

Future Visions of NATO Partnerships and Cooperation Programs

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Implementing the Riga Agenda: Implications for Partnerships

One of the major commitments agreed to by NATO member states at the Riga Conference in November 2006 was to strengthen and develop partnerships held between NATO and other states. A healthy partnership development and retention policy has been identified by NATO leadership as imperative in order for the Alliance to succeed in its self-defined mission of being a modern expeditionary force. In the view of Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer, “If we sustain the momentum of our partnership policy, it can be a major strategic tool for coping with 21st-century challenges.”¹ One particular goal of NATO’s partnership agenda is using partnership collectives, such as the Partnership for Peace (PfP), Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), and the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative (ICI) to develop capacities in countries that can be put to use in future NATO campaigns. The Political Guidance offered by the NATO Heads of State and Government in Riga on 29 November 2006 reflects this objective, and it aimed “to increase NATO’s ability to provide practical advice on, and assistance in the defense and security-related aspects of reform in countries and regions where NATO is engaged.”

The centrality of partnerships in the Riga discussions clearly reflects the Alliance’s belief in the importance of these ties, for multiple reasons. An exploration of why NATO feels that partnerships are important raises many questions. What are NATO partnerships for? What do they provide for NATO that NATO cannot attain otherwise? What advantages do they bring to partners? Does the proliferation of partnerships—a veritable partnership industry seems to have emerged—risk diluting the label of “NATO-partner”? Does NATO need to develop new, pragmatic, flexible, cost-effective mechanisms and models (formal and informal) of partnership, or should it concentrate on improving existing mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation? Need NATO develop a more formal hierarchy of partnerships? Is there an organizing princi-

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¹ Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, speech given at the 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007, available at www.nato.int/docu/speech/2007/s070209d.html.

ple and logic (the application of PfP tools to other partnerships?) that creates synergies and adds value to the range of partnerships, or do we face rather overload, overstretch, duplication, and incoherence—a recipe for inaction?

Given that the future pathway NATO takes will shape the nature of NATO partnerships, their role and function, it is pertinent to pose the question: where is NATO heading? This is not easy to answer with any confidence, though it is possible to identify the extremes of the debate that is unfolding in the media as well as in academic, policy, and practitioner circles. One extreme suggests that NATO will go global, building on its successful military operations in Afghanistan and, with the help of a global coalition of democracies, uncover the holy grail of international security politics: grand strategic stability. The other suggests that going out of area, especially post-9/11, will result in strategic defeat, with NATO reacting by returning to a redundant collective defense role, with its partnerships largely left to wither on the vine.

It is our belief that the future of NATO's development and its reliance on partnerships rests at a point between the two poles of "Global NATO" and "strategic defeat." This essay will analyze the partnership visions implied by these two poles through the prism of NATO's contemporary operations and standing. This analysis will not simply define the current partnership landscape, but will also help identify where we feel NATO's partnership hopes realistically rest between the two poles. Based on this assessment, we conclude by providing an assessment of the future of NATO's mission of common defense and the role of partners in this mission by examining the future of three partnerships: PfP, MD, and ICI. While avoiding the certainty of prediction, we will highlight the plausible future successes/failures of these partnerships based on their ability to assist or hinder the Alliance.

Possible NATO Future Pathway 1: Global NATO

United States Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs R. Nicholas Burns stated prior to the Riga Summit, "Our goal at the Riga summit is to showcase a NATO that must have global missions and has partners and capabilities to achieve those missions. The U.S. is working hard with transatlantic partners to promote shared values throughout the world." In this vision, NATO responds to the logic of the international security environment: transnational security threats and sources of insecurity that are global demand a global response, or "global threats cannot be tackled by regional organizations."² It recognizes that NATO is no longer self-sufficient; already eighteen non-NATO members are involved in NATO operations, eleven of them in Afghanistan. As a result, NATO operational effectiveness is only as good as the NATO network and NATO partnerships. Partnerships are needed to develop three main inter-related functions: a robust advanced expeditionary warfare capability; stabilization and reconstruction capability in complex crisis management environments; and rebuilding indigenous militaries and security forces as part of an exit strategy. These functions are

² Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, "Global NATO," *Foreign Affairs* (September/ October 2006): 105–13.

the *sine qua non* of grand strategic stability.³ This amounts to a doctrine of global intervention for NATO.

