

4th International Seminar on Security and Defence in the Mediterranean

Ten years of the Barcelona Process: Results and new aims

NATO Mediterranean dialogue: analysis and outlooks after the
Istanbul summit

A vision from the NATO
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I will attempt to make some comments quickly focusing on a few things that strike me as important and then we can start the discussion.

The first thing is that we have lost a lot of time. For too long after 1994, the Mediterranean Dialogue in the alliance was something that was pushed by the six Mediterranean allies but without necessarily the attention or the full support of the others. So the Dialogue was there but it did not receive before September 11th the necessary impulse it deserved. The September 11th context has given us a second opportunity and as Ambassador Benavides pointed out, this has been reflected not only in the upgrading of the old Mediterranean Dialogue, but in the launch of the ICI, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. I personally believe that although September 11th may have been the impulse, the need for a NATO-Mediterranean dialogue is based on sound strategic rationale and common interest that predates, naturally, September 11th and of course cannot simply be limited to threat perceptions from the south or from international terrorism. But speaking pragmatically, the lever is there and we now have to make up for lost time and to build upon it.

Second point: NATO is not particularly well-equipped to carry forward that opportunity at the moment. We have no Arabic speakers among the international staff of NATO today, although there are plans to recruit some. Not more than half a dozen officials are professionally involved in conducting the Mediterranean Dialogue. When one thinks of the vast numbers that are engaged in the Partners for Peace (PfP) activities, *vis-à-vis* the Central and Eastern European countries, we badly need to acquire, not simply the language skills but the regional policy expertise to seriously engage with these countries and it is long overdue. As I have said, we are rectifying it now, but we need to go faster in that direction.

Third point, we need to be patient. Unlike the PfP, which to some degree was motivated by a framework document and a series of mutual political commitments and undertakings, such as a commitment to consult in crisis situations, and unlike PfP, which for some was linked directly to the prospect of NATO membership and was seen as a vehicle

to NATO membership, we do not have the same formal political basis yet with our Mediterranean Dialogue partners and of course even less, as you would imagine, with our Istanbul Cooperation Initiative countries. We need, therefore, to accept that it will be, if not slow, at least a gradual process, to build up the trust and the knowledge of each other; the degree of confidence to form a veritable partnership. Therefore we should not be surprised if we do not have miraculous overnight results, but on the other hand, we need to stay engaged in this process.

Fourth point: we need far better coordination with the other international organisations; Ambassador Benavides and others referred to it this morning. We tend to exchange information with the other international organisations. There is a good degree of transparency, but unfortunately there is still far too much duplication. For example, between NATO and the OSCE there is plenty of scope to cooperate or to establish a pragmatic division of labour on issues like the disposal of surplus ammunition stocks or dealing with small arms and weapons on de-mining projects and the rest, for example, through the constitution of trust funds.

The next principle –and again Ambassador Benavides referred to this– we need to enhance the scope of our political consultations. I myself –although I can understand the idea that we should expand the Euro-Atlantic partnership council to the Mediterranean Dialogue countries and create a kind of vast mini-UN General Assembly type forum– prefer a different approach, which is that we should focus more on developing the notion of the North Atlantic Council meeting regionally with these countries, and with the same degree of regularity with which we meet the partners from the PfP countries. I believe that a more regional approach would ensure that the agendas would serve common interests, the meetings would be more results-oriented and focused. Although, yes, we have had, as the Ambassador rightly said, meetings of Foreign Affairs ministers for the first time last December over dinner, meetings of intelligence chiefs, we have yet to sustain regular series of political consultations with these countries. There is still too much briefing after the ministerial, as useful as that is. I see opportunities here for the future; for example, Morocco has now sent signals about inviting the North Atlantic Council to visit the country; Egypt, which was rather reluctant to engage in the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue after it was launched in Istanbul, is now showing a much more forward-leaning, positive approach; we can build on that.

