

Arab Public Opinion and NATO after the International Military Operations in Libya

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Abstract: *Although, NATO has always taken into account public opinion in its member states, the emergence of new Information and Communication Technologies and the extension of its out-of- area operations have given NATO a new impetus to extend the space of communication beyond the Alliance countries. With regard to the NATO's partnership with Arab countries, the Arab spring uprisings have created a new political atmosphere in which many signs of a positive perception of NATO and its members states have been expressed, and can be flourished with more support to new governments arising from this unprecedented political and social mobility in the region. So, giving the growing influence of Arab public opinion on the region countries' foreign policies, in the post-Arab spring era, getting public support is one of the fundamental preconditions for the success of the NATO cooperation initiatives in the Arab world. The article aims to give an approximate picture of the current Arab public's perception of NATO. It deals with the vision of the Arab elites and public opinion on the Alliance after its participation in overthrowing the Gaddafi regime, surveys the opinion of some segments of Moroccan public opinion, and explores some possible kinds of relations between Arab countries and NATO viewed by the Arab public.*

Keywords: NATO, Libya, Arab public opinion, perception

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Introduction

Today, any state or non-state actor acting in the international scene can no longer disregard the trends in public opinion when making critical decisions. Therefore, they always seek to obtain the support and satisfaction of the public and prevent its opposition. Some governments spend large sums of money and mobilize tremendous human and organizational resources for this purpose.

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Although, NATO has always taken into account public opinion in its member states, the emergence of new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), especially the internet, has given it a new impetus to extend the space of communication beyond the Alliance countries. In the virtual sphere, NATO started early using the internet in transmitting its image to the public. It has established itself on the most popular and widely used social networks and social media sites like Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Flickr and others. It has showed a great flexibility in absorbing quickly new ways of listening, sharing information and engaging in conversational communication with people.¹ The current NATO's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, is the first ever Secretary General who has made extensive use of the social web at NATO.²

In NATO's new Strategic Concept adopted at the Summit meeting in Lisbon on November 19, 2010, public diplomacy becomes the main soft power tool used by NATO to gain hearts and minds. The NATO Public Diplomacy Division, created in 2004, is now the central body that assumes this task.

Since its creation in 1949 and throughout the Cold War, NATO had been seen by the majority of Arab public, inspired by nationalist ideas, as the military arm of imperialism against the perceived communist threat. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the end of the "red menace", an important part of Arab and Muslim public opinion, based on statements by some western politicians, believed that Islam became the new main enemy of NATO. This perception began to fade since the NATO intervention in Bosnia and Herzegovina against the former Republic of Yugoslavia to protect Bosnian Muslim civilians from Serbian forces. But the great development occurred in the Arab Spring age, with the international military operations in Libya leading to the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, which marked undoubtedly a turning point in the perception of NATO not only in Libya³ but also in the entire Arab region. After that, the image of the Alliance has positively changed in the eyes of a large segment of the Arab public in comparison to how it was before.

The Arab spring uprisings have made a dramatic change in political and geopolitical landscape in the Arab world. Today, the state is no longer the dominant political actor in the region; however, public opinion and the whole spectrum of civil society have gradually become key players in political and social scene vis-à-vis the state apparatus. So, that's why now, addressing the general public in the region, rather focusing only on governments and elites, becomes vital for NATO. Given the growing influence of public opinion on the region countries' foreign policies, getting public support is one of the fundamental preconditions for the success of the NATO cooperation initiatives in the Arab world.

The paper aims to give an approximate picture of the current Arab public's perception of NATO. It deals with the vision of the Arab elites and public opinion on the Alliance after its participation in overthrowing the Gaddafi regime, surveys the opinion of some segments of Moroccan public opinion and explores some possible kinds of relations between Arab countries and NATO viewed by the Arab public.

NATO-led Military Operations in Libya and Arab Public Opinion: One Target and Many Justifications

The overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, which was considered by the UN as a threat to international and regional security, has been the common goal of all who supported the Libyan uprising. Regardless of the supposed undeclared agenda of each actor interested in the crisis of Libya, it was the first time that the ambition of the majority of Arab public met the goal of the NATO

member states. Despite those different motivations probably stimulated each one, a set of elements had combined to make those different interests converge in a single target, to put an end to Gaddafi's regime.

