

Highlights of Strategic Concept Seminar 3 Oslo, 14 January 2010

The third Strategic Concept seminar, “NATO’s Partnerships and Beyond”, took place in Oslo on 14 January 2010. The event brought together members of the Group of Experts on NATO’s new Strategic Concept, government and military officials, representatives of international organisations and NGOs, independent experts, and journalists. NATO partner countries and other cooperation fora were also well represented.

Panel 1 – Partnerships

General:

- NATO now has more partners than members. Most participants agreed that the structure and purposes of the current system of partnerships need to be reassessed. Speakers from partner countries noted that the system does not meet their needs adequately and find significant gaps between their expectations and reality. There is a need for both NATO and partner governments to strike a balance between expecting too much and delivering too little. Partnerships must be mutually advantageous. NATO must be attractive to partners.
- The current system is rooted in the strategic realities of the 1990s, when partnerships were largely driven by the demands of partners in Central and Eastern Europe interested in drawing closer to NATO and linked to preparations for membership. The question now is how to make the system attractive to a more diverse array of countries that are not pushing for closer ties to the Alliance, but where there are opportunities for mutually-beneficial dialogue and cooperation in security affairs.
- Several speakers noted that partners have varying degrees of convergence with the Alliance’s core values and commitment to effective cooperation. There is a group of countries that embrace NATO’s core values, have common security concerns, and are deeply committed to close ties with the Alliance. Another group of “instrumental partners” does not share NATO’s core values and neither seeks nor can sustain closer engagement with NATO, but finds it useful to cooperate in certain areas. Should Allies just accept this situation or differentiate the scope of partnerships based on commitment to common values and level of engagement? One speaker argued that continuation of the principle of self-differentiation is the best way to ensure that partnerships neither expect too much nor demand too little.

Purpose:

- The vision and purpose of current partnerships are not clear. Many partners have the sense that NATO is actively seeking their contributions to current operations, but they don't see a clear strategic direction in the relationships.
- Should the partnership architecture be shaped by operational cooperation or a broader function? One speaker asked what partnerships are committed to or against in the evolving global security environment? He argued that the goals of partnership have evolved somewhat by default to deal with pressing security challenges from instability in the Balkans in the 1990s, to transnational terrorism after 2001, to disruptions to global stability and commerce more recently. Some partners and NATO members have more traditional concerns and are not fully committed to this global agenda. Some partners are involved in Afghanistan largely out of a desire to enlist attention and support from the United States. Is there a need to put current operations and other forms of cooperation into a more strategic, global context?
- Several participants argued that the structure of partnerships has largely been driven by operational cooperation, but could serve larger purposes, such as fostering regional stability and understanding.
- Speakers generally agreed that flexibility should remain a major feature of partnerships: no one size fits all. Several welcomed specialized functional and regional approaches, for example in the Black Sea and the Caspian, but opposed regional divisions of labour that would take on or limit regional responsibility. NATO and partners could enhance cooperation with existing regional structures and various countries, particularly those that are not members of security organizations. For others, NATO should avoid regional tags that create "backyards" for which certain organizations will claim leadership. It is important to keep the East-West linkage and thus avoid excessive regionalisation.
- Resources: The Partnership for Peace Framework Document notes that partners should fund their involvement in partnership activities and exercises. One speaker noted that limited resources available for partnership activities have led to uneven engagement of some countries. He suggested that common funding and voluntary contributions be solicited. Allies and partners could create trust funds for areas of cooperation as well as certain countries needing assistance.
- Consultations on security concerns: Several speakers called for making dialogue in the EAPC more central and focused on the common strategic concerns of NATO members and partners. Under paragraph 8 of the Partnership for Peace Framework Document, NATO commits to consult with any active Partnership for Peace participant if that Partner perceives a direct threat to its territorial integrity, political independence, or security. One speaker argued that the Russia-Georgia War revealed such consultations to

be inadequate. This speaker argued for developing a new system of guarantees for certain vulnerable Partners that is different from Article 5, but more robust than consultations. However, some questioned whether such steps would dilute the value of Article 5.

