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NATO Partnerships:
Shaking Hands or Shaking the System?

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Abstract

The new Strategic Concept takes stock of the past ten years but outlines only modest objectives for the future of NATO. Partnership falls under the third core task, cooperative security. A subsequent partnership policy was unveiled, but has provided little new impetus. NATO launched the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in 2004. They have been designed to ensure that NATO maintains a constant cooperation with its periphery to anticipate emerging threats and to contribute to the stability of its neighborhood. Yet their interest has decreased and NATO faces multiples obstacles that prevent partnerships from moving forward. This paper outlines three scenarios for the future of those cooperative programs to show that they stand today at a crossroads and Allies need to appreciate the moment accordingly.

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Le nouveau Concept stratégique de l'OTAN ne définit que des objectifs modestes pour l'avenir de cette institution. La modestie des ambitions vaut aussi pour les partenariats qui n'ont pas pu être redynamisés malgré l'adoption d'une politique dédiée en avril 2011. Le Dialogue méditerranéen (DM) et le Partenariat pour la paix (PpP) ont été lancés en 1994. Quant à l'Initiative de coopération d'Istanbul (ICI), elle remonte à 2004. Ces coopérations ont été créées pour que l'OTAN maintienne des échanges constants avec sa périphérie afin d'anticiper les menaces émergentes et de contribuer à la stabilité de son voisinage. Néanmoins, leur intérêt a décru et l'Alliance doit faire face à divers obstacles qui empêchent les partenariats d'aller de l'avant. Cette étude présente trois scénarios concernant l'avenir de ces programmes de coopération qui se trouvent aujourd'hui à un tournant.

Acronyms

ACO	Allied Command Operation
ACT	Allied Command Transformation
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
ENP	European Neighborhood Policy
EU	European Union
ICI	Istanbul Cooperation Initiative
ICP	Individual Cooperation Program
IFOR	Implementation Force
IPAP	Individual Partnership Action Plan
IPCP	Individual Partnership Cooperation Program
IPP	Individual Partnership Program
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MD	Mediterranean Dialogue
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OUP	Operation Unified Protector
PARP	Planning and Review Process
PfP	Partnership for Peace
TCP	Tailored Cooperation Package

Introduction

The new Strategic Concept approved at the Lisbon summit in November 2010 takes stock of the past ten years but outlines only modest objectives. It defines three core tasks for NATO: collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. Partnership falls under the third basket. The Alliance faces multifaceted challenges that have often included partners as part of the solution envisaged. For instance, partner countries in Central Asia are relevant to ensuring transit routes to Afghanistan to support NATO operations there. Several partners partake in Operation Unified Protector, such as Qatar and the United Arab Emirates. As the organization has been expanding its portfolio, partners have grown more involved with the Alliance.

NATO launched the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Partnership for Peace (PfP) in 1994 and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) in 2004. They have been designed to ensure that NATO maintains a constant cooperation with its periphery to anticipate emerging threats as much as to contribute to the stability of its neighborhood. Yet their developments have largely been left to the NATO bureaucracy, which attempts to get the most out of them. Member states have only shown scarce interest in bolstering the ambitions of these programs.

The partnerships stand at a crossroads and it is time to discuss what has gone awry, what hampers progress, and what initiatives may straighten the curve. Does their original cadre still fit today's context? Are they only a matter of public diplomacy, designed to brand a better image of NATO, or programs with strategic potential that needs to be reasserted? Most importantly, does a political project still guide them? Studying the programs' evolution will help fathom how intertwined they have been with the organization's history for the past twenty years, including why significant limits and obstacles have endured. Finally, we will offer three scenarios mapping the partnerships' possible evolution.

A post-Cold War Effort

Cooperation with non-NATO members is a longstanding objective of the Alliance. "The Future Tasks of the Alliance," also known as the Harmel Report, already featured cooperation as a path to pursue.[1] That this 1967 document paved the way for the partnerships after the Cold War is far-fetched; however it shows that the Allies have always been keen to promote cooperation. Moreover, the unraveling of the Warsaw Pact and the emergence of a "new world order" have prompted the Allies to redefine what NATO stood for.

A new context and a search for purpose

Three factors greatly enhanced the adaptation of the Alliance. First, the United States was very active in the endeavor. Second, the Allies realized that reshaping NATO was less costly than creating a new organization. Finally, NATO's bureaucracy promptly contributed to redefining its missions.

U.S. involvement in post-Cold War Europe

The United States has been instrumental in keeping the Alliance relevant after the Cold War. Its reasons were both military and political. Militarily, the U.S. remained committed to European security and Europe was also strategically located vis-à-vis new theaters where the U.S. foresaw potential engagements, like the Middle East. During the Cold War, the United States had more than 300,000 military personnel based there. The Soviet collapse prompted Washington to review its European involvement. If only because of budgetary reasons and new political priorities, maintaining such a large military presence was deemed unnecessary, and the United States reduced its presence by 70 percent within a few years.[2] From "Forward Basing," which prevailed during the Cold War, the Americans moved to "Forward Presence." It illustrated an interest in keeping a presence in Europe but for different purposes. The United States expanded its global military footprint in the 1990s with strategic commands based in every

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[1] North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), "The Future Tasks of the Alliance: Report of the Council", December 13-14, 1967, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_26700.htm (accessed August 12, 2009).

[2] Frank Douglas, *The United States, NATO, and a New Multilateral Relationship*, Westport, Praeger Security International, 2008, p. 52.

region of the world.[3] USEUCOM was already well-established in Europe and there was an institutional interest in maintaining NATO as this command was historically linked to the Alliance.[4] Second, the unpredictability of the security environment encouraged the U.S. to build a network of commands with a pool of forces ready to deploy on short notice. In that sense "Forward Presence" demonstrated an enduring commitment to European security while remaining a coherent project to position U.S. forces closer to other potential theaters so as to accelerate U.S. deployments if necessary.[5]

Politically, the United States stated early on that it strived for a stable Europe and NATO's enlargement appeared to be the optimal solution. "A Europe whole and free" was one of George H. W. Bush's main foreign policy objectives. When Clinton came to power, he sought to further stability and peace in Europe by expanding NATO eastward. In an extremely favorable position after the Cold War, the United States sought to emerge as the leading and most respected nation in a new world order shaped according to American interests and values.[6] Washington wanted to retain a leading role in European security and enlargement fit that objective. The Clinton administration aimed to create "a world's free community of market democracies."[7] It intended to use NATO's enlargement to spread the values of democracy and economic liberalism to former Soviet countries. Along with this ideological stance, the U.S. had specific reasons to support an open door policy. It did not want to repeat the mistakes made after the Second World War and let Central and Eastern European countries out of the community of democracies and vulnerable to a hypothetical reconstituted Soviet Union.[8] The process of enlargement was regarded as the best way to create stability, reassure these countries and answer their repeated requests for integration into the Western community. Enlargement may also have been ingrained in the geopolitical views defended most prominently by Zbigniew Brzezinski. According to this influential Washington player, Eurasia was "the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continued to be played."[9] Though ultimately rejected, the draft titled Defense Planning Guidance authored by some members of the Bush Administration in 1992 also stressed the importance of preventing the reemergence of a rival in Eurasia.[10] Accordingly, it made sense

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[3] Thomas Barnett, *The Pentagon's New Map: War and Peace in the Twenty-First Century*, New York, Berkley Books, 2005.

[4] Etienne de Durand, *The United States and the Alliance*, Paris, IFRI, 2001, p. 22.

[5] *Ibid,* pp. 29-32; Douglas, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

[6] G. John Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order After Major Wars*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2001, p. 4.

[7] Anthony Lake, "From Containment to Enlargement," *Vital Speeches of the Day*, Vol. 60, No. 1, October 1993, pp. 13-19.

[8] Gale A. Mattox, "NATO and Enlargement and the United States: A Deliberate and Necessary Decision," in Charles-Philippe David and Jacques Lévesque (eds.), *The Future of NATO: Enlargement, Russia, and European Security*, Montreal, McGill-Queen's University Press, 1999, pp. 79-94.

[9] Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives*, New York, Basic Books, 1997, p. 31.

[10] The National Security Archives released a declassified draft of the DPG filling the excised parts with excerpts leaked to the press at the time. The memo is available at: http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/nukevault/ebb245/doc03_extract_nytedit.pdf (accessed May 29, 2011).

to ensure that Russia would remain diminished and never again be in a position to reconstitute Soviet power and become a threat to European and US security. Enlargement was arguably the way to achieve that goal.

