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STRENGTHENING NATO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS: A TRANSITION TO PARTNERSHIP

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by Roberto Aliboni¹

Today, the Southern approaches to Europe are perhaps the most important source of instability for that continent and the West in general. Instability has increased as a result of the West's failed attempts to curb it in the 1990s and solve the conflicts that nurture it. As a result of this failure, frustration and interdependence - as opposed to integration - have increased regionally and globally so that Southern instability now generates larger and more diffuse spillovers than a decade ago.

The situation has changed with respect to the NATO strategic concepts of 1991 and 1999. In them, Western security was supposed to be essentially affected by external risks, that is the impact of external instabilities and the involvement of vital interests outside the Alliance area. By contrast, it was supposed to be unaffected by "calculated aggression".² Such an aggression, however, took place on 11 September 2001 against NATO's leading nation, the United States, and was perceived by the United States and NATO allies as an act of war.

This development adds a distinctive threat in the shape of terrorism to traditional risks. In the Mediterranean region, besides national and religious terrorism, there is now a global terrorist trend. The latter is distinct from regional ones, but may easily merge with it thanks to their similar ideological background.

That background is important in understanding the new strategic setting. It means that relatively sparse trends, at national or local level, are now objectively coalescing in a single and enlarged perspective. The wars in Afghanistan, the western Balkans and Chechnya have contributed to unifying and strengthening Islamist trends from the Maghreb to Central Asia. As illegitimate as Al Qaeda's call to the whole of Islam may be, it links up with an effective mass consensus across the regions concerned. The events of 11 September have added new substance to the Greater Middle East strategic perspective and unveiled a new transnational Islamist trend in addition to the traditional ones.

At the same time, within the Greater Middle East circle, the Near Eastern and North African areas, i.e. the Mediterranean, look particularly exposed to this sweeping trend of Islamist feelings and terrorist warfare. This is due to two main reasons:

In the terrorists' eyes, a significant shift towards Islamism in the regional balance of power would open the way to the shift in the global balance of power they are seemingly seeking. The Near East and North Africa are of great cultural and political significance for the Muslim world. A change there would be bound to have far more decisive repercussions throughout the whole of that world than any change in Central Asia.

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² See Part I, point 10 of "The Alliance's Strategic Concept agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Rome on 7-8 November 1991", in *NATO Handbook*, Brussels 1995.

At the same time, the Mediterranean is close to Europe. Since the 1970s, Europe has served as a logistical platform for expatriated political activities aimed at North Africa and the Middle East. Increases in migration have facilitated this role. Thus Europe has often suffered the spillovers of terrorism. Only very seldom, however, has it been the direct target. In contrast, post-11 September evidence suggests that Europe is now becoming a target in itself as well as a platform for actions directed not only across the Mediterranean but also at the United States.

Thus, because of its cultural and political relevance for the Muslim world and Europe's proximity, the Mediterranean area is becoming particularly important for global terrorism. By the same token, it is becoming more sensitive for Southern Mediterranean and Western security.

The Secretary General of NATO has recently recognized the new relevance of the Mediterranean for Western security. He identified five concerns that make the Mediterranean increasingly important:³ its potential for instability; terrorism; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and related Arab-Israeli disputes; WMD and missiles proliferation; energy. NATO and Western governments feel that the Southern Mediterranean countries face the same threats and risks they do. Thus they believe that the scope for security and political cooperation is even greater than before and look for chances to enhance existing frameworks of cooperation, such as the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue (NMD).

Despite the convergence of interests in and challenges to national security, common ground in North-South security across the Mediterranean remains subject to limits. To understand how security cooperation can nevertheless be concretely advanced in the new situation, these limits have to be kept in mind.

The first limit regards the continuing Arab-Israeli conflict and the state of tension that prevails in the region as a result of it. The conflict prevents Israel and the Arab countries from cooperating – even indirectly – in the field of security, that is in the framework of collective security organizations such as the NMD or the EMP. Furthermore, while Southern security depends to a large extent on the Arab-Israeli conflict, there is no apparent functional link between the chances for solving that conflict and North-South cooperation in the framework of collective security bodies. As a consequence, while bilateral military cooperation is more often than not welcome, collective cooperation may be accepted in principle but never becomes truly operational and constructive.