If the global NATO pathway is taken, what are the implications for NATO partnerships, in particular the status of the Contact Group that operates alongside NATO in Afghanistan? According to this vision of NATO's future, Article 10 is revised, and a range of states—from Argentina, Australia, Brazil, and New Zealand to Japan and South Korea—become the cornerstone of a new Global Partnership Initiative (GPI). GPI is a way of rewarding states that have contributed to NATO missions with formal partnership status, and represents one path to complete NATO military transformation.

However, a number of red flags have already been waved by both existing NATO members and the wider international community that suggest that the reception of the GPI would be turbulent. First, NATO members have asked: What of the selection criteria? Is this a partnership of the rich, of the capable, in which democracies are privileged above key players/security providers? Does this result in a Global Security Network, an Alliance of Democracies, a Security Providers Forum, a Global Security Directorate that rivals the United Nations Security Council for influence?

How does NATO avoid alienating those states that are excluded and, more generally, avoid the creation of a “the West is best versus the rest” syndrome that is divisive and undermines the agendas of defense and security sector reform? Would this result in a view of NATO as a neo-imperial instrument of Western military conquest—a global political and military bloc?⁴ Would not China and Russia look to the example of PfP, and conclude that so too will GPI inevitably provide an eventual stepping-stone to NATO membership? Might not regional superpowers raise concerns that NATO military interventions and stabilizations supported by global partners will upset regional balances of power and so lead to regional instability?⁵ How does NATO ensure that it continues to be perceived as an honest broker if it now intervenes in specific regions in partnership with states from that region?

Finally, what are the implications of closing the gap between Allies and Partners? Might this result in a three-tiered NATO structure? Already NATO appears divided between those that use national caveats and understand transformation as an end in itself and those that are more willing to reduce such caveats and see transformation as a means to operationalize and then use the NATO Response Force. It is likely that GPI members who actively support NATO military operations would increasingly demand access to NATO intelligence, planning processes, and decision-making venues, thus

³ Julian Lindley-French, “The Capability-Capacity Crunch: NATO's New Capacities for Intervention,” *European Security* 15:3 (September 2006): 259–80.

⁴ Stephen Castle, “France blocks NATO bid to create a global terror force,” *The Independent* (4 November 2006), 26.

⁵ Russian State Duma Deputies stated: “NATO membership of any state that is a participant in the CIS runs counter to the highest strategic interests of those states and the aspirations of their peoples” and expressed its negative attitude toward NATO expansion eastward, “believing it to run counter to interests of international security.” ITAR-TASS news agency, Moscow (in Russian), 20 December 2006.

compensating for the NATO shortfall in troop numbers and effectiveness. Will this GPI auxiliary role encourage “Core NATO” to step up to the challenges of the 21st century, or in fact reduce the pressure for them to do so? What are the obligations of NATO to its global partners? If Japan is attacked by North Korea, is NATO suddenly embroiled in an all-out war in Northeast Asia?

Possible NATO Future Pathway 2: NATO Suffers Strategic Defeat

At the other end of the spectrum of future possibilities is the scenario in which NATO, by virtue of having gone “out of area” after 9/11, will inevitably suffer strategic defeat and go out of the collective security business. The possible future of “strategic defeat” is intimately bound with the status of NATO’s present expeditionary missions in out-of-area locations. The U.S. and U.K.-led coalition of the willing in Iraq had sixteen of the twenty-six NATO member states as participants; it now appears that, although defeat is not an option, victory is not possible.