Humanitarians Reasons

A serious question: what would have happened if NATO had not intervened? In the beginning of the uprising in Benghazi, Gaddafi and his sons prepared a great assault on the city. They vowed "no mercy" in attack on Benghazi, and they threatened that everything will be over in 48 hours. Those statements and words were not only threats, but Gaddafi forces started creeping closer to Benghazi. Observers argued that it would have been a massacre in the city if French forces and later NATO had not intervened to halt the advance of Gaddafi troops into Benghazi. Misrata, the country's third largest city, witnessed some of the most gruesome crimes committed by Gaddafi forces against Libyan civilians.

Libyan rebels and NGOs have amassed thousands of documents implicating Gaddafi forces in brutal war crimes and crimes against humanity in Libya, including "murder, torture, rape, forced internment, and disappearance." Those crimes were used by Gaddafi forces as weapons of war. Because of these atrocities, Chief Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Luis M. Ocampo, requested the court to issue warrants against Gaddafi, his son, Saif Al-Islam, and his intelligence chief, Abdullah Senussi, for war crimes and crimes against humanity. Horrible crimes and atrocities committed by Gaddafi forces against the Libyan people since February 17, 2011, the start of the uprising in Benghazi, made the majority of Arab public opinion convinced of the necessity of an urgent international military intervention to stop the massacre.

Local Request And Regional Support

The local public support of the NATO-led operations was a key element of the success of this military campaign against the Gaddafi regime. The most populated cities and regions, that represent the vast majority of Libyans rose up against Gaddafi, requested a non-fly zone and the intervention of NATO members. An international coalition led by the US, France, UK and Canada decided to act in accordance with the UN resolution 1973 (March 17, 2011). Intervening to protect civilian people was the sole solution of the crisis in Libya since Gaddafi and his family members refused to give up the power and stop attacks against the revolting cities.

Concerning the regional public opinion, although, certain voices were sceptical about the perceived NATO long term goals, the overwhelming majority of the Arab public requested international intervention. The unprecedented consent of the Arab public on the NATO military operations in Libya gave them a significant support to succeed. In the beginning of the Libyan uprising, many Arab prodemocracy NGOs launched campaigns requesting international intervention. For example, By February 25, 2011, before even the formation of the National Transitional Council of Libya (NTC), 200 Arab NGOs coordinated their efforts by calling for the protection of civilians in Libya through a UN sponsored and Arab League-led No-Fly Zone.⁴

In April 2011, an opinion survey of 1,000 respondents was conducted by *The Doha Debates*, a BBC-TV program emanating from Qatar, in 16 Arab countries showed that more than half the mainly-Arab audience at the program supported military action led by the Western alliance.⁵ The absence of demonstrations condemning the intervention of NATO is a clear indication of the support that the Arab public provided to military measures taken by the Alliance. In deed, the pressure of international and Arab public opinion and NGOs, with the support of some prominent political and religious figures, has influenced the crucial decisions taken later by international and regional institutions, including the UN⁶, Arab League,⁷ Gulf Cooperation Council,⁸ that provided the legal and political umbrella for the leading role of NATO in ending the Gaddafi regime.

One of the most important elements that made the Arab public to accept the international intervention is that the UN Security Council Resolutions did not authorize landing troops on the ground which could have been considered, if it had happened, by a large part of the Arab public as a foreign invasion by invoking the case of Iraq.

International Authorization

Resolution 1973 adopted by the UN Security Council on March 17, 2011, was a defining moment not only in the history of the United Nations but also for the contemporary development of international law. It was one of the few cases where the United Nations reached this high level of agreement on the military implementation of the United Nations resolutions. Acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nation, the Resolution established a no-fly zone over Libyan airspace, and authorized Member States “to take all necessary measures, notwithstanding paragraph 9 of resolution 1970 (2011), to protect civilians and civilian populated areas under threat of attack in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, including Benghazi, while excluding a foreign occupation force of any form on any part of Libyan territory” (para. 4). The resolution stated also that the situation in Libya at that time continued to constitute a threat to international peace and security. Resolution 1973 provided clearly the legal basis for the NATO-led operations.

The NATO-led operations in Libya fall within the principle of the “Responsibility to Protect”, known as R2P, which was adopted at the 2005 UN World Summit. The principle is a framework for taking action to prevent or halt four mass atrocity crimes: genocide, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and ethnic cleansing. The “Responsibility to Protect” requires three conditions which obviously existed in the case of Libya:

1. A state has a responsibility to protect its population from mass atrocities,
2. The international community has a responsibility to assist the state if it is unable to protect its population on its own.
3. If the state fails to protect its citizens from mass atrocities and peaceful measures have failed, the international community has the responsibility to intervene through coercive measures such as economic sanctions. Military intervention is considered the last resort.⁹

In this context, it is worth mentioning the difference between the Libyan and Syrian cases in the terms of quick international intervention. The National Transitional Council of Libya has achieved broad international recognition, as the only legitimate representative of the Libyan people, once it was established. For instance, by mid-July 2011, the entire Libya Contact Group decided to recognise the NTC as the legitimate authority of Libya. In addition, the unity of the Libyan opposition, gave an additional support to the NATO-led operations against Gaddafi forces. These two key conditions have not been achieved until now in the case of Syria, where the opposition is still divided and disorganized.