NATO, the best alternative

In addition, NATO was brandished as a success and as the best alternative to achieve a peaceful Europe. Ivo Daalder outlines three reasons to explain why NATO survived.[11] First, right after the end of the Cold War, the existence of the Alliance reassured many politicians wary about the uncertainty of the emerging security environment. Second, NATO had become more than a military alliance over the decades; it had fashioned a community of like-minded countries that shared fundamental values, including democracy. Third, the organization was staffed with thousands of people and large bureaucracies rarely disappear. A fourth and related reason could also be presented. NATO had become extremely institutionalized over the Cold War and highly institutionalized organizations are more likely to endure, because the marginal costs of maintaining them are less significant than are the costs of creating new ones.[12] It turned out to be more practical to keep NATO alive to enhance stability within Central and Eastern Europe. NATO steadfastly embraced that new mission and enlargement became one of its core tasks.[13] It also corresponds to broader post-Cold War priorities. Andrew Cottey and Anthony Foster showed that in the 1990s the Western agenda of democracy promotion brought about the growth of "defense diplomacy" and the realization that armed forces could also be used in peacetime to build relationships with former or potential enemies, to promote democratic civilian control over armed forces, and to support partner states in developing troops able to contribute to peacekeeping operations.[14]

As importantly, NATO successfully managed on the ground the crises in ex-Yugoslavia first with the no-fly zone, Deny Flight Operation, and then with the launching of Implementation Force (IFOR) and Stabilisation Force (SFOR) in Bosnia. NATO's role in these successes stood in stark contrast to prior endeavors and other international organizations. While Europe had initially failed to address the unraveling of the situation, the UN had proved incapable to live up to the expectations placed in it and the OSCE had been all along bogged down by divisions

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[11] Ivo Daalder, *NATO in the 21st Century: What Purpose? What Mission?*, Washington, Brookings Institution Press, 1999, pp. 6-7.

[12] Celeste Wallander and Robert Keohane, "Risk, Threat, and Security Institutions," in Helga Haftendorn, Celeste Wallander, and Robert Keohane (eds.), *Imperfect Unions: Security Institutions Over Time and Space*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999, p. 31.

[13] NATO, "Study on Enlargement," *NATO Basic* Texts, September 1995, available at: http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/enl-9501.htm (accessed August 29, 2009).

[14] Andrew Cottey and Anthony Forster, *Reshaping Defence Diplomacy: New Roles for Military Cooperation and Assistance*, Adelphi Paper, IISS, No. 365, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2004.

between member states. This episode conferred NATO a strong reputation as a security and stability provider.[15]

A quickly adapting bureaucracy

Lastly, NATO had lost its *raison d'être* in 1991 and promptly launched an effort to revamp its focus. According to realist theories of international relations, the North Atlantic Alliance should have been dismantled once the Warsaw Pact collapsed.[16] With the end of the Cold War, NATO found itself with scores of officers well-versed in analyzing Warsaw Pact countries. Talking of "survival" might be overstated, because the Alliance had never been truly in danger of being dismantled, but "adaptation" certainly comes to mind. It sounds only logical that NATO bureaucrats shifted their knowledge from anticipating and interpreting Warsaw Pact behavior to cooperating with its former members.

Thinking of bureaucracies as merely implementing political decisions is too narrow a view to fully comprehend what they do. They benefit from a great deal of autonomy based on their legitimacy and expertise, which confer them power. Legitimacy is rooted in the fact that despite the risk of inefficiency of a bureaucracy, it remains the most widespread and accepted model to run a state. Expertise is constitutive of any bureaucracy as its members develop specialized knowledge and experience.[17] As first shown by Max Weber, both give them power over politicians and explain why bureaucracies sometimes shape policies. International organizations may also use state sovereignty to serve their agenda. Indeed, bureaucrats spend a lot of time setting priorities, providing concordant evidence to that end, lobbying state representatives, and offering consensual resolutions.[18] They may not get their way all the time, but expanding democracy and stability eastward turned out to be an objective by and large shared by the Allies. Enlargement and more broadly partnerships find their roots, directly or not, within those three factors.

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[15] See for instance Olivier Kempf, *L'OTAN au XXIe siècle. La transformation d'un héritage*, Perpignan, Artège, 2010, pp. 305-311.

[16] Glenn Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 1997; Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," *International Security*, Vol. 8, No. 2, Autumn 1993, pp. 44-79.

[17] Michael N. Barnett and Martha Finnemore, "The Politics, Power, and Pathologies of International Organizations," *International Organization*, Vol. 53, No. 4, Autumn 1999, pp. 699-732.

[18] Gayl D. Ness and Steven R. Brechin, "Bridging the Gap: International Organizations as Organizations," *International Organization*, Vol. 42, No. 2, Spring 1988, pp. 245-273, p. 252.
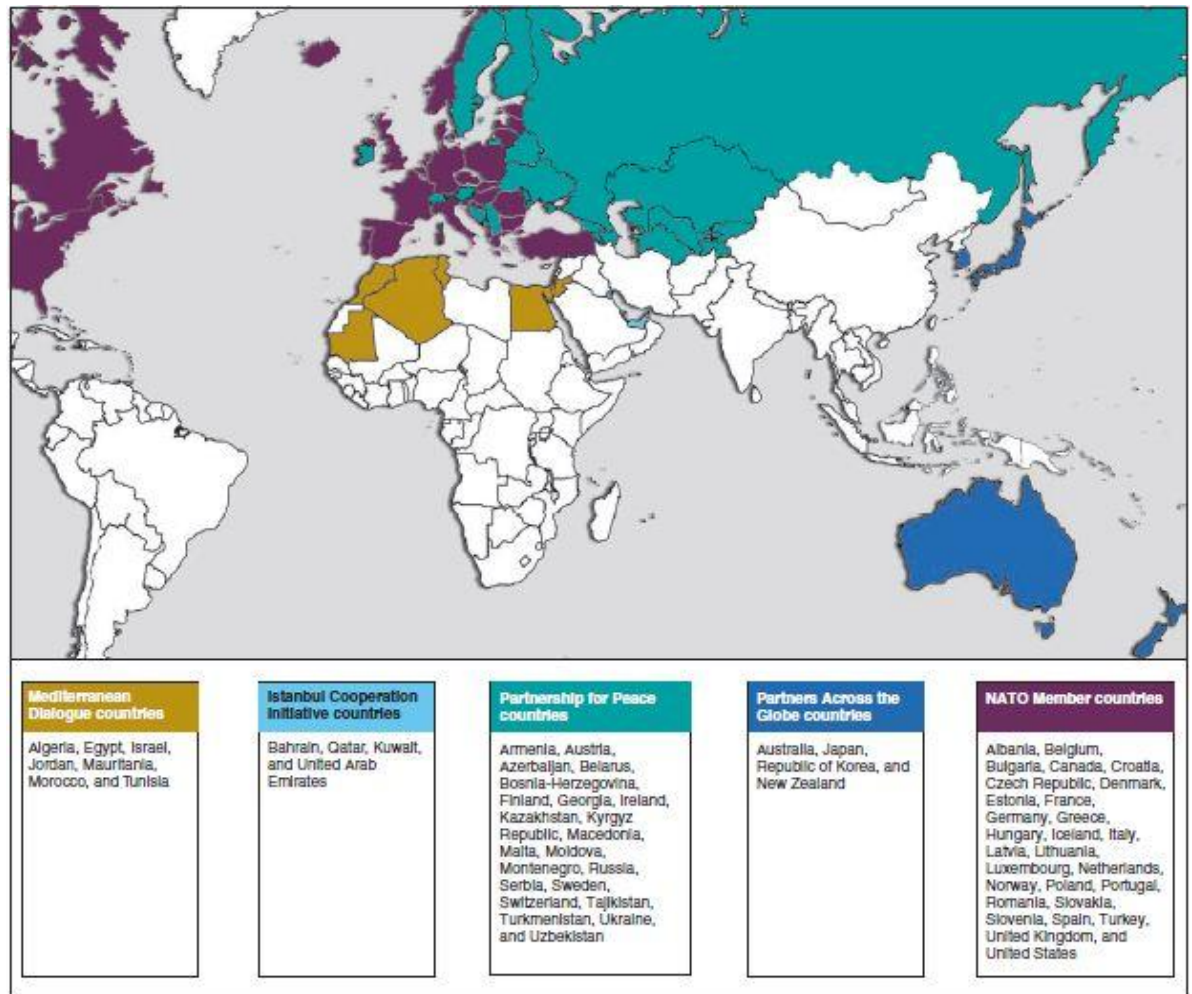
Figure 1 NATO and its partners (Source: Government Accountability Office, 2010)

Origins and evolutions

NATO successively launched three major partnerships: the Partnership for Peace, the Mediterranean Dialogue, and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. These frameworks have been developed at different moments and for different reasons, some more obvious than others, some linked to the lobbying of a few countries rather than a shared strategy. Notwithstanding different historical purposes, they all face challenges regarding which objectives to achieve.

