics.

There are clear differences among the Mediterranean countries, those of the Levant, and those of the Gulf. Then there is Israel and, bordering the Sahara, Mauritania. To better understand events, it

is important to view them also in their local context, otherwise it is impossible to understand the overall picture. This section ends with an attempt to draw lessons from past experience for the future and to give an overall view of developments in North Africa and the Middle East.

The book closes with a chapter on the functioning of the international system, multilateralism most especially. This needs to be discussed, because it is so poorly understood among those who are not in some sense experts, and yet is so important for everyone. It is impossible to understand the dynamics of events unless we know how the international bodies of which our countries are members actually work.

An alternative title for this book could have been: "In praise of diversity." Its theme is about finding common values and interests among peoples who have always viewed each other as "different." A tacit optimism runs through these pages; the implicit idea is that it is possible to do unexpected things when there is conviction and a good cause to fight for.

My conclusion at the end of this study is that the best way to advance international governance is by dialogue among and between regions. We can call such "cooperative security" a key factor in tomorrow's world. Why? Without it, the world would be unstable, lacking dominant powers, but with more competition, somewhat akin to an oscillating pendulum. It would be a world with more players than there are today, and one in which it would not be possible for Western values to prevail. This dialogue should be a top priority and tirelessly pursued. The first steps in this direction are described in these pages.

This political journey begun in the Greater Middle East forms part of an evolutionary process underway also in other parts of the world, and should be viewed as such. These historical developments are in the hands of peoples who must make their own choices. This does not diminish, however, the important and positive role that the great democracies can have in accompanying them in these processes, without seeking to dominate them.

PART ONE

A Changing Course for Arab History?

“Do you always travel like this, in planes laid on just for you?”, enquired the Jordanian air force general on welcoming me at Amman military airport. He looked at me with a somewhat surprised and worried air as I descended the steps of an impressive and cavernous C-130, followed by some assistants. Everyone was fairly exhausted. We had left Algeria at dawn in heavy rain in order to arrive on time at 4:00 PM in Jordan. We travelled from west to east along the southern shores of the Mediterranean, flying over many centuries of history, perhaps too many for just one trip.

With a forced air of confidence, I replied in an apparently decisive manner: “Yes, of course! Security is always necessary when travelling!” The general seemed only half-convinced and replied in a more cheerful tone: “Well! Naturally! I understand that the Atlantic Alliance is important, but normally this plane is used for carrying a company of paratroopers.”

Bureaucracy sometimes has procedures that are impossible to understand. I am sure the C-130 was assigned to me simply because it was the only aircraft available. But, if we had sought to make an impression, we certainly had succeeded! However this is not a story about aircraft.

The Atlantic Alliance had never been part of the Middle East’s political framework, which periodically took shape then fell apart again. The Alliance had been little concerned with the southern regions of the world, and even less with Arab countries. In all its publications, NATO wrote that the challenges were to be found on the plains of Central Europe, from the Rhine to Moscow. At its headquarters in Evere, in the rainy Belgian capital, the names of all

Russian provinces were known by heart, and there were more than enough specialists and interpreters who knew everything that happened between East Berlin and the Urals.

Together with an air of austerity, there reigned a culture of secrecy, even concerning minor issues. The corridors were plastered with warnings not to discuss confidential matters on the phone. More than once I was tempted to make a collection of them. The terrible coffee was legendary, but became almost a point of pride in that environment permeated by Anglo-American political-military culture, where traditions of frugality and understatement still mattered.

The Fulda Gap, a valley in Thuringia, was the focal point of this culture, a threat that was partly real and partly imaginary. According to the analysts, this was the place where a Soviet invasion of the Federal Republic of Germany, and the world's greatest tank battle, would take place. In Cold War days, the tank was the weapon par excellence. It was calculated that if all the tanks available were put in a line they would cover the length of the Netherlands.

To the south, everything was different. This area seemed of secondary importance, if not irrelevant, during the long years of the Cold War, which we are now forgetting far too quickly. At that time, maps seen hanging on walls at NATO Headquarters ended around Sicily. Indeed the south was viewed simply as a side issue in the 20th-century version of the "Great Game." A metaphorical "here be dragons," that in more recent times has been turned completely upside down. Enough thought is almost never given to how, in recent centuries, only the northern parts of the world have been considered of any consequence, in particular the Anglo-American part. The south was considered a place for travel and adventure, romantic inspiration, lost civilizations, sources of energy, raw materials, and manual labor, and for all that was "other." The countries of the south were not considered real international protagonists, because important world matters were decided elsewhere. Indeed, often in places where there was a very vague idea of what went on in the rest of the world.

True, within the overall context of NATO's post-Cold War outreach, heavily focused on the states of the former Soviet Bloc, the Alliance also had initiated a program of case-by-case contacts with

countries in the Mediterranean region, with the stated objective of strengthening regional stability. By November 1995, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia had joined the Mediterranean Dialogue, with Algeria joining in 2000.