Arab Elites and NATO: Between Hesitation and Implicit Support

The Arab elite perception of NATO has been formed especially both by how Arabs perceive foreign policies of some Western powers, especially the US, UK and France, and by how the Alliance has recently dealt with some crises, e. g. in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan, Iraq and finally in Libya. Since its creation until the collapse of Eastern Bloc in 1989, some Arab elite had been looking to NATO by the perception prevailing during the Cold War. After that, some others thought Islam became new NATO’s enemy after the communist threat disappeared. Today, the position of Arab elites towards NATO fluctuates between their previous prejudices characterized by mistrust and suspicion of Western powers, and the new perception which is formed recently by

Alliance's role in the success of the Libyan uprising. The previous image has not yet changed completely, but the support given by the Arab public to the NATO-led operations in Libya was a significant development of the Alliance's image in the region.

To address partially the new position of Arab elites towards NATO, the paper presents positions of some actors playing today significant role in the formation of Arab public opinion. I selected two of the most influential media in the region, *Al-Jazeera Channel* and *Al-Hayat* newspaper, and the most currently influential religious figure, *Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qardawi*.

Al-Jazeera Channel

The paper focuses on Al-Jazeera channel because of its significant influence on Arab public opinion and its full sympathy for the Arab Spring uprisings, except the case of Bahrain where the channel has covered the demonstrations with some reservations. In the case of Libya, the editorial line of Al-Jazeera Channel was characterized by full and clear support for the uprising. The way in which the channel dealt with the event and type of personalities invited to discuss and comment on the NATO operations reflected not only the channel position towards the uprising but also its view on the NATO intervention. It was clear, when Al-Jazeera journalists interview any guest on the crisis of Libya and later on Syria, they ask them specific questions to push them to defend the international military intervention in the two countries, or at least to show, implicitly or explicitly, to the audience the necessity of international military intervention. This led some to criticize Al-Jazeera for being a propaganda tool of NATO during the Libyan crisis. The absence of criticism of NATO during the crisis of Libya from Al-Jazeera programs was quite remarkable, in comparison to other cases especially Afghanistan, where the channel launched scathing criticism on NATO and its allies.

So, what has changed?

There are two main reasons that can explain the change of Al-Jazeera's position towards NATO. The first is the leading role that Qatar wants to play in the Arab world. The second is the political and ideological backgrounds of Al-Jazeera journalists who have expressed their clear support and sympathy with the Arab Spring uprisings.

Concerning the first reason, Qatar has emerged during the recent decade as a key actor in the region using several soft power mechanisms, including establishing and sponsoring Al-Jazeera Channel, to improve its regional and global position. It is apparent that the creation of Al-Jazeera channel did not reflect only the ambitions of the Qataris to influence the region, but also it reflected a specific view of Qatari leaders about the role that should be played by media and Arab public in the political change in the region. Libya and Syria have been two important occasions where the Qatari and NATO desires converge. Qatar and other Arab countries cooperated with NATO to support anti-Gaddafi Libyans not because they have changed their positions completely on the Atlantic Alliance, but because they agreed on a common goal: overthrow the Gaddafi regime.

The second main reason is the political attitudes of Al-Jazeera's journalists and editors towards Arab Spring uprisings. It is argued that the most influential journalists of Al-Jazeera are nationalist and Islamic-oriented in some way or another. The political and ideological convergence between the most influential journalists in Al-Jazeera and the most powerful actors in the Arab Spring uprisings – Islamic movements, has been certainly a significant factor in changing the attitudes of the Channel towards NATO. Unlike other Gulf countries, especially Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, Qatar has good relations with Islamic movements, mainly branches of the "Muslim Brotherhood" in all Arab countries, who have been among the key actors in the Arab Spring uprising, and almost certain to play a crucial role in the next generation of Arab politics.¹⁰ In fact, with regards to the manner in which Al-Jazeera Channel dealt with the NATO-led operations in Libya, there were four main actors with one stated goal:

convergence of interest of Qatar leadership, Al-Jazeera, key local actors in the Arab Spring and NATO for ending the Gaddafi regime.

