New Challenges for European Security.

The Security Dialogue Towards the Mediterranean.
Alberto Bin
The Security Dialogue Towards the Mediterranean

*Alberto Bin

The profound changes in the European security climate over the last decade have also had impact on the Mediterranean Sea region. The increasing strategic importance of the region stems from the growing realization that security in Europe is closely linked with security and stability in the Mediterranean.

However, to take a closer look at the Mediterranean is also to acknowledge that this region is currently facing a multitude of problems and challenges, which include socio-economic disparities, migration, conflicts and arms proliferation. The nature of the issues which characterize the Mediterranean security environment is by no means exclusive to the region. The specific geo-political and socio-cultural context, however, give the Mediterranean a particularly complex security identity.

Within this degree of diversity and challenges, there is a clear interrelation among the countries and regions insisting on the Mediterranean, which derives mainly from their growing interdependence. This interrelation suggests the need for a cooperative approach to security, one that privileges dialogue and cooperation.

In fact, attempts at generating a dialogue in the region date back to the early 1970s, but these were relatively ineffective due to the conditions prevailing at the time of the East-West confrontation. The end of the Cold War, though, has lifted many of the constraints on the type of regional co-operation that can effectively address these challenges in the Mediterranean.

*Coordinator for NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue.

The opinions expressed in this paper reflect only the author’s views and not necessarily those of NATO or its member states.
SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE MEDITERRANEAN:
CONCEPTUAL AND INSTITUTIONAL ISSUES

An analysis of the Mediterranean security environment must first consider the problems surrounding the definition of concepts.

Over time, the concept of security has increasingly been given a broader meaning than merely meaning the absence of military aggression. Although the bottom line of security continues to be survival, it also includes a substantial range of concerns other than military ones. Indeed, today there seems to be a broad consensus on the need for a comprehensive vision of security, one that takes into account not only political and military requirements but also socio-economic, environmental and cultural factors. In fact, many of the security-related concerns that have come to the fore in the Mediterranean after the end of the Cold War are non-military issues that may interact with more traditional security risks.

Unlike the concept of security, the Mediterranean appears to elude a coherent and comprehensive definition. Some look at the Mediterranean as “the place where the Persian Gulf begins”, that is, in terms of its proximity to geo-strategically sensitive areas such as the Middle East. Some others look at developments in and around the Mediterranean mainly in terms of their implications on European security and stability. Some regard the Mediterranean as an area whose problems stand in their own right, that is, in addition to their links with broader European and Middle Eastern security issues. Some believe it useful to approach the Mediterranean in sub-regional terms and consider the Western and Eastern Mediterranean as distinct areas characterized by different problems and issues. Some even consider the Mediterranean as a sort of “fault line” in civilizational terms.

One of the most important factors contributing to the confusion surrounding the concept of the Mediterranean is the lack of political, economic, social and cultural cohesion in the region. Difficulties in developing regional security arrangements in the Mediterranean derive in part from these problems of definition and scope.

The multidimensional character of the Mediterranean security environment accounts in large part for the growing interest in the Mediterranean on the part of individual nations, international organizations, and non-governmental bodies. Indeed, many intra- and inter- regional cooperative undertakings have seen the light of the day since the collapse of the Berlin Wall. They include the EU’s Barcelona Process, the Middle East Peace Process, and the Mediterranean initiatives of the WEU, OSCE, and NATO. The long-term objective common to all the cooperation schemas is creating a climate for peaceful and mutually rewarding relations in the Mediterranean region.

As the prevailing problems of the region are mainly of a socio-economic nature, it is only logical that in promoting cooperative relations across the Mediterranean the EU takes
the lead. Indeed, the Union offers what the Mediterranean probably needs most: economic cooperation. Yet it is equally clear that the EU alone can not cope with the breadth and diversity of that region. Moreover the EU alone does not represent the views of all nations that play a major role in the Mediterranean such as Turkey and the United States.

It is thus only logical that the evolution of the Mediterranean as a stable and prosperous region requires the involvement of other actors. NATO is one such actor. Its Mediterranean Dialogue, launched in 1994, is a component of the broad framework of regional cooperation and is meant to complement other international efforts, most notably the EU’s Barcelona Process.

