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Chances and Limits of NATO's Global Partnership with Australia

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Chances and Limits of NATO's Global Partnership with Australia

As the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) has changed its role significantly, so has the meaning of being a partner of the Atlantic alliance. In the decade after the end of the Cold War, the rationale of the Partnerships for Peace was the prevention of a security gap east of NATO's borders.¹ With the accession of many of these nations to the alliance in recent years, NATO seems to have fulfilled this role largely successfully. At the same time, NATO's role has shifted from a regional military alliance into an actor with more global aspirations, exceeding the boundaries of a common defence organisation. Further, as the security environment has changed and emerging threats acquire an increasingly international and even global character, NATO members agreed that a purely regional approach would not be able to sufficiently tackle the challenges the organisation faces now and in the future. After its transformation the alliance thus perceives itself not only as the Euro-Atlantic defence organisation, but also as a global security provider, acting on behalf of the United Nations and engaging emerging threats at the source. Missions in Sudan, the Balkans and most importantly Afghanistan have shown that NATO members are willing to commit to the new agenda. As NATO went out of area, so did its partnerships, with Korean, Mongolian and other non European forces forming a part of NATO's ISAF mission in Afghanistan. An initiative towards global partnerships was thought of as an answer to the question of how the alliance can better interact with countries, which are increasingly important to its success in Afghanistan, and potential out of area missions in the future.² The purpose of this discussion paper is to give insight into the rationale for the intensification of a NATO partnership with Australia, the largest non NATO troop contributor in Afghanistan. It will point out the benefits for each side, but also shed light on the various challenges for closer cooperation. The analysis suggests that both NATO and Australia are facing a number of obstacles, which

will require political will and commitment to overcome, if the global partnership is to be of relevance for either side.

1. The global partnership initiative

Through the initiative of the United States in 2004, NATO began to look for candidates for a new kind of partnership, which would connect the alliance to democracies around the world in order to 'strengthen and deepen' its relations and sustain its relevance.³ It was to be an important step in the globalisation of NATO. The initiative, originally welcomed by NATO member states, sparked a significant degree of discomfort among members and partners, when then U.S. NATO-Ambassador Victoria Nuland presented a vision of a reformed global partnership forum and even advocated a dissolution of the European Atlantic Partnership Council at a speech in 2006.⁴ NATO was to be at the heart of an international network of democratic powers, the first address to respond to crises and emerging threats, with a new 'security providers forum' at its heart. Many feared a U.S. intention of transforming NATO into an instrument of American global aspirations within the agenda of its war on terror.⁵ Despite these uneasy periods, the idea of global partnerships has been sustained, due to the need for international legitimization and support for the transitioning alliance. Among the circle of possible candidates were U.S. allies in the Pacific, which were loosely connected to NATO as 'contact countries'.⁶ Current NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen re-confirmed the alliance's ambitions only recently, underlining that territorial defence starts beyond NATO's borders, and that 'NATO can be the place where views, concerns and best practices on security are shared by NATO's global partners'.⁷ The vision of NATO as the vehicle for an internationally concerted effort to take on global security challenges maintains the motivation for global partnerships.

The form of these partnerships will differ, however, from the relationships NATO established with its neighbours in the decade after the Cold War. With the responsibility for the 'structural intervention'⁸ in

¹ See e.g. Wolff, 2009. pp. 479-482

² Flockhart & Kristensen, 2008. p. 12

³ See NATO – Topic: 'relations with contact countries', 2010.

⁴ Nuland Speech, October 23, 2006.

⁵ Kamp. 2006, p. 3.

⁶ NATO – Topic: 'relations with contact countries', 2010.

⁷ NATO Secretary General Rasmussen Speech, 2010.

⁸ Structural Interventions, *merge war fighting, peacemaking and*

Afghanistan, the alliance's relevance is measured in the successful conclusion of the operations it has engaged in. Failure to achieve its goals would undermine its *raison d'être*. The focus has thus shifted away from ideals toward practical cooperation, partners are chosen by their ability to add value in order to meet the new agenda.⁹ Accordingly, former Secretary General Jaap De Hoop Scheffer announced in 2006 that the partnership with Australia would not mean the creation of 'heavy structures', but would instead be based on a pragmatic approach.¹⁰ As Australia is already closely connected to NATO's most powerful member, it is worth assessing the fields of collaboration between the U.S. and Australia, as well as the fields in which the alliance and Canberra aim to intensify cooperation.