***Al-Hayat* Newspaper**

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Despite its great caution in dealing with Saudi and Gulf issues, *Al-Hayat* newspaper remains one of the Arab newspapers that reflect to a certain degree the position of Arab elite on Arab and world issues. The editorial line of the *Al-Hayat* newspaper agreed on the need to overthrow the Gaddafi regime for several reasons associated generally with the kind of its relationship with Saudi Arabia, but at the same time, the newspaper editors fear the rise of Islamist groups in the post-Gaddafi Libya.¹¹

There is a subtle difference between how the *Al-Hayat* approached the uprisings in Libya and Syria in the term of the international intervention. While it supported the international military intervention in both countries, it has been more cautious towards the rising political forces in post-Gaddafi Libya. But in the case of Syria, *Al-Hayat* editors criticised the West and NATO for failing to intervene and support militarily the opposition movement. Elias Harfoush¹² wrote about the paradox of the Western approaches towards the two crises, arguing that the West declared its reluctance to intervene in Syrian to stop the tragedy faced by the people because of the disintegration of the opposition, while NATO led military operations against the Gaddafi regime even if there were many differences within the National Transitional Council in Libya and among the Libyan opposition. However, these differences did not prevent the West to support the Libyan opposition politically and militarily.¹³ The ambivalent position of *Al-Hayat* stems from its doubts about the ambitions of the Islamic movements, which occupied a privileged position in the leadership of the Arab Spring uprisings, while its absolute support for intervention in Syria can be explained by the desire of Saudi Arabia to undermine Iranian influence in the region.

In comparison with Al-Jazeera, *Al-Hayat* criticizes and looks suspiciously at the new situation in Libya. Newspaper writers have not ceased to criticize the new position of Arab and Libyan Islamists toward the role of NATO in the region.¹⁴ Moreover, some of them use the “Islamist Scarecrow” idea to intimidate NATO from the risk of the control of Islamic groups on the southern shore of the Mediterranean.¹⁵

Sheikh Yusuf Al-Qaradawi

Yusuf al-Qaradawi an Egyptian-born Islamic scholar, who is based in Qatar, is considered a spiritual guide of many Islamic movements and associations all over the world. His popular TV program, “*ash-Sharia wal-Hayat*” (Islamic Law and Life), on Al-Jazeera Channel, which has an estimated audience of 60 million worldwide,¹⁶ plays a significant role in forming today’s Muslim opinion.

Yusuf al-Qaradawi expressed clearly his endorsement of the NATO-led operations in Libya, through his interviews given to international media,¹⁷ the weekly Friday sermons, and his TV program. Al-Qaradawi also has frequently expressed his support to an international military intervention in Syria. Al-Qaradawi, and other religious figures sharing his point of view, justified the recourse to the international military intervention by the inability of Arab countries to do so. Such a position gave actually legitimacy to the NATO intervention in the eyes of a large segment of Arab elite and public opinion.

It is worth mentioning that during previous crisis in the Islamic and Arab worlds, in which NATO and Western countries intervened militarily, Islamic and nationalist movements all over the Islamic world had organized many demonstrations to reject and condemn these interventions. However, in the Libyan crisis we did not hear about such anti-intervention demonstrations and slogans. In contrast, many demonstrations had been held to call for international intervention to protect civilians from atrocities committed by the Gaddafi regime. The significant role played by moderate Islamic movements in the Arab Spring uprisings is another important reason that can

explain to a large extent both the implicit support of NATO operations in Libya by Islamic elite and the absence of major opposition to it in the Arab world.

Even if some Islamic scholars, representing or identifying with official institutions especially in the Gulf countries, expressed the same opinion in the second Gulf war in 1990-1991 when Saddam invaded Kuwait, the Al-Qaradawi position was particular, because of both his independence of any particular official religious institution and his close relation with the majority of moderate Islamic movements which give him a huge influence on the Arab street.

Is this a shift in Islamic perception towards NATO or just an ephemeral political position dictated by current regional circumstances? What is important now is not to choose the first possibility or the second one, rather is how to benefit from new political and social atmosphere in the Arab world in order to improve the image of NATO and its member states by seeking new models of cooperation and partnership.

Moroccan Students and NATO: an Intermediate Position between the two Extremes

A poll conducted in March 2012 by the author among 600 students of Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fez, Morocco, to survey their opinion towards NATO after its participation in overthrowing the Gaddafi regime. Six in ten of the respondents (60.16%) were master students and four in ten (39.83%) were BA students. Three quarters (77.66%) of them were students at the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Social Science; 13.5% were students at the Faculties of Letters and Human Sciences and 8.83% were from the Faculty of Science. I chose to focus in this survey on students, especially Master students, because of the significant role has been played by the Arab youth during the present Arab Spring uprisings, the majority of whom are students or recently graduated. The questionnaire contained five specific questions. Four of them were single-select multiple type, and one was multi-select multiple choice type.