The PfP: running out of steam

The PfP is deemed a success story but now has to cope with a loss of interest. NATO established contacts with former Warsaw Pact countries early on. In 1990, the Allies began encouraging more cooperation with the East, saying that "a continent divided for four decades [was] searching for

new patterns and structures of cooperation,"[19] and this was reinforced in the 1991 Strategic Concept.[20]

The PfP was formally launched at the Brussels summit in January 1994. NATO singled out five areas on which it wanted to focus cooperation: transparency in defense budgeting, promotion of democratic control of defense ministries, joint planning, joint military exercises, and interoperability with NATO forces.[21] As one NATO officer explained, the PfP works at three levels: systemic, state, and individual.[22] At the systemic level, NATO establishes cooperation with a country. At the state level, it encourages and assists the country to reform its defense and security sectors. At the individual level, it invites military officers and civilians to attend courses and seminars at different NATO institutions, such as the NATO Defense College in Rome.

However, the purpose was not only to be the antechamber of membership; many countries did not seek that prospect, such as Sweden or Kazakhstan. Several authors argue that the PfP was left deliberately ambiguous and flexible to enable a wide variety of countries to participate.[23] NATO perceived that cooperation with its neighborhood would strengthen stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. The prospect of membership was nonetheless the critical incentive for Central and Eastern European countries to reform.[24] Although NATO instigated the program, it was in response to the demands of active partners willing to engage in wide-ranging reform programs and show how resolute they were to joining the Alliance.[25] Both partners and the Alliance committed energy and resources to the success of the PfP. Had that balance not been found, it is unlikely that the PfP would have achieved such results.

This partnership's profile has however been decreasing over the years. Since its launching in 1994, and the creation of its forum, the Euro-

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[19] NATO, "Final Communiqué of the Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council," Turnberry, June 8, 1990, paragraph one, available at: http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c900608a.htm (accessed August 24, 2009).
[20] NATO, "The Alliance's New Strategic Concept," November 8, 1991, § 28, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_23847.htm (accessed August 24, 2009).
[21] *Ibid.*, §3.
[22] Interview with NATO staff officer, May 2009.
[23] See for instance, David S. Yost, *NATO Transformed: The Alliance's New Roles in International Security*, Washington, United States Institute of Peace, 1998, p. 98; Jean-Marie Guéhenno, "L'OTAN après la guerre froide, une nouvelle jeunesse," *Critique Internationale*, Vol. 4, No. 7, 2000, p. 104.
[24] See for instance Rachel A. Epstein, "NATO Enlargement and the Spread of Democracy: Evidence and Expectations," *Security Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2005, pp. 63-105; and NATO, "Study on NATO Enlargement."
[25] To a have a brief overview of the importance of NATO's membership to Central and Eastern European leaders, see "What the East Thinks About NATO Enlargement," *Wall Street Journal Europe*, July 8, 1997. The newspaper interviewed leaders from eleven countries and all, but one, enthusiastically endorsed enlargement. The only one who disapproved of enlargement was Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) in 1997, 12 partners out of 34 have become members. Except for a few countries, such as Montenegro, most remaining PfP states are unlikely to join the Alliance. Today the EAPC suffers from complaints from the Allies that partners do not cooperate enough and from the partners that the Alliance does not communicate enough on its missions and activities.

Partners have diverse expectations from the Alliance which makes it difficult to find common grounds. The most active partners want integration, such as Georgia. Some are not vocal, but might be interested, such as Azerbaijan, and finally others are not seeking integration. Even within the last category, differences stand out between Western non-aligned countries which are very active with the Alliance, such as Switzerland, and the South Caucasian and Central Asian states that are far more difficult partners. In a nutshell, the PfP/EAPC is too heterogeneous and too large to function efficiently.

The special partnerships: Russia and Ukraine

Russia and Ukraine have developed specific relationships with NATO. Though analyzed in greater detail elsewhere, these two crucial relationships deserve at least an overview here.[26] Both countries signed up for the PfP, but their relations quickly evolved. The NATO-Russia relationship has been bumpy. In the beginning, Moscow was willing to favor the PfP as an alternative to enlargement and even participated.[27] The air campaign in Bosnia however postponed the talks to get Russia into the PfP. After several months of tensions, they finally agreed on the terms and based the partnership on the motto "no vetoes, no surprises." NATO would not grant a veto to Russia to allow it to block the Alliance's activities; meanwhile, it agreed to consult with Moscow before any major decision.[28] Between 1995 and 1997, the relationship improved and conditions seemed favorable to strengthen the partnership, as the NATO-Russia Founding Act in 1997 testified.

The 1999 war in Kosovo beset the NATO-Russia relations and Moscow officially broke off its relations with the Alliance, yet it never completely closed the door.[29] Vladimir Putin's first term as Russian President ushered in a positive era in the NATO-Russia relations. After the September 11 attacks, he was eager to support the fight against terrorism,

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[26] On Russia, see for instance Vincent Pouliot, *International Security in Practice: The Politics of NATO-Russia Diplomacy*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2010. On Ukraine, see for instance Jakob Hedenskog, *Ukraine and NATO: Deadlock or Re-start?*, Stockholm, Swedish Defense Research Agency, 2006, available at: http://www2.foi.se/rapp/foir2165.pdf (accessed May 29, 2011).

[27] Martin A. Smith, *Russia and NATO since 1991: From Cold War Through Cold Peace to Partnership?*, London, Routledge, 2008, pp. 53-55.

[28] *Ibid*, pp. 62-66.

[29] Julianne Smith, "The NATO-Russia Relationship: Defining Moment or Déjà Vu?," *Europe, Russia, and the United States: Finding a New Balance*, Paris & Washington, Ifri/CSIS, November 2008, pp. 9-10, available at: http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/081110_smith_natorussia_web.pdf (accessed August 24, 2009).

which resulted in better cooperation between Moscow and Brussels. It paved the way for the Rome summit in May 2002 where the two sides agreed on the creation of the high-profile NATO-Russia Council.[30]

Putin's second mandate was detrimental to the relations with NATO. He grew more confident and wanted to rebrand Russia as a world power, challenging the West and relentlessly opposing enlargement. The cooperation reached its nadir after the Russia-Georgia war of 2008. NATO officially suspended its activities with Moscow. The Allies have been voicing disappointment with Russia, yet the relationship is getting back on track, because of both a mutual interest in maintaining the channel of cooperation and the "reset" brought about by the Obama Administration, which has granted Russia some of the conditions it wanted, especially freezing enlargement. Russia's participation to the Lisbon Summit last November was a success and some positive outcomes have emerged, such as the agreement on International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) transit routes through Russia or the potential cooperation on missile defense. Yet the overall outcome has been mostly unimpressive even on issues that seemed ripe for substantial cooperation, such as the fight against terrorism.[31]

Ukraine also holds a specific status. Several Allies, such as the U.S., have never hidden their desire to see it join the Alliance, but Ukrainian politicians have often been ambivalent about the membership and have failed to appreciate the reforms and changes that it entails.[32] In addition, a majority of the people has consistently opposed joining NATO. Ukraine entered the PfP in 1994. In 1997, the two parties signed a Charter for a Distinctive Partnership, which led to the creation of the NATO-Ukraine Commission. In 2002, President Kuchma announced that his country was willing to join the Alliance, but due to the vicissitudes of Ukrainian domestic politics and the Kolgucha affair with Iraq, NATO decided to put the cooperation on hold.[33] After the Orange Revolution, the election of Viktor Yuschenko in 2004 fostered a new impetus in NATO-Ukraine relations. In 2008, NATO did not offer a Membership Action Plan (MAP) to Ukraine despite U.S. pressure, and only granted an Annual National Program (ANP) that bears a lot of similarities with a MAP. However, the new presidency has been moving away from integration.[34]

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[30] *Ibid*, p. 7.

[31] Andrew Monaghan, "From Lisbon to Munich: Russian views of NATO-Russia relations", *Research Report*, NATO Defense College, February 2011, available at: http://www.ndc.nato.int/download/downloads.php?icode=238.

[32] James Green, "NATO Membership is a Realistic Goal if Ukraine Shows Courage and Resolve," *Working Paper*, DCAF, No. 135, March 2004, p. 3, available at: http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/grj06/grj06.pdf (accessed on August 16, 2009).