The second limit is the widespread perception of Western interference in the Arab world. Colonial legacies are far from being superseded. In the broad Arab and Muslim perception, Western interference is first of all attested to by the state of Israel, the poisonous tail of colonization. According to Arab public opinion and domestic opposition groups, largely shaped by nationalist and Islamist trends, interference is also attested to by the economic, cultural and political influence the West allegedly exercises on their countries and governments. With regard to governments, Western interference

³ In his speech on "NATO and the Mediterranean - Moving from Dialogue to Partnership" at the Royal United Services Institute-RUSI, London, 29 April 2002.

concerns domestic affairs - pressures relating to human rights abuses, political reform, economic conditionality etc. - as well as regional politics - political and military interventions in the region. Governments are affected not only by interference in itself but also by the negative impact such interference has on their public opinion. Security cooperation with the West cuts two ways for Arab governments: it reinforces governments in many respects, but at the same time, it may weaken them in many others. If mismanaged, relations with the West may destabilize rather than stabilize governments and countries.

Finally, this ambiguity in security relations with the West is reflected in the fact that whatever the security cooperation offered by the West to the Arabs, it is never fully inclusive. For sure, the agendas proposed by the West, such as the EMP and the NMD, are intended to avoid a sense of exclusion and to create, instead, a sense of inclusion. They are meant to provide the Southern countries with a say. They also provide some transparency. Still, they exclude all Arab influence on assessments and decisions. In fact, they fall short of a real partnership in the true sense.

However, in the presence of such stumbling blocks on the road to security cooperation, there are also a number of building blocks.

The first such building block is the danger for both the North and the South of the Mediterranean constituted by global terrorism. Until recently, terrorism used to attack Southern governments and generate spillovers in the North. Today, it attacks both Northern and Southern governments. Cooperation against a common enemy is needed. As NATO Secretary General noted in the statement mentioned above, “without a coherent strategy to combat terrorism, neither the NATO Allies nor their Mediterranean neighbours can be truly secure”.

Second, cooperation against global terrorism cannot remain without effects on the Arab-Israeli conflict. Global terrorism draws large consensus in the Arab-Muslim world by construing its struggle as a contribution to Palestine’s liberation from Israeli occupation. A renewed joint political effort by the West and the moderate forces in the South to provide a two-state solution is bound to undermine global terrorist claims. It is surely a cornerstone in the fight against it.

On the other hand, if the Western countries were to accept Al Qaeda’s identification with the Palestinian national struggle and were to provide only a military response to Palestinian terrorism - regarded as part and parcel of global terrorism - this would play into the hands of global terrorism. A response of this kind would weaken moderate forces in the Arab and Muslim world and prevent any North-South cooperation in the Mediterranean and elsewhere.

Right now, the outlook for the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is in a state of flux. President George W. Bush’s Rose Garden statement was ambiguous, including both negative and positive elements. However, the Task Force on Reform, if managed and directed so as to reinforce and restructure moderate actors, could emerge as the platform for a renewed and successful peace process. In any case, the Alliance is deeply convinced of the need to solve the Arab-Palestinian conflict as a precondition for defeating terrorism and making security cooperation possible. To quote the NATO Secretary General once again: “without a breakthrough in the Middle East peace process, a major obstacle to normalising Western relations with the Arab world will remain”.

Third, security dialogue in the EMP and NMD may be limited in its effectiveness, but it has generated an important set of confidence-building measures and the habit of cooperation, which could constitute a good platform for moving ahead.

If this is a more or less exact picture of existing liabilities and assets in Mediterranean security cooperation, what the picture seems to suggest is that the countries involved cannot proceed immediately to establish a security partnership in the Mediterranean, still they have good reasons to start a transition towards such a partnership. They would be deluding themselves if they thought they could establish a full partnership now. Yet, they would make a mistake if they failed to act at all. What they should definitely do is to establish a clear and definite perspective of partnership with the aim of gradually consolidating it. The next section builds on ways and means to work in such a perspective starting from the NMD platform.

The West's interest in strengthening security ties with the Southern Mediterranean countries is clearly motivated in terms of stability, international governance, domestic and international security. To be attractive, the prospect of NATO partnership should bring similar benefits to the Southern countries. For that purpose, the partnership should embrace three broad objectives:

- An enhanced political dialogue that would give the Partners the chance to debate not only Mediterranean but also international trends broadly affecting regional and respective national security;
- This political dialogue would serve to broadly strengthen joint assessment and action capabilities for managing international instability; on the other hand, enhanced operational cooperation in the military as well as civilian fields within the Partnership would serve to reinforce their joint crisis management capabilities. Both the political dialogue and their enhanced capabilities to participate in international crisis management would contribute to reinforcing Southern Mediterranean nations' international status;
- Political dialogue and operational security cooperation would contribute to consolidating the Partners' domestic security and their capabilities for combating terrorism.