The first question was “What is your opinion on the participation of NATO in air strikes to overthrow the Gaddafi regime in Libya?”. Slightly more than half (53.66%) of the students respondents were favourable, 44% were unfavourable, and only six percent (6.33%) were undecided. If we take into account the popular support in Morocco for the uprising in Libya, it can be argued that the vast majority of Moroccan public opinion supported the NATO-led operations in Libya. According to the 2011 edition of annual survey of six Arab countries conducted by Shibley Telhami of the University of Maryland in October 2011, more than one-third of respondents supported the international intervention in Libya. The survey found that 35% of respondents said that the intervention was the right thing to do, while 64% thought it was the wrong thing to do.¹⁸

The second question “In your opinion, does NATO have special goals behind this participation?” intended to explore the respondents’ perception of the possible hidden intentions of NATO. Only four percent (4%) said NO, whereas the overwhelming majority (93%) answered YES, believing that, in addition to the humanitarian reasons, NATO intervened in Libya motivated also by the interests of its member states.

The third question “If YES, what kind of goals were they?” related to the previous one, includes multi-select choice: economic, political, military and religious. A strong majority of the students respondents (87.66%) said economic goals, three quarters (77%) marked political, one-third (33%) selected military, and only one-fifth (20.16%) believed that religious goals were among the reasons of the NATO operations in Libya. The remarkable observation in these answers is the relative weakness of the religious determinant in the view of Arab public opinion, or at least in the eyes of the respondents, towards NATO. With regards to economic, military and political goals as undeclared objectives, it can be understood by the fact that they are still a commonplace in international relations. This may explain also the promises of the National Transitional Council of Libya to give priority in the investment and reconstruction to countries that helped them to end the rule of Gaddafi.

The fourth question “Do you agree with a NATO intervention in support of the revolution in Syria?” aimed to explore the opinion of the respondents towards any potential intervention of NATO in others cases in the Arab region. Four in ten (39%) of the polled students were in favour of the intervention, half of them (50.66%) disagreed, and ten percent (10.33%) were undecided. When comparing these results and those found in the first question concerning Libya, we note the decline of the support ratio for the potential NATO intervention in Syria. This is not the result of any change in the position of Arab public opinion towards NATO, but rather, it is due to the difference in the Arabs’ perception towards Bashar’s Syrian regime and Gaddafi’s Libya regime. It is notable that, the Baathist regime in Syria, in the eyes of Arab public opinion, is not as bad as Gaddafi, especially because of the Damascus support of some Palestinian movements and its positions and slogans towards Israel.

The fifth question was “What is NATO?” Although two-third of the questioned students (64%) identified correctly NATO as an international military alliance, almost 36% of them did not. More than a quarter of the respondents (17.66%) believed that NATO is military forces of the United Nations, while a similar proportion (17.66%) stated that NATO is forces of the United States. Many of those polled, even if they answered the question correctly, they commented to the effect that NATO is in fact a subsidiary of the United States and a tool of its foreign policy. This shows the great deal of confusion and ambiguity that exist in Arab public opinion towards NATO.

In addition to the authoritarian character of the Gaddafi regime and its atrocities, the long and close relations between Morocco and NATO member states, especially in Western Europe and North American, and several agreements of partnership, cooperation and free trade signed with them, are also among the main reasons that can explain this relatively positive position towards NATO. However, it should be noted that this position remains temporarily. It was the result of the undeniable role of NATO in overthrowing Gaddafi, and any transient event can also reverse the trend towards the worse. Developing specific programs of cooperation with Arab universities and organizing seminars and meetings with them about NATO and its missions would improve the image of the Alliance and its member states in the eyes of Arab public opinion, particularly future generations, and reduce mutual prejudices.

NATO and the Post-Arab Spring Era: New Situation and New Perception

Arab Spring uprisings have reshaped the Arab world’s political landscape. The political and social uprisings that have swept the region over the past one and a half years represent the most significant challenge to authoritarian rule since the end of the Cold War. Citizens who arose up against corrupt and despotic leaders, like Mubarak of Egypt, Zain El-Abidin of Tunisia, Gaddafi of Libya, Ali Saleh of Yemen, Bashar of Syria and others, become today a key actor in the political scene, and they are likely to play a significant role in influencing the foreign policy making processes.

