

NATO's Partnerships After 2014: Go West!

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Throughout more than two decades, NATO has woven a dense network of partnerships in Europe and beyond. In many cases, the partner countries are either unable to apply for membership or not interested in doing so. A very sophisticated system of partnerships has thus developed over the years: most partners are grouped within a collective arrangement like the Partnership for Peace (PfP) / Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) or the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD). There are also a few which cooperate on a bilateral basis - i.e. NATO plus the partner country.

This dense grid of relations has been extremely successful in bringing countries up to NATO standards, in helping to export stability, in soothing delicate relations with and among partners, and in gaining support of partners for NATO missions in Afghanistan, Libya or the Balkans. On the other hand, the rising number of partners from different regions, with different interests and levels of ambition has brought difficulties: it has made the management of partnerships increasingly cumbersome, complicated its political oversight, and increasingly failed to meet the expectations of partners.

A major reform of NATO's partnership policy in April 2011, known as the "Berlin Package", was intended to make the running of partnerships less complicated and more manageable. Regrettably, the reform has worked only in part by making military cooperation run like clockwork but at the same time ignoring the main political questions that come with partnership. Moreover it will prove to be difficult in the post-2014 era - when not only NATO combat operations in Afghanistan but all the business related to the mission with the respective partners on a day-to-day basis come to an end.

How can the Alliance best manage its interaction with partners, at a time when it is evolving – as Secretary General Rasmussen has put it - "from deployed NATO to prepared NATO"? Can traditional forms of partnership be pursued? Is it necessary to rank partners, on the basis of how much they contribute to NATO's objectives? Should provision be made for special consultations with politically like-minded partners, who share and support NATO's values?



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² See the "Berlin Partnership Package", http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_04/20110415_110415-Partnership-Policy.pdf. Note: while recognizing that the Alliance has established relations with various international organizations, this paper focuses exclusively on NATO's partnerships with countries.



The Need for a New Approach

Partnerships were initially organized in geographical groups, beginning with the creation of the PfP programme in 1994. Today the 28 NATO nations and 22 PfP members from Europe and beyond meet in the EAPC. The MD was also launched in 1994, as a framework for cooperating with Mediterranean and North African states. Ten years later, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) was born: the aim in this case was to offer countries in the broader Middle East region practical, bilateral security cooperation with NATO. Outside these formal structures, NATO has partnerships - mostly on a bilateral basis - with other countries such as Australia, Japan and Pakistan. Since these relations are not confined to specific regions or grouped in a specific forum, the countries concerned are generically referred to as “partners across the globe”.

The problem is that, over the last two decades, partnerships with a variety of countries have been set up in different historical periods and political contexts. In addition, the various partner countries have cooperated with NATO in different ways. The result is a jungle of different relations and regulations, with attendant difficulties in terms of practical management and political oversight. It was therefore almost inevitable that, over time, the efficiency of the partnership “business” would suffer as a result of new developments, changed circumstances and inconsistencies within the system. This holds all the more true if one bears in mind that “partnership” is a highly political issue, containing all kinds of sensitive questions. For example, what are the criteria for becoming a NATO partner? Is NATO more concerned with the country’s political system, or the contributions it can offer? What if partners’ actions are in contradiction with the obligations they have undertaken? (For instance, all PfP partners have pledged to uphold NATO values, basic human rights and the rule of law.) How can partners influence the Alliance’s decision-shaping processes in exchange for their contributions to NATO operations? What are the implications for a consensus-based alliance like NATO, if any given member is at odds with a partner country?

The April 2011 meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers in Berlin agreed on a major reform to make partnerships more effective - the “Berlin package”. This was a pragmatic approach, in which flexibility was the key concept. The idea was to give all partners the option of being engaged in a variety of flexible formats, based on common interests, including topics like cyber threats, terrorism or energy

security. To facilitate this, NATO created a single menu of partnership activities (from seminars and conferences to military exercises and training programmes), open to all partners. This means that partners can now choose what to participate in, regardless of which framework they belong to.

The reform is an attempt to rearrange the Alliance’s partnerships through reasonable management regulations, without involving politics. Critical political questions were intentionally left off the agenda, so as to ensure the agreement of all 28 NATO nations.³ While the introduction of “flexible formats” was intended to encourage a rethinking of partnership activities on a non-regional basis, the established frameworks/regional forums (PfP/EAPC, MD and ICI) have been kept and repeatedly confirmed. Discontinuing them would have been too politically sensitive.

