

The New NATO Strategic Concept and the Mediterranean

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In its 20 November 2010 meeting in Lisbon, the North Atlantic Council adopted a new “Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.”¹ The Lisbon Strategic Concept is NATO’s third post-Cold War concept, following those issued in 1991 (Rome) and 1999 (Washington D.C.). The new Concept provides a very clear-cut illustration of the Alliance’s objectives (“Core Tasks and Principles”); the evolution of the security environment justifying those objectives (“The Security Environment”); and the instruments the Alliance intends to use to achieve its objectives (“Defence and Deterrence,” “Security through Crisis Management,” “Promoting International Security through Cooperation”).² Unlike that adopted in Washington, the Lisbon Concept marks a considerable shift in the process of change and reform that the Alliance kicked off at the end of the Cold War, as it takes an unequivocal step forward in the transformation of NATO from a defensive alliance into one concerned with members’ broader security from a global rather than merely regional perspective. The new strategies and policies that the Alliance plans to implement to achieve its updated objectives and broader security objectives are bound to have a

considerable impact on the Mediterranean and NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (although the new Concept mentions the latter only very briefly, in paragraph 35).³ From this perspective, this paper, first, examines the new strategy and policies of the Alliance. It then considers the implications that the new Concept may have for the Mediterranean, with particular reference to NATO-EU relations and the prospect of deeper NATO involvement in the Middle East.

The Global Relevance of the New NATO Strategy

The debate over whether NATO should go “global” was implicit in the 1991 reformulation of the strategic environment (an array of multi-dimensional risks stemming from areas others than those the Alliance had dealt with in the Cold War). In the 1990s, the United States repeatedly asked its European allies to provide NATO with a new rationale by expanding the Alliance’s mission to the so called “out-of-area,” in particular to the Persian Gulf, but its efforts were to no avail. In the first decade of the 21st century, most Europeans continued to reject engagement in the Greater Middle East, and, although the 11 September attacks did lead to a NATO intervention in Afghanistan, side by side with the United States, the allies remained sharply divided on Iraq.

¹ *The New Strategic Concept: Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, available at www.nato.int/lisbon2010/strategic-concept-2010-eng.pdf. See also *Lisbon Summit Declaration issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Lisbon*, available at www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/official_texts_68828.htm?mode=pressrelease. (Both documents were accessed on 10 January 2011.)

² ERALP, Yalim. *NATO’s Lisbon Summit: New Strategic Concept and the Missile Defence*. GPoT-Global Political Trends Center Policy Brief No. 20, Istanbul Kültür University, December 2010.

³ DE SANTIS, Nicola, “NATO’s Outreach to and Cooperation with Mediterranean Countries through the Mediterranean Dialogue,” in *IEMed Mediterranean Yearbook Med.2010*, IEMed, Barcelona, pp. 139-143; STIVATCHIS Yannis, A. and JONES, Benjamin, *NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue: An Assessment*, Research Institute for European and American Studies-RIEAS, Research Paper No. 137, Athens, November 2009; and RAZOUX, Pierre, *The NATO Mediterranean Dialogue at a Crossroads*, NATO Defense College, Research Paper No. 35, Rome, April 2008.

In conclusion, the Alliance has proved unwilling to adopt an automatic commitment to cope with any threat stemming from any part of the globe. While Art. 5 automatism remains valid in the case of defence, other more or less direct threats need to be considered and their nature assessed on a case-by-case basis before any shared commitment is undertaken. In this sense, the Alliance was not transformed into a global alliance.

It did not become global in another sense, as well. There has been a debate about enlarging the membership beyond the traditional perimeter, for instance, to include countries such as Japan. This would have done away with the original Euro-American identity of NATO. However, this kind of global development has also failed to materialise. NATO remains a Euro-American or Euro-Atlantic alliance whose membership has been enlarged on the European side without exceeding the European perimeter. Furthermore, the new Concept, in stressing NATO's willingness to keep the "door open," expressly refers to "European democracies" only (paragraph 27).

At the same time, though, NATO has remarkably strengthened its capabilities to intervene in different places and for whatever objectives the allies may want or need. Functionally, NATO has become a global alliance and is ready to act globally. The decisions made in Lisbon enable NATO to improve its global capabilities. Also, the definition of the security environment (paragraphs 7-15) points to a global vision thereof, stressing that "Many regions and countries around the world are witnessing the acquisition of substantial modern military capabilities," in particular, the proliferation of ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction, and that "Instability of conflict beyond NATO borders can directly threaten Alliance security." Moreover, unlike the previous Concepts, it speaks of terrorism as a "direct threat." This trend towards globalisation is summarised in the Concept's Preface: "The citizens of our countries rely on NATO to defend Allied nations, to deploy robust military forces where and when required for our security, and to help promote common security with our partners around the globe."