Currently, in the Arab Region, a majority of the population, 54 per cent, is now under the age of 25. By comparison, 48 per cent of the population of developing countries and 29 per cent of the population of developed countries is under the age of 25.¹⁹ In addition to its experience with injustice or a sense of lack of dignity that serves as a catalyst for participation,²⁰ the new Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) give Arab youth an opportunity to access to information and communicate widely with each other along the region. This combination between the sense of injustice and the new ICTs, especial social media, has produced various forms of uprisings that erupted across the Arab World in early 2011.

The dramatic political transformations taking place in the region thanks to Arab Spring will inevitably strengthen the position and impact of public opinion. Thus, this new situation requires NATO and its member states to take into consideration trends in Arab public opinion when they deal with any issue that will probably affect the Arab public. State actors are no longer the only interlocutor in the region, public opinion, NGOs, universities and embryonic think tanks

become more and more main target audience of public diplomacy that can be led by western countries and NATO.

The significant role of NATO in the success of the Libyan uprising is not a simple event in the region. NATO has taken part in a turning point in the region's history. Its participation increases certainly NATO's credits in the region and it is likely to improve its relations with civilian actors. An old adage is "perception is more important than reality". The reality refers to past and present facts, which should of course not be ignored, but what is more important is the outcome of these facts. In other words, how the public perceives the reality. The perception transcends the present context of reality to envision and shape the future. The old adage, mentioned above, applies to some extent to the Arab public's perception of NATO after its decisive role in overthrowing the Gaddafi regime. Indeed, NATO and its allies did a good job on the ground, but what is the next?

In May 2012, I asked 100 Moroccan faculty members²¹ a question "What kind of relation between Morocco and NATO would you like?", with five choices: full membership, advanced partnership, limited cooperation, rupture of all relations and no opinion. The result was a surprise:

- 20 % preferred full membership.
- 31 % opted for advanced partnership.
- 31 % chose limited cooperation.
- 7 % picked rupture of all relations with the Alliance.
- 11 % had no opinion.

There are four main different points of view among Arab elites on how Arab countries would develop their relations with NATO. Concerning full membership option, although it is unlikely at least in the medium term for several reasons, some Arab elites are in favor of such an engagement. They believe that membership in NATO would strengthen the country's position in the region. Even if some of them argued that the full membership is not a realistic option for the time being, they thought that it is the best option in terms of strategy especially for those countries suffering from unresolved territory issues or threatened by their neighbors or transnational military groups. With regards to Morocco, respondents who prefer this option mentioned the instable relation between Morocco and Algeria, Western Sahara issue and the Morocco-Spain dispute over the Spanish-controlled territories in Northern Morocco, especially the two enclaves Ceuta and Melilla. Others focused on the importance of such engagement, by invoking the case of Turkey in reducing defence spending, steering the savings to suffering sectors, and taking advantage of the resulting synergies.

The Advanced partnership is one of the most preferred options for Moroccan professors, and it is probably preferred by a sizeable part of Arab elite too. They expected that such a relation with NATO would offer their countries twofold benefit: obtain necessary security and military assistance, and keep certain independence in involving in some crises that might irritate local and regional public opinion. In other words, advanced partnership means access to the most important advantages of membership without joining the Alliance.

With regards to the limited cooperation option, which exists already with many Arab countries whether in the framework of Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) or the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI), Arab elites think that it is better for their countries to engage in regional military cooperation by implementing and developing its institutional instruments adopted by the Arab league and other Arab regional institutions, including the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). This perception corresponds to some extent with the official position of Arab governments. For instance, the Moroccan Minister delegate for Foreign Affairs, Youssef Al Amrani, emphasized the necessity of regional security cooperation, stating that the

construction of the Maghreb becomes a "security imperative" in view of what is happening in many African areas in terms of security disruptions often made by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb.²² Also, new ruling elite in Tunisia prefer to establish a regional security system, rather engaging in multilateral military forums. Furthermore, the Arab public remains very sensitive to any existence of foreign military basis in the region. For example, Egypt has voiced strong concern over media reports that the National Transitional Council may consider accepting NATO military bases in the Libyan territory.²³

Voices demanding the rupture of relations with NATO are still heard in different spheres, including political, religious, media, and civil society. Their argument based on one hand on the specificity of NATO as a "Western" organization, in which Turkey is the exception, and, on other hand, on multiple conflicts in Arab and Islamic World that NATO will probably intervene in, which may cause many troubles for their own country whether internally or externally. The opposition to any kind of relation with NATO can also be explained by the ambiguity and confusion of terms such as "dialogue", "initiative" and "partnership" in the perception of both Arab elites and the wider public.²⁴ So, instead, they prefer that Arab countries should develop their own collective security system.