Today, two years after its initiation, the Berlin reform has worked only in part – some even consider it a failure. The reason for this seems to lay not so much in the Berlin package itself as in political issues which constantly interfere with the practicalities of partnership. In particular, a dispute among NATO members over management of the Alliance’s dialogue with Israel brought partnership activities practically to a halt in 2012: hundreds of also deployment and NRF-related activities on the partnership menu were blocked.

NATO’s failure to establish a “hierarchy” with regard to the importance of partners is a far more serious issue to address. Putting everybody in the same category means disregarding the expectations of many close partners, such as Sweden and Finland. Within the PfP, even before the Berlin package they made strange bedfellows with authoritarian regimes with whom they had little if anything in common - not even close operational partnerships. After the reform, they found themselves in an even bigger pool. This is not simply a question of sense and sensibility. In the on-going Afghan mission, NATO’s closest operational partners are still included in the International Security and Assistance Force (ISAF) format of meetings and decision-shaping processes. After 2014 there will be nothing left but the general pool of partners, since the 2011 Berlin reform did not venture so far as to fill the political vacuum. It thus failed to create a partnership policy which institutionalizes the close operational cooperation with NATO’s longest-standing and most like-minded partners.

³ See Heidi Reisinger, *Rearranging Family Life and a Large Circle of Friends: Reforming NATO’s Partnership Programmes*, *Research Paper n. 72*, NATO Defense College Rome, January 2012.



A political response to this development is long overdue. The Alliance lacks a transparent concept that mirrors the existing perceptions and practice. Despite NATO's attempts to avoid prioritization and hierarchy, everybody is aware that in day-to-day business there are partners and *partners*.

As a result of political pressure from some of the nations concerned, a group of 13 partner countries were invited to NATO's May 2012 Chicago Summit. The rationale of what was announced as an "unprecedented meeting" with NATO was to discuss the further development of partnerships and of course, to honor the important contribution of the invited countries. However, the choice of the 13 countries⁴ remained enigmatic and there was no follow-on meeting of this group. The ambassador of one of the nations concerned admitted that he was not sure about the wisdom of such a "one-night stand".

Clearly, NATO cannot afford to focus exclusively on the managerial aspects of partnerships. There are also key political questions to be addressed. Three major sets of issues seem to be the most pressing.

1. How to deal with the regional frameworks

Even if the Berlin reform has devalued geography as a criterion for cooperation with partners (all partners can sign up for partnership activities, if the topic belongs to the mutually agreed objectives), the Pfp, MD and ICI still exist. This means that there have been regular meetings in these frameworks, despite the problems they pose.

- The EAPC, the largest partnership forum, has evolved into an almost dysfunctional body. It groups countries as different as Austria, Switzerland, Tajikistan and Moldova, some of which have contrasting positions vis-à-vis NATO. Finland, a democratic country and a strong supporter of NATO, thus finds itself together with very difficult partners – some of them nothing less than a dictatorship. Sweden, as another example, was one of the major contributors to NATO's operation in Libya, whereas Belarus's dictatorial president Lukashenka condemned the mission as "vandalism". As a result of these incompatibilities, the EACP has increasingly become an empty husk without a driving force; its members organize their bilateral relations with NATO according to their individual needs.

- The MD is not in good shape either. It was initiated to use the Oslo peace process between Israel and Palestine as a basis for supporting cooperation between NATO and the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean. With the breakdown of the Israeli-Palestine reconciliation, the implementation of the MD partnership has become extremely difficult. Since the Israeli raid against the so-called "Gaza Freedom Flotilla" in spring 2010, one NATO member has strongly opposed partnership activities with Israel in the MD framework. The result is that, despite the Israeli apology, the MD seems permanently paralyzed by the Israeli-Arab question - an issue in which NATO has no role to play, and which is unlikely to be resolved in the foreseeable future.⁵
- The ICI, too, appears paralyzed. Unlike the MD, it is not burdened with any major contentious issue. It has nevertheless failed to fulfil the hopes which accompanied its inauguration in 2004. Two important members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Saudi Arabia and Oman, still remain outside the ICI. In addition, all NATO partners in the Gulf region prefer bilateral relations with NATO instead of a multilateral partnership within the ICI.⁶ To further complicate the Alliance's relations with the countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, many ICI or MD partners seem to assume that partnership with the Alliance entails some sort of NATO security commitment for the region – something which is definitely not intended by any Alliance member. Since the revolutions in the MENA region, the situation has worsened. On the one hand, NATO is expected by many to actively assist in the transformation of the region – something the Alliance is willing to do – but its offers have not always been picked up by the regional actors. On the other hand, countries in revolutionary mode hardly have the political energy to concentrate on partnership programmes.

