

NATO - India: Prospects of a Partnership

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In February, the global strategic community met at the 48th Munich Security Conference to discuss how they can tackle upcoming security challenges. The conference also marked the first anniversary of the most recent high-level exchange between NATO and India, when NATO's Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and India's National Security Advisor Shivshakar Menon met to talk about a possible partnership. Even though the meeting prompted confidence about moving closer towards cooperation, the parties are just as far from cooperating today as they were a year ago.

NATO's interest in such a partnership stems from India's growing political and economic importance. A closer relationship between the two parties makes sense because both share a number of security challenges and values. Like NATO, India has a large stake in Afghanistan and is committed to counter-terrorism and maritime security. This makes India attractive as a partner for the Alliance considering that NATO plans to "engage actively to enhance international security, through partnerships with relevant countries," as stated in NATO's new Strategic Concept.² It is also natural for NATO, as a value-based alliance, to reach out to democracies around the world. In this perspective, India is the bedrock of stability and democracy in the South Asian region and shares NATO's commitment to liberty, human rights, global peace and the rule of law.

Such is the background to this paper, which sets out to analyze the prospects of a partnership between NATO and India. It argues that the Alliance needs to understand India's lack of enthusiasm for such a partnership in relation to its strategic culture. Only if NATO explains to New Delhi's strategic community how it has changed since the Cold War will India be inclined to accept a partnership proposal from the Alliance. NATO also needs to be clear about its intentions in this regard, and to highlight what it can offer New Delhi to make Indian policymakers realize that closer relations with NATO would be a win-win situation. At the same time, it is necessary for India to move out of its Cold War mindset and consider NATO as a potential partner with many shared security challenges and capabilities. Cooperation can then take place by joint efforts in

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² NATO, "Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of The Members and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization", 2010, <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2011), point 4.c.



specific fields, ranging from counter-terrorism to maritime and cyber security.

At the 2010 Munich Security Conference, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen voiced NATO's stance on a partnership with new potential partner countries: "What would be the harm if countries such as China, India, Pakistan and others were to develop closer ties with NATO? I think, in fact, there would only be a benefit, in terms of trust, confidence and cooperation. [...] I believe that this network of consultation and cooperation would be even stronger if countries such as China and India were to take part as well."³

NATO has managed to have staff-level contacts with China, but has been unable to set up any sort of formalized relationship with India. The Alliance's only regular exchanges of ideas with India have taken place on the track II-level during the five NATO-India Dialogues, organized by the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation in New Delhi since 2005 with the intention of developing a better understanding between the two sides. Many of those participating in the conferences voiced their hope that the 2011 Dialogue would mark a breakthrough in NATO-India relations, but nothing more happened than a visit of an Indian delegation to the NATO Headquarters in Brussels in December 2011. If NATO's intention now is to pursue a partnership with India, it is important that the Alliance understand Indian foreign policy and develop a strategy to engage New Delhi.

UNDERSTANDING INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY PRINCIPLES

After the breakup of the Soviet Union, India's foreign policy establishment moved away from the traditional principle of non-alignment and developed an increasingly realistic mindset. As a result, national interest rather than ideology is the focal point of India's foreign policy. This does not mean that India's foreign policy has changed completely, because the main pillars of the non-alignment movement – peace and independent understanding of world affairs – remain valid. At the same time New Delhi's strategic community is aware that, in a changing world order, India cannot remain averse to revisiting its foreign policy outlook, which is why it has established closer relations with the United States. India therefore struggles between upholding its traditional foreign policy principles and adjusting to an emerging multipolar world, in which it wants to be a major pillar free of any constraints resulting from partnerships with other states.

In general, India seeks to develop friendly relations with any state so as to secure international support when needed the most. This is sometimes referred to as India's "360-degree vision", with attempts to reach out west to foster foreign investment, north to enhance energy security, and east to establish partnerships with various actors in the Asia-Pacific sphere.⁴ While some believe that the strong relationship with the US indicates a closer alignment of India with "the West", one cannot dismiss the fact that India has over a dozen strategic relationships with states as diverse as Brazil, Iran, Japan, Kazakhstan, Russia, South Africa and Vietnam. This is a sign that India has moved away from non-alignment towards multi-alignment, and cooperates whenever it suits its national interest. At the same time, New Delhi does that in a non-committing way to maintain complete sovereignty in foreign policy decision-making, which is why strategic autonomy remains an important principle of Indian foreign policy.⁵