Session 2 – Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)

- Regional dimension: Speakers noted that NATO has developed individual approaches to countries in the region (North-South track), but has failed to develop a sub-regional dimension that would help the development of a common security architecture. This is important as many security issues are transversal. Self-differentiation pushed to an extreme is not helpful as it introduces an element of competition and rivalry among countries. A speaker noted that observers in the region ask: Is NATO seeking to ensure its security interests in the region, regional security, or the security of various regimes? Another participant suggested that the Atlantic Policy Advisory Group should explore ways to reassure the region about NATO's intentions and that joint public diplomacy initiatives could improve attitudes toward the Alliance. Cooperation with NATO has no impact on local conflicts (e.g. Morocco and Algeria are more engaged in security cooperation individually with NATO, than with each other, though the same applies to relations with the EU). One speaker urged NATO to develop relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council to bolster collective security cooperation those states are pursuing and try to push Mediterranean countries to do more among themselves. On MD and ICI linkage, there are commonalities between both, but overall NATO should keep different approaches.
- Relations with MD and ICI: There is a widespread perception that MD is a second class partnership – the region has no “Russia” to draw serious NATO attention. NATO loses its role as stabilizer when it crosses the Mediterranean. There is a risk of militarizing the response to social challenges, like migration, or to deal only with the consequences as opposed to the root causes. A speaker urged that ICI should be more inclusive and be expanded to Iraq and Yemen at some point in the future, given their importance to regional security. However, it was also noted that Saudi Arabia and Oman have taken a tentative approach to ICI.
- Potential areas of work: More emphasis is needed on multilateral approaches – the objective of the MD should be to stabilize the region. NATO should consider the development of a document on the strategic purpose of the MD, as it lacks a founding act or a framework document like the Partnership for Peace, and it should develop more cross-cutting activities. There is interest in discussing denuclearization, counter-proliferation, including ballistic proliferation (the impact in the region of the US Ballistic Missile Defence Review could be looked into). One speaker said NATO should shy away from

Security Sector Reform, as it is a very sensitive area and NATO's involvement would scare-off government officials: in the region, national security, the security of the regime and even the security of the ruling family are closely enmeshed. One speaker argued that the small Gulf states have considerable bilateral security cooperation with several Allied governments and that NATO's engagement could be better coordinated with these efforts to ensure an effective division of labour and clarify NATO's added value.

- Israel: One speaker noted that Israel welcomes NATO's engagement in the Middle East and cooperation on global security challenges. Israel is adjusting its security doctrine based on self-reliance to embrace principles of security cooperation. Currently, Israel is interested in deepening its bilateral relationship with NATO just short of membership by engaging in the full range of Partnership for Peace programs. This could create tensions with other MD partners. It should be possible to create an umbrella of cooperation for all, which would still allow individual countries to follow their own path. Overall, NATO has a growing relevance for Israel. Still, more could be done on regional aspects of new threats, Iran, intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism cooperation, exercises, planning, etc. On the Middle East peace process, Israel's partnership with NATO should not be seen as a way to circumvent it, but to strengthen the process, as it makes Israel feel more secure. NATO should actually consider a position in advance of the peace process. One speaker argued that even membership in NATO should not be ruled out, after a Middle East peace agreement. NATO could also play a role as a guarantor of an Israeli-Palestinian peace accord. It was suggested that this twin prospect would provide reassurance to Israel in concluding a peace accord. Otherwise, the usual underlying tensions with MD and ICI countries resurfaced during discussions – Gulf States don't want any involvement of Israel in ICI (although formally a Gulf State). One speaker argued that suspicions that Israel seeks to influence NATO's strategic concept through an organized campaign will not help outreach to MD countries during the new Strategic Concept process (see article in Jerusalem Post 13 January).

Session 3 – Russia

- A speaker from a NATO member country advanced several proposals for the future of NATO-Russian relations, noting the need to restore confidence in light of negative developments in recent years:
 - 1) Need to reach a new level of transparency: trust cannot be rebuilt overnight and requires specific actions – e.g. a dialogue on defence planning (a Russian proposal).
 - 2) Confidence building: the OSCE Vienna Document has a number of military confidence building mechanisms that could be used more effectively and bilateral confidence building measures could be developed – e.g. the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) could develop an exhaustive catalogue of crisis situations and ways to avert future problems.