In this regard, it would be useful to start a reflection on how to achieve better coordination of existing cooperation initiatives - while respecting their specific characteristics - in such a way as to exploit to the full their complementary nature.

THE CENTRAL ROLE OF PARTNERSHIP, DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION IN NATO’S NEW STRATEGIC CONCEPT

Notwithstanding the positive developments in the strategic environment after the end of the Cold War, the security of the Alliance remains subject to a wide variety of military and non-military risks which are multi-directional and often difficult to predict. These risks include uncertainty and instability in and around the Euro-Atlantic area and the possibility of regional crises at the periphery of the Alliance, which could evolve rapidly. Some countries in and around the Euro-Atlantic area face serious economic, social and political difficulties. Ethnic and religious rivalries, territorial disputes, inadequate or failed efforts at reform, the abuse of human rights and the dissolution of states can lead to local and even regional instability. The resulting tension could lead to crises affecting Euro-Atlantic stability, to human suffering and to armed conflicts.

Such conflicts could affect the security of the Alliance by spilling over into neighbouring countries, including NATO countries. Additional matters of concern are the proliferation of NBC (nuclear, chemical, biological) weapons and their means of delivery, and the global spread of technology that can be of use in the production of weapons and may result in the greater availability of sophisticated military capabilities. All this could be used by some countries in trying to solve territorial/ethnic/religious disputes.

Other risks affecting the global context must also be taken into account. These include acts of terrorism, sabotage and organized crime, and the disruption of the flow of vital resources. The uncontrolled movement of large numbers of people, particularly
as a consequence of armed conflicts, can also pose problems for security and stability affecting the Alliance.

NATO’s new Strategic Concept, approved by the Alliance’s Heads of State and Government at the Washington Summit in April 1999, reflects the Alliance commitment to a broad approach to security, which recognizes the importance of political, economic, social and environmental factors in addition to the indispensable defense dimension. This broad approach constitutes the basis upon which the Alliance is to accomplish its fundamental security tasks effectively while increasing its efforts to develop effective cooperation with other European and Euro-Atlantic organizations as well as the United Nations. The collective aim is to build a European security architecture in which the Alliance’s contribution to the security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic area and the contribution of these other international organizations are complementary and mutually reinforcing, both in deepening relations among Euro-Atlantic countries and in managing crises.

The Alliance’s contribution to this security architecture is centered around six fundamental tasks: the preservation of the transatlantic link; the maintenance of effective military capabilities sufficient for deterrence and defence and to fulfil the full range of its mission; the development of the European Security and Defence Identity within the Alliance; an overall capability to manage crises successfully; its continued openness to new members; and the continued pursuit of partnership, dialogue and cooperation with other nations.

This last task is of particular importance for our discussion. Through its active pursuit of partnership, dialogue and cooperation, the Alliance is a positive force in promoting security and stability throughout the Euro-Atlantic area. Through outreach and openness, the Alliance seeks to preserve peace, support and promote democracy, contribute to prosperity and progress, and foster genuine partnership with and among the Euro-Atlantic countries. It is very important to underline that this aims at enhancing the security of all, excludes nobody, and helps to overcome divisions and disagreement that could lead to instability and conflict.

Indeed, the Strategic Concept has made partnership a fundamental security task. This central role of partnership is a reflection of an evolving reality: the complex security environment requires cooperative approaches. NATO has acted in line with this logic since the end of the Cold War. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program, the Permanent Joint Council (PJC) with Russia, the NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) and, of course, the Mediterranean Dialogue are among the tools now available for use by Allied and partners countries.

Yet, of the many facets of post-Cold War’s NATO, the Mediterranean Dialogue is perhaps the most under appreciated. At best, it stands in the shadow of other agenda items, such as Kosovo, Bosnia, the NATO-Russia relationship, or NATO enlargement. At worst, it is being considered by some critics as "yet another Mediterranean initiative".
I would maintain, however, that the Dialogue holds tremendous potential for shaping the security environment in the Mediterranean in the longer term. I would also maintain that it has already demonstrated some of this potential, not least through the participation of some Mediterranean Dialogue partners in IFOR/SFOR in Bosnia and, now, KFOR in Kosovo. I would argue, furthermore, that one of the leading factors in the evolution of the strategic environment in the Mediterranean will be the future of NATO’s own approach to the region and individual states in the South.