While India has built up many strong bilateral relationships, it does not like to engage with alliances. This dogma remains part of India's psyche even twenty years after NATO's post-Cold War transformation. India views the UN as the only legitimate international peacekeeping force and is contrary to any non-UN-led operation, even if it is mandated by the UN Security Council as was the case with NATO's intervention in Libya. New Delhi's firm commitment to the UN is the reason why India is a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and pushes to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Despite the country's opposition to alliances, New Delhi has observer status in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which has a military component in the form of the Peninsula Shield Force. In Europe, India considers the EU a strategic partner even though the EU Common Security and Defence Policy has involved sending troops abroad on independent operations. India is thus on the whole not discouraged from working with the GCC and the EU, because both organizations stand for much more than their respective defence components; NATO, on the other hand, is viewed as a military alliance in the traditional sense.

Another principle of India's foreign policy is non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries.⁶ This is why India opposes promotion of democracy in Myanmar and does not support regime change through military intervention – which is an additional reason for its opposition to NATO's campaign in Libya. Interestingly, it was Indian civil society

³ Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO in the 21st Century: Towards Global Connectivity", Speech, Munich Security Conference, February 7, 2010, Munich, Germany - http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_61395.htm (accessed December 2, 2011).

⁴ Khanna Parag and C. Raja Mohan, "Getting India Right", *Policy Review* no. 135 (2006), pp. 43-61, p. 47.

⁵ Teresita C. Schaffer, "The United States and India 10 Years Out", Center for a New American Security, October 2010, http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_10YearsOut_Schaffer.pdf, p. 6 (accessed October 11, 2011).

⁶ Daniel Twining and Richard Fontaine, "The Ties That Bind? U.S.-Indian Values-based Cooperation", *The Washington Quarterly* 34, no. 2, 2011, pp. 193-205.



and many members of the foreign policy establishment who opposed the intervention in Libya, whereas the Indian government did not issue any official criticism of NATO's actions as it would have during the Cold War. This is a sign that it is no longer keen to highlight India's non-interference doctrine.

INDIA'S SECURITY PRIORITIES

New Delhi continues to have unfriendly relations with a number of states in the region. Throughout its history, India has fought wars with many of its neighbours or within their borders, including Pakistan, China, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Alongside a number of internal security challenges, India faces border conflicts in Kashmir and all along the Chinese border, piracy in the Indian Ocean and cross-border terrorism.

New Delhi's strategic community views Pakistan as India's largest threat, because Islamabad supports terrorist groups targeting India and many in the Pakistani government are willing to make use of the country's nuclear arsenal in the event of a conflict. Many Indians are frustrated over the ongoing US aid to Pakistan, which enables Islamabad's military and intelligence forces to continue their efforts to disrupt India's security. Nevertheless, it is in India's interest to maintain stability in Pakistan because instability there would cause problems of mass migration along the border between the two countries. India is also concerned with China, which plays an increasingly aggressive role along its border with India and in the Indian Ocean while at the same time maintaining close relations with Pakistan.

Beyond its immediate neighbours, India's main security concerns range from the East China Sea in the east to Somalia in the west. Until recently, New Delhi did not see a place for NATO in its security framework because many viewed the Alliance as an actor concerned with European security. It was only when NATO became heavily involved in Afghanistan that New Delhi's strategic community clearly recognized NATO's engagement.

NATO AND INDIA: SHARED REGIONAL CHALLENGES

SECURITY IN POST-2014 AFGHANISTAN

The most pressing area where NATO's and India's interests converge is the stability of Afghanistan. After more than a

decade of military engagement, NATO plans to withdraw its troops by 2014. India, which has strong historical ties with Afghanistan, fears that once the NATO forces leave the Taliban will take power again. A Taliban-controlled Afghanistan would be friendly to Pakistan and undermine India's role in the country. NATO shares India's interest in a stable Afghanistan after Western troops leave the country. After all, the Alliance has committed massive resources to Afghanistan, lost thousands of troops, and had to overcome political turmoil because of domestic opposition to the war. The main reason why NATO fought the Taliban in the first place was to destroy the safe haven which Afghanistan offered Al Qaida. This is why the Alliance has a major interest in ensuring that Afghanistan will not fall back into the hands of the Taliban and become a safe haven for international terrorists again.

