

NATO'S ROLE IN GENERATING COOPERATIVE APPROACHES TO REGIONAL SECURITY IN THE MEDITERRANEAN- MIDDLE EAST

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The beginning of the 21st century stands out as a period of fundamental transition in the international system, characterized by a high degree of instability, violence and uncertainty. In contrast to the tense stability of the bipolar Cold War era, the current environment poses significant challenges and risks, as well as opportunities. These dangers and opportunities are particularly relevant in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East – an area in which the dangers of regional insecurity and instability are particularly salient, and where democratic norms are only beginning to develop.

In this framework, there are a number of important roles that NATO's unique security and democratically-based political foundations can play in the region. Based on this structure, NATO might potentially promote realistic confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) among the Mediterranean partners and between them and NATO, including measures to prevent surprise attack. In addition, NATO's expanded Mediterranean partnership is instrumental in developing working relationships with each of the individual states in ways that contribute to threat reduction and regional stability, contribute to environmental threat reduction, and other important dimensions.

In the context of this analysis, five key issue-areas can be discerned for particular attention:

1. Regional elements related to combating global terrorism;

2. Containing the Iranian nuclear challenge, in combination with support for terrorism;
3. Cooperation in developing regional ballistic missile defense capabilities
4. Establishing stability and cooperation in the Arab-Israeli conflict zone during the post-Arafat era, including a possible role in Israeli-Palestinian reduction in tension (Gaza disengagement)
5. Establishing stability and democratic norms in Iraq following the Saddam Hussein and Baathist era;

Before turning to the examination of these topics, and the potential role for NATO, it is necessary to consider structural issues related to relationship between NATO members and the Mediterranean partnership program. This region, extending to include the wider Middle East as a closely interconnected region of intense conflict and instability, has a long history of unilateral approaches to security and other challenges. Efforts to develop a foundation for multilateralism and co-operative approaches to regional security have been largely unsuccessful – particularly in the case of the multinational dimensions of the Middle East peace negotiations initiated in the 1991 Madrid conference. The ACRS (arms control and regional security) talks ended in 1995, without significant accomplishments, in part reflecting the absence of key participants, such as Syria, Iran, Iraq and Libya, but also as a result of failure to even agree on a core agenda.

However, the logic and even necessity of multilateral approaches to regional security threats have become even more important in the past 15 years, increasing the dangers of a strictly unilateral approach to national security, and highlighting the potential benefits of regional cooperation. To the degree that the nations and regimes in the Mediterranean/Middle East region recognize the necessity of cooperation, NATO represents the most developed and effective security framework, and a logical foundation

for initiating such cooperation. The question then becomes one of defining the roles for which NATO is best suited in this context.

In addition, the different mechanisms offered by the evolving NATO – Mediterranean partnership also need to be examined in order to determine how best to implement and further these frameworks in addressing acute security concerns. In some cases, an upgraded “26+7” structure can provide a foundation for promoting dialogue, mutual understanding of threat perceptions, and regional cooperation. In other issue areas and responses to threat perceptions, enhanced cooperation based on the “26 + 1” framework will work better, and avoid the obstacles resulting from the disagreements among the Mediterranean partners.

1. NATO, the Mediterranean and Global Terrorism

In confronting the threat of global terrorism, much of it emanating from the Middle East and supported by radical and revolutionary regimes, the advantages of multilateralism are clear. Areas of cooperation include intelligence sharing, joint operations, and protective activities on the high seas, commercial aviation, and other modes of mass transportation. Indeed, NATO already heavily involved in such activities, particularly with respect to naval surveillance and inspection, including in the Mediterranean region.