Global Approach to Partnerships

One of the most evident aspects of NATO's globalisation is the reordering that the Lisbon Concept envisages with regard to its external cooperation. This

development directly impacts the Mediterranean Dialogue and NATO's Mediterranean policy.

Previously, NATO had pragmatically pursued distinct and unrelated cooperation relations with other organisations and countries, the Mediterranean Dialogue being one of them. The Lisbon Concept has now brought these relations together under the homogeneous structure of "partnerships," and they have emerged as NATO's principal tool for conducting its external cooperation.

The Concept mentions a list of partnerships, including the UN, the EU, Russia, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the NATO-Ukraine and NATO-Georgia Commissions, the Western Balkans, the Mediterranean Dialogue, and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) (in that order).

In the new strategy framework, the varying relationships set up by NATO in the past – as well as any new ones that NATO may initiate in future – will thus be implemented in a single policy framework, in which NATO will act as a hub. This will definitely increase the broad effectiveness of NATO's external cooperation policy and open the door to interaction between the various partners.

The homologation of the different kinds of external relations maintained by NATO is twin to the intention of multiplying partnerships around the globe. Admittedly, this trend towards multiplication is already underway. It is reflected in the ICI in the Persian Gulf and the cooperation with Georgia in the Caucasus, which clearly goes beyond NATO's traditional area. The Lisbon Concept states, "The promotion of Euro-Atlantic security is best assured through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organisations around the globe." Setting up new partnerships around the globe is clearly the vector that will allow NATO to go global and act globally. In other words, NATO is adopting a "global approach to partnership," which objectively goes in the direction of an overall NATO globalisation.

The Lisbon Concept underscores that NATO's approach to partnerships, in addition to being global, will also be flexible: "We will enhance our partnerships through flexible formats that bring NATO and partners together – across and beyond existing frameworks." This means that NATO will not feel captive to given frameworks and is prepared to act with single partners, both within existing partnerships and across their boundaries, if need be.

A global approach by means of a variety of existing and future partnerships and the use of flexible for-

mats across and beyond existing partnership frameworks are the two pillars underpinning NATO's new strategy, including for the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Mediterranean region. What will their impact be on the latter?

Implications for the Mediterranean

In a reaction similar to the one that, at first, followed the implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the Mediterranean partners (which moreover do not loom high on the partnership list) may perceive the Lisbon changes to the NATO Concept discussed above as a downgrading. However, again as in the case of the ENP, they will soon understand that the change is actually bound to upgrade their bilateral relationship with NATO, and they will very much appreciate this upgrade.

By establishing a "hub and spokes" structure of relations among partnerships, the global approach to partnerships is bound to strengthen the bilateral nature of the current "hub and spokes" relationship between NATO and its partners within existing individual partnerships, in particular the Mediterranean Dialogue. The flexible formats, which will be used in implementing this approach, are complementary to the global approach to partnerships. In fact, they will allow individual partners, if willing, to take part in ventures and debates that cross the varying partnership frameworks. This may well present opportunities to individual Mediterranean partners, which they will be happy to seize.

This is already true for individual partners' participation in peace support operations and related training and civilian management tasks (a large menu of which is offered by the Concept in paragraph 25), as well as for special operations, such as "Active Endeavour" (in which Morocco has been taking part since October 2009).⁴ The global approach and the flexible formats may provide novel opportunities for cooperation across different geopolitical regions, i.e. beyond the Mediterranean, most of all with respect to proliferation, terrorism, transnational illegal trafficking and cyber attacks (the new kind of risk added

by the Lisbon Concept to the standing list), as well as communication, transport energy and the security environment. Flexible formats will enable NATO and its partners to cooperate individually and across existing frameworks in technology, interoperability, exercises and military planning.

NATO's flexible formats may provide opportunities for cooperation between the Mediterranean Dialogue and the ICI countries. They may also foster cooperation – to date extremely limited – among the Mediterranean Dialogue countries themselves.⁵ Most importantly, they may upgrade NATO-EU cooperation in the Mediterranean, where the EU has always been and continues to be particularly engaged with its Euro-Mediterranean frameworks (the ENP and the Union for the Mediterranean) and its own policies, from development aid and commerce to the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP).

The Lisbon Concept is remarkably more open towards NATO-EU cooperation than the previous concepts were. This reflects President Sarkozy's decision to have France rejoin NATO's integrated command. As a result of that decision, it is precisely in the Mediterranean, a region traditionally seen by French governments as falling within France's exclusive purview, that fresh opportunities for NATO-EU cooperation may arise.