[33] F. Stephen Larrabee, "Ukraine at a Crossroads," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Autumn 2007, pp. 45-61, p. 48, available at: http://www.twq.com/07autumn/docs/07autumn_larrabee.pdf (accessed August 16, 2009).

[34] Jakub Kulhanek, "Ukraine's No to NATO reexamined: Not seeing the forest for the trees," *Europe's World*, Summer 2010, available at: http://www.europesworld.or

The Slow-Moving Mediterranean Dialogue

The Mediterranean Dialogue was formed after a few Allies lobbying NATO not to look exclusively eastward. NATO had little interest in the southern Mediterranean shore during the Cold War. It did not want to short-circuit bilateral relations between countries on the two shores and was careful not to be dragged into the Arab-Israeli conflict.[35] The 1991 Strategic Concept mentioned the Mediterranean but the breakthrough occurred at the Athens summit in 1993.

Italy and Spain were adamant supporters of the Mediterranean Dialogue, because they wanted to broaden NATO's scope to appreciate challenges coming from the South.[36] They sold an ambitious plan to the Allies, who only approved of a frugal and incremental approach.[37] In February 1995, Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia were invited to join the program. Despite U.S. pressure, Jordan did not enter the initiative before the end of the year. Algeria joined the MD only in 2000.

The MD seeks to promote better understanding and contribute to the stability of the region. Yet an analyst defined the Dialogue as no more than "a diplomatic talking shop."[38] Several NATO-related factors have indeed slowed progress. First, many more resources were devoted to the PfP. It is revealing that the MD was not considered "a partnership" until the Istanbul summit in 2004. Moreover, "the membership carrot" was not an option for the partners, which might have diminished NATO's leverage over them – though MD partners have never sought membership. The program is based on self-differentiation and allows each country to tailor its own ties with the Alliance around its own interests, yet cooperation remains limited. The partners have been anxious to maintain a low profile, because they know that NATO is domestically associated with bad press. To counter the negative image of the Alliance in the region, NATO has increased its public diplomacy efforts.

Several countries have also been contributing to NATO operations, such as Egypt in IFOR and SFOR, in which Jordan and Morocco also participated. Several reasons might have justified their choice to participate.[39] They might for instance have found it advantageous for their armed forces to contribute to peacekeeping operations, especially as they

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g/NewEnglish/Home_old/CommunityPosts/tabid/809/PostID/1599/language/en-US/Default.aspx (accessed May 31, 2011).

[35] Gareth Winrow, *Dialogue with the Mediterranean: the Role of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue*, New York, Garland Publishing, 2000, pp. 49-68.

[36] See for instance Domenico Corcione, "New Risks and Roles in NATO's Southern Region," *NATO's Sixteen Nations*, No. 93, 1993, pp. 37-39.

[37] Rodrigo de Rato, *Coopération et Sécurité en Méditerranée*, Commission politique, Sous-commission sur la région sud, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, Brussels, 1995, p. 5.

[38] Helle Malmvig, "From a Diplomatic Talking Shop to a Powerful Partnership? NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the democratisation of the Middle East," *DIIS Brief*, DIIS, May 2004.

[39] Thierry Tardy, *Gestion de crise, maintien et consolidation de la paix. Acteurs, activités, défis*, Brussels, De Boeck, 2009, pp. 45-50.

had an excess of military personnel compared to security needs (particularly following positive developments with neighbors, such as the Jordan-Israel peace treaty in 1994). Contributing was also a way to train and modernize their military and their skills. In addition, they may share with NATO a certain view of the international order that compelled them to participate, such as Jordan in Kosovo.

The cooperation within the MD stepped up after the September 11, 2001 attacks. The Mediterranean grew more important in the so-called "global war on terror," notably with the launching of the article-5 maritime Operation Active Endeavor on September 12, 2001 although its ambitions and results have been limited.

In 2004, NATO upgraded the MD to "a genuine partnership," singling out four missions: enhancing the existing political dialogue; achieving interoperability; developing defense reform; and contributing to the fight against terrorism.[40] Seeing positive outcomes in their military, Mediterranean countries began expressing more interest in cooperating with NATO and the Alliance therefore decided to increase the substance of the partnership. It enabled the most active partners to claim some ownership of the Dialogue. Nonetheless, the Alliance has always refrained from institutionalizing the partnership with a signed document, such as the PfP Framework Document, in fear of alienating partners unwilling to commit to profound reforms. It will be interesting to see what impact the so-called "Arab Spring" will have, especially in Tunisia and Egypt. Tunisia has a small military force and has been a discreet partner, but may now seek closer relations with the Alliance. In Egypt, the role of the armed forces is central and Cairo has always been a difficult partner, which is unlikely to change.

The partners seem to recognize NATO's new face and appear less leery, at least within political and military circles. Arab partners have however been reluctant to meet at a high level, because they do not want to appear at a summit next to Israel. It only happened informally, such as a summit in February 2006 where all Defense ministers from MD partners and NATO met for the first time. In the short term, the authorities may be even more reluctant to engage publicly with NATO to palliate potential backlash from their citizens; the situation is inflammatory and the partners will probably try to avoid any unnecessary criticism. In a word, the Mediterranean Dialogue has gained some substance in the past 15 years, but it still lacks clear objectives, guidance, and outstanding strategic interest of partnership.

The still nascent Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) is NATO's most recent partnership and its achievements remain limited. It was launched in 2004 and targets the Gulf countries. Bahrain, Kuwait, and Qatar joined the Initiative in 2004

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[40] NATO, "A more Ambitious and Expanded Framework for the Mediterranean Dialogue", *NATO Policy Document*, Istanbul, June 28, 2004, §4, available at http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/docu-meddial.htm (accessed March 10, 2009).

and the United Arab Emirates in 2005. The Allies were not all in sync with the idea, but some member states already involved in the region, such as the U.S., wanted NATO to cooperate with the Gulf, on energy security for instance. Yet, the name of the program indicates a cautious approach and questions the ICI strategic relevance. It illustrates the fact that the Alliance, as an organization, has sporadic contacts within the region and that this program remains exploratory.

At the Istanbul summit, NATO released a policy document that offered some scope and objectives, even if generic, for the ICI. The most important goal was to "enhance security and regional stability."[41] First, the document stressed that the ICI was "a cooperative initiative based on joint ownership and mutual interests." It also reasserted the principle of a voluntary-based participation. The activities offered mostly refer to hard security issues, such as terrorism and WMD. It also cautiously proposes to "tailor advice on defense reform, defense budgeting, defense planning and civil-military relations." Similar to the MD, NATO has embarked on a large public diplomacy campaign with the organization of seminars and conferences, as well as press tours in Brussels. Progress has been marginal, because the ICI countries are still not certain why they would be better-off cooperating with NATO, as Brussels has never provided a very convincing argument.

ICI partners being wealthy, they can easily participate in more activities assuming the political willingness increases, but that is difficult to forecast. On the one hand, some Gulf leaders predict a brighter cooperation in the years ahead.[42] For instance, the UAE contributes to ISAF and Operation Unified Protector and may even be the first Arab country to have a representation at the NATO headquarters.[43] On the other hand, the reality of the cooperation does not foster optimism. Despite attempts to have them sign an entry-level cooperation program, they have been shunning such a step. Reform is not on the agenda, and there would likely be no role for NATO anyway. First, they are reluctant to tie with an organization that would expect democratic reform from them. In the short term, the so-called "Arab Spring" may run a counter-effect in that region, resulting in more conservative politics rather than political openness.[44] Second, the partners are not eager to get involved into countless activities, do not know what NATO's goals are and do not foresee any particular role for the Alliance in the region.[45] Accordingly, they prefer to

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[41] NATO, "Istanbul Cooperative Initiative," *NATO Policy Document*, Istanbul, June 29, 2004, § 5, available at: http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/2004/06-istanbul/docu-cooperation.htm (accessed July 12, 2009).

[42] See for instance Sheikh Khalid bin Ahmed bin Mohammed Al-Khalifa, "Opening Address," Manama, April 24, 2008, available at : http://www.nato.int/multi/2008/080424a-bahrain/audio/080424a-01.mp3 (accessed August 12, 2009).

[43] Charlie Hamilton, "UAE will appoint Nato envoy," *The National*, May 19, 2011, available at: http://www.thenational.ae/news/uae-news/uae-will-appoint-nato-envoy (accessed May 19, 2011).

[44] Kristian Coates Ulrichsen, "Counterrevolution in the Gulf," *Foreign Policy*, May 6, 2011, available at: http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2011/05/06/counterrevolution_in_the_gulf (accessed May 7, 2011).