Frankly speaking, however, this was a low-profile activity, with little energy or political impetus. In fact, when I joined NATO in 2001, I asked the Dean of the North Atlantic Council, i.e. the longest-serving ambassador, for some guidelines on this program, and was advised not to waste too much time on it.

Everything suddenly changed after September 11, 2001. Washington had decided that the new priority for international security was the Islamic world, centered in the southern Mediterranean and around the Persian/Arabian Gulf. The latter generally was called “the Gulf” to make it clear that only one gulf had any real importance. I was a witness to 9/11 and of the speed with which this line was firmly adopted by the United States and the other principal countries, leading to a complete turn-around in priorities. As if it were necessary, a further sign that policies can be the result of unexpected situations.

It seemed in those days that, besides the Twin Towers, the very world itself was collapsing. Lord Robertson, Secretary General of NATO, wanted to make NATO’s presence known, but in the first few hours it was not even clear where the attackers had come from. Immense confusion reigned, including fears of follow-on terrorist attacks. Edgar Buckley, Assistant Secretary General for Defense Policy, was the first to write that, if the attacks originated from a foreign country, in other words, an external attack against one of the allies, Article 5 of the NATO Treaty could be invoked, the crucial article that makes an attack against one NATO ally an attack against all.

Initially, the Americans thought this was a step too far. However, they quickly understood that solidarity expressed by the Alliance could carry great political weight and supported the proposal. George Robertson glued himself to the telephone for twenty-four hours, talking to all the NATO heads of government, and obtained their consent to consider the terrorist attacks in the US an act of aggression against which the Allies had to intervene jointly. It was a historic decision for the Alliance and the United States, and made headlines all over the world.

In this context, there was a sudden realization of the great potential a dialogue that brought to the table representatives of Europe, North America, the Arab world, and Israel offered for security. The Arabs were skeptical at first, not knowing how to interpret this sudden interest. Was there something in it for them? Such sudden interest and attention coming from the northern part of the world seemed a little dubious. Western declarations of affection seemed a bit ambiguous to those being courted after years of relative neglect and even exploitation.

Though we should be wary of falling into the trap of imagining that the Arab world is as it is often depicted in literature. I could not help but think of a book that had fired my adolescent imagination. T. E. Lawrence, who had fought alongside the Arab insurgents in World War I against the dying Ottoman Empire wrote: "The [British] Cabinet raised the Arabs to fight for us by definite promises of self-government afterwards ...It was evident from the beginning that if we won the war these promises would be dead paper" (*Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, Introductory Chapter).

In general, Arab governments lacked democratic legitimacy in fragile countries with stagnant economic and political systems controlled by a few people. Across the Arab world, from the Atlantic to the Gulf, material wealth and power were unequally distributed in closed societies. Often the main concern of Arab governments has been to maintain internal stability, rather than to promote the countries' development. Declarations of brotherhood with neighbors have turned out to be contradictory whenever serious problems have arisen.

A classic example is the dispute between Morocco and Algeria (plus the Polisario Front and Mauritania) over the Western Sahara, which the United Nations has been trying to mediate for decades. The land borders between the two biggest countries in the Maghreb remain closed, although UN efforts to promote a negotiated settlement continue.

There is also a chronic dearth of planning in the Arab world. Neither European domination nor that of the Ottoman Empire provided many benefits, and no economically homogeneous area has ever been created. Quotes by famous historians such as Braudel, who spoke of a sea that unites, need to be taken with a grain of salt. For the most part, they are simply literary formulas.

Naturally, political passivity and the weakness of civil society may be explained and justified in a historical context. However, it is wise to remember that for centuries the Mediterranean has been a sea between peoples who still do not know each other well, and with values and interests that are often perceived as divergent.

In part because of such factors, while the trauma of 9/11 and the invocation of Article 5 broadly speaking heightened the focus of the NATO members on threats originating in the Arab countries, and the Arab-Israeli crisis, a contributing factor, was as far as ever from a solution, NATO was still cautious about undertaking any political initiatives vis-à-vis the Arab states. Over decades of laser-like focus on managing, very successfully, the Soviet and Warsaw Pact threat, NATO had become, in effect, a quite conservative organization. It was only in the aftermath of the 2003 Iraq war, which provoked an unprecedented crisis within the Alliance, that a concerted political outreach to the Arab countries (and Israel) would begin.

Fortunately, the Atlantic Alliance as such was not directly involved in the initial Iraq adventure, which nonetheless opened up wounds that despite, every good intention, have not yet completely healed. Nevertheless, every attempt was made to save what could be saved, and to present the outward appearance of shared basic values. The old Atlantic Alliance in those years somehow remained the foundation of that political instrument still proudly called the "Euro-Atlantic community."