The idea that even dysfunctional but established platforms for dialogue are better than none is misleading. Here, the continued existence of the outdated structure causes negative repercussions of two kinds. First, preserving the familiar Pfp, MD and ICI frameworks – albeit as little more than an empty shell – has not left sufficient opportunity for new structures and concepts to settle.

⁴ Australia, Austria, Finland, Georgia, Japan, Jordan, Republic of Korea, Morocco, New Zealand, Qatar, Sweden, Switzerland, United Arab Emirates.

⁵ Also the Moroccan initiative to reform the MD frameworks can be seen as an attempt to overcome the inefficient status quo.

⁶ Jean-Loup Samaan, NATO in the Gulf: Partnership Without a Cause?, *Research Paper n. 83*, NATO Defense College, Rome, October 2012.



Only hard-core experts have really sought to understand the reform, while the broad strategic community has continued talking about PfP/EAPC, MD and ICI. From a psychological point of view, the reform was to all intents and purposes dead on arrival.

Second, the old frameworks are an obstacle to consistent use of more efficient and flexible formats. If NATO wanted to meet with *some* MD countries to discuss a specific issue, for example, the other MD partners could justifiably ask why they were being left out. The old frameworks thus continue to limit the possibility of innovative, more cluster-oriented dialogue.

2. What to do with the special relationships

Some countries not only belong to a geographical partnership framework, but also enjoy privileged bilateral relationships with NATO. These arrangements, granted for political reasons years ago, are not always in line with today's realities.

- The PfP member Georgia, for instance, is striving to become a NATO member and is using its special partnership, the *NATO-Georgia Commission* (a consolatory arrangement created in 2008, when Georgia was not granted rapid accession), for that purpose. In the meantime, there is a deep split in NATO about when to admit Georgia.
- Ukraine also enjoys a special relationship, in addition to belonging to PfP. The *NATO-Ukraine Commission* was founded in 1997, when the country was desperately lobbying for admission to NATO. In the meantime, however, Ukraine has changed its mind: NATO membership is no longer the goal of the government in Kyiv. This begs an important question: what justifies this privileged relationship, compared to other partner countries?
- Russia, a PfP member and a special partner in the framework of the *NATO-Russia Council*, is frequently described as NATO's "Strategic Partner". However, hardly any major partnership activities take place between the two. In addition (and unlike most other partners), Russia is not contributing directly to any NATO operation. The much trumpeted strategic partnership materializes mainly in bitter disputes over NATO's open door policy and its efforts to build a missile defence system. In addition, the Russian ruling elite cultivates anti-NATO sentiment and speaks caustically of the Alliance in Russian domestic debate.

3. How to deal with the global partners

NATO's partners around the globe make up another very diverse group: Western-oriented democracies

like Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea, together with countries like Iraq, Pakistan and Afghanistan. The first four are active supporters of NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan, and can therefore regularly meet with NATO members in this framework. Even if the ISAF meetings are mostly concerned with operational requirements in Afghanistan, they have provided a form of sustained partnership contact. However, with NATO's combat operations in the Hindu Kush due to end in 2014, these meetings of ISAF contributors meetings will no longer exist. This means that, unless a new forum is created, implementing partnership activities will be possible only on a bilateral basis.

All in all, a fundamentally new approach to organizing NATO's relations with outside countries and with international organizations is required.

Eight Insights for a New Partnership Concept

Despite the institutional and organizational shortcomings, partnerships still range high on the Alliance's agenda: in the NATO Chicago Summit Declaration, the term "partnership" appears no less than 31 times. However, it must not be forgotten that the heyday of NATO's partnership concept in its present form is over and done with. Politically, it was at its height during the transformation of Eastern Europe in the 1990s; from a military viewpoint, the peak came during the campaign in Afghanistan.

With the Afghanistan mission ending, there is a requirement and an opportunity for a fundamental overhaul of the partnership architecture – not to correct the Berlin reform, but to tackle the political issues that have so far been left unaddressed. This holds all the more true as other developments further highlight the need for a profound change. With the United States' foreign policy pivoting towards the Asia-Pacific region, NATO too will have to rethink its geographical horizons. A huge financial crisis confronts all NATO members with the need to cut their defence budgets, and to compensate for shortcomings in capabilities through coordination and cooperation. The Arab world is likely to be in turmoil for years: such a scenario requires NATO to ensure that it can engage - and at the same time not interfere - with the countries concerned, while safeguarding stability.