[45] Abdulaziz O. Sager, "What do the Gulf Cooperation Council States Want from NATO?", in Ronald D. Asmus (ed.), *NATO and the Global Partners: Views from the*

maintain relations at a nominal level with high level visits and discard any discussion on reform. Finally and most importantly, they value bilateral relations with the United States far more than any agreement, formal or otherwise, with an international organization.

The ICI remains nascent. No country has signed any binding agreement or signaled its willingness to beef up cooperation. They see NATO as an additional insurance policy to protect them against Iran,[46] despite the fact that the Alliance has always remained non-committal on that topic.

The main reason why the MD and the ICI have not generated the same enthusiasm as the PfP is that the stakes are not as high and the goals are not clearly defined. Moreover, very few MD and ICI countries contribute to NATO operations.

The loosely defined: Partners across the globe

Participating in operations is indeed rewarded. The Afghan campaign has encouraged NATO to establish some links with non-NATO troop contributors, which are called "partners across the globe." Generally it refers to Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea, all ISAF contributors. For the first years, the relationship was mostly focused on operations. Both parties could sign a Tailored Cooperation Package (TCP), which only consisted of activities chosen by the partner. The relations may evolve after the release in April 2011 of the new Partnership policy, because it envisages more political cooperation. It is still too early to assess which partners could be responsive.

Only the PfP has managed to rally support among the Allies. The other frameworks have relied on the limited support of some member states that have vested interest in the regions. Consequently, few resources were engaged, and partners have been reluctant to actively participate. Moreover, both Allies and partners seem content with modest ambitions and loosely defined strategic goals, using the growing number of activities, always a weak indicator, as a way to gauge the effectiveness of cooperation. That the partnerships lack clear priorities and rest on a complex set of mechanisms has also probably contributed to the general lack of interest.

Mechanisms and institutions

The partnerships process appears inextricable with so many different mechanisms. Although they try to address specific concerns, the mechanisms of partnerships, by their sheer number, begs the question of whether such complexity can or cannot be simplified. Following the

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Outside, Washington, German Marshall Fund of the United States, 2006, pp. 17-25, p. 17.
[46] Interview with NATO staff officer, May 2009.

Strategic Concept, an effort to streamline the process was launched, which culminated with the release of the Partnership policy in April.[47]

Cooperative security, as good as it gets

Partnerships are based on cooperative security as outlined in the new Strategic Concept. This notion remains very poorly understood. We define it here as an institutionalized or non-institutionalized arrangement, involving a group of states who pursue dialogue and cooperation on a wide variety of issues, primarily concerning security. This definition assumes that they can all share the same interpretations of the security challenges, whether internal or foreign, and thus cooperate to increase the level of confidence and trust among them, and to mitigate hypothetical conflicts, divergences, and misunderstandings.[48] Cooperative security operates on a very flexible basis, letting the actors define their own involvement. Moreover, the Alliance offers a great variety of activities that range from crisis management, to defense institution building, environmental security, and even language courses. The partners can pick the number of activities they wish. NATO funds most of the activities for the poorer countries up to 80 percent or even 100 percent in some cases.

This kind of relationship has been favored to suit the reluctance of partners to commit extensively to NATO. Consequently, the Alliance has little grip over the level of involvement of every partner and little leverage when it negotiates with them on thorny issues.

Deciphering mechanisms and institutions

Each partnership used to have a different set of mechanisms and institutions but the release of a new Partnership policy has attempted to make it more straightforward. The PfP served as the model for the reform. The entry-level program was a two-year Individual Partnership Program (IPP), which described the nature of the political and military relationship between NATO and the partner. The IPP also encompassed the steps that the partner would take to improve defense budget and planning transparency, and the democratic oversight of the military. The Dialogue had limited its potential to Individual Cooperation Programs (ICP). An ICP established a framework for bilateral cooperation, but without any genuine commitment. Its goal was to strengthen political ties and reinforce military cooperation. Egypt, Israel and Jordan have signed an ICP. Agreements are moving ahead with Mauritania and Tunisia. The new Policy has established a common mechanism system for all frameworks. At entry-level, all partners will be required to sign an Individual Partnership Cooperation Program (IPCP). It is unclear how it will shape up as entry-level programs had different purposes for each partnership.

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[47] NATO, "Active Engagement In Cooperative Security: A More Efficient And Flexible Partnership Policy," April 15, 2011, available at: http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_04/20110415_110415-Partnership-Policy.pdf (accessed May 12, 2011).
[48] Vivien Pertusot, *NATO partnerships and cooperative security: what means for what ends?*, unpublished manuscript, October 2009.

Each PfP partner could also sign a Planning and Review Process (PARP). Its technical goal is to improve the interoperability of the partner's armed forces with the Allies'. The next and more ambitious stage is the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). More political, it aims to deepen the bilateral cooperation based on the needs and interests of the partner. The objective for NATO is to support the state in its domestic reform efforts. Despite reluctance from some member states, now both the PARP and the IPAP are open to all partners but will be considered on a case by case basis, as their fundamentals remain enshrined in thecommitments laid out in the PfP Framework Document. The only mechanism open to PfP partners alone is the Membership Action Plan (MAP). It assists partners in meeting the membership's criteria but does not trigger an automatic eventual accession. However, NATO has so far never offered a MAP to a country that has not joined the Alliance. The Russian protests against a MAP that could have been extended to Georgia and Ukraine in 2008 demonstrate how intertwined it is with membership. The new Policy has addressed concerns of unnecessary complexity, but it remains to be seen how it will all unfold. If it barely affects the PfP, it is unclear whether the MD and the ICI countries will be eager to adopt the new system. It will also change the relations with the "partners across the globe." So far, relations with them had only been technical. They will now fall under the same regime as the others; again, how they will react to NATO requests is unclear.

The new policy will also change how NATO meets with its partners. So far, each partnership had specific formats, with the PfP even having its own forum, the EAPC. Now member states have agreed to organize meetings where all interested partners are allowed to attend regardless of their framework. Those meetings will not discriminate existing formats but when deemed appropriate will be scheduled to address a specific theme or event. It is too early to see the actual benefits and how NATO will manage both the framework-driven meetings and those flexible meetings, especially at a time when it wants to reduce the number of meetings.

At SHAPE, NATO launched the Partnership Coordination Cell whose aim was to organize and monitor the military aspects of the cooperation with the partners. It was replaced by the Military Cooperation Division in 2008 to act as a focal point for ACO and ACT to coordinate their partnership military activities.

Although the success of the PfP is often brandished – at least for its first ten years – the partnership programs today are lingering, with many limits and obstacles stalling progress.

Limits and obstacles

Two types of obstacles primarily hamper progress. First, external challenges have been slowing down the programs considerably, and NATO cannot critically impact them. Second, internal obstacles are rooted within the Alliance itself but can only be fixed with resolute political will. Additionally, some cross-framework aspects impact the overall partnership policy.

Less leverage, less malleability

Three characteristics may be common to the vast majority of partners: no membership in sight, parsimonious handling of common security concerns, and reluctance to reform.

No membership, far less leverage

Article 10 of the Washington Treaty states that "the Parties may, by unanimous agreement, invite *any other European State* in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty."[49] Potential membership for most partners would require the Treaty to be amended, which is a remote prospect.

It is then difficult for NATO to contemplate a strong leverage on the partners. In the 1990s, the aspirant countries were keen to join the Alliance and make sacrifices in a short timeframe. That scenario will not repeat itself with today's partners. They do not have any interest in becoming members, and the Allies do not intend to let them in. Consequently, NATO is very dependent on them to participate, as there is no mechanism to force them to cooperate.

Divergent security concerns

Furthermore, NATO focuses on hard security issues, while many challenges partners face call for soft security approaches. Hard security policies primarily involve defense mechanisms and are commonly carried out to deter terrorist activities and WMD proliferation. In contrast, soft security policies require civilian means coupled with political and economic

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[49] NATO, "The North Atlantic Treaty," April 4, 1949, available at: http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/treaty.htm (accessed August 12, 2009), article 10. Emphasis is my own.

improvements and are often related to political and/or economic issues, such as migration and political instability.[50]

The new Strategic Concept outlined the risks and threats the Alliance is facing, ranging from WMD to terrorism and cyber attacks.[51] Based on its political-military nature it is not the best qualified institution to assist countries that have to deal with soft security issues. In these matters, other institutions, such as the European Union (EU), through its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), are better equipped. The EU and its members share with NATO part of the blame, as they have been offering too many activities without any prioritization and thus have been spreading themselves too thin. It is debatable whether NATO is for instance best qualified to assist countries on cooperation with NGOs or even humanitarian relief operations.