The International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan has become the centerpiece of NATO’s “out-of-area” intervention policy. In the words of United States Senator John McCain, “The future of our alliance is now intimately bound with the outcome in Afghanistan, and our success or failure there will impact not only the security of each of our member states, but also the credibility and effectiveness of NATO itself.”⁶ Recent events in Afghanistan have showcased the limitations on success that NATO and its partners are facing. The multi-tiered military intervention that is occurring on the ground has several nations bearing the brunt of violence in the south of the country, while other countries (notably Germany) have placed caveat restrictions that keep their forces out of hot zones. Hence, NATO’s ISAF military operation seems to lack the urgency, commitment, and political will to win, but at least at present it is sufficient not to lose. Tactical victories, such as “Operation Medusa,” which defeated Taliban elements in Kandahar Province in the autumn of 2006, are examples of success, but the political, economic, and social dimensions of the hoped for end-state have as yet not progressed as fast as the growth of either neo-Taliban forces or opium production. Furthermore, the heightened levels of civilian casualties being inflicted by NATO forces is seriously damaging the credibility of the operation in the hearts and minds of Afghan citizens.⁷ There is a real danger, as a result of these conditions, that Afghanistan could emerge as a narco-terrorist failed state.⁸ If this becomes the future of Afghanistan, NATO will suffer a severe defeat, and could likely return to its classical and traditional passive core Article 5 collective defense role against a non-existent threat on NATO’s immediate borders. Ultimately, this posturing could lead the United

⁶ “NATO’s Litmus Test in Afghanistan,” remarks given by John McCain at 43rd Munich Conference on Security Policy, 10 February 2007; available at www.securityconference.de/konferenzen/rede.php?sprache=en&id=186&.

⁷ “NATO Tries to Cut Afghan Civilian Deaths,” *New York Times* (31 July 2007).

⁸ Stanislaw Koziej (a retired general and former Polish deputy minister of national defense), “The ruination of NATO in Afghanistan,” *Gazeta Wyborcza* website, Warsaw (in Polish), (9 October 2006).

States to be inclined to disengage and embrace a more isolationist posture, damaging the credibility and effectiveness of NATO missions abroad.

If the first scenario does unfold and NATO goes global, then the agendas of defense and security sector reform will be vital components of its overall global engagement—the soft-power equivalent of the hard-power structural engagement. It will be critical to sustainability, and thus to the long-term success of these engagements. Going global does not necessarily mean that this agenda is lost in the shuffle. The second scenario—strategic defeat—also does not inevitably torpedo either the partnership framework or the notion of a global partnership framework. Indeed, it may, paradoxically, provide a more secure and focused platform for pushing forward partnerships, particularly if the focus of partnerships moves from expeditionary warfare, stabilization, and reconstruction, toward the agendas of security sector and defense reform.

These future visions are certainly extreme, overly deterministic in their predictions and based on a black-and-white worldview. The future pathway will likely meander between these two stark extremes. NATO will increasingly operate in a murky security environment within which new security challenges, obstacles, and dilemmas will characterize the topography. The tension between the core/classical NATO missions and NATO's interaction with the rest of the world—best captured by the formulation that what we are seeing is not a global NATO but a NATO responding to global threats⁹—will remain unresolved. The task for NATO is to reinterpret Article 5 for the contemporary world: what exactly is common defense in a borderless world, and how might partnerships contribute to maximizing common interests in stability?

Identifying Lessons and Best Practices: PfP Success

So the real question is this: How might the defense reform agenda be promoted via partnerships? A good starting point would be to consider what has made PfP effective as a mechanism. To what extent can the successes of the Partnership for Peace be replicated through the other partnerships? Which new mechanisms that are affordable, appropriate, and acceptable need to be created? And, ultimately, what is the fabric that holds the partnerships together and provides an organizing logic that meets both partner and NATO interests?

PfP arose from the rubble of the fallen Warsaw Pact, and the program has always been aimed at establishing trust and development for transitioning countries. The opportunities of PfP, and its use as a pathway to prospective NATO membership, has benefited many Eastern Bloc countries. At the end of 2006, the Partnership was extended to the Balkans, bringing PfP membership to twenty-three countries.¹⁰

The principle of self-differentiation within PfP was critical to its success. This allowed some partners to join NATO through the Membership Action Plan (MAP) proc-

⁹ *Global NATO: Overdue or Overstretch?*, Brussels, 6 November 2006; available at [www.forum-europe.com/download/SDA/SDA Global NATO Report Ebook.pdf](http://www.forum-europe.com/download/SDA/SDA%20Global%20NATO%20Report%20Ebook.pdf).