2. A Network of Partnerships

Although the rationale of further enhancing NATO-Australian partnership appears self-evident, there are a few factors which require consideration. The main driver behind NATO's global outreach, the United States, is the same actor which has brought together the alliance and Australia in Afghanistan in 2007. Through ANZUS, the military alliance linking the U.S. and Australia¹¹, the two states remain strongly connected. Although the ANZUS alliance has no dedicated forces like NATO, it incorporates a common defence clause similar to NATO's Article 5. Despite dwindling public support among the younger generation, ANZUS remains a cornerstone in Australian defence policy.¹² On the basis of the alliance with Australia, the United States continues to cooperate with Canberra in terms of military technologies and force training. Further, through the UKUSA agreement, Australia and the U.S. share a large amount of their signals intelligence since 1946.¹³

peacekeeping'. For a detailed explanation see Lindley-French, 2006, p. 260.

⁹ Kamp, 2006, p. 4.

¹⁰ NATO press release, 25.09.2006.

¹¹ After a dispute between the U.S. and New Zealand in 1984, it no longer applies between the two.

¹² See Pietsch, Clark & He, 2010, pp. 171-173.

¹³ The UK, Canada and New Zealand are also part of the UKUSA agreement.

NATO and Australia: Areas of Cooperation

A promising factor for the enhancement of their partnership is the similarity of both actors' threat perceptions, which translate well into the envisioned agenda for closer cooperation. Key challenges are the fight against international terrorism¹⁴ concerted efforts against proliferation and the containment of (especially Afghan) drug smuggling to Europe and Australia. Among the first initiatives has been an agreement on the exchange and protection of classified information. Being a Western nation in the South Pacific region and having some experience with NATO operational cooperation, Australia seems to be an ideal 'global partner' for NATO. Culturally, Australia remains closely linked to Europe and the United States. In 2005, the Australian government decided to assign a military attaché to NATO. Since 2007, Australian Defence Force (ADF) forces are fighting alongside NATO troops in Afghanistan. Australia is by far the largest non-NATO troop contributor to ISAF with nearly 1500 soldiers currently stationed in the southern province of Uruzgan. Until the Dutch withdrawal in July 2010, Australia shared the responsibility with the Dutch armed forces. Now the US have replaced the Dutch. It is therefore not surprising, that with terrorism and drug trade, topics related to the war in Afghanistan defined the main features of a deepened cooperation. Australian soldiers have also participated in NATO military exercises in order to strengthen interoperability.

3. Individual Perspectives: Alternatives to Cooperation

Australian Foreign Policy: Between Global Aspirations and Regional Integration

From Canberra's perspective, cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan is out of question, as newly elected labour PM Julia Gillard has recently stated.¹⁵ The allocation of additional resources for a strengthened partnership with the alliance has proven to be a more difficult decision. While under Prime Minister John Howard cooperation was pronounced through his

¹⁴ In 2002, 88 Australians were killed by a bomb in a Bali night club, in 2004 a car bomb in front of the Australian Embassy in Jakarta killed 9 civilians, further bombings occurred South Jakarta (2003) and in Bali (2005).

¹⁵ BBC Online, June 2010.

foreign minister Alexander Downer in several speeches and visits to Brussels, Kevin Rudd's election in 2007 has shown a slowdown in the further development of the relationship.¹⁶ Instead, Rudd emphasised Australia's need to integrate more as a regional actor in South East Asia and subsequently launched an initiative for increased and more effective regional diplomacy. The Rudd administration's foreign policy shift, as well as recent developments in Australian threat perception and response is sobering news for global partnership enthusiasts. At the heart of the regional integration strategy rests the plan to create an 'Asia Pacific Community' by 2020, a regional institution aimed at the fostering of political and economic cooperation and dialogue, including security issues. The security rationale behind these plans is to establish a more multilateral security environment in South East Asia, which will be able to deal with an increasingly confident China in the region. Research on public opinion suggests that Australian public support for increased regional involvement is growing among the younger generation.¹⁷ If these numbers are to remain constant, is it likely that future administrations will continue to enhance Australian involvement within the region. Should this change in orientation indeed be a permanent feature of Australian foreign and defence policy, it remains questionable whether the resources and commitment for cooperation with the Atlantic alliance would allow the deepening envisioned at the 2006 Riga Summit.