Still, most partners are eager to cooperate with the Alliance (especially to combat terrorism), but definitions over the term may differ. However some countries favor bilateral relations with individual members rather than with NATO, as has been the case in Central Asia.[52]

Reluctance to reform

Finally, many countries that are deemed democratic today are at best "illiberal democracies:" not only are they not maturing to become liberal democracies but they seem willing to strike a lasting balance between a degree of democracy and "illiberalism."[53] In the Gulf for instance, rulers are wary to control the impact of the reforms they are ready to carry out lest they jeopardize their power.[54] While they pay lip service to it and are willing to set the right tone, those states are not ready to engage in a substantial reform of their security sector.[55] Their leaders have no interest in heading in that direction, especially since the rulers have been anxious to maintain close ties with the military to avoid a potential counterweight to their authority. Careful to eschew any empowerment of the regular army, they

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[50] For a good overview of both concepts, see Julian Lindley-French, "The Revolution in Security Affairs: Hard and Soft Security Dynamics in the 21st Century," *European Security*, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2004, pp. 1-15.

[51] NATO, "Active Engagement, Modern Defence," Lisbon, November 19, 2010, §7-15, available at: http://www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf (accessed November 20, 2010),.

[52] Robin Bhatty and Rachel Bronson, "NATO's Mixed Signals in the Caucasus and Central Asia," *Survival*, Vol. 42, No. 3, Autumn 2000, pp 129-146, p. 133.

[53] Fareed Zakaria, "The Rise of Illiberal Democracy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 6, November/December 1997, pp. 22-43, p. 24.

[54] Marina Ottaway and Michele Dunne, "Incumbent Regimes and the 'King's Dilemma' in the Arab World: Promise and Threat of Managed Reforms," *Carnegie Papers*, No. 88, Washington, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 2007, pp. 2-3, available at:
http://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/index.cfm?fa=view&id=19759
(accessed on July 16, 2009).

[55] Matteo Legrenzi, "NATO in the Gulf: Who is doing whom a favor?," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 70-72.

have for instance favored a strong national guard that falls under their direct authority.[56]

External factors

Several external factors also stand out as obstacles to the initiatives. NATO has to face a resurgent Russian presence in its neighborhood. Within the ICI and the MD, the Alliance has to deal with the Arab-Israeli conflict. Another powerful factor is the existence of defense agreements between partners and individual Allies; they are so developed that they complicate NATO's offer of assistance.

The Russian factor

Russia's role in the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia has greatly evolved since the collapse of the Soviet Union. At first, Moscow had capability and financial shortages that made it difficult to pursue an active foreign policy with those countries. Its leverage was so limited that it could do nothing but condone the decrease of its influence. Moreover, leaders in both regions had been under Moscow's thumb for decades and wanted to diversify their partnerships.[57] The election of Vladimir Putin in 1999 signified the "return" of Russia in its "near abroad," which has become increasingly salient. The showdown between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 is but one example illustrating Moscow's eagerness to maintain an active presence in the region at any cost. Russia has also been instrumental in mustering security cooperation with its neighbors as shown with the creation of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, whose aims are to boost regional security and combat Islamist terrorism – and which also provides a ready alternative to NATO.[58]

Russia's willingness to expand its power in the "near abroad" has clearly held back NATO's efforts in the region, because it cannot compete with Moscow's influence. Central Asia is a faraway region and beyond operations in Afghanistan it is not clear to all members what NATO's interests are in the region, especially considering the low level of engagement on the partners' side; second, NATO cannot trump Russia's financial and military support. In both regions, the countries are cautious to maintain a balance between their cooperation with the West and Russia.

The Alliance can only move forward prudently, in order not to alienate Moscow and avoid putting those partners in an awkward position vis-à-vis Russia.

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[56] *Ibid.*

[57] Anna Matveeva, "Return to the Heartland: Russia's Policy in Central Asia," *The International Spectator*, Vol. 42, No. 1, 2007, p. 43.

[58] *Ibid*, p. 13; and Frédéric Lasserre, "Permanence et Bouleversements en Asie Centrale: L'insertion de l'étranger proche russe dans la dynamique stratégique internationale," in Thomas Juneau, Gérard Hervouet and Frédéric Lasserre (eds), *Asie Centrale et Caucase. Une sécurité mondialisée*, Sainte-Foy, Les Presses de l'Université Laval, 2004, p. 76.

The persistence of the Arab-Israeli conflict

Second, cooperation with Arab countries has been spoiled by the Arab-Israeli conflict to a certain extent. The Mediterranean Dialogue has survived it and Israeli and Arab delegations have met on several occasions. It has however affected the evolution of the MD and to a lesser degree the ICI. For instance, the outbreak of the Intifada in 2000 had an impact on the MD, yet the fallout impaired the Dialogue far less than the European Barcelona Process. The Arab-Israeli conflict remains the least common denominator among all the Arab partners, and it often happens that NATO is confused with U.S. policies perceived as biased in favor of Israel. The Arab-Israeli conflict has remained poisonous to the evolution of the MD and the ICI, but it is debatable what effect it would have if it were resolved.[59] It slows down progress and the creation of a Palestinian state could facilitate the cooperation with and among those partners, although lukewarm feelings toward Israel would be resilient.

One of the reasons that NATO has been able to keep the partnership alive is that it has been shying away from the Arab-Israeli issue in MD meetings. NATO has stuck to the "three ifs" before mulling over its options to get involved: if the parties involved come to an agreement, if they request NATO to help them implement it, and if there is a UN Security Council Resolution, then member countries would discuss NATO's participation.[60]

Caution appears reasonable for the sustainability of the MD and the ICI. The prudent evolution that has characterized the MD and the ICI might lead some to conclude that those efforts are not worth it, yet it would be mistaken to be too aggressive on reform. These countries will perhaps engage in serious reforms, but at their pace and from within, as the Arab Spring has shown; NATO can only steadily encourage them.

Strong bilateral defense agreements

Finally, bilateral agreements between partners and individual NATO members have been hindering the Alliance outreach activities. In most cases they are stronger and more profitable to the partners than the assistance the Alliance can offer. France for instance has robust defense agreements and cooperation with Kuwait, Qatar, and the UAE.[61]

The United States is yet the most active Ally in terms of defense cooperation agreements and military training. Its financial, technical and

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[59] For a good assessment of the situation, see Pierre Razoux, "L'OTAN face à la crise au Moyen Orient," *Géostratégiques*, No. 22, 2009, pp. 129-139.

[60] "NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue & Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: Questions & Answers," March 8, 2007, available at: http://www.nato.int/med-dial/qa.htm (accessed March 10, 2009).

[61] France and Kuwait signed a first agreement that was strengthened in 2009. France and Qatar signed a defense agreement in 1994 and France should soon open in Doha the first international branch of French military academy Saint-Cyr. France is in the process of ratifying a renewed defense agreement with the UAE and opened a military base in Abu Dhabi in 2009.

material assistance often trumps NATO's capabilities. It provides military training to every country from the PfP, the MD and the ICI.[62] Some of these U.S. activities are carried out under the NATO flag, but the most sensitive and the most critical to its foreign policy are not, which is also the case for other members.

This situation in effect implies that NATO will remain a secondary actor in most partner countries, because it is unlikely that individual members will drop out of their commitments.

Those three external factors are unlikely to disappear in the near future. The most difficult to circumvent may be the Russian factor. Despite a lessening of tensions with NATO, Russia will remain strong in its neighborhood. Moreover, the "reset" has come at the price of giving up – at least for now – membership prospects for Ukraine and Georgia, which stresses the threshold NATO cannot cross if it wants to nurture good relations with Moscow. The Arab-Israeli conflict will remain problematic, but the Alliance has been able to work around it so far and it might be possible to envision growing bilateral relations, yet at the cost of multilateral efforts. No less difficult to cope with, NATO could try to find a compromise with its members to put more bilateral activities under the NATO flag without such a decision jeopardizing existing defense agreements. It could perhaps mirror what the United States was keen to do in the 1990s by having activities "in the spirit of the PfP." However, NATO personnel cannot expect much, especially as NATO activities are now by default open to all partners, and restrictions are in theory not allowed.

Internal factors

Internal factors also damage the evolution of the partnerships. The Alliance should clearly define what its overarching strategy is; only then will it be possible to identify what role the partnerships can play, and how they can best be articulated to suit NATO's interests.

Strike the right balance

NATO adopts an *ad hoc* approach on whether the role of the partnerships is to extend security or anticipate risks through dialogue and information sharing. It has been ambiguous about its role, which has been detrimental to building confidence. In other words, it often struggles between pragmatic interests and a value-based policy.

