

STRATEGIC CONCEPT SEMINAR 3

NATO's Partnership and Beyond Oslo, 14 January, 2010

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Conclusions

If NATO's new Strategic Concept is to give orientation and legitimacy in a globalized security environment (where threats and risks in most cases cannot be dealt with by one state alone and often enough not even by one alliance), the concept of partnership becomes central, and partnerships with others, in different regions of the world, become more important than ever in the past.

The new Strategic Concept should be clear about the rationale for seeking and developing partnerships.

Partnership is an essential concept, and an instrument, because enlargement has its limits. For some time to come, it is likely that more countries would want to join NATO at any given moment than actually are ready for it and that NATO can or wants to admit. This is proof to the attractiveness of NATO, to its soft power, as it were.

Partnerships are also essential because they allow NATO to deal with global problems and challenges without becoming a global alliance.

Certainly, strengthening and expanding partnerships also demands from NATO to be sensitive to the risk and threat perceptions and to the security considerations of its partners and third parties, and to be aware that their expectations with regard to "partnership" with NATO could differ from our interest in such a partnership.

The Future of NATO's Partnerships

This brings us to the heart of our debate. Foreign Minister Støre said that NATO today has more partners than it has members. This is true. But is it a problem? Probably not – if we make right use of what partnerships and partners can offer. We have to realize that we are entertaining and will entertain a variety of partnerships with quite different functions which can be categorized according to key aspects:

1. There are partnership formats that basically serve to promote security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.
2. In this context, there are partnerships to prepare countries for NATO membership. It is true that all new members of NATO since 1999 have participated in the Partnership for Peace (PfP), but it should be clear that not everybody who participated in PfP will at one point be a member of NATO.
3. Then there are partnerships aimed at promoting and improving interoperability and enhance cooperation of others in NATO-led operations. The functions of different forms of partnerships overlap, but this latter aspect is certainly a main function, among other things, of the partnership with Contact Countries.
4. Other partnerships are basically about confidence building, dialogue, and support for transformative goals in our geopolitical neighborhood. Note that transformation here not only refers to technical and training aspects. It clearly also has a normative meaning, particularly as we are focusing on security sector reform, i.e., on bringing countries and their militaries closer to NATO's political standards, trying to make sure that militaries are instruments of security, not of repression, let alone aggression.
5. And finally there is the partnership with Russia. This is a more complex.

The Strategic Concept should make clear – this is something we can take home from the debate at this seminar – that we need to tailor our partnerships according to three factors:

1. interests: our, NATO's interests with regard to regions and issue areas and to specific challenges which we meet in the Europe-Atlantic area, our neighborhood, and globally,
2. values: the political nature of partner countries. There are like-minded ones, i.e., countries that are fully compatible to NATO even with regard to political standards; and there are others where partnership will be of a more instrumental nature, and
3. operations: the contributions that partners can make and responsibilities they can assume.

The depth of dialogue and consultation, of assistance, and of coordination and cooperation will differ according to these factors.

The Strategic Concept –supposed to be a rather short document – cannot go into detail with regard to resources devoted to partnerships, particular measures, or specific clauses in the PfP framework document or others. For the credibility of the Alliance, however, the Strategic Concept will have to make clear that our partnerships are based on our interests, and be clear about what we stand for.

This bears on the question of values and “realpolitik” interests. Very practically, we may need troop contributions to NATO-led operations from countries that do not fully share our political values. We may need partner countries to help us train the Afghan National Army (ANA) whose armies are not under democratic civilian control. And we have PfP and other partners that render essential infrastructure services for our engagement in Afghanistan, but are far from being democratic countries or from applying the rule of law.

NATO's Strategic Concept will probably have to make clear that the Alliance is open for instrumental cooperation even with such not likeminded countries, but that such cooperation has its natural limits. After all, NATO is and will remain a value-based alliance. And it is values and like-mindedness that do define the ultimate depth which a partnership can reach.

As mentioned more than once in our debate, the Strategic Concept needs to acknowledge that partnerships are also about some form of reciprocity. Partners have made clear that they seek a full commitment from NATO members to the formats that have been established, or that troop contributors, like Australia, expect full consultation with regard to our strategy in Afghanistan. This is not controversial. Other partners, from different partnership regions, have indicated that they would like NATO to provide some form of security guarantees. This is probably not what NATO can do, and certainly not what it could write into its Strategic Concept. We might give more thought, however, to forms of closer consultation.

One idea that we have not explored here may be important in this context. We may want to find out whether consultation mechanisms can be developed so as to practically help NATO and various partners in anticipating risks, i.e., in early warning. This may apply to regional conflicts and the risk of escalation as much as to dangers of a more domestic nature. Such exchanges could automatically raise the interest and the commitment to “political consultations”, and help us to define risks together with our partners rather than with respect to their region. The latter may be particularly interesting for partners participating in the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI).