The achievement of these objectives requires institutional as well as operational measures of cooperation.

As far as institutional mechanisms are concerned, two main measures should be implemented. First, NATO should consider "involving interested Dialogue countries more closely in some activities of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council".⁴ This involvement would give the Dialogue countries the chance to assess international security trends alongside Western countries in a partnership role. It would begin to ensure the inclusiveness that Mediterranean relations lack today.

Second, a Mediterranean Dialogue Partnership (MDP) should be developed, drawing from the PfP experience and cooperative activities but specifically tailored to the realities of Mediterranean Dialogue countries.

⁴ This measure is suggested in the NATO Secretary General's speech already quoted.

To set this MDP in motion, there should be periodical meetings at ambassadorial level to consider a common enlarged agenda to be implemented by joint actions and measures. “The ambassadors should meet periodically (3-4 times a year) in a kind of 19+7 ‘Mediterranean Cooperation Council’, which, by its very denomination, would represent a regular political partnership between NATO and non-NATO Mediterranean countries”.⁵ This should include a meeting of the Mediterranean Cooperation Council (MCC) at Foreign Ministers level, at least once a year. The MCC should also consider in the next three years to hold meetings at Defense Ministers level.

The deliberations of the “Mediterranean Cooperation Council” should be prepared by the NATO Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG). The latter would be committed to generating an agenda to be submitted to and jointly considered by the “Mediterranean Cooperation Council”. In doing so, it should keep in touch with the Dialogue countries’ representatives in more or less formal or informal ways (seminars, routine diplomatic contacts and so forth).

Today, after the decisions taken by the North Atlantic Council in Washington D.C. in 1999, the MCG works out an annual Work Program that is implemented on the initiative of NATO’s International Staff. This Work Program is discussed by NATO and the Dialogue countries’ representatives in informal meetings at varying levels. The “Mediterranean Cooperation Council” would institutionalize this process and give it a more pregnant political significance.

To conclude with institutional mechanisms, it must be noted that, in pursuing such an agenda, NATO should maintain the bilateral dimension of the Mediterranean Dialogue “19+1” also in the Mediterranean Dialogue Partnership. By so doing, NATO’s security cooperation with Mediterranean Dialogue countries would present the advantage of offering Mediterranean Dialogue partners both a bilateral “19+1” and a multilateral “19+7” consultation, which other international organizations do not offer them.

The current agenda already includes a considerable array of cooperative projects. The Work Program for 2000, for instance, includes activities in the field of information, civil emergency planning, crisis management, science, education, as well as a set of military activities broadly directed at improving confidence and interoperability. This agenda – which clearly draws on the Partnership for Peace’s (PfP) experience - should be enlarged by either upgrading cooperative activities already envisaged, such as cooperation in peace-support operations (PSOs), in particular peacekeeping, or introducing new activities, such as anti-terrorism cooperation and security good governance. While a detailed set of proposals is attached to this paper, in the following the paper dwells on the agenda’s broad guidelines only.

Peacekeeping operations have already proven to be a promising field of cooperation. They have provided good results in terms of cooperation with Mediterranean countries. These results can be improved and upgraded. Despite its deeply different political and strategic significance, the PfP experience with such operations can be applied fully to

⁵ R. Aliboni, “Between Dialogue and Partnership: What North-South Relationship Across the Mediterranean?” paper presented to the international conference on “Governing Stability Across the Mediterranean Sea: A Transatlantic Perspective”, IAI, Rome, 21-23 March 2002.

the Mediterranean perspective. It must be noted that all the kinds of peacekeeping-related activities presently developed in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and PfP are coordinated by the Political Military Steering Committee Ad Hoc Group. A similar group could be developed in the Mediterranean framework as well to promote similar activities: joint peacekeeping training; joint force planning for peacekeeping purposes; interoperability; joint logistics; joint command and control, etc.

Training Partners' military forces to work together in a peacekeeping perspective would open the way for the use of such forces in civil emergency operations as well as specific interventions, such as demining. This kind of cooperation could also prove important were NATO called in to contribute to peacekeeping operations relating to an Israeli-Palestinian peace settlement if it became possible.