Even though some US troops and intelligence are likely to stay behind, the responsibility will mainly be transferred to the Afghan security forces. Many Indians fear instability after the NATO troops leave and raise the question of what India will do to help secure stability in post-2014 Afghanistan. There is a consensus within India's foreign policy establishment that India will not replace the ISAF troops, whereas many welcome the idea of launching a UN peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan to which India would contribute troops. Military engagement would be questionable, from a political and practical standpoint. Who would grant the mandate for a military operation in Afghanistan? Where would India take the resources from to sustain an "out-of-area" operation? And, if NATO has ultimately not been able to create long-lasting stability in Afghanistan, how could one expect India to do a better job?

It is important to understand that India does not view Afghanistan solely from a military standpoint. India is already one of the largest donors to Afghanistan, having pledged up to \$2 billion in aid.⁷ At their most recent meeting in New Delhi in October 2011, Indian Prime Minister Singh and Afghan President Karzai signed a strategic partnership agreement in which India promises to play an important role in the reconstruction of Afghanistan as well as the training of the Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF).⁸ Overall, India will thus continue to sponsor infrastructure projects, invest in education and start training Afghan security forces. Details of military training have not yet been released, but it is likely that thousands of Afghan officers will be trained on

⁷ Although no recent official statistics about Indian aid to Afghanistan can be accessed, the latest reports claim that India pledged \$2 billion in aid to Afghanistan after Prime Minister Singh announced an additional \$500 million in May 2011: "Indian commitment to Afghanistan touches USD 2 billion: PM", *Hindustan Times*, May 1, 2011 - <http://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/Afghanistan/Indian-commitment-to-Afghanistan-touches-USD-2-billion-PM/Article1-697007.aspx> (accessed December 21, 2011); "Indian PM Manmohan Singh pledges \$500m to Afghanistan", BBC May 12, 2011, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-south-asia-13370637> (accessed December 21, 2011).

⁸ Indian Ministry of External Affairs, "Text of Agreement on Strategic Partnership between the Republic of India and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan", October 4, 2011, <http://trade.nic.in/mystart.php?id=530518343> (accessed December 2, 2011).



Indian soil.⁹

Although both NATO and India have an immense stake in the stability of Afghanistan, cooperation between the two is unlikely. While India benefits from NATO's operation in Afghanistan and would like the Alliance to continue its presence in the country beyond 2014, New Delhi is unwilling actually to work with it in Afghanistan. Many Indians are disappointed that NATO and the US did not involve New Delhi in their Afghanistan strategy. Moreover, NATO chose Pakistan as its main ally in its effort to counter the Taliban – which makes sense for many reasons, but still upsets the Indian policymakers. India does not see the advantage of attaching itself to any NATO effort in Afghanistan, because New Delhi can ensure influence and continue its development efforts on a bilateral basis. Instead of coordinating the efforts to maintain stability in Afghanistan with NATO, therefore, India would rather deal with the Karzai administration directly. In addition, logistical problems would arise if India was to cooperate with NATO. The best way to reach Afghan soil from India is through Iran, because Islamabad would not grant permission for Indian supplies to pass through Pakistan. Given NATO's poor relations with Tehran, cooperation between India and NATO would thus make it logistically even more difficult for India to help Afghanistan.

THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

Another point of convergence is maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). India and NATO already work together in counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden and the western Indian Ocean, through the Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) initiative. This involves a variety of actors, such as the Combined Maritime Forces,¹⁰ Russia, China, other participating states, and members of the merchant and shipping community.¹¹ Since 2008, SHADE has met regularly in Bahrain to coordinate and deconflict naval counter-piracy operations in the region. Both India and NATO have a joint interest in protecting sea lines of communication, especially in the IOR where about half of the world's container products and almost seventy percent of its ship-borne oil and petroleum traffic transit.¹² In addition to vested economic interests, India is heavily committed

to protecting its influence in the IOR as a counterbalance to China's growing military weight – Beijing has set up military bases and strengthened diplomatic relations with island states such as the Maldives and Sri Lanka. In this perspective, China's strategic strength is ensured along sea lines of communication forming a "string of pearls" from the South China Sea through the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean all the way to the Arabian Sea and the Persian Gulf, where each "pearl" represents a focus of Chinese military influence.¹³ Of particular concern for India is that a number of these actually encircle the Indian subcontinent – from Sittwe in Myanmar to Chittagong in Bangladesh, Hambantota in Sri Lanka and Gwadar in Pakistan. New Delhi thus does not view Beijing's engagement in the IOR merely as a means of protecting its economic interests, but also as aggressive expansion of military influence hemming in India on its own soil.