In principle, NATO-EU cooperation in the Mediterranean could materialise in the bringing to bear of certain NATO capabilities in the military and security realm and of certain EU capabilities in the economic/civilian realm. In general, it should be facilitated by the convergence between NATO and the EU as organisations dealing with broad security concerns. Cooperation could easily be fostered in the field of civilian crisis management. A number of areas mentioned in the Lisbon Concept, such as communication, transport, energy and the security environment, might also lend themselves to broadening cooperation between NATO and the EU in the Mediterranean.

Military cooperation, i.e. cooperation between NATO and the EU's CSDP, has already been successfully achieved in the Western Balkans. It could be further

⁴ "NATO and Morocco Sign Agreement on Operation Active Endeavour," press communiqué by the Public Affairs Office of CC-MAR Naples, 21 October 2009 (accessed on 10 January 2011).

⁵ See RAZOUX, Pierre, *Comment redynamiser le Dialogue Méditerranéen de l'OTAN avec les pays du Maghreb?*, NATO Defense College, Research Papers No. 64, December 2010, which mentions, among other options, maritime and energy security, the struggle against terrorist trends in the Sahel and the need to keep a "door open" to Libya.

developed in North Africa and the Near East, where the EU has considerable experience, in particular with regard to Palestine (providing political conditions one day allow for a “third-party intervention” in which NATO and the EU could work out a suitable division of labour). Admittedly, despite the Lisbon Concept’s new-found warmth towards NATO-EU cooperation, problems stemming from Turkey’s opposition to cooperation in the military field, unless the EU somehow includes Turkey in the CSDP,⁶ have yet to be overcome. That may hinder further developments in NATO-EU military cooperation in the Mediterranean (and elsewhere).

The global approach and flexible formats, while encouraging cross-cooperation, certainly will not render the existing regional and bilateral frameworks of partnership void. According to the Concept, “We are firmly committed to the development of friendly and cooperative relations with all countries of the Mediterranean, and we intend to further develop the Mediterranean Dialogue in the coming years.” NATO’s Secretary General has expressed his organisation’s special interest in the Mediterranean on many occasions.⁷

To conclude, reference must be made to the possible deeper involvement of NATO in the Middle East by means of new partnerships in that region and/or by upgrading the existing partnership with the Gulf Cooperation Council countries in the ICI and/or through operations that NATO might be asked to lead in the region, such as a third-party intervention in Palestine. Should NATO take on possible new tasks in the Middle East, and should it do so using its new “flexible formats” approaches, the current distinction between its relations with the Mediterranean and its relations with the Middle East or the Greater Middle East will no doubt fade. First, the trend is embedded in the new approaches ushered in by the Lisbon Strategic Concept. Second, the geopolitical evolution of the Middle East and the Mediterranean over the past few years has objectively united the two regions. The Mediterranean, as a separate strategic or political framework, can no longer really stand alone. It makes sense as an EU neighbourhood, less so as a strategic prospect from the transatlantic and CSDP perspective. From this point of

view, the new NATO strategy may contribute to making overall Euro-Atlantic strategy more effective and to modernising the EU’s strategic approach.

Conclusions

NATO’s new Concept is definitely a significant step forward for the Alliance. The global approach to partnerships and the use of flexible formats in NATO’s relations with the different partnerships promises to be effective.

From a general point of view, whether and to what extent it will be possible to implement the new doctrine will depend less on the doctrine itself than on developments inside and outside the Alliance.

Additionally, when it comes to the Mediterranean and the Middle East, the outstanding weakness is that NATO’s good (and now also flexible) relations are more with regimes than with countries or people. While with democratic members and partners, changes in governments will hardly cause changes in relations with NATO or call NATO into question, no one really knows what would happen if NATO’s current partner regimes in the South were to fall or change.

Admittedly, this is less a problem for NATO (or, for that matter, the EU) than for the Member States. It is the latter that have to decide to shift from a policy of stability with a rhetoric of democracy to a less ambiguous policy of reforms and democratisation (with the costs that may entail). The new Concept lays the foundations for greater effectiveness, but on the condition that the regimes remain stable. This is the question that the Member States of NATO and the EU must focus on in the coming months and years, placing more emphasis on their declarations in favour of political reform and good governance.

Finally, whether NATO will be able to implement such an ambitious agenda remains to be seen. Here again, much depends on future international developments and, even more, on whether the Member States will be able and willing to support and fund the agenda. In particular, in an era of decreasing military expenditure, funding may emerge as a major stumbling block.

⁶ On this point see GNESOTTO, Nicole, “The EU and NATO: Beyond Appearances,” in VASCONCELOS, Álvaro (coord.), *What do Europeans Want from NATO?*, European Union Institute for Security Studies, Report No. 8, Paris, November 2010.

⁷ Most recently, see the speech by the NATO Secretary General at the NATO-Jordan Public Diplomacy Conference, “NATO, the Mediterranean and the broader Middle East region,” Amman, 7 March 2010.