Conceptualizing this overhaul, NATO needs to consider some insights and truths that have emerged from the partnership experience in recent years.



1. NATO benefits from partnerships

All partnerships are based on mutual interest and mutual benefit. Many partners are particularly interested in military cooperation with NATO, in order to familiarize themselves with the procedures and norms of an integrated military structure which is widely regarded as the gold standard. NATO in turn receives four major gains, which should be preserved in any partnership reform:

- In the last two decades, NATO supported political and military transformation in partner countries. Many of these are now fully interoperable with the Alliance.
- NATO in many cases receives military and financial support from partners for its crisis management operations. For instance, 22 countries (not all of them partners) contribute to NATO's mission in Afghanistan.
- Through partnerships, NATO can have a say in certain regions and at least try to affect political developments with a view to defusing crisis situations or easing tensions. Even if this influence depends on the situation and cannot be guaranteed, it can be an important element of preventive security policy.
- Through training and military assistance, NATO as a multinational enabler can empower partner countries to take care of their own regional security and to intervene, if needed, in crisis situations on their doorsteps. Empowerment of this kind can reduce the pressure on NATO to use its own forces for out-of-area crises.

2. Key NATO nations pursue the idea of benefitting from partnerships in their national policies

A crucial element of the U.S. administration's rebalancing towards Asia is to regard the countries in the region not as objects or as potential bases for American troops, but as partners. Military capacity building in the region should be achieved by military cooperation and by training partner countries' armed forces.⁷ This is in line with an essential requirement of President Obama's second term, which is to reduce the need for U.S. military interventions abroad. The Merkel government in Germany, too, is explicitly pursuing a strategy of "empowerment",⁸ i.e. military cooperation (including delivery of weapons) to ensure that partners can deal with security challenges in their neighbourhood.

3. Military contributions from partners will remain limited

Few partners are willing or able to contribute to NATO operations in a militarily significant way. Many countries make a token contribution to NATO's missions in Afghanistan or the Balkans. Of the almost 140,000 troops which were deployed in Afghanistan at the height of ISAF, only five per cent were provided by partner countries. This has to be put into perspective, however: there are also some NATO member states – even among the larger ones – which limit themselves to a similarly symbolic level of support.

4. Geography is no longer a guiding principle for NATO partnerships

Different countries in different regions could face an identical challenge (like energy security or terrorism) and cooperate with NATO accordingly, giving the partnership a very specific focus. This was one of the major steps in the Berlin reform package of March 2011: to arrange partnerships in the most flexible format possible – an idea which was widely shared among partners. In such a perspective, far from fostering the partnership idea, PfP, MD and ICI are now slowing down momentum or even bringing it to a halt.

5. The political system counts

NATO is a community of values. Its members all abide by the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law (even if some of the more recent members still show shortcomings in this respect). This means that other countries sharing these principles should be given priority for partnership, not merely in relation to questions of values but also in terms of practical cooperation. Sharing sensitive information is easier, in actual practice, among politically like-minded partners. The same holds true for military cooperation among countries with firm civilian control of their armed forces. While this does not preclude fruitful cooperation with non-democratic countries, politically like-minded partners should nevertheless be given special consideration.

6. Partnership cannot be free of hierarchies

Not all partners are equal and not all partners are equally important from NATO's point of view. Countries which contribute extensively to Alliance missions (referred to, in NATO parlance, as "heavy partners") deserve - and demand - particular attention. As explained under the previous heading, the same holds true for politically like-

⁷ Mark E. Manyin, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Toward Asia*, Congressional Research Service, Washington D.C., March 2012.

⁸ The Chancellor herself created the German term "Ertüchtigungs-Strategie".



minded countries.⁹ However, neither of these criteria is sufficient in itself to justify special importance as a partner. What constitutes privileged partnership status is the combination of fully sharing NATO's values *and* contributing to its missions. This is consistent with the expectations of close partners, and places a premium on a political - as opposed to a technical - approach to partnership.

7. Privileged partners need to have a voice in NATO.

In exchange for their support for NATO, politically like-minded partners should not merely have a say regarding the specific operation they are contributing to. They should also be put in a position where they can contribute to NATO deliberations on a broad range of security issues. With security challenges no longer limited to certain regions, the interests of democracies everywhere overlap considerably. This needs to be reflected in discussions between NATO members and partners.