The Future of the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative

NATO’s strategic interest in the region covered by the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, i.e., the Mediterranean and the Middle East, is quite clear. The region is part of our closest neighborhood, we are concerned with various instabilities, regional conflicts, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, energy security and energy infrastructures, or weak states. And the region lacks the culture of multilateral cooperation, particularly in the security field.

Regarding our partners, and potential partners, interest varies. Some are interested in increased cooperation, but other remain rather skeptical. The notion that some countries are “courted” by NATO, is not actually one that we would like to spread. Obviously, there is also some confusion about what NATO could and what it wants to offer. NATO therefore needs to be clear about the limits of possible commitments. Among what we have learned in our debate, four points seem to be of particular importance with regard to our regional partnerships in the Mediterranean and the Middle East:

- NATO needs to be cautious about some goals that are high on our agenda. This applies particularly to security sector reform which may be too sensitive an issue for many of our would-be partners.
- NATO members should avoid competing with one another in offering training. Too many, sometimes incompatible offers in this field may overburden some of our partners.
- NATO should contribute to confidence building between partners in the region, particularly if such partner states already entertain developed bilateral relations with NATO or with individual NATO countries.
- NATO at some point may become involved as a peacekeeping force in the Arab-Israeli fold. Certainly, NATO ought to be open to that perspective if the regional parties so wish.

NATO's relations with Russia

NATO's relationship with Russia is no doubt a very special form of "partnership". This becomes clear if we look at the variety of concepts that are used to describe this relationship in different NATO countries, ranging from "antagonistic relationship" on one hand to "strategic partnership" on the other. Of course, history plays a role here, geography does, and interests do. There is no consensus today in NATO about the current role of Russia in Euro-Atlantic security; and this could become a divisive issue within the Alliance. Some members clearly feel threatened, emphasizing potential threats to the territorial integrity or to the functioning of their economy and their infrastructure. Others emphasize the need of a close partnership with Russia exactly because of the globalized nature of threats and risks and the need for a Russian contribution in addressing such threats, and also, of course, because we need to build European security together.

We also realize that Russia's perception of NATO is mixed at best. Some NATO decisions have been seen as impacting negatively on Russia's security interests. And there clearly are disappointments in Russia with regard to cooperation with NATO so far.

What we share among the allies – and this is what mostly counts for the Strategic Concept – is a feeling of uncertainty about Russia's domestic development and how this could impact on Russia's relations to its neighbors. We also agree that we need to enhance cooperation with Russia in areas of common interest. These areas are wider than they are in any other partnership NATO entertains.

Suggestions for practical cooperation have been made including

- increased transparency about, among other things, defense planning;
- joint scenarios and exercises;
- increased cooperation on guaranteeing the freedom of the seas;
- theatre missile defense;
- counter-terrorism, or counter-narcotics.

Of course, we need Russian cooperation in Afghanistan; and we have learned that Russia's expectations with regard to NATO fulfilling its mission in that country are rather high.

Mainly, however, we need to organize European security cooperatively. The Corfu process may bring us closer to a common vision. From an Alliance standpoint it is extremely important that the Helsinki principles are preserved.

It goes without saying that Russia – as any other partner – has no veto over Alliance policies. And of course, we do not want Russia to play allies off against one another. This, however – whether allies allow themselves to be played off against each other – depends more on us than on our partners.

Russia certainly is a partner, not an adversary. It is not yet a strategic partner – a partner with whom NATO would coordinate response to strategic challenges. But NATO has a strong interest that Russia becomes a full partner not only in Euro-Atlantic security, but also in global governance.

Thinking about the visions for a long-term perspective, we should not exclude a much closer relationship between NATO and Russia. Is a NATO membership of Russia thinkable? Is it realistic? Certainly not for the next few years, for the period of time that this Strategic Concept is designed for. But beyond that: NATO's door remains open in principle for all democratic European countries that can contribute to European security, and commit to resolving conflicts peacefully. We should not rule out that Russia at some point sees its place in NATO, and we see it there. This would be a new NATO, again. But not for the first time.

Global Partners

Finally, as we started from the global nature of many current security threats, we may remind ourselves that NATO, while not a global organization, is already a global security provider in different respects. Hence, it is only natural that NATO has a genuine interest in building cooperative relations with all the countries needed to address global risk and threats, be that the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, failing states, the effects of climate change, or others. This means particularly to explore the possibilities of cooperating with rising regional and global partners such as China, India, and probably states like Brazil or South Africa. Of course, we need to be cautious so as to avoid unintended perceptions by third parties (such as trying to set up a world directorate). But seeking such cooperative relationships would make clear – here I am paraphrasing Foreign Minister Støre – that NATO values interdependence highly, and that it is prepared to turn global interdependence into a source of strength.