U.S. and NATO: Which Role for the Alliance?

The question of genuine commitment must however also be posed to the initiator of the project on NATO's side, the United States. In the new National Security Strategy paper of the Obama administration, President Obama announced to strengthen U.S. involvement in the Pacific region, while at the same time advocating an increased role for international organisations as vehicles for cooperation.¹⁸ Yet, a renewed avocation of enhanced NATO partnership with Australia or other regional actors has not been identified as a part of this course. This raises the question of whether the Obama administration shares the previous administration's belief that deepened global NATO part-

nerships with South Pacific countries will be of advantage to the region and the United States.

For the alliance itself, the new strategic concept will set the agenda for global partnerships, including Australia. The expert report published in May 2010 identifies Australia as a 'partner of value' and recommends the alliance should 'do more to deepen its partnerships with countries outside the Euro-Atlantic region by expanding the list of shared activities while preserving the ability of individual partners to form tailored co-operative relationships with the alliance.'¹⁹ For NATO-Australian cooperation, this seems to hint toward the maintenance of the Status Quo.

4. Chances and Limits

Although Australia and NATO seem ideal partners on paper and Australia cooperates relatively successfully in Afghanistan, this does not necessarily mean that an enhanced partnership between the two will grant additional synergies. With the circumstances outlined above in mind, it is feasible to analyse the benefits, which a strengthened NATO-Australian partnership could bring about. At least equally important, however, is the array of obstacles and risks for the undertaking. For Australia, a range of mainly strategic problems arise through the cooperation, which will impinge on its ability to commit to the partnership. NATO, on the other hand, will face primarily operational difficulties, which will make it difficult to persuade critics of the benefits enhanced cooperation could bring about.

Australia: Regional or Global?

The first strategic problem for the Australians arises in their defence planning. Keeping in mind that an increased NATO-Australia partnership would be based on a more pragmatic level, such as force projection for Counter-Insurgency operations in ISAF, it remains unclear whether the Australians are indeed ready to commit to such plans. Faced with an array of tactical and operational problems in Afghanistan, NATO armies have tried to develop reasonable adaptations to their forces in order to become more successful at this kind of structural intervention. On national and alliance level, reforms have also been initiated in order to

¹⁶ See e.g. Downer Speech in May 2004.

¹⁷ See Pietsch, Clark & He, 2010, pp. 174-176.

¹⁸ National Security Strategy, 2010.

¹⁹ NATO Expert Report on New Strategic Concept, 2010.

maximize mobility and effectiveness with the creation of the NATO response force and the development of Counter-Insurgency contingents in European armies.²⁰ Accordingly, an effective partner for NATO would be required to follow a similar path, moving away from classical homeland defence towards a smaller, more mobile military, ready for deployment in distant locations and able to not only kill or capture, but also to assist with reconstruction and cultural engagement. In ISAF, Australian Special Forces are deployed along with American troops in the province of Uruzgan. Before July 2010, the Australians were assisting the Dutch troops deployed in the province. While the Dutch relatively successfully engaged with civilians in their so called population-centric approach, Australian soldiers have been involved mainly with fighting, actively engaging the Taliban with Special Forces.²¹ These forces have provided a relatively safe environment for the Dutch to operate in, but have not seriously engaged in peacekeeping and reconstruction. In order to foster cooperation with NATO and maintain the ability to take part in potentially distant interventions, Australia would therefore be required to further build and develop forces ready to be deployed in asymmetric conflict zones. While the Australian Defence Force has gained some experience in such undertakings in its interventions among others in East Timor, further steps (in coordination with NATO in order to ensure combat compatibility) would be necessary. However, the 2009 Defence White Paper produced by the Rudd Government does not identify cooperation with NATO as a distinct feature of Australian defence planning. It explains that 'Australia's international engagement strategy centres on developing our capacity to work effectively with NATO and the EU to address these challenges *where it is in our strategic interests to do so.*'²²

Further, the white paper suggests that the main focus will 'continue to be the ability to engage in conventional combat against other armed forces.'²³ In capacity terms, this is expressed by a significant increase in maritime capability, estimated to be completed by the mid 2030s. This includes a doubling of the submarine fleet and the introduction of new combat vessels for increased border protection. Australian defence plan-

²⁰ For a critical review of these developments see e.g. Roberts, 2009.