8. There has to be a level below formal partnership.

There are countries which have an interest in cooperating with NATO but hesitate to join any formal partnership agreement, let alone contribute to NATO operations. The Alliance needs to leave itself scope for informal dialogue with these countries (as already happens on an occasional basis). One example would be China, a country that has approached NATO about establishing contacts. In the meantime, staff talks between high-level Chinese and NATO military have taken place in Beijing; it remains to be seen how these relations will continue to develop.¹⁰ India is another important country with which dialogue has started; however, New Delhi still seems very hesitant to engage. Nevertheless, both countries are too important for the Alliance (and vice versa) to be left without the prospect of closer cooperation. Also countries such as El Salvador, Malaysia, Singapore and Tonga, which are contributors to ISAF need to be taken into consideration. Do they have to become official partners of the Alliance to stay in contact after 2014? If yes, NATO will have almost the rest of the world as a partner after some years.

A New Partnership Model

In the light of the above considerations, a new partnership model should be developed. The first step should be to pension off the old frameworks PfP, MD and ICI, which have fulfilled their purpose but are no longer in step with the political and historical changes of the new century. Instead, new flexible formats should be used consequently for any kind of dialogue. Finally the Alliance should go ahead with the opened up spectrum of military cooperation, but introduce two new political categories. One at each end of the partnership spectrum: Advanced Partners and countries with which NATO does not maintain a formal partnership, but stays in contact. As a result, partners should still organize their cooperation with the Alliance on the basis of the united pool of activities, the Partnership Cooperation Menu, but on the *level of political visibility* NATO should group partners in three concentric circles around NATO: *Advanced Partners*, *Cooperation Partners* and *Dialogue Countries*.

The Advanced Partners – NATO's partners of choice – would constitute the politically closest circle around the Alliance. It would include the countries which want to engage in partnership with NATO, are politically like-minded (i.e. fully developed Western-style democracies), and are willing and able to contribute to operations. A group of countries fulfilling these three requirements should be included in NATO's debates and consultations on a regular basis, covering a wide range of security issues of common interest. For this purpose, a special forum should be created (with a title such as "Advanced Partners Council" - APC)¹¹ and convene with the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on a regular basis. APC members could request extraordinary meetings and propose items for the agenda. Their role would obviously be limited to influencing the Alliance's *decision-shaping*, while the classical *decision-making* would be the preserve of NATO members in NAC meetings. In certain cases they might be even involved in the decision-making processes.¹² Invitations to join the APC would be subject to the unanimous consent of all NATO member states, and geography would not be taken into account: Austria and Australia, for example, would be considered equally eligible.

The second group would be Cooperation Partners

⁹ Before NATO's Chicago summit, two Nordic countries submitted a non-paper to NATO in which they asked for deeper cooperation with "advanced partners".

¹⁰ China provides a ship for the anti-piracy mission off the Horn of Africa. Even if this is strictly national support with no subordination to a NATO or EU command, China takes part in the so called "de-confliction meetings" with all other contributors.

¹¹ Alternatively, Zbigniew Brzezinski suggested years ago that a group of this kind could be referred to as "NATO participants".

¹² Seven partners have already committed themselves to contribute to "Resolute Support", the follow-on mission to ISAF. For the first time these partners are partly also included in the decision-making.



- countries actively interested in partnership and in cooperating with NATO, to the mutual benefit of both sides, in certain areas of common concern. Contributions to NATO operations would be desirable but not indispensable. For instance, NATO might agree to provide military education for a partner's armed forces, irrespective of whether the country concerned would be willing or able to involve them in a NATO mission.

The essential difference between these two innermost circles of partners is that the first (the APC) would be limited to politically like-minded countries and benefit from regular consultations beyond the area of immediate cooperation. In addition, membership of this group would not be limited to the time frame of a certain project or activities – it would continue, unless specifically revoked by NATO and the partner countries.

Finally, the third circle and newly added category would be made up of the Dialogue Countries: while interested in an exchange with NATO, these would essentially be an unknown quantity with regard to any subsequent scope for cooperation. China and India have been mentioned. A dialogue with these countries would be intended first and foremost to correct mutual misperceptions and build trust. Also countries which contributed to a NATO mission, with which there is no need for institutionalized level should be offered the possibility to stay in touch with the Alliance beyond their contribution.

A special case that would need to be solved politically is that of NATO's three bilateral partnership forums: the NATO-Russia Council, the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and the NATO-Georgia Commission. Created under special historical and political circumstances, these hardly mirror today's realities. At the same time, the dynamics involved are politically charged and require a careful approach.