3) Implement the NRC work programme for 2010: this is a good roadmap and joint exercises could be carried out on the basis of a joint threat review – e.g. disaster relief in the Baltic area.

4) Conduct maritime security activities of mutual interest and benefit – e.g. joint exercises on anti-piracy.

5) The most successful NRC working group is on ballistic missile defence: the U.S. Ballistic Missile Defence Review offers an opportunity for further cooperative action in this area - e.g. table top exercises and possible preparations for a live fire exercise.

6) The NRC should be used for more fundamental discussions and crisis resolution: it must be made more resistant to possible crisis - NATO made a mistake in suspending the NRC in August 2008; the NRC is not an institution to rebalance power politics; it could be a useful mechanism for crisis management.

7) Russia is in the process of transforming its military forces: NATO could help in this effort of modernization.

8) NATO should maintain an Open Door policy towards Russia: the argument that Russia will not ask for NATO membership is not cast in stone, therefore NATO should start to consider what the parameters would be and what would need to change to make Russia's membership possible.

- Relations with Russia: A Russian speaker commented that cooperation in certain areas does not mean a cooperative partnership. Another speaker argued that it was a transactional relationship, not a partnership in that Moscow is seeking to link cooperation on Afghanistan with a halt to NATO enlargement. The reality is that there is a weaker partnership than in the 1990s. The high point of the partnership was Russia's participation in SFOR's peace implementation operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. A Russian speaker noted that the NATO-Russia dialogue has not enhanced confidence. Prime Minister Putin has expressed disappointment that NATO is represented at meetings with an established, coordinated position that leaves little room for compromise. The Georgian crisis showed the limited added value of the partnership as it could be suspended. One speaker said the ball is in Russia's court as it will have to decide what it wants: a partnership, realpolitik or an instrumental relationship. One problem is the diminishing number of Russian supporters of partnership with NATO. However, one Russian speaker argued that President Medvedev offers a window of opportunity as he is open-minded about the prospects for developing a good relationship with NATO and the economic crisis has led to a reset in Moscow's worldview. The challenge for NATO is to find a new *modus vivendi* with Russia. Cooperation on Afghanistan on the Northern Distribution Network can help to some degree. However, Russia's priority is maintaining influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus, and it is deeply sceptical of U.S. and NATO intentions in the region – it will risk relations with the West to defend its interests there. Historically, Russia has been an integrator, not an *integratee*, so it also mistrusts European institutions. One speaker offered four possible

alternatives:

- 1) The bureaucratic model made up of working groups and conferences, which is better than nothing, but not enough – the results of the December ministerial point in this direction.
- 2) Practical cooperation in niche issues: safety at sea, maritime security, etc., but which would not be central to security interests.
- 3) NATO-CSTO cooperation instead of bilateral cooperation, as suggested by Zbigniew Brzezinski, although two speakers noted that while CSTO had developed some useful cooperation on border security, it is still an untested organization that may have more utility in Central Asia than in the Caucasus, where only Armenia is a party. Several participants suggested that NATO should also explore partnership with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which has fostered counter-terrorism and counter-narcotics cooperation in Central Asia.
- 4) A more strategic approach by setting up a working group to look into the potential integration of Russia.

