For historical reasons, and because of continuing political relations and economic ties, the European countries (France and Great Britain in particular) have a special interest in the geographical area stretching from the Persian Gulf and Red Sea regions to the Mediterranean Middle East and Maghreb regions. In fact, Algeria and Djibouti were French colonies, Libya and Somalia were Italian colonies, Syria and Lebanon were French mandates and Tunisia a French protectorate, while Jordan, Iraq and Palestine were British mandates. Finally, Egypt, Sudan and South Yemen, although technically not colonies, were part of the British domain.

The European countries have today, due to their growing integration within the EEC framework, larger common interests and are affected more than in the past by international crises, which have an impact on their foreign policy and their economic situation. Moreover, there is a growing awareness among the European states that the threats to their security stem less from the traditional scenario of a Soviet aggression and more from South–South or North–South crises in areas outside NATO’s boundaries, leading to a Soviet-American, hence East–West, confrontation.

The European countries are also aware that situations of domestic instability in the ‘grey areas’ at the NATO borders could be exploited by the Soviet Union to expand its political and military influence. Furthermore, they recognise that oil from the Persian Gulf and other parts of the Middle East will continue to be of vital importance for their economic growth and that Soviet direct or indirect control of the ‘oil faucet’ in those regions will give Moscow an instrument of political pressure and jeopardise their independent industrial
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development. Finally, the nations of Europe know that the solution of Middle East political problems and the fight against the spectre of a spreading state sponsored international terrorism require a common effort and a closely coordinated policy.

Yet, nothing is more divisive in the Atlantic Alliance than out-of-area issues. Too often national – if not ‘nationalistic’ – approaches to these issues undermine a badly needed coherent ‘European’ attitude and put heavy strains on Euro-American relationships. Today, not only would it be impossible to expand NATO’s area of responsibility[^1] but also impossible to generate the political willingness to establish even the basic lines of a collective strategy to confront the most immediate and evident out-of-area challenges.

This chapter intends to describe the political framework for such a lack of foresight and political wisdom, and then to examine the specific positions of the European countries on the out-of-area question. The United States position is also analysed. In fact, the interests affected and undermined by out-of-area crises are collectively Western and not simply European, even though the European stakes might be higher. Furthermore, it would be very difficult to understand the complexity of Euro-American interface, interdependency and interactions without an explanation, though very schematic, of the United States’ approach and attitude toward out-of-area issues. Finally, several case studies of real out-of-area crises are schematically outlined in search of a thread of common attitudes and responses, thus providing in the concluding section a tentative recipe for future use.

I THE POLITICAL FRAMEWORK

The European countries recognised as early as the 1950s[^2] that their security could be deeply affected by developments in areas beyond the boundaries of the Atlantic Alliance as established in the 1949 Treaty. They indicated their concern for (and their interest) in the stability of those areas collectively in several key Alliance documents[^3] and in almost all final communiqués of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) meetings and individually, in a more concrete and direct way, through their foreign policies.

Historically, the focus of Alliance security concern has switched from area to area of the world in accordance with the changes in the international scene and the behaviour of the Soviet Union. In 1967