Unlike other points of convergence between India and NATO, protecting sea lines of communication in the IOR is not a sensitive issue. A bilateral counter-piracy effort would not be seen as a coalition against any other state, but as an effort to protect the common interests of the IOR. In addition, a common undertaking to counter piracy would not disturb India's relations with other actors. A further consideration is that collaboration in the field of maritime security would be welcomed by the naval community, because of the benefits of advanced interoperability and coordination. Overall, because the cooperation would make sense from an operational standpoint and would not pose any major political constraints, maritime security in the IOR could be a possible entry point for cooperation between NATO and India.

BEYOND REGIONAL COOPERATION: POSSIBLE ENTRY POINTS ON THE FUNCTIONAL LEVEL

Not only regional theatres but also functional areas of activity need to be considered as possible areas of convergence and cooperation. NATO addressed a wide range of themes in its 2010 Strategic Concept, including counter-terrorism, cyber security, space, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) and missile defence.¹⁴ All of these topics

⁹ "India Boosts Afghan Military Role", *The Diplomat*, December 7, 2011, <http://the-diplomat.com/2011/12/07/india-boosts-afghan-military-role/> (accessed December 21, 2011).

¹⁰ A coalition of 25 navies, <http://combinedmaritimeforces.com/about/> (accessed December 20, 2011).

¹¹ Alastair Clark, "Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) Operations – Counter Piracy Operations, Challenges, Shortfalls and Lessons Learned", Combined Maritime Forces PowerPoint Presentation, June 4, 2009, <http://www.nato.int/structur/AC/141/pdf/PS-M/Combined%20Maritime%20Forces%20Ops.pdf>, slide 12 (accessed December 23, 2011).

¹² Robert Blackwill and Naresh Chandra, "The United States and India: A Shared Strategic Future", Council on Foreign Relations/Aspen Institute India, September 2011, http://www.aspenindia.org/pdf/shared_Strategic.pdf, p. 3 (accessed November 22, 2011).

¹³ Christopher J. Pehrson, "String of Pearls: Meeting the Challenge of China's Rising Power Across the Asian Littoral", Strategic Studies Institute, July 200, <http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pdf/files/PUB721.pdf> (accessed December 23, 2011).

¹⁴ NATO, "Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of The Members and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization", 2010, <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2011).



are also of interest to India. It is very important to highlight the functional areas of NATO's engagement, because such a perspective shows the organization less in the light of a traditional military alliance established to counter a threat posed by another international actor, and more as a global peace and security provider. This can be a step towards changing the perceptions of Indians who still view NATO as a traditional military alliance, and towards highlighting the common interests of both India and NATO.

The potential of certain functional tasks as possible entry points for cooperation should thus be assessed. The most pressing security issue for India throughout the last decades has been terrorism. This is why India has embraced cooperation on counter-terrorism with both the US and the EU. Since 2000, India and the US have worked together to counter terrorism through intelligence sharing and capacity building. In July 2010, the two countries signed the India-US Counter-Terrorism Cooperative Initiative and, in May 2011, US Secretary of Homeland Security Napolitano visited Indian Minister for Home Affairs Chidambaram to hold the first round of a new Homeland Security Dialogue.¹⁵ In the same spirit, India and the EU have announced their joint commitment to high-level political dialogue, law enforcement and police cooperation, coordinated transport, aviation and border security, sharing of experiences in consequence management, and cooperation in multilateral systems like the UN as well as in research, technology and cyber security.¹⁶

NATO too focuses on counter-terrorism, through initiatives such as the "Defence Against Terrorism" programme. This addresses a range of specific activities, such as countering improvised explosive devices, protecting ships and harbours, and detecting chemical, biological, radioactive and nuclear weapons. NATO's "Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism" offers partners a format for working together on a case-by-case basis to share information, conducting joint exercises and receiving advice on issues like civil emergency planning. Such activities can be of use to India and therefore become a platform for cooperation.