²¹ See Dimitriu & de Graaf, 2010; Ringmose & Dahl Thruelsen, 2010.

²² Australian Defence White Paper, 2009.

²³ Ibid.

ning therefore suggests that its centre of gravity has been placed in the South Pacific region, and the instruments identified are almost exclusively conventional. It is also worth noting that the renewed Australian commitment to ISAF was directed at the United States, not NATO. This suggests that cooperation in Afghanistan from Canberra's perspective is to some extent still a bilateral issue, which is merely carried out within a NATO framework.²⁴

A second strategic obstacle for cooperation with NATO arises from Australian foreign policy priorities. Australia is gearing up to become a key regional actor, bringing together all countries of the complex South Pacific region. It will therefore be forced to consider its legitimacy for this role and back up its intentions through full commitment to the course. This will without a doubt set additional limits to the extent it may involve in further NATO cooperation, let alone operations. The administration in Canberra must evade the predicament of reaching out to its neighbours with a new found regional identity - while at the same time appearing to be hedging against potential threats, endorsing NATO's agenda by becoming a prime partner to the organisation. Such a strategy may appear intransparent and create more mistrust in the South Pacific region than increase its security. Throughout Australia's initiatives for regional integration, Canberra has been unable to convince a number of its neighbour countries of the genuineness of its intentions. Its membership in ANZUS already impinges on its legitimacy. For popular and radical actors in the region (as e.g. Islamist groups in Indonesia), a stronger Australian involvement with NATO will most certainly be utilised to mobilise against Australia and NATO.

On a broader scale, potentially increased European influence in Asian affairs through NATO will certainly unease leaders in Beijing which are already concerned with the strong U.S. involvement in the South Pacific region. Respectively, as the priorities in Australian foreign and security policy have changed with the administration, it remains to be seen how future elections may again reshape the Australian position. Rudd, new Australian foreign minister, can be expected to continue the regional course he set during his rule as PM. While all political camps have identified China's rise as the determining factor of Australian security policy in the long run, it is unclear to

²⁴ BBC Online, June 2010.

which extent regional involvement will compete with more global cooperation in future administrations, of which NATO cooperation could be a vital factor.

NATO – Limited Capacities

Keeping in mind that both NATO and Australia are emphasising the practical nature of increased cooperation, operational shortcomings of the alliance will undoubtedly limit the success of the partnership. This is first of all due to the fact that, in terms of purely practical cooperation, no NATO member state apart from the United States could offer real support for Australian concerns in South East Asia, be it Islamists in Indonesia or the drug routes via Myanmar and Vietnam. Major European allies do not even have policies dealing with North Korea or East Timor, and many prefer to tackle problems such as drug smuggling at the bilateral level, instead of relying on organisations such as NATO.

With Washington as the central player in the Atlantic and the Pacific, the benefits for Australia and European NATO allies in the field of intelligence sharing might be marginal, too. The U.S. is the main collector, analyst and disseminator of sensitive information within NATO. The Atlantic alliance on the other hand has no autonomous intelligence collection mechanism and relies therefore exclusively on the information provided by member states. Due to repeated security breaches, the incentives to share sensitive material within NATO are low.²⁵ This situation has been identified by scholars and the organisation itself as an important shortcoming of NATO, especially with the organisation engaging in the fight against terrorism.²⁶ An overwhelming amount of intelligence utilized by NATO in the Balkans and in Afghanistan has been and still is provided by the American intelligence community. As the U.S. is also the main provider of intelligence within ANZUS through the UKUSA agreement, the value added for intelligence sharing through the new partnership seems therefore limited. Thus, once again, NATO's ambitions seem to outweigh its capacities significantly.

While from NATO's point of view the obstacles for cooperation are mainly concerning the operational

²⁵ The most prominent example being Herman Simm from Estonia, who spied for the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service until 2008, see NY Times article by E. Barry.