NATO'S MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE:
THE ALLIANCE'S CONTRIBUTION TO REGIONAL SECURITY COOPERATION

Since the end of the Second World War, and the emergence of the bloc-to-bloc confrontation thereafter, security in the Mediterranean region was too often perceived as an extension of the East-West standoff that divided the European continent. This region was seen as a perimeter to the Atlantic Alliance, a fact reflected by the Mediterranean being portrayed as NATO’s “Southern Flank”.

In recent years, a fundamental transformation in the Mediterranean security environment has occurred. The end of the Cold War and progress – albeit slow and uneven – in the Middle East Peace Process have provided an auspicious environment for the promotion of new relations in the Mediterranean region. As a result, the Mediterranean has finally come to be regarded as a security region on its own merit, to be approached without intellectual or ideological barriers.

Today, NATO looks to the Mediterranean as a region with its own specific dynamics and challenges, and with a still largely untapped potential for dialogue and cooperation in security matters. In this regard, one of the most important facets of NATO’s reorientation in the post-Cold War security environment has been the decision adopted by the Alliance Foreign Ministers in December 1994 to establish the Mediterranean Dialogue.

The Alliance’s Mediterranean Dialogue with six non-NATO Mediterranean countries –Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia –is not a reaction to any particular event or threat but rather is part of NATO’s overall cooperative approach to security. It stems from the realization that security in the whole of Europe is linked to the security and stability in the Mediterranean. As such, it is an important component of the Alliance’s policy of outreach and cooperation.
OBJECTIVES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The objective of its Mediterranean Dialogue is primarily political: to increase understanding of NATO’s policies and activities and get a better appreciation of the security needs of the countries involved. It is also by necessity differentiated, starting with the idea that the same solutions and methods of cooperation cannot be applied wholesale to the entire area, taking into account the richness of the political, socio-economic, cultural and religious diversity of the region.

The successful launch of the Mediterranean Dialogue and its subsequent development have been based upon five principles:

I) The Dialogue is progressive in terms of participation and substance. Such flexibility has allowed the number of Dialogue partners to grow and the content of the Dialogue to evolve over time.

II) The Dialogue is primarily bilateral in structure. This principle has proved extremely important for Mediterranean partners who do not form a group and wish to conduct the dialogue with NATO as individual sovereign states. It has consequently made the Dialogue less vulnerable to disruption due to political developments ongoing elsewhere in the region. Despite the predominantly bilateral character, the Dialogue nevertheless allows for multilateral meetings on a regular basis.

III) All Mediterranean partners are offered the same basis for cooperation activities and discussion with NATO. This non-discrimination is an essential feature of the Dialogue and has been key to its successful establishment and subsequent development. Within this non-discriminatory framework, Dialogue countries are free to choose the extent and intensity of their participation.

IV) The Dialogue is meant to mutually reinforce and complement other international efforts to establish and enhance cooperation with Mediterranean countries. These include the EU’s Barcelona Process, the Middle East Peace Process, and efforts by institutions such as the WEU and the OSCE.

V) Activities within the Dialogue take place on a self-funding basis. However, there are circumstances in which financial support by NATO is considered on a case-by-case basis.

The Mediterranean Dialogue gained special momentum at the Madrid Summit in July 1997 when the Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG) - under the authority of the North Atlantic Council - was established. Through the Mediterranean Cooperation Group, NATO member states are directly involved in political discussions with Mediterranean Dialogue countries, thus providing a forum for an exchange of views on the security situation in the Mediterranean. Since the establishment of the MCG in 1997, three rounds of bilateral consultations between the Allies and individual participant countries have taken place.
Although the Dialogue is predominantly bilateral, multilateral meetings also take place, particularly in the form of information sessions and briefings specifically for officials from Dialogue countries. These included regular updates on NATO’s operations in Kosovo, which were especially appreciated by the Alliance’s Mediterranean partners. In addition, Allies have met regularly within the framework of the Mediterranean Cooperation Group to discuss policy and other matters of direct relevance to the Dialogue. The creation of the Mediterranean Cooperation Group has added a high degree of visibility to the Alliance’s Mediterranean dimension.