Partner countries are aware of the security challenges originating from their countries. They know that part of the reason why NATO wants to cooperate with them is precisely because of the security risk they are perceived to represent. NATO does not need to hide its concerns. On the other hand, NATO has always claimed to seek the spread of democracy at

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[62] See US Department of State, "Foreign Military Training and DoD Engagement Activities of Interest, 2009-2010," available at: http://www.state.gov/t/pm/rls/rpt/fmtrpt/2010/index.htm (accessed May 10, 2011). U.S. training activities vary greatly from one country to another.

its borders. It is unlikely to give it up at least at the rhetorical level, but it would be ill-advised to be stentorian on democracy promotion and expect significant changes where prospects are limited. In any case, the Alliance needs to be more transparent and consistent so that partners can better anticipate how to deal with the Alliance and understand what it seeks.

The need for a comprehensive strategy

The partnerships suffer from NATO's lack of comprehensive strategy and internal divisions between member states about where the future of the organization lies. The Alliance is experiencing an identity crisis, mainly because a strong link to tie all members together has been missing since the end of the Cold War. They share values, norms and security concerns, yet they may disagree on threat assessments and there is no easily identifiable threat or paramount strategy to rally all the members. The rift on the Iraq war in 2003 was only the clearest example of the disagreements that sometimes divide Allies. The difficult launching of OUP in Libya has again brought to light that NATO is an intergovernmental organization whose members have national interests that may clash from time to time.[63] The negotiations on the new Strategic Concept have also emphasized divisions on the future of the Alliance, for instance between the French and the Americans on the development of a civilian crisis management capability. The impact on partnerships may be marginal at first glance, but they suffer from this lack of unity. The follow-up work from the Lisbon summit last October on partnership has resulted into the new policy published in April. It has attempted to bring new prominence to the programs but in fact offers only evasive and lofty goals, no clear strategic design, and brings to the table only technical changes.

Interviews with national officers have revealed that the Allies hail partnerships as an important component of the Alliance, but comprehensive guidance is lacking. For too long, there has been a void in strategic thinking related to partnerships. When there was a chance to really think about how to strengthen their relevance, the effort was too hasty and completed in a few months on an issue that had been off the radar of many member countries at the highest level for years.

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[63] For a good summary of the disagreements, see Rebecca R. Moore, *NATO's New Missions: Projecting Stability in a Post-Cold War World*, Westport, Praeger Security International, 2007, pp. 95-114 on Iraq and Afghanistan, and pp. 129-136 on other disagreements.

Scenarios

We have argued that partnerships are standing at a crossroads. The Strategic Concept seemed to offer some new breathing room, but the new policy has once again painfully revealed the lack of strategic vision the Alliance has for those programs. Regarding how partnerships shall evolve in the future, three scenarios seem possible. The first assumes that NATO cannot get more than what it has now. The second offers a grim future for partnerships arguing that stringing budgets will outweigh the relevance of partnerships. The last one foresees a shift in the focus to reenergize the overall concept.

The mid-course: Business as usual

Partnerships have proved their usefulness over the years but have shown their limits. Partners contribute to operations, sometimes to a great extent. In Afghanistan, non-NATO troop contributors amount to close to 10 percent of ISAF troops, without including the United States.[64] Some partners like Georgia, Sweden and Australia contribute far more than some NATO members, both in terms of actual participation and in terms of ratio between troops in Afghanistan and overall number of military personnel. Some partners do not contribute with troops, but offer logistical support with fields for bases, transit routes, etc.

Not necessarily during an operation, partners share information with the Alliance, especially to monitor and counter terrorist activities. Information sharing may be limited but cannot be discarded altogether. Moreover, the growing range of missions in the basket of the Alliance demands that NATO cooperate with partner countries, for instance on cyber security and energy security. In that sense and following Secretary General Rasmussen's idea, cooperation with emerging powers, such as China and India, would increase while recognizing relations may still remain underdeveloped.

Following a functionalist approach, some would assert that despite partnerships' limited strategic relevance, keeping the dialogue open is important. In other words, the structure would remain operational, the dialogue ongoing, hoping for a spillover effect when the conditions are ripe. The Alliance would need to keep the channel of communication up and running, if only to facilitate strategic communication campaigns. The more it

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[64] According to the latest figures on ISAF website, available at: http://www.isaf.nato.int/troop-numbers-and-contributions/index.php (accessed May 10, 2011).

cultivates political, military and media contacts, the more it increases its opportunities to communicate its message through official visits, media campaigns, etc. As partnerships are based on the idea that "talking is better than fighting," NATO would also ensure that all partners in their respective framework talk to each other, thus anticipating risks that can rise from its neighborhood. Partnerships would in addition offer a possible pool of troop contributors. NATO would maintain military and political cooperation with partners to increase the chances that those countries be receptive to the idea of combating in NATO-led operations. There would always be non-NATO partners to partake in operations, yet existing structures could be helpful to incite others to contribute. The nurturing of partner relationships could be key in convincing nations to participate in an effort, especially where trust and transparence have been established.

Yet, partnerships would not serve ambitious objectives. Allies would still lack clarity on the reasons why partnerships are important to the organization, especially when their attention and resources are mostly devoted to Afghanistan or now Libya.

Allies and NATO personnel alike have recognized the need to streamline the partnerships in the Lisbon declaration[65] and the subsequent partnership policy.[66] Building on this attempt to bring some clarity in the functioning of the programs, they would then try to implement a prioritization scheme to make sure that resources spent on partnerships coincide with announced goals. Clear political objectives would still be lacking, for disagreements would remain among the member states.

The first scenario displays a situation in which partnerships would carry on, more or less like they are today with some limited refurbishment. They would still lack clear political guidance, but Allies would be cognizant enough of the value of partnerships to keep them afloat for future contingencies.

The low course: Slow death of political partnerships

A second, more negative course portrays the slow death of political partnerships and the growth of operational partnerships. NATO is struggling to redefine its missions and relieving the organization from managing partnerships would enable it to focus its attention on more pressing issues.

From the inside, the Alliance has never been so active and has expanded its range of missions, with cyber security now included, and has forces committed to three fronts. From the outside, however, NATO seems

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[65] NATO, "Lisbon Summit Declaration," November 20, 2010, available at: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm?mode=pressrelease (accessed November 20, 2010).
[66] NATO, "Active Engagement In Cooperative Security: A More Efficient And Flexible Partnership Policy," available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_04/20110415_110415-Partnership-Policy.pdf (accessed June 15, 2011)."

overextended and incapable of tackling all the issues at once. It has been fighting in Afghanistan for years and support for the operations is dithering. It is trying to build a strategic partnership with Russia, but obstacles keep preventing any substantial progress and Moscow does not seem anxious to cooperate with the Alliance. NATO has been a prime advocate of the comprehensive approach and consequently of a strengthened cooperation with the European Union, but bureaucratic differences and the Turkey-Cyprus issue obviate concrete advances. NATO is contemplating the development of costly missile defense capabilities. In a nutshell, NATO has a lot of challenges to tackle, but all those issues require resources, both in terms of budget and manpower. The organization is greatly in debt and national defense budgets are facing sharp cuts throughout the Alliance. Moreover, Allies are increasingly reluctant to commit military officers to NATO posts leaving many vacancies in the NATO Command Structure. This situation would obviously call on the Allies to prioritize.

Assessing the value of partnerships is difficult and Allies could become increasingly skeptical that concrete outcomes can be reached. It is true that cooperating with partners allows dialogue to continue. However, it is questionable whether this kind of relations is worth the budget and manpower spent on activities offered to them. In terms of cost-effectiveness, the nexus of the issue would be whether NATO needs to nurture structured political programs or whether it can run the risk of getting a bit less information or support from those countries. It would consequently save money and reassign a batch of personnel to immediate concerns, such as operations, or simply suppress positions. It is likely that the organization would not be able to get so many countries to participate to its operations, but it is unclear to what extent. If NATO does not get out of Afghanistan with a success, the Alliance would lose its credibility and its relevance would be questioned. In other words, partnerships would in this scenario be considered no more than ancillary to the future of the Alliance. Partnerships have never been the top objective for NATO. It is therefore unlikely that, after ISAF and OUP and the difficult reality-check the Alliance will have to face, Allies would somehow de-emphasize operations, NATO's main post-Cold War task, to the point that partnerships would then become its main business.