Security good governance was introduced early on in the PfP agenda with a view to helping democratize civil-military relations in society as well as making military expenditures more cost-effective and transparent in terms of domestic governance. As democratization – unlike in the PfP - is for the time being not a goal shared by the Mediterranean partnership's member nations, security good governance must be introduced mostly as a tool for rationalization and effectiveness.

Every year, the PfP security governance agenda has included a wide array of topics discussed and more or less implemented by the Partners. Broadly speaking, four main headings should be retained by the NATO and Dialogue countries' representatives in working out a concrete agenda to be submitted to the "Mediterranean Cooperation Council": (a) defense expenditures and budgets and their relationship with domestic economic performance; (b) security aspects of economic development, that is: the consequences of the implementation of UN-mandated economic sanctions on socio-economic aspects of regional stability; energy security; economic aspects of migration and refugees affecting security and stability; (c) interoperability, to allow Med Dialogue countries' military forces to participate with NATO forces in humanitarian aid, peacekeeping and peace support operations; (d) defense conversion activities and their industrial and human impact. While defense conversion may prove less important for the Mediterranean countries than it has been for Eastern European ones, the other activities mentioned are definitely relevant.

Terrorism is a completely new field of cooperation. The PfP has never taken it into consideration from an operational point of view since, in fact, it had no reason to do so (it could do it now). A North-South agenda of cooperation on terrorism was worked out by the Sharm el-Sheik summit in March 1996 and ratified in June 1996 by the Cairo Arab summit. But subsequent developments in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict engendered strong disagreements and brought cooperation to an end.

If some degree of Mediterranean cooperation in combating terrorism is to be established today, a basic distinction must be made between global and regional, transnational and national terrorism. Any attempt to use anti-terrorism cooperation at the global level to fight terrorism carried out by national and religious movements in historical Palestine would not be accepted by Arab countries and would immediately bring cooperation to an end.

By the same token, any Southern Mediterranean attempt to use national anti-terrorist policies to suppress opposition or abuse human rights would produce similar results.

In many respects, cooperation against terrorism will have a very narrow path to walk. Thus, to make cooperation possible, the 19+7 officials in charge of the Mediterranean partnership's agenda will have to set out very precise and limited objectives and guidelines. Like the rest of the Mediterranean exercise in security cooperation, even anti-terrorism must be strictly based on what the PfP calls self-differentiation, i. e. the application of voluntary participation and variable geometry. More in general, the agenda should be less predicated on concepts than specific endeavors.

In conclusion, it must be stressed that, while a full security cooperation across the Mediterranean is not still possible, there are common interests and dangers that advise the countries concerned to reinforce existing security cooperation and add to it new, more fitting, institutional dimensions. Thus, a clear signal should be provided by beginning a transition from the present confidence-building Dialogue to a more operational and cohesive Partnership.

ATTACHMENT

NATO and its Mediterranean Partners should consider adapting the following PfP activities to the Mediterranean Dialogue Partnership (MDP), which would be promoted through the Mediterranean Cooperation Council (MCC).

Political and Security Related Matters

- Specific political and security related matters, including regional security issues;
- Conceptual approaches to international terrorism, arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, including transparency;
- Strengthening the consultative and cooperation process "19+1" and "19+7".
- Consultations at Ambassadorial level on general and specific issues, including in "19+7" brainstorming format;
- Early consultations, particularly on regional tensions with a potential to grow into crisis;
- Informal political consultations between NATO and individual Mediterranean Dialogue partner countries, as appropriate;
- Meetings of Regional Experts Groups with experts from Mediterranean Dialogue partner countries once a year;
- Briefing of Mediterranean Dialogue partners, including at the partner's request when possible, on decisions taken by the North Atlantic Council and other important developments in the Alliance having direct bearing on security and stability.

Education and Training:

- Establishment of a baseline of common knowledge, skills and experience for enhancing cooperative military relations;
- Familiarization with and harmonization of armed forces' concepts, doctrines, procedures and structures, including the military's role in a democratic society;
- Improvement of capabilities for the development and application of common doctrines and procedures for education and training, including fields such as language training, communications, crisis management and environmental issues.
- Promotion of mutual understanding, interoperability and cooperation among Allied and Med Dialogue nation forces.