Joint projects on cyber defence would also be possible. Both India and NATO members have experienced cyber attacks, such as the one on Estonia in 2007 and several

on Indian government ministries since 2009.¹⁷ India is at the very beginning of developing active cyber defence. Although the 2008 amendments to India's IT Act appointed the Computer Emergency Response Team (CERT) as the organization empowered to deal with cyber defence, CERT deals with the topic only very passively, for example recording cyber incidents which are reported to it.¹⁸ NATO has a more sophisticated cyber defence apparatus. The Alliance launched the Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence (CCD COE) in Estonia in 2008, which includes a staff of about thirty to conduct research and training in cyber defence. In NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, the Alliance promises to develop further capabilities to prevent, detect, defend against and recover from cyber attacks.¹⁹ Cyber space is a global public infrastructure which has no clear geographical dimensions, making collaboration on cyber security less likely to be seen as a partnership aimed against any outside power.

Other areas which could serve as entry points for cooperation are humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, as well as energy and environmental security.

More sensitive topics include non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Although it is in the interest of both NATO and India to prevent WMDs proliferating, India is not part of the global non-proliferation regime and thus feels uncomfortable dealing with the issue alongside NATO, an organization which is committed to the Non-Proliferation Treaty.²⁰ New Delhi is also unlikely to cooperate on developing missile defence technology, for two main reasons. First, India faces a missile threat from its direct neighbours – hence the need for an immediate response in the event of an attack. In view of this priority, many question the effectiveness of a missile defence system for India based on heavy investment in missile defence technology irrelevant to New Delhi's needs. A second consideration is that cooperating with NATO on missile defence could disturb India's sound relations with Iran, based on strong commercial, energy and cultural links. For these reasons, attempts by the US to work with India on missile defence have failed to lead to any appreciable progress.

¹⁵ Indian Ministry of External Affairs, "India-US Relations", <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?id=50044540> (accessed November 22, 2011).

¹⁶ "EU-India: Joint Declaration on International Terrorism", Council of the European Union, December 10, 2010, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cms_data/docs/pressdata/EN/foraff/118405.pdf

¹⁷ Jeffrey Hunker, "Cyber war and cyber power: Issues for NATO doctrine", *Research Paper No. 62*, NATO Defense College, November 2010, p. 3; Datta, Saikat. "DNA investigation: PMO fights largest cyber-attack" *Daily News & Analysis*, August 22, 2011 - http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report_dna-investigation-pmo-fights-largest-cyber-attack_1578348 (accessed January 4, 2011).

¹⁸ "The Information Technology (Amendment) Bill, 2008", *Lok Sabha*, December 22, 2008, <http://www.cyberlaws.net/itamendments/IT%20ACT%20AMENDMENTS.PDF>, p.14 (accessed January 4, 2011).

¹⁹ NATO, "Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of The Members and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization", 2010, <http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf> (accessed November 20, 2011), point 19.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, point 26.



LACK OF MOMENTUM FOR A CLOSER PARTNERSHIP

Even though a number of NATO's and India's interests converge, it is not easy to form a partnership for a number of reasons. Most importantly, many Indians perceive NATO as a Cold War alliance and they see this as making any kind of partnership impossible because of India's strategic culture. India still shies away from dealing with military alliances because the concept of non-alignment remains deeply engrained in large sectors of the nation's strategic community and civil society. In this perspective, it would be politically unacceptable to develop close ties, let alone a strategic partnership, with an alliance which was once seen as hostile to India.

The trust deficit which accumulated during the Cold War has not been repaired by the transformation of NATO. This is mainly because the majority of Indians are not sure how they should perceive NATO. Since the Atlantic region is mostly outside the scope of India's security interests, Indians are predominantly indifferent to NATO. One could count the experts on NATO in New Delhi's vibrant think tank community on the fingers of one hand. No Indian university has any kind of programme focusing on NATO. No staff position in India's foreign policy machine, including the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence and the National Security Council, is designated to focus on NATO. This is why most Indians do not see the Alliance as anything more as a Cold War relic which exists today as a tool for American influence.

Because so few Indians know what NATO is today, many do not know that NATO can offer know-how in security sector reform and defence planning, as well as downsizing and transformation of forces. They are unaware of the value of being a NATO partner, and thus consider it unnecessary to establish relations with the Alliance. A contributing factor in this respect is the argument that India already has very strong ties to large NATO member states, making it hard to see any additional benefit in dealing with NATO as an organization. India thus deals more willingly with member states on a bilateral basis, the strategic partnership with the US providing the benchmark. Many members of New Delhi's foreign policy establishment ask why the country should partner NATO if it can get anything it wants out of the partnership it already has with the US. Most of the converging priorities identified above as possible entry points for a NATO-India partnership have already been addressed as part of India's relationship with the US. For

example, India and the US launched a maritime security framework in 2006²¹ and India is already Washington's largest partner in terms of joint naval exercises.²² As pointed out above, the US and India also work together to counter terrorism. In addition, they have attempted to collaborate on missile defence and cyber security. What remains for NATO to focus on is the future of Afghanistan, but India perceives the war in Afghanistan as a US operation with trivial support by Washington's allies.