The post-Arab Spring era will most likely be characterized by the emergence of new political players, especially Islamic parties, which will give more priority to the regional military and security cooperation. However, at international level, they will prefer bilateral relations with their traditional western partners especially US, UK and France rather multilateral military framework within NATO. But this expectation is not inevitable. The position of NATO in the region, and the type and degree of its relations with Arab countries will depend on the Alliance's creativity in proposing new initiatives that respond to the needs of the region, and its ability to build mutual confidence with new governments and non-state actors emerging from the modern Arab uprisings.

In North Africa, the position of public opinion and elite are almost the same concerning the relation of their countries with NATO, because of their almost similar views regarding the relations with NATO member states, as a result of their constant economic, cultural and political interactions with western societies. The public opinion perception of NATO in some middle-east countries, including Jordan, Qatar and UAE, is almost similar to that of North African countries. In Saudi Arabia, it is agreed that the public opinion is sceptical about any advanced cooperation with NATO because of several reasons, including the cultural background of the society, Saudi's traditional and conservative foreign policy. Saudi government can get easily popular support for any recourse to western countries or NATO to defend the country from external threat. But when it comes to institutional relations, it seems that current circumstances do not permit a significant change in the trend of the public towards such security cooperation with NATO. Bahrain, Oman, Lebanon, Syria and Iraq because of both their Shiite Muslim population and/or close relations with Iran, public opinion may not be favourable to any advanced cooperation with NATO. But this attitude will likely change if the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the West are revised. What is important now is not the percentage of those who are still sceptical of NATO, but those who began to look positively to the Alliance and how to expand this margin.

In sum, it seems that the position of the Arab public and elite on the kind of relation between their countries and NATO they would like, fluctuates between limited cooperation and advanced partnership, since full membership is not possible at least in the medium term according to article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty (April 4, 1949), which limits membership extension to European states. So, NATO and its Arab partners would look for a new form of cooperation more than what exists now and less than advanced partnership. This means that NATO would develop the existing initiatives towards a comprehensive method that includes all Arab partners in one framework of cooperation, because the Arab public is more confident about the common initiatives than the sub-region ones.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, the Arab spring uprisings have created a new political atmosphere in which many signs of a positive perception of NATO and its members states have been expressed, and can be flourished with more support to new governments arising from this unprecedented political and social mobility in the Arab world.

It is worth noting until now many Arabs do not distinguish between NATO as a multinational organization and the foreign policies of its member states, especially the United States. While some argue that NATO is an American-controlled organization, others believe that NATO is American military forces. So, one of the major challenges of NATO is how to present itself as an international organization gathering a number of nations that have different interests, objectives and priorities. On the other hand, NATO out-of- area operations would be authorized by the UN and/or regional organizations concerned, and with a strict mandate. The dilemma is when NATO can get the international legal umbrella without popular consent. Anyway, today we live in a world in which the will and consent of the people cannot be ignored. The international legality of NATO interventions and operations is not sufficient unless it coincides with the popular and political legitimacy.

The Arab Spring uprisings allow to the world, especially in the West, to know different Arab political spectrum as they really are not as they have been perceived because of some wrong prejudices. Concerning the Islamic movements which are playing today a major role in shaping the future of the region, NATO and its member states should not put all of them in one basket. Today, there are in all Arab countries moderate and active Islamic movements that are likely to govern, alone or in coalition with other parties, most, if not all, Arab governments if the winds of the Arab Spring sweep the whole region. So, inevitably, the pro-Islamic governments in the region will be for a long time the principal partner of NATO in security and military fields. Adopting a new approach to deal with the new political actors in the region will undoubtedly be a top priority for strategic decision-makers of both NATO and its member states.

NOTES

¹ Stefanie Babst and Elizabeth Linder, "NATO and Facebook Join Forces in the Global Digital Age," *Huffington Post*, April 19, 2012, accessed May 23, 2012, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/dr-stefanie-babst/nato-facebook-collaboration_b_1437764.html

² These are personal pages of NATO's Secretary General on Facebook and Twitter: <http://www.facebook.com/andersfoghrasmussen>, <http://twitter.com/#!/AndersFoghR>

³ In the beginning of 2012, an Oxford Research International conducted a poll, considered as the first scientific national survey of Libya, found that 76% of Libyans are to some extent confident in NATO (27% great deal, 26% quite a lot, 23% not very much). The survey was made by Oxford Research in association with the Institute of Human Sciences at the University of Oxford and the University of Benghazi, Libya.