- Medvedev Plan: for one speaker, the plan reflects Russia's desire to be heard on matters of special concern, and the sense that a new forum it has designed would better address those concerns. There is still frustration that NATO survived and the Warsaw Treaty Organization did not, which accounts for some of the reservations about the NATO-Russia channel. The Corfu process is the appropriate forum to address this, because it encompasses all stakeholders and provides a comprehensive approach to security. Still the results of Corfu are disappointing and they risk diluting the Human Dimension of the OSCE, which is crucial. Russian proposals should be taken into account if they provide added value to Alliance security. One speaker said Medvedev Plan was the equivalent of the 19th century Concert of Europe.
- Strategic reassurance: A Russian speaker asserted that the reinforcement of Article 5 through renewed military exercises is unnecessary and could lead to remilitarization of border regions given the “zero probability” of a Russian attack. Another Russian speaker asserted that the Russian military was in a grave crisis with less than 10 percent of its forces maintained at high levels of readiness and many senior commanders being replaced in the aftermath of the operational shortcomings that were exposed during the war with Georgia. Still, that speaker agreed there could still be a conflict between Russia and NATO, as there is a risk of escalation. One participant noted that Russia should also do more to reassure its neighbours, making fuller use of the Vienna Document and other transparency measures. Another speaker warned about a “spiral of reassurance” that could be counterproductive.
- Open Door policy: Several speakers urged that Russian concerns about enlargement should be taken into account, especially economic ones, although Russia has no veto. Georgia and Ukraine are key tests of Russia's relations with NATO. For one speaker, a speedy accession of Russian

neighbours will aggravate the European security environment. For another, the problem is that Russia is concerned about the lack of codification or formalisation of the current situation. Russian membership of NATO should not be ruled out. Actually, NATO should evaluate all the pros and cons of Russian accession and the costs of a still divided European security system, something similar to the Cecchini report (a 1988 report that examined the benefits and costs of creating a single market in Europe). NATO's existential challenge is whether it will make Russia a stakeholder in a stronger NATO.

- Disarmament: Iran shows that the concept of deterrence must be rethought. Several speakers argued that Russia should not be considered an adversary, so Cold War thinking cannot continue and NATO needs to review its force posture. Germany will use the Treaty on the Non-proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) review conference to push for a withdrawal of sub-strategic nuclear arms from its territory. But, this should not interfere with other disarmament initiatives. The NATO-Russia Council should discuss nuclear issues like the old Permanent Joint Council used to do. Nuclear disarmament should be accompanied by progress in conventional disarmament.
- A Russian speaker commented that he was assured by the openness and fairness of the overall discussion of NATO-Russia relations at the seminar and would take that back to Moscow.

Session 4 – Rapporteur

- The rapporteur offered additional perspectives and a review of the seminar's discussions. The new Strategic Concept should give direction and legitimacy to NATO in a global security environment. NATO can deal with global security challenges without becoming a global alliance. In the future, NATO is more likely to have deeper partnerships than many new members. Partnerships allow for relationships tailored to distinct needs and interests: they can prepare partners for future membership; enhance interoperability for joint operations; promote mutual confidence; support transformation; and have a normative impact by bringing countries closer to NATO's political standards. Partnerships should continue to be interest-based. Partners can be helpful, even if they are not democratic countries, although such relationships have limits, as shared values allow for deeper ties. There is some confusion as to what NATO could offer: NATO needs to clarify the limits of its cooperation. NATO cannot provide security guarantees to all Partners, but could widen the concept of consultations. Partners could be involved in early warning and anticipation of risks to prevent state failure. It is worth assessing threats and challenges together with Partners. Security Sector Reform is high on the agenda, but there are sensitivities among Partners. NATO must also contribute to building confidence among and with partners through its bilateral relations.

- Russia is a much more complex partnership: perceptions vary from an antagonistic relationship to a strategic partnership. There is no NATO consensus on the current role of Russia, but there is uncertainty among all 28 Allies about Russia's future course. Whether Allies are played off against each other depends more on themselves than on Russia. NATO should enhance cooperation on common interests, which are wider with Russia than with any other partner. Russia can be a partner both in the European Security architecture and in global governance. Many felt NATO should remain open to Russian membership if it makes a transition that reflects full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of its neighbours and a desire to be a cooperative stakeholder in Euro-Atlantic security. This would clearly be a different kind of NATO, and it would be important that it not look like a directorate to third parties. Such a NATO would need to develop relations with the other major world powers.
- Closing speakers noted that NATO's partnerships have broken barriers and built confidence. A strategic partnership with Russia should be built on shared interests and not blocked by lingering differences. It was noted that individuals can play an important role in developing these relationships and that both Secretary General Rasmussen and President Medvedev have made the development of a new NATO-Russia relationship a priority.