Peacekeeping activities

1. Development of a common understanding of concepts and requirements for peacekeeping:

- Continue exchanges of views on concepts, terminology and national doctrines on peacekeeping within the NACC/PfP framework. Specifically:
- Discuss and exchange views on humanitarian aspects of peacekeeping, including civil-military relations;

- Examine concrete lessons learned from peacekeeping operations.
 - Promote contacts with the United Nations and OSCE on peacekeeping issues, and encourage exchanges of information on this subject with other international concerned bodies;
2. Cooperation in planning for peacekeeping activities
 - Command and control: expert seminar, plus further development of the topic based on conceptual and practical experience.
 3. Development of a common technical basis in peacekeeping
 - Communications: Further discussion on the development of a peacekeeping communications concept and the possible implementation of a communications database.
 4. Peacekeeping training, education and exercises
 - Training Course Handbook:
 - Training Standardization Pamphlet:
 - Exercises: Consideration of lessons learned, based on after-action reports of NATO/PfP exercises and on national inputs on bilateral, multilateral and NATO/PfP exercises; and application in other areas of practical cooperation;
 - Briefings by nations on national peacekeeping training.
 5. Logistics aspects of peacekeeping
 - Discuss the Compendium of lessons learned, based on national inputs;
 - Discuss logistic peacekeeping issues in Senior NATO Logisticians Conference with Mediterranean Dialogue Countries;
 - Organize a logistics peacekeeping exercise/seminar.

Defense Expenditures/Defense Budgets and their Relationship with the Economy
Interrelationship between defense expenditures/budgets and the economy, including:

- Defense Planning and Budgeting;
- Defense policy implementation in an open market economy,
- Financing of defense,;
- Best practices in military budgeting
- Economic problems of long-term defense budget planning;
- Defense policy/strategy/military doctrine;
- Connections between Energy Supplies and State Security;
- Economic implications of migration and refugees affecting security and stability;
- Consequences of UN mandated economic sanctions on socio-economic aspects on socio-economic aspects of regional stability.

Enhanced Military Cooperation

1. Defense Structures:

- The structure, organization and roles of Defense Ministries;
 - The structure and organization of the armed forces including command structure;
 - Reserve forces and mobilization;
 - Personnel issues.
2. Military Reform:
 - Promotion of civil-military relations in a democratic society;
 - Legal framework for military forces.
 3. Crisis Management;
 4. Planning, organization and management of national defense procurement programs:
 - Governmental organization for defense equipment procurement;
 - Defense procurement planning systems and project management concepts;
 - Defense procurement policy and procedures, to include legal framework, contracting methods and government/ industry relations.
 5. Air Defense related matters:
 - Air Defense concepts, procedures and terminology;
 - Air emergency and cross-border air movements;
 - Air Defense training concepts.
 6. Air traffic management/control:
 - Civil-military airspace coordination;
 - Coordination of airspace requirements for multinational air exercises.
 7. Standardization and interoperability:
 - Material and technical aspects of standardization and interoperability;
 - Procedures and in-service equipment in peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian and other agreed exercises and operations;
 - Military medicine.

Possible Military Exercises and Related Activities to be organised with Mediterranean Dialogue Countries

- Humanitarian Aid Operations ;
- Disaster Relief Operations;
- Maritime Embargo Operations;
- Peacekeeping Operations;
- Peace Support Operations;
- Peace Enforcement Operations;
- Search And Rescue;
- Air delivery of Humanitarian Aid;

- Develop common understanding on MAROPS and Exercise on Non-combatant Evacuations Operations (NEO);
- Develop common understanding on doctrine of military contribution to PKG and humanitarian aid operations;
- Familiarize Mediterranean Dialogue countries with and develop necessary background for exercising multinational PKG operations;
- Familiarize Med Dialogue countries with NATO maritime concept of embargo operations;
- Introduce Med Dialogue countries naval officers in NATO procedures for naval control of shipping (NCS);
- Promote forms of cooperation for river operations in PKG, humanitarian and Search And Rescue in the field of monitoring the embargo conditions;
- Maritime Exercise on Sanctions Enforcement, Search and Rescue, Embargo Operations, Convoy Operations;
- Multinational Medical Exercise Focused on Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Aid;
- Develop Joint Staff Procedures for a Joint Task Force HQs, UN Mandated in a PKG Operations Out of Area and Studying practicalities and limitations of such an operation;
- Legal and Public Information Issues;
- Political-military issues;
- NATO Concept of Medical Operations and Terminology;
- Familiarize Med Dialogue Countries with NATO Staff Procedures;
- Logistics and communications for interoperability;
- Familiarize Med Dialogue countries on procedures in decision-making process activity related to PKG, PEO and PSO;
- Prepare Med Dialogue countries in Staff procedures related to the decision-making process on operational issues and military activities related to hypothetical PKG, PEO and PSO.