In addition to its political goals, the Mediterranean Dialogue also seeks to foster practical cooperation. The primary vehicle for this is an annual work program between NATO and the Mediterranean Dialogue countries, which includes activities in the information field, civil emergency planning, scientific and defense-related areas.

Information is a key component of the initiative, facilitating mutual understanding between the Alliance and Dialogue countries. NATO has supported conferences and seminars for representatives from NATO and Dialogue countries, including the 1997 Rome conference on NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue, co-sponsored by the Italian Centro Militare di Studi Strategici, and the Conference on “The Mediterranean Dialogue and the new NATO” organized by the Spanish authorities in cooperation with NATO in Valencia in February 1999.

While the Rome Conference helped identifying the practical cooperative dimensions of the Mediterranean Dialogue, the Valencia Conference was the first opportunity for Ambassadors from NATO and the six Mediterranean partner countries to meet jointly to discuss the way ahead. The Valencia Conference was an important step towards greater interaction between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries. It was also particularly timely, coming before the Washington Summit when the Alliance was considering how to move forward NATO’s external adaptation, of which the Mediterranean Dialogue is an integral part.

In the field of Information, NATO also awarded a number of Institutional Fellowships to scholars from the region, following a successful pattern established for partner countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Research topics included such issues as Eastern Mediterranean security, Economic aspects of security cooperation in the Mediterranean region and Competing security and cooperation visions in the Arab world.

Other information activities have included visits of parliamentarians, opinion leaders, academics, journalists and officials from Mediterranean Dialogue countries to NATO Headquarters in Brussels for briefings on the Alliance’s current agenda and NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue.

An important step in the effort to exchange information was the decision taken by Alliance foreign ministers last year to establish “Contact Point Embassies” in Mediterranean Dialogue countries. Under this system, similar to that which has been
successfully operating in Central and Eastern European partner countries since 1992, the Embassy of a NATO member country will not only represent the Alliance in each Dialogue country but also participate in our efforts to increase cooperation. The program is fully operational since 1 January 1999.

Another key element of the Alliance’s Mediterranean work program is in Civil Emergency Planning (CEP). Mediterranean Dialogue countries have already been invited to participate in several CEP activities, including courses at the NATO School in Oberammergau on civil-military cooperation in response to natural or man-made disasters, as well as conferences and seminars in Portugal, Austria and Hungary. In order to strengthen cooperation in this field, visits to Dialogue countries by NATO’s CEP teams have also been organized.

In addition, NATO –together with the Greek authorities –sponsored a seminar held in Athens in November 1998 on Natural disaster reduction in the Mediterranean basin, designed specifically for Mediterranean Dialogue countries. The seminar brought together heads of CEP agencies from NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries for the first time. The event was a forum for both the exchange of information and for professional and personal contacts among civil emergency planning experts.

A similar event, this time focusing on Search and Rescue in Disasters, took place in Turkey from 30 September - 2 October 1999. Like its predecessor, the seminar aimed at enhancing confidence-building between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries by pursuing cooperation in areas of common concern.

It is worth noting that Jordan will be hosting the next yearly CEP seminar. The gathering will focus on Regional Cooperation and the Role of NGOs in Confronting Disasters and also be the first such CEP event to take place in a Mediterranean Dialogue country.

NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue has also promoted scientific cooperation through the NATO Science Program. Mediterranean Dialogue country scientists have participated in NATO-sponsored Advanced Research Workshops, Advanced Study Institutes, Collaborative Research Grants and Science Fellowships. For example, a workshop co-directed by a Greek and an Israeli scientist held in Israel in 1998 took up the subject of Unconventional optical elements for information storage, processing and communications. Scientists from Jordan and Morocco also participated in the workshop.

There is also a military dimension to the work program. This includes invitations to Dialogue countries to observe NATO and PfP sea and land exercises, invitations to attend seminars and workshops, visits to NATO military bodies and the exchange of staff officers between NATO and Dialogue countries. The program also includes port visits to Dialogue countries by NATO’s Standing Naval Force in the Mediterranean (STANAVFORMED).