Intelligence is a key element in combating terrorism, as demonstrated in the Israeli experience,¹ Afghanistan (with respect to preventing a return of Taliban and other armed forces), with respect to al Qaida, and elsewhere. While the level of intelligence sharing regarding terror threats has increased significantly in the wake of the September 11 2001 attacks, much of this is still based on ad hoc exchanges (often limited to bilateral links), and NATO’s capabilities and assets in the Mediterranean are still considered to be below par, due to the earlier focus on Eastern Europe, the Balkans, and the former

Soviet Union.² By institutionalizing and developing a structure for such cooperation between NATO and the Mediterranean partners, it will be possible to increase the effectiveness and impact of these assets. Perhaps more importantly, NATO's relatively limited ability to interpret and extrapolate from the information obtained could also increase significantly through wider cooperation. NATO could also conceivably assist in promoting anti-terror intelligence sharing among the Mediterranean partners, the importance of which was recently illustrated in the triple-bombing attacks in Sinai.

Beyond intelligence sharing, NATO, in conjunction with the Mediterranean partners (primarily in the "26+1" format), can also provide an important institutional venue in discussing and creating new international norms for combating terrorism. Central issues include the conditions and limitations on pre-emptive attacks against terrorists, in order to prevent mass attacks and civilian casualties, and legitimate responses to the use of densely populated areas as human shields for preparing terror attacks. The existing human rights framework has been shown to be inadequate in an environment of mass terrorism, and new more responsive norm and legal concepts are necessary. NATO's democratic emphasis (in contrast to the United Nations and other international institutions), endow this organization greater legitimacy in considering these important moral issues.

2. WMD and Missile Proliferation: Iran and beyond

In addition to the threat of mass terror, the threat posed by the accelerating proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly in the Middle East, continues to be a major source of instability and the potential for catastrophic conflict. Saddam Hussein's plans and capabilities in this area, as documented in great deal in the Duelfer report³, have been destroyed, and the Libyan government appears to have revealed and cooperated in the destruction of its illicit WMD capabilities and facilities.

However, the ongoing efforts of the radical Iranian regime constitute a fundamental threat to stability in the region, in Europe, and beyond. Using imported technology, such as centrifuge components and fabrication technology purchased via the head of Pakistan's weapons project, A. Q. Khan, as well as uranium conversion facilities acquired from China, and other sources, Iran has continued to make progress towards a nuclear weapons capabilities. Unless these efforts are halted, they will lead not only to confrontations with Iran, but also a chain of responses, and nuclear weapons proliferation throughout the region.

Iran's attempts to acquire nuclear weapons violate its commitments under the 1970 NPT, (which the Iranian government exploited to acquire technology and materials under the guise of a "peaceful nuclear program"). The threat and instability that will be created by Iranian nuclear weapons, and linked to the ongoing development of Shahab ballistic missiles (based on North Korean and Russian technology), is enhanced by the nature of Iran's radical regime, its active role in terror, and its declared goal of destroying Israel. (Missiles paraded in Teheran that boast the slogan "Wipe Israel Off the Map" are not helpful in creating confidence or develop mutual understanding.) Direct Iranian involvement in the terror activities of Hizbollah and Hamas are well documented, as is the Iranian role in supplying weapons for Palestinian terror, as in the case of the Karine-A arms ship.

The argument that Iranian nuclear capabilities can be contained through stable deterrence, similar to the U.S.-Soviet balance of terror during the Cold War, is weakened by the absence of any diplomatic links between Teheran and Jerusalem, making the type of crisis management that avoided nuclear catastrophe in the 1962 Cuban Missile crisis impossible. (Similarly, assertions that denial of nuclear weapons to the Iranian regime reflects a double standard in comparison to Israel are also simplistic and misleading given

the strong asymmetry in this relationship.)⁴

In the U.S. and more recently, in Europe as well, the threat resulting from the Iranian WMD programs is also recognized, and the UK, Germany and France are leading a major diplomatic initiative designed to reach an agreement with Teheran to end its nuclear efforts. If this fails, other options are being considered, including economic sanctions and perhaps also military action, which would delay the completion of the Iranian nuclear program, but could also increase regional instability and conflict in the region significantly.