Sixth point. It is absolutely critical that we deliver on our partnership commitments. One aspect, and I agree again with the Ambassador, is that we should open up fully the PfP mechanisms to the Mediterranean Dialogue countries. They are already moving in that direction, with the possibility of concluding individual partnership agreements. But in order to be truly effective, one needs to go further. For example, the establishment of Mediterranean Dialogue liaison officers in military planning cells that shape the opening up of Mediterranean Dialogue missions to NATO could be a successful formula, having already worked for PfP partners. We need also to deliver more on providing results. NATO as an organisation has a great

deal of expertise, we are great at giving advice. We are not so good at delivering the hardware and the technology. Obviously we are a small inter-governmental organisation and we therefore have to go to the nations to look for that and already we see, for example in the case of Jordan, a request that came in a long time ago for assistance with the training and the equipment of border guards that took a long time for us to follow up. If we are going to be credible, either we have got to find a better way of providing that material ourselves through enhanced common funding and bigger NATO budgets, or we are going to have to be better at playing a kind of clearing house mechanism role in assuring that those nations interested in those programmes via NATO deliver that kind of equipment. But we cannot invite these countries to sign up to Chinese menus of practical cooperation activities and then take a long time to respond when we go beyond advice or encouragement to specifically concrete cooperation activities.

Seventh point. We need to show those countries that we are assisting them with practical security issues. Ambassador Benavides mentioned specifically in this respect the Palestinians and Iraq. If in the future NATO with the Mediterranean Dialogue and perhaps ICI countries could be involved in the security sector reform of the Palestinians, who at the moment I understand, have 14 different forms of security forces, to make those forces more efficient, better equipped, to bring them under democratic control; if at the same time we can expand our mission in Iraq to play an even more significant role in helping Iraq to build its democratically controlled security institutions of the future and to train its armed forces; if we can seem therefore to be playing a constructive role in helping Muslim countries deal with their security issues, then I think the beneficial knock-on effect in terms of improving NATO's image throughout the region will assist of course in our practical cooperation programmes as well.

Then we need to improve our public diplomacy. We are still seen rather negatively by the countries of this region. Part of it, of course, is the fact that these countries naturally during the Cold War didn't really discuss or debate NATO; it wasn't really on their radar screens, so it is not so much the type of opposition based on propaganda that one experienced in the former Warsaw Pact or the former Soviet Union; it is more a kind of vacuum in which no information took place for a long time, which makes me optimistic that this is not an insuperable problem. But our initial contacts with the think tanks, with the elites, with the press, with the political classes in these countries does make it obvious that, if our cooperation programmes are to evolve, we need a greater degree of popular demand for cooperation with NATO. We have begun that, but again we need to constantly redouble our efforts. The fact, as Ambassador Benavides said, that the Secretary General is now going to these countries and the fact that we are doing more activities in these countries themselves –at the beginning all the activities were in NATO countries, notably Spain and Italy– is obviously going to help, and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which has spearheaded the effort by, for example, having Morocco early on as an associate member and reaching out to these countries is also going to assist.

Final point. Progress is not stand alone. NATO –I say this openly as a NATO official– is not going to be the main player. The EU has far greater resources, particularly linked to development and economic integration, than NATO has, and I think we should respect this while looking, of course, for the “synergies” –the buzzword at the moment– that can make our programmes still more effective. Secondly, NATO’s efforts cannot take place in a conceptual vacuum. To the extent that the United States initiative on the Greater Middle East and Prime Minister Zapatero’s initiative for an Alliance of Civilizations take on concrete shape in terms of dialogue, in terms of civil society programmes, the things that the Ambassador was talking about at the beginning of his remarks, building bridges, building confidence, we are going beyond the sentiment that we are engaging with these countries because we see them as problems to our security, and it is then not only a defensive type of engagement. To the extent that we create an intellectual hinterland of building bridges, then, again, the climate will be improved. As John Kennedy used to say, a rising tide lifts all boats, and therefore NATO has a clear stake in the progress of those other initiatives made in the future.