Despite the difficulties, not all three of these forums would have to be kept. In the case of Georgia, ending the bilateral partnership would be justifiable, as Georgia already enjoys special status in its relations with NATO. It is the only candidate for NATO membership which has – unlike all other applicant countries – received an *assurance* that it will be taken into NATO one day.¹³ Dissolving the NATO-Ukraine Commission would also

be possible, given that Ukraine is no longer interested in membership and a special bilateral agreement is thus an anachronism. Of course, Ukraine would remain a very important partner for the Alliance and would still have a great deal to offer in terms of common activities. Conceptually, Russia too could be included in the circle of Cooperation Partners: the degree of political like-mindedness in this case would definitely not be conducive to closer partnership. However, Russia's history, size and importance might be thought to justify the preservation of the NATO-Russia Council even for the relatively limited current and foreseeable level of partnership/cooperation. As the major successor of the Soviet Union, Russia would thus be the only state enjoying a special bilateral partnership with NATO. In this case, both sides would necessarily have to review their rhetoric and their level of ambition.

Problems of Implementation

The idea of creating a new partnership framework in which politically like-minded partners have special access to NATO deliberations is by no means new, and is not without its critics. As far back as January 2006, important voices in NATO proposed the dissolution of the EAPC and the creation of a special forum for the global (democratic) partners.¹⁴ In the last few years this idea has been repropounded in various shapes and forms, by academics as well as by political practitioners. Familiar catchwords in this respect include “Global NATO” and “Alliance for Freedom”; before the 2008 US elections, Republican candidate John McCain coined the expression “League of Democracies”.¹⁵ All these proposals had one common feature: special treatment by NATO for Western-style democracies, irrespective of their geographical location.

The proposals voiced in recent years for an overhaul of partnerships have been criticized on both main points involved – the dissolution of existing frameworks, and the privileged status for like-minded countries. Evidently, many partners within P4P have felt concern that the institution EAPC might disappear: some of the countries which cooperate less actively with NATO arguably see EAPC participation as an important symbol of their relationship with the Alliance. In addition, some critics

¹³ At NATO's 2008 Bucharest Summit, the Heads of State and Government declared that Georgia and Ukraine will become NATO members. This was the first time in history that NATO had given a membership guarantee to applicant countries, even if no time frame was mentioned. http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_8443.htm. For Ukraine, this guarantee is no longer valid: the country has officially declared that it is no longer interested in joining the Alliance.

¹⁴ The then US NATO ambassador, Victoria Nuland, brought this idea up in a meeting of the EAPC at the NATO School in Oberammergau, Germany.

¹⁵ For a good synopsis, see Tobias Bunde and Timo Noetzel, Unavoidable Tensions: The Liberal Path to Global NATO, in *Contemporary Security Policy*, August 2010, pp. 295-318.



have opposed the idea of privileged partnerships as a sort of red-carpet treatment set aside exclusively for democracies, meaning a return to the “political West” of the past (associated with the distinct possibility of interpreting the new construct as directed “against” someone).

Today, such reservations hardly apply. Existing partnership forums like the EAPC are dysfunctional. Discontinuing them would make no difference to NATO partnerships, as other mechanisms have been set up (flexible formats). In a scenario such as that proposed here, belonging to a given group of partners would merely determine the level of regular consultations with NATO, not the intensity of partnership activities. Close and flexible cooperation with different countries in Europe, Asia or the Middle East, irrespective of political like-mindedness, would be ensured.

There is nothing inherently wrong, or offensive to others, in the idea of NATO rolling out the red carpet for the democracies with which it enjoys particularly

close cooperation. In the post-Afghanistan world, this will surely be meaningful and important for the partners around the globe. Countries like Australia, New Zealand or Japan will certainly be asking themselves what added value partnership with NATO can offer, over and above their existing partnership with the United States. How would these countries benefit, given that they can already count on U.S. military and political engagement in their region? The answer is simple: close consultations on a regular basis, and on a variety of issues of mutual concern, with the 28 democratic countries which are part of NATO.

Given the fundamental political developments of the last decade, involving blockages and inconsistencies in NATO’s partnership activities, the Alliance’s approach to its dealings with non-member states is in definite need of reform. It is no longer enough to treat the symptoms by merely repairing institutions which date back to the political environment of the past. Giving like-minded countries, which are sharing Western values, a say in NATO’s deliberations and cooperating transparently with all other partners should be the indispensable leitmotiv in NATO’s future partnerships.