In this environment, there a number of roles that NATO could potentially fill, in both the “26+7” and the “26+1” formats). To the degree that Iran continues to rely on imports to complete its missile and nuclear weapons development programs, NATO might be able to use its resources in limiting access to technological imports. This would require the type of intelligence sharing discussed in the context of anti-terror security links.

In addition, given the potential for failure in preventing the radical Iranian regime from acquiring nuclear weapons in the next five years, NATO should also prepare for the security environment that is likely to emerge following this development. Specific programs would include ballistic missile defense, crisis management capabilities, and realistic confidence and security building measures (such as steps to prevent mutual fear of surprise attack).

3. ***Ballistic Missile Defense***

The ongoing regional proliferation efforts, including the spread of North Korean-based missile technology among many states in the Mediterranean and Middle East, and core threats to national survival that result from these development, have resulted in an increased interest on defensive measures within NATO. The Iranian

Shahab 4, for example, can reach targets at distances of 2000 km, and the “space launcher” under development in Iran will provide an ICBM capability capable of hitting any target in the world.⁵

In response, the development of effective BMD (ballistic missile defense) systems poses formidable challenges, as illustrated in the ongoing U.S. and Israeli programs to develop and deploy first generation systems. The effectiveness of any BMD system is closely linked to the degree of cooperation that links a number of states together, providing increased early warning, tracking and intercept capabilities. NATO is currently examining potential regional BMD architecture and technology, and in this context, the experience gained from the Israeli Arrow missile program, as well as preliminary Israeli work with respect to boost-phase intercept is of importance.

In this context, cooperation between Israeli and NATO can provide early warning and perhaps even direct support to protect forces deployed in the region and also for homeland defense.⁶ In addition, NATO development of BMD capabilities can be made more efficient through cooperation with Israel.

4. ***Post-Arafat options for stability in the Arab-Israeli conflict***

The ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict is not the main cause of regional violence, terrorism, instability and war in the region, as is often simplistically claimed, but it is a major symptom that reflects the core ideological, religious, and economic “root causes”. (The dependence of the industrial world on Arab and Middle Eastern oil is also a major factor in the conflict that is unrelated to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but contributes to the intensity of the violence.) While such protracted ethno-national conflicts are not readily resolved through diplomatic negotiations and formula, (as in the case of the Balkans, Sri Lanka, India-Pakistan, Chechnya, etc.), and the prospects for a “permanent status agreement” in the next decade remain limited, the change in the Palestinian leadership

following the death of Arafat provides a basis for potential stabilization. As demonstrated in the catastrophic outcome of the “Oslo peace process”, in this conflict that began in the early 20th century (long before the 1967 war resulted in “occupied territory”), efforts to press for short term resolution of Palestinian claims regarding refugees and other core issues are likely to fail. Instead, pragmatic and limited measures to develop stability and security cooperation are the primary items on the agenda.

On this basis, if a pragmatic post-Arafat leadership emerges from the scheduled elections, this could lead to disarming terror groups such as Hamas, the Al Aksa brigades affiliated with Arafat’s Fatah movement, and Islamic Jihad, as well as to a halt in the incitement that promotes suicide attacks and embraces terrorists as martyrs. On the Israeli side, Prime Minister Sharon is pursuing a policy of withdrawal from all settlements in Gaza, and the transfer of responsibility for the entire area – free of Israeli checkpoints, closures, and other restrictions that have been required to protect civilians from terror attacks. This framework, whether based on Israeli unilateral disengagement, as envisioned prior to Arafat’s death, or the result of coordination with the Palestinian Authority as may be possible following elections, could reduce friction and violence significantly.

In this context, there is increasing discussion of the potential role for an international force to provide humanitarian assistance while preventing terrorism and arms smuggling (particularly through the tunnels from Egypt into Gaza), and also assist the Palestinian Authority in rebuilding local police capabilities. In this framework, in which the United Nations and the European Union are considered (at least by Israel) to be incapable and biased institutions, NATO is often considered to be among the more realistic candidates for such a mission. The presence of the U.S. and Europe in a single security-based framework, based on the common emphasis on democratic and

representative government, are important dimensions in NATO's structure and identity.