¹⁰ "Kosovo Premier Asks to Join NATO's PfP," Kosovo Albanian Television Koha Vision TV, Pristina (in Albanian), 16 January 2007.

ess, and others to use the NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) process to provide practical advice on and assistance in the defense and security-related aspects of reform to make their states more stable. Indeed, just in the Western Balkans, three states exemplify the first trend (Croatia, Albania, and Macedonia) and the three newest PfP members (Serbia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina) the second. At the same time, PfP provided an attractive framework through which the “neutrals” and “non-aligneds” could interact with NATO without full membership status.

PfP also provided an incremental, progressive, and multilayered framework through which military and security CBMs could be implemented from the “soft end” through to more sensitive areas of concern. Official representation at NATO HQ allowed for real dialogue and cooperation and momentum for change, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly outreach process provided a political channel of communication to Partner states. In addition, engagement with security-sector NGOs and wider civil society through an educational focus (NATO Science Projects) and an effective information and communication program positively shaped perceptions and expectations of NATO in Partner states.

The Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: Success Hampered

The Mediterranean Dialogue is a much less successful program than PfP, and both publics and elites are much more suspicious of NATO’s role and purpose in the program. The Dialogue was established in 1994, and consists of seven members: Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia. The primary purpose for the dialogue is political, to promote better mutual understanding and confidence, as well as good and friendly relations across the Mediterranean. In terms of member state interests, the Mediterranean Dialogue is supported in large part so that NATO can develop ties with a region that contains a number of security threats. The Dialogue has grown both in number of states and in number of discussion areas over the years, but this growth has not necessarily led to what could be termed success.

Why has the Mediterranean Dialogue proven to be largely ineffective? There are several reasons for this. They include a lack of investment of time, people, and money, a profound suspicion and ignorance of NATO on the part of many countries in the region, and the lack of those mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation on which the success of NATO and the Partnership for Peace is based. Another key stumbling block has been the inability to decouple wider regional security issues from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹¹ These differences boil down to the fact that NATO allies and MD countries have contrasting expectations and priorities for the partnership. NATO countries want to use the dialogue to approach and engage difficult regional security issues, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, yet the MD countries have different views on what they want from it. For example, Israel sees its membership in the Dialogue as a

¹¹ Chris Donnelly, “Forging a NATO Partnership for the Greater Middle East,” *NATO Review* (Spring 2004).

means to buttress its security in the face of potential Iranian aggression. As a result, the two sides of the partnership lack many of the ties needed to bind it into an effective and functional cooperative.

The Istanbul Cooperative Initiative, established in 2004, is a regional cooperative aimed initially at “the six countries of the Arabian Peninsula that comprise the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC): Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.”¹² The Initiative focuses on practical areas of cooperation where NATO can add value, notably in the defense and security fields. While the central aim of the Initiative was to engage hard security challenges in the region, thus far the body has operated at only a political level. This hindrance is due in large part to the poor conditions for peace and dialogue in the Middle East at present. But the inertia that has resulted in the security sector has frustrated many in the military wing of NATO. As a result of this situation, “One is led to believe that the entire initiative has much less to do with actual concern for the state of the security sector in the GCC states and a lot more with the need to find a new role for the Alliance.”¹³ Unfortunately, the toll of the war in Iraq has likely poisoned any possibilities for significant progress in the region, either through the Initiative, or through some other member state means, be they bilateral or multilateral.

In reviewing these two main partnership initiatives of NATO besides the PfP, it is easy to identify more failure than success. Part of the explanation for these failures results from the perception of NATO in this region as being little more than “the foreign policy arm of the United States.”¹⁴ But the lackluster quality of the MD and ICI efforts is not solely due to structural and historical circumstances. Organizational and operational failures by NATO members have also contributed to the feeble stature of the partnership and cooperation bodies.