If faced with tough questions regarding the cooperation's effectiveness, NATO seems much more likely to favor first and foremost "operational partners," non-NATO members that contribute to operations. Political partnerships would become increasingly moot. That would demonstrate that NATO refocuses on the Euro-Atlantic zone and does not reach out to faraway countries, such as China and India, especially when it is not clear what NATO would get out of establishing cooperation with them. It would address Allies' concerns on whether there is any added-value for NATO to spread so far and scatter its resources when challenges are not so remote and the path to improvement starts in Brussels.

The second scenario foresees a grim future for the partnerships. Political partnerships would fade away as resources would be refocused and only operational partners would retain NATO's attention. Favoring operational

partnerships could appear reasonable and a welcome development. It would be a tangible outcome for the Alliance. NATO offers some kind of partnership arrangement in return for a contribution to operations. Yet cooperation has always been envisaged in political terms by the Alliance, hence sticking to operational partnerships would be a failure. In addition, it presents the disadvantage of having only temporary partners – during operations – and introducing political elements to the cooperation would become increasingly difficult.

The higher course: Revamping the partnerships

The last scenario is optimistic but demands that tough choices be made. It is preconditioned on the new partnership policy bearing fruits.

The complexity that prevails in partnership mechanisms may be streamlined after the release of the new policy, but only the implementation can attest to its actual value. While keeping the specificities of all partnership frameworks, Allies have been pushing for more cohesion between the programs. That may alleviate confusion among partners and Allies alike. The more the overall process is self-explanatory, the more it attracts attention and potentially interest. In addition, a clear feedback and assessment mechanism would be developed to enable all parties to better gauge the cooperation and adjust it accordingly, something that has been lacking so far.

Frameworks would benefit from more concrete guidelines to ensure better visibility and appreciation by the Allies. Consultation with partners would be strengthened. NATO could explore extending Article 4 to partners. It would not dramatically impinge on the way NATO does business and it would be a symbolic but significant evidence of interest for the partnerships. Second, reviewing – or creating – framework documents would force coming up with concrete and realistic objectives. The PfP remains ingrained in the 1994 PfP Framework Document that was written under very different political circumstances and for a very different purpose. Its ambition is too grand for the Partners today. It would be a long process, but reviewing the pillars of the PfP to reflect today's reality would be welcome. The risk is to end up with a less ambitious document, yet it would be tailored to the reality of the situation and would offer a more pragmatic approach and achievable objectives.

The Mediterranean Dialogue and the ICI would also undergo a thorough review. Both are loosely based on political declarations made at the Istanbul summit in 2004. Genuine framework documents would delineate overarching principles. Self-differentiation would remain central, but the Allies would request objectives and a degree of reform common to each framework and consequently each partner. Consultations with the partner countries to develop a framework document would be sensitive, but it would establish a reference document for both parties and would clarify what NATO and the partners can expect from each other. The ICI would be the trickier, because none of the countries seems close to reaching a bilateral agreement. However, they might agree to concede to a framework

document that would set limited goals for the partnership. This effort to review the objectives of the frameworks would help the Alliance refine its perspectives on what it does best and what activities it should leave to other organizations.

NATO would favor political partners over operational partners. The latter would only be considered opportunistically and should not take away resources otherwise available to political partners. The more the Allies grant partnership status to a variety of countries, the more it dilutes the concept. Non-NATO partners who decide to contribute to operations do not participate to get partnership with NATO in return.

That overhaul could also develop into a concerted approach to specific regions between the European Union and NATO. Although it is unrealistic at this stage, both bureaucracies dealing with partnerships should foster an informal dialogue and pave the way for more structured cooperation when the conditions are ripe. The partner countries are mostly alike, the objectives are similar, and the approach is complementary. This link does not exist and neither the ENP Review published in May 2011[67] nor the NATO Partnership policy take into consideration the efforts of the other organization.

This new visibility would ensure that partnerships are increasingly included in the development of Alliance's policies. Partners are already involved to various degrees in every aspect of the organization, whether it is in operations, in political dialogue, in exercises, and even in defense investment. Allies would then tie the partners more closely to the success of the organization. Although they would not offer security guarantees, they would enhance consultation with them and be more transparent with partners engaged in activities central to the Allies, such as operations. The Alliance would keep on emphasizing the need for a comprehensive approach and see the partners as instrumental in achieving that objective. As longtime Swiss Ambassador to NATO Jean-Jacques de Dardel argues, partners possess a variety of skills and strengths that could be useful to assist NATO in facing different types of crisis, looking beyond ISAF.[68]

This third scenario is the most optimistic. It envisions revitalized partnership programs and frameworks as well as subsequent objectives that would be pragmatic and would reflect the situation today. Implementing such an approach could also lay the ground for a genuine prioritization. The partnership policy has singled out some priorities, but the effort seemed precipitated. This higher course could open the door for conditionality. NATO has always refrained from exploring it to conduct its partnerships. Although

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[67] European Commission and High Representative of The European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, "A New Response to a Changing Neighborhood," COM(2011) 303, May 25, 2011, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/pdf/com_11_303_en.pdf (accessed May 26, 2011).
[68] Jean-Jacques de Dardel, "Whither the Euro-Atlantic Partnership? Partnership and NATO's New Strategic Concept," *GCSP Geneva Papers*, No. 10, 2009, pp. 25-26, available at: http://www.gcsp.ch/content/download/1097/9014/download (accessed December 3, 2010).

controversial, prioritization and conditionality would increase NATO's transparency on how it conducts cooperation with its partners, clarifying how it disburses its budget – something that is currently intricate because there is no "partnership budget" – as well as bridging the gaps between political objectives and implementation – equally impossible because of the innumerable actors involved in partnerships and the lack of coordination across the NCS. It would curb the waste of limited resources where potential results are non-existent. It would also send a clear message to the partners that NATO expects substantial cooperation from the partnerships but is willing to reward active partners. On the other hand, such an approach needs to be carefully thought through and adapted on a case by case basis with some common grounds for all. Some partners present geostrategic importance, such as the Central Asian countries for ISAF, but are reluctant partners. Conditionality would be difficult to carry out, because it implies both a positive and a negative side for the policy. Yet NATO cannot embrace a double standard policy, hence the need for common grounds applicable to all partners within each framework. Furthermore, NATO would need to clearly define what it is ready to offer to the most resolute partners, because it cannot count on its hypothetical inherent attractiveness.

Conclusion

NATO partnerships are in danger of becoming nugatory, of no real value. The concept of partnership emerged after the end of the Cold War as a valuable policy to make the Euro-Atlantic neighborhood more stable and more democratic at a time of uncertainty. It has increasingly become diluted, as interests are less obvious and not fully shared by all members, and partners are less enthusiastic to cooperate. The three frameworks are facing daunting challenges, since their political cadres appear out of touch with the reality of the relations between the parties. A series of obstacles, external and internal to NATO, have also impeded progress and while some may be manageable, others will endure and remain problematic. In the end, NATO seems to lack a convincing narrative able to incite cooperation and bring it to a new level.

The recently launched partnership reform should have been the perfect opportunity for audacious proposals. Yet neither NATO nor the Allies have taken the appropriate time to assess what the partnerships have achieved, what has gone wrong, what they can realistically accomplish in a new context, and how NATO could deliver more to its partners, even if that means changing the overall structure of the frameworks. The partnership policy unveiled in April is yet again evidence of the lofty approach that has been detrimental to the cooperation programs.

Therefore, of the three scenarios advanced in this paper, the third one – a comprehensive overhaul – is both the most optimistic and the only viable option in the long term. If NATO wants to carry on cooperation with and play a role, even if limited, in its neighborhood, it needs to come up with a genuine and unprecedented effort to rethink the programs, based on an in-depth assessment and an ambitious overhaul of the existing structure and the model on which partnerships have historically been based. However, given the lack of ambition on partnerships and the very significant issues that beset the Alliance more generally, this scenario seems very unlikely to take place in the near future.

The most likely scenario is then the first one, business as usual, although some Allies will lobby for the second one – the preeminence of operational partnerships. Partnerships will be deemed useful enough to be allowed to linger into the future, but not to the point that Allies or partners might want to invest significant political capital in them. This likelihood is reinforced by the recurrent divisions between Allies on the future of NATO and the fact that despite those oppositions, no one really wants to confront

such fundamental questions to the risk of further diminishing the Alliance. Since a fully shared and overarching way forward is not in the offing, NATO will carry on the way it has so far.

This option is all the more short-sighted given that revamped partnerships would have in fact a lot to offer the Alliance once it has overcome the current crisis. Accordingly, and despite the uninviting odds that prevail today, the Secretary General, the NATO staff, and the Allies would be well-advised to inject more policy into the partnership, not less. As Shakespeare said, "defer no time, delays have dangerous ends."

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