NATO’s military authorities have devised a military concept specifically designed for the Mediterranean Dialogue countries which includes three main components: courses at the NATO School in Oberammergau, courses and other academic activities here at the NATO Defense College in Rome, and specific activities to be conducted
under the responsibility of Allied Command Europe (ACE/SHAPE) and Allied Command Atlantic (ACLANT).

Mediterranean Dialogue countries are regularly sending students to courses at the NATO School in Oberammergau in environmental protection, peacekeeping, multinational forces, conventional arms control implementation, and European security cooperation. There is also a course in civil-military cooperation for civil emergency management available to Dialogue country participants and, given the strong interest shown in crisis management, a course has also been opened in this field.

The NATO Defense College in Rome offers General and Flag Officers Courses specifically intended for Mediterranean Dialogue country representatives. These provide an excellent opportunity to learn more about current Alliance issues, including NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue. In addition, the College organizes international research seminars on Mediterranean security, which aim at increasing understanding between researchers and experts in security studies from NATO and its member states and from the Mediterranean Dialogue countries.

Furthermore, NATO’s two major commands –ACE and ACLANT– opened several military activities to the participation of Mediterranean Dialogue countries. These included observing PfP activities in the fields of search and rescue, maritime safety and medical evacuation, as well as exercises related to peace support and humanitarian relief. In this regard, three of the Mediterranean Dialogue countries –Egypt, Jordan and Morocco – have already cooperated militarily with the Alliance in the NATO-led IFOR/SFOR operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Some Dialogue countries will also participate in the NATO-led KFOR operations in Kosovo.

THE WAY AHEAD

At the Washington Summit in April 1999, the Alliance’s Heads of State and Government decided to enhance both the political and practical dimensions of the Dialogue.

Enhancements include increasing the frequency of political discussions between representatives from NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries, as well as offering additional opportunities for meetings of Ambassadors, including conferences and seminars on the Mediterranean Dialogue. In this regard, both Allied nations and Mediterranean Dialogue countries have been encouraged to organize such events as the Rome Conference of November 1997 and the Valencia Conference of February 1999. As a result, the next meeting will take place in Egypt in the course of year 2000 - the first of this kind to be hosted and organized by a Mediterranean Dialogue country.
The Allies also decided to strengthen the practical dimension of the Dialogue by including additional activities in areas where NATO can add value, particularly in the military field, and where Dialogue countries have expressed interest.

The Washington Summit has further demonstrated that the Mediterranean Dialogue has the potential to evolve. There is room for expansion of both participation and content. The question then arises what could be the future development of the Alliance’s Mediterranean Dialogue. NATO’s successful Partnership for Peace program in Central and Eastern Europe should not be considered the only possible framework of cooperation with non-member countries. After all, post-Cold War NATO has been able to create a variety of tools designed to meet the specific security requirements of a wide spectrum of potential "users".

Thus, in developing cooperation with the countries to the south of the Mediterranean, the Alliance needs to be sensitive to the specific context within which such cooperation would take place. In other words, what works in Central and Eastern European countries may not necessarily work—or work as well—along the southern Mediterranean rim. While some elements of Partnership for Peace may be applicable to the Mediterranean, the relative non-homogeneity of the region would require separate and specific solutions appropriate to the area.

At the same time, the future of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue will be influenced to a large extent by developments in two other regional fora, the EU’s Barcelona Process and the Middle East peace process. Both aim at enhancing stability and improving security cooperation in the region. The success or failure of these two very different processes will have a considerable effect on the region as a whole. Thus it is in the interest of all Allies to ensure that both processes are alive and functioning well if NATO’s own bridge-building effort is to be successful.

In this regard, NATO’s contribution should be to continue to strengthen the Mediterranean Dialogue by concentrating on fields where it has a clear comparative advantage: defense and security. This will complement the initiatives of other organizations and contribute to constructive relations with NATO’s Mediterranean neighbors.

Thus, NATO could consider developing additional military cooperation venues and increasing participation of Dialogue countries in peace support and other military-related activities, including by providing additional training opportunities.

Over the course of the past few years, the Dialogue has demonstrated a solid basis for developing additional cooperation in a variety of fields. It is clear, however, that the ultimate success of NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue will very much depend on the active participation and strong support by both NATO members and Mediterranean Dialogue countries alike, working together to build the trust and transparency required of a true partnership.
Note