²⁶ See e.g. Lefebvre, 2003, p. 529; Clough, 2004, pp. 606-607.

level, a major strategic shortcoming can be identified to be the general lack of a European stake in the Asian security arena. It is out of question that European countries will especially in the long term take an increased strategic interest in Asia as Rod Lyon rightly emphasises, due to the fact that the growing global economic weight of the region creates growing interdependences and will progressively impact the European security agenda.²⁷ These dynamics require close observation and will therefore force NATO members to expand their efforts in Asia. Whether this increase in attention will translate into a more prominent role for the alliance in that region should be seriously doubted, however. With a distinct European character, the alliance would certainly encounter a range of difficulties if it tried to gain a level of influence in the complex Asian security issues. Key NATO members will be faced with strategic problems, such as historic resentments against them by a number of Asian actors which used to be colonised by European powers. While in diplomatic and economic terms most troubles have been overcome, these dynamics should not be underestimated when it comes to security issues.

Chances:

Given the array of obstacles, it seems that NATO-Australian cooperation will not mark a new chapter in history books. However, the two actors have indeed some things to gain from enhancing their cooperation. Although Australia has been very active on the international level through peacekeeping and combat operations from Africa to the Balkans and Afghanistan, it does not have the image of a truly global player. On a strategic level, strong, formalised security cooperation with the Atlantic alliance would yield more legitimate recognition regarding this issue, as analyst Jeff Grey²⁸ observed - even if it may come at the cost of some diplomatic difficulty in its vicinity. A similar argument works for the alliance, which could gain some much needed legitimacy in its role as a security actor beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. Additionally, the successful incorporation of a reliable countries such as Australia from across the globe into its security network, NATO and its members can in the long run gain more influence in the Asian theatre,

²⁷ Lyon, 2008, p. 2; Ayson, 2010, p. 7.

²⁸ Grey, 2006, p. 29.

enabling it to increasingly exercise the influence its leaders are envisioning today. Without partnerships this would be unthinkable. Australia is a key partner in Afghanistan for NATO, a key ally for the United States, and could be the ideal springboard for NATO to gain a foothold in the South Pacific, in case the member states decide to use it as an instrument for increased influence in the region. Although it is questionable whether NATO will once more engage in an intervention similar to Afghanistan, future out of area missions are not unlikely. Australia, which participated in ISAF through its commitment toward the United States, would without a doubt represent an experienced, reliable partner for NATO to build on.

On an operational level, terrorism and drug trafficking are global phenomena, which require global answers. Through the continued construction of mutual trust, sensitive information exchanges yield a key to tackling these threats, if the above mentioned challenges can be met. Establishing a framework in which this development is possible must be among the first steps to achieve mutual gains. Much of the operational obstacles are general problems of NATO impinging on its effectiveness in virtually all its undertakings and overcoming them would open many doors for the alliance, including operational gains in practical partnerships.

What can be expected?

The pragmatic cooperation we currently see in Afghanistan works quite well, which is also one of the main drivers of inspiration to deepen the partnership. Outside, and most importantly after Afghanistan, enhanced cooperation will however have to be embedded within a new framework, and despite similar threat perceptions, it does not look like either side is quite sure whether and how this should be approached. Currently, leaders in Canberra prioritise regional integration over the fostering of a global profile for their country. Additionally, Australian commitment to ISAF is toward the U.S. not toward NATO. Neither counter-terrorism nor non-proliferation are particular strengths of NATO, and while increased information exchange is a vital part of both issues, both NATO and Australia are individually relying mainly on the United States to provide the information they would share with each other.²⁹ Fur-

ther bad news to the cooperation might be coming in the form of NATO's new strategic concept, in which the fight against terrorism might not be a vital part of the alliance's agenda. If this was the case, fewer resources on this issue will further impinge on the significance of cooperation on this topic. Australia, as a reliable partner of the United States, adds value to the current joint initiatives. However, it has been made clear by Canberra, that in the future the level of cooperation will be determined by Australian interests. In order to realistically assess and achieve the mutual gains available through an increased global partnership, NATO members and Australia need to reconsider their motives and ambitions. Since it is unlikely that NATO will take on another operation similar to the one in Afghanistan, much of the rationale behind the partnership will depend on how successful the ISAF operation will be considered once the troops have returned. Shared values and similar threat perceptions will definitely facilitate mutual understanding; however the basis for an increased and effective partnership will be a transparent and realistic estimation of its goals, accompanied by confirmed commitment.

²⁹ For Australia through UKUSA.

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