POSSIBLE PARTNERSHIP MODELS

Having considered possible areas of cooperation and the main obstacles to building a partnership between NATO and India, the next consideration is what partnership models NATO can offer. Although NATO's favoured institutional approach is based on integrating partners into forums such as the Mediterranean Dialogue or the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, with so large and powerful an actor as India the only appropriate framework for dialogue is surely bilateral. The Alliance is very flexible in terms of cooperation models, which can be seen in the variety of relationships with its partners across the globe. Among other joint projects and operations, NATO works with its long-standing partner Japan on issues like crisis management and civil emergency planning; with South Korea on disarmament and non-proliferation; with Australia and New Zealand, as part of the ISAF operation together in Afghanistan; and with its new partners Afghanistan, Iraq and Pakistan on capacity building and homeland security-related issues. One can see that NATO's partners are able to pick and choose from NATO's wide-open tool box.

In addition to working on specific security concerns, NATO serves as a security forum – it is, after all, an organization with an important political component and the primary place for consultation about any of its individual members' security-related concerns. Secretary General Rasmussen's statement advocating that NATO become a global forum for consultations on security issues has already been highlighted above, in the section on NATO partnerships.²² This is not an attempt to duplicate the UN as the global security organization, but to ensure that NATO's partners across the globe are involved in the dialogue so crucial to the "out-of-area" engagement it has already implemented.

Considering NATO's institutional framework, the Alliance can offer two possible options for a partnership with India:

²¹ "Indo-U.S. Framework for Maritime Security Cooperation." U.S. Department of Defense March 2006, <http://www.defense.gov/news/Mar2006/d200600302indo-usframeworkformaritimesecuritycooperation.pdf> (accessed October 20, 2011).

²² Richard L. Armitage, R. Nicholas Burns and Richard Fontaine, "Natural Allies: A Blueprint for the Future of U.S.-India Relations", Center for a New American Security, October 2010, http://www.cnas.org/files/documents/publications/CNAS_Natural%20Allies_ArmitageBurnsFontaine.pdf, p. 5 (accessed October 20, 2011).

²³ *Ibid.*, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "NATO in the 21st Century: Towards Global Connectivity".



cooperating on an operational and thematic basis, or using NATO as a forum for security consultation. The first option would make sense not only in the light of possible entry points, but also as the less sensitive of the two. Cooperating on specific security concerns would be legitimate for the Indian government because this would further India's security interests, whereas using NATO as a forum for addressing security matters in general would create the impression of India being aligned with the Alliance. A common threat analysis would be valuable with a view to determining common security challenges, but Indian officials are unlikely to be willing to travel to Brussels on a regular basis to discuss their concerns with NATO.

REQUIREMENTS TO MOVE FORWARD – FIVE QUESTIONS FOR NATO

It is now up to NATO to move the relationship forward and overcome the reluctance caused by India's strategic culture and ignorance about NATO. With this end in view, it is necessary to recognize that India needs to be approached gradually and to avoid rusing in prematurely with proposals. Only if NATO is able to convince the broader strategic community that it is in India's interest to cooperate with NATO will it be able to reach an agreement with Indian policymakers.

Progress will be made only if three conditions are met. First, specific cooperation needs to be in an area which is of vital national interest to India, because New Delhi examines each case individually and evaluates resulting strategic gains for its national security. Second, the partnership model needs to ensure that India's independence is not limited: strategic autonomy remains one of the most important parameters in India's strategic culture. Third, the partnership with NATO must not affect India's relations with its strategic partners, because India does not align with one actor at the expense of another.

To meet these requirements, NATO would first and foremost have to clarify five questions and disseminate its answers effectively among the Indian strategic community. First, what is NATO? Second, where does NATO see itself in the future? Third, where does NATO fit into the South Asian security framework? Fourth, what are NATO's expectations of a partnership with India? Fifth, what can NATO bring to the table? If NATO fails to answer these questions precisely, Indians will remain diffident and will be uncomfortable about entering into any agreement.