⁴ Josh Rogin, "Over 200 Arab groups call for Libya no-fly zone" *Foreign Policy* (February 25, 2011), accessed May 7, 2012,

http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/02/25/over_200_arab_groups_call_for_libya_no_fly_zone

⁵ *The Doha Debates*, "Huge majority of Arabs want Gaddafi removed from power," May 18, 2011, accessed May 02, 2012, <http://www.thedohadebates.com/news/item.asp?n=12791>

⁶ UN Security Council Resolution 1970 adopted on February 26, 2011, and UNSC Resolution 1973 adopted on March 17, 2011.

⁷ On March 11, 2011, The Gulf Cooperation Council denounced Gaddafi's regime as illegitimate and called on the Arab League to take action so as to stop the bloodshed.

⁸ On March 12, 2012, the Arab League voted unanimously to establish a no-fly zone over Libya.

⁹ "2005 World Summit Outcome", United Nations General Assembly, Sixtieth session, items 48 and 121 of the provisional agenda. A/60/L.1, 40 pages. September 15, 2005, accessed May 23, 2012, <http://www.who.int/hiv/universalaccess2010/worldsummit.pdf>; Cristina G. Badescu, *Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: Security and Human Rights* (New York, NY: Taylor and Francis e-Library, 2010), 110.

¹⁰ Anthony Shadid, "Qatar Wields an Outsize Influence in Arab Politics," *The New York Times*, November 14, 2011.

¹¹ The paper aimed at giving a general overview of those actors' opinion towards the role of NATO in Libya. So, the paper provided the mainstream orientation of the newspaper editors and writers delivered from numerous articles that the author has read.

¹² Elias Harfoush is a prominent columnist for *Al-Hayat* newspaper.

¹³ Elias Harfoush, "Why the West refuses to intervene in Syria?," (in Arabic) *Al-Hayat*, February 21, 2012, accessed April 20, 2012, <http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/365102>

¹⁴ See for example: Faleh Abdul-Jabbar, "words that enslave us ... the Motherland, the Nation, Strangers," (in Arabic) *Al-Hayat*, Sunday, January 8, 2012, accessed April 20, 2012, <http://www.daralhayat.com/print/347992>; Faiz Salim ibn 'Amr, "Arab Revolt in front of the Mysterious Fate," (in Arabic) *Al-Hayat*, Tuesday, April 18, 2012, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://international.daralhayat.com/internationalarticle/386377>

¹⁵ See Hani Al-Dhahiry, "Season to get rid of the Islamists of Libya!," (in Arabic) *Al-Hayat*, December 06, 2011, accessed April 22, 2012, <http://ksa.daralhayat.com/ksaarticle/336466>

¹⁶ Alexander Smoltczyk, "the Voice of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood," *Der Spiegel*, February 15, 2011, accessed May 4, 2012, <http://www.spiegel.de/international/world/0,1518,745526,00.html>

¹⁷ See for example Roula Khalaf, "Outspoken Cleric guides Arabs on Revolution," *Financial Times*, December 8, 2011, accessed May 4, 2012, <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/96a52b92-21a7-11e1-a19f-00144feabdc0.html>

¹⁸ Shibley Telhami, "Annual Arab Public Opinion Survey", Anwar Sadat Chair for Peace and Development University of Maryland, 2011, accessed May 7, 2012, <http://newsdesk.umd.edu/pdf/2011/telhamipoll2011.pdf>

¹⁹ Barry Mirkin, Population Levels, "Trends and Policies in the Arab Region: Challenges and Opportunities," UNDP, Regional Bureau for Arab States, Arab Human Development Report, Research Paper Series, 2010, 10.

²⁰ Rima Afifi, "Youth as Agents of Change," in *Arab Youth: Civic Engagement & Economic Participation* (Beirut: UNESCO Regional Bureau for Education in the Arab States, 2011), 9.

²¹ The number of professors in Moroccan university is about 12,000. So, a sample of 100 respondents is a significant number to conduct such a survey.

²² Interview with *Assabah* Newspaper (in Arabic), May 07, 2012, accessed May 8, 2012, <http://www.assabah.press.ma/?view=article&tmpl=component&layout=default&id=26375>

²³ Lenka Filípková and others, "NATO and the Arab Spring: Challenge to Cooperation, Opportunity for Action?," Policy Paper, Association for International Affairs, Czech Republic, April 18, 2012, 8.

²⁴ Mustapha Alani, "Arab perspectives on NATO," *NATO Review*, accessed April 17, 2012, <http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2005/issue4/english/art3.html>