However, even within these two partnership models, two effective mechanisms can at least be identified. The first is that of adopting a sub-regional cluster approach. Sub-regional forums and clusters or bilateral approaches can side-step divisive regional sore points. The second is the bottom-up approach based on needs identified by MD and ICI states.¹⁵

Functional and Regional Imperatives

NATO has received top-down political guidance from the Riga Summit, and now must work from the bottom up to provide solutions that are appropriate, acceptable, and affordable. The solutions must be appropriate in that they practically address the security challenges NATO and its partners face. They must be acceptable to publics and elites

¹² Mario Legrenzi, “NATO in the Gulf: Who is Doing a Favor for Whom?” *Middle East Policy* 14:1 (Spring 2007): 69-75.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ NATO, “STOPWATCH 2, Bridging the Mediterranean,” Special Interactive Video Forum series with Jamie Shea, 12 March 2005, available at www.nato.int/docu/speech/2005/s050311a.htm.

¹⁵ Donnelly, “Forging a NATO Partnership for the Greater Middle East,” 26–30.

within partner states, and also affordable in terms of how much investment in time, people, and money is needed for the partnerships to be successful. NATO can both deepen the functions that partnerships perform and widen access to its partnership frameworks by adopting the PfP principle of self-differentiation and using it in a more focused way to restructure the ICI and MD.

All partnerships can offer a common menu or portfolio of engagement, allowing partners to select the level and nature of the engagement according to their interests and needs. This *à la carte* approach can be bundled into three main functions:

- Pursue security sector governance that includes defense reform and interoperability as an end in itself. This builds confidence and gives time for elites and publics to understand NATO's evolving role, function, and purpose. Combined with active discussions on how best to respond to global security challenges, it can allow NATO to become a stronger political actor.
- Advance the transformation agenda, including developing modalities (operational capabilities concept) that allow for integrated operations. This emphasizes the political role and nature of NATO and has practical benefits for NATO and its partners.
- Operationalize those discussions through agreed "security solutions"—that is, maintain and strengthen the ability of some partners to cooperate with NATO in military operations, be it "Active Endeavour" in the Mediterranean, ISAF in Afghanistan, or future operations with the NATO Response Force.

This functional differentiation maximizes capacity and expertise building between partnerships, and thus provides an overarching connecting fabric that runs through each of the regionally based partnerships. For example, Jordan, Tunisia, Ireland, and Australia can all work alongside ISAF, while Mauritania, Egypt, Serbia, and Kyrgyzstan can focus on the first tranche of activities—the agendas of defense reform and security sector governance. Functional differentiation maintains focus while still recognizing the value, specificity, and utility of regional groupings. Different regions face different issues—or they face the same issues, but experience them differently, have different needs and objectives, and may propose regionally-sensitive solutions.

Conclusion

NATO's experience with partnership and cooperation collectives over the past dozen years has produced a mixed record of success and failure. Of course, it is simplistic and analytically dangerous to place all of NATO's partnerships under one microscope for scrutiny, as the PfP, MD, and ICI initiatives all differ from one another in many respects. However, similarities between the partnership approaches of the member states of each partnership and NATO's self-declared embrace of partnerships as part and parcel of the overall future of the Alliance demands that the overall partnership policy receive a careful review.

NATO has been searching for an operational identity ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall, and its latest incarnation appears to be that of a mobile expeditionary force

capable of global reach. This reach depends on multiple partnerships. However, the sobering reality of NATO operations in Afghanistan shows how precarious this approach is for the Alliance. On the other hand, an embrace of strictly defined Article 5 commitments—in other words, an “old NATO” mentality—would also prove detrimental to the Alliance’s development: collective defense against non-existent threats to member states’ territory is an empty function.

NATO will indeed need partners in the future for success, and it will continue to need different partnerships to achieve different objectives, as will the partners themselves. The prudent path for the Alliance to take is to build in flexibility and achievable and practical goals into these partnerships, to treat each case on an individual basis, and to carefully select partners in the first place. This fluid and flexible approach holds the best promise for the future of a dynamic and relevant 21st-century military alliance.