In considering this role, NATO members would have to be assured of a security environment in the areas under the control of the Palestinian Authority, so that peacekeepers and stability forces would not become targets for terror attacks. The mandate of such a force would also have to be defined carefully and in detail, based on a negotiated agreement involving Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Egypt (with respect to joint operations along the borders). Potentially, such an international force might even involve individuals provided by NATO as well as the Mediterranean partner states.

However, the implementation of any such scenarios will require a fundamental change in the Palestinian leadership, a willingness to confront the terror organizations, to end the incitement, and to stabilize the relationship with Israel. In the absence of such cooperation from the Palestinians, strong military involvement will be required to prevent Gaza from becoming a major center for international terror operations following the Israeli withdrawal.⁷

5. Iraq: The Importance of Stability in the post-Saddam Era

Any hope for Middle Eastern stability, reduction in violence and eventual democratization depends on an end to the insurgency and terrorism in Iraq. In this process, beyond the primary role of the coalition forces that are directly engaged, NATO is also playing a small role in helping to train Iraqi government security forces. Successful elections in Iraq could also allow for the expansion of this role for NATO forces, following a path similar to that of Afghanistan.

In contrast, the departure of the coalition forces, without the establishment of a stable and responsible government, is likely to result in the fragmentation of Iraq, and lead to the establishment of one or more radical regimes that would contribute to global

terrorism. Rather than moving forward towards creating an environment in which cooperative regional security becomes more realistic, such a development could destroy the fragile basis for such regional cooperation, and result in increased threat perceptions and responses, particularly in the case of Israel.

In conclusion, NATO embodies a potentially important source of stability and security in the Mediterranean and Middle East region. The combined presence of the US and Europe in a single military/strategic partnership, based on a common foundation of representative government and democratic principles, provides NATO with the credibility that no other international organization possesses. This foundation also provides the basis for an expanded NATO role in limiting these sources of instability and insecurity, including terrorism and WMD proliferation, while also providing necessary assistance in building confidence and security among the Mediterranean partners, as well as developing increased cooperation with NATO in responding to the opportunities for promoting regional security.

¹ Between March 2002, the height of the Palestinian terror campaign, and September 2004, Israeli military actions and policies have reduced the impact of violence and casualties from over 100 deaths per month to less than 50 per year. Intelligence regarding the activities of terror groups and key individuals, linked to control on the ground, interdiction of weapons, and where necessary, the use of precision guided weapons, played a major role in this outcome.

² Shlomo Shpiro, *The Communication of Mutual Security: Frameworks for European-Mediterranean Intelligence Sharing, 2001* <http://www.nato.int/acad/fellow/99-01/shpiro.pdf>

³ Comprehensive Report of the Special Advisor to the DCI on Iraq's WMD, 30 September 2004, U.S. Central Intelligence Agency, Washington DC. http://www.cia.gov/cia/reports/iraq_wmd_2004/

⁴ Gerald M. Steinberg "No, it's not a double standard", International Herald Tribune <http://www.iht.com/articles/541294.html>

⁵ Uzi Rubin, "Beyond Iraq: Missile Proliferation in the Middle East" Jerusalem Viewpoints 493 (March 2, 2003), Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs <http://www.jcpa.org/jl/vp493.htm>

⁶ Uzi Rubin, Azarel Ram, and Dan Hazanovski, "The Growing Role of Sea Based Missile Defense in the Middle East", Berlin Conference on Missile Defense, July 2004

⁷ Yaakov Amidror and David Keyes, "Will a Gaza ' Hamas-stan ' Become a Future Al Qaeda Sanctuary?" Jerusalem Issue Brief No. 4-7: November 2004

<http://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief004-7.htm>