EXPLAINING NATO

The first step needs to be educating Indian interlocutors at all levels about NATO. The track II-level dialogues organized

by the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation fulfilled their purpose as a means of establishing contact between NATO and India, which is why the organization decided to discontinue the dialogues and leave the next move to NATO. This is where NATO could step in to increase the scope of the dialogues, drawing in more members of New Delhi's strategic community and bringing the talks up to track 1.5-level with involvement of Indian officials. Developing regular official dialogues may be premature, because India is not yet comfortable about opening up to NATO at such a level; only when the public discourse about NATO as a Cold War alliance changes will Indian officials agree to any official contacts of this kind.

NATO's public diplomacy effort, however, should not be limited to organizing conferences. The Alliance could set up an information and documentation centre in New Delhi which could engage in a variety of projects to educate Indian policymakers and civil society about NATO, for example through seminars, briefings and fellowship programmes.

Such efforts would give NATO the chance to explain that the organization is not a traditional military alliance. This is a fundamental requirement for changing the Indian perception of NATO, and portraying it as a soft power organization committed to the purposes and principles of the UN Charter. It would also be valuable to inform the Indian strategic community about NATO's latest Strategic Concept, which is the core document defining the organization. In addition to initiatives devised to explain NATO to the broader strategic community, the Alliance could also use outreach activities to explain to the defence establishment what NATO as a partner can bring to the table.

The Alliance could also build closer relations with India through military diplomacy. India already trains officers of NATO states at its National Defence College. NATO could, in turn, invite New Delhi to send Indian officers to the NATO Defense College in Rome and the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany. Interaction between NATO and Indian forces would help build trust between the parties, and would allow the Indian defence establishment to gain a better understanding of NATO's inner workings.

COOPERATION IN THE FIELD

NATO's talking points should prioritize functional cooperation on neutral topics. The most practical and least sensitive points of convergence, where India would stand to gain from a partnership with NATO, are counter-terrorism and maritime and cyber security. Starting to collaborate on such an agenda would provide a way of starting regular official contact and furthering the trust-building process. This is why NATO should propose specific cooperation in these areas.



In terms of counter-terrorism, NATO could invite India to join its Defence Against Terrorism programme to share information and best practices on an issue which is of deep concern to both sides. NATO could become the focal point for India to work with Europe and the US on the military aspects of counter-terrorism, while cooperation in the fields of homeland security, including airport and border security, could be pursued in the framework of India's relations with the US and the EU.

The Alliance could also propose working together to counter piracy in the Indian Ocean. In September 2011, NATO invited representatives from over 47 nations and organizations, including India, to exchange experiences and coordinate their counter-piracy efforts in the Indian Ocean. NATO, however, does not take part in any regional forums designed to promote security in the IOR. Only two NATO states, the US and France, participate in the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), a forum of 32 states launched in 2008 to promote a shared understanding of maritime issues in the IOR and to increase interoperability between the actors involved. It makes sense for NATO to attend, and organize, such meetings on a regular basis. Because India is fundamental to security in the IOR, counter-piracy gives the Alliance a chance to establish a relationship with India while at the same time gaining a greater stake in a region which is of vital interest to its member states. The Alliance could start by inviting Indian officers as observers to NATO exercises and later initiate joint exercises between NATO and India, which already participates in such activities with individual NATO states. At the same time, NATO could ask to participate as an individual actor in the IONS, which would give a tangible sign of the Alliance's interest in the region. In the long term, NATO could work towards developing a maritime security framework with India as one of its main partners in the region.

Cooperation in cyber security is another starting point for NATO to engage with New Delhi. Indian researchers have already attended conferences organized by NATO's Cooperative Cyber Defence Center of Excellence, which shows that there is interest on both sides in cooperating on cyber defence. NATO could therefore offer India help in building up an active cyber defence body. Even if NATO and India are diffident about capability sharing, the parties could work together in an academic environment where best practices for cyber defence could be discussed with the shared goal of keeping cyber space open and secure.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

India and NATO share too many interests to neglect the benefits of a partnership. It is now time for India's foreign policy makers to overcome their attitude towards NATO, shaped as it is by the legacy of the Cold War. NATO can further this process by stepping up public diplomacy efforts to engage with New Delhi's strategic community. A partnership would then require an initial focus on functional cooperation. Establishing relationships in the fields of counter-terrorism and maritime and cyber security is not an outlandish proposal, and could be achieved within the next few years. The question is therefore not whether, but when, India will start working with NATO.