

Rearranging Family Life and a Large Circle of Friends: Reforming NATO's Partnership Programmes

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After three post-Cold War enlargement rounds, 28 countries are now members of NATO. Finding consensus is a challenge in this extended family. However, the Alliance has not only to take care of its internal family life but also to manage relationships with its growing circle of friends: it runs partnership programmes with about forty countries. Some ten percent of the troops in NATO-led missions today come from countries outside the Alliance, which make significant contributions in terms of personnel and equipment – sometimes more than those offered by a number of NATO members. These figures raise questions. For example, why are there so many partners? How are the partnerships organized? The partnership programmes differ in structure, and NATO's partnership policy may thus appear somewhat chaotic to the uninitiated. Revision and reform have long been overdue, but for some time there was little appetite to start a task involving such a range of players and essential questions about NATO's purposes.

At the initiative of NATO's Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, a reform of its partnership policy was at last launched and a new management structure for the programmes became active in summer 2011. Is this reform "the one", or at least a breakthrough in a difficult debate? Or is it merely a relabelling of partnership tools and only a first step toward a more profound reform?

The reform is an attempt to square the circle: don't upset anybody, don't provoke endless discussions, but change everything for the better. At a policy level, the new approach is in fact more open, flexible and pragmatic. The Alliance intends to do justice to every single partner, but also to keep the whole business manageable. In order to produce lean and reasonable structures, tools and mechanisms had to be adjusted. This reform of partnership policy is therefore above all a reform of the management of partnership structures, set up in such a way as to avoid "hurting anybody". Some of the previously existing structures (formats and dialogue instruments) have thus been left unchanged, having already been largely superseded in practice by the flexible new so-called 28+n formats. These have been in use for some time now, and promise to become central platforms of troubleshooting as well as political development in the coming years.

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The reform sidesteps some fundamental political questions and avoids addressing political catchphrases. It is an attempt to set a course through management, and to bring NATO's partnership policy to the tasks where attention is focused: practical cooperation in missions and capability building. This does not mean reducing the reform to the lowest common denominator, but avoiding overreach and creating a pragmatic basis for cooperation. Apart from some political rhetoric about universal democratic values, the reform extends a "light" political approach to all partners. What this means is nothing less than a seismic shift within the context of a management reform: if one is looking for a political vision beyond the management of daily partnership business, this reform does not give a direct answer and thus marks a point of departure from the initial idea of NATO partnerships.

PARTNERSHIPS: STABILITY THROUGH DIALOGUE AND COOPERATION

Partnerships first became an important issue when the Warsaw Pact dissolved and NATO lost its "enemy". In contrast to the Warsaw Pact, the Alliance was not confronted with centrifugal, but centripetal forces: nobody wanted to leave NATO and its former adversaries were on the whole clearly interested in cooperation with NATO. Some of them even wanted to become members. This success presented a dilemma for NATO. It had to redefine its purposes, find a new basis for Alliance cohesion and avoid angering Russia. Was it ready to integrate new members that were sometimes both mentally and geographically distant from the Alliance?

The answer to this dilemma was the Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme, which created a framework for cooperation involving countries in the Euro-Atlantic region with shared interests.² This makeshift solution worked. The PfP programme and subsequent partnership frameworks with differing regional and political focuses have provided an adequate answer to globalization and the changing political landscape. They have met the need of the partners to transform their defence sector, complementing NATO's willingness to let interested nations cooperate, contribute and, subject to specified prerequisites, even become

members – also known as an open door policy. After preparation for NATO membership through participation in the PfP programme, twelve former PfP partners have become members of the Alliance. A further three countries are working on their Membership Action Plan (MAP) with a view to joining,³ and some partners that were politically distant from the Alliance at the beginning have grown noticeably closer. Partners themselves have changed, but they in turn have changed NATO too.

It could even be argued that partnership activities have contributed to NATO's strategic vision, because the programmes have created a network for a cooperative approach to security and most PfP activities have included the export of political values. In this respect the PfP has focused strongly on democratization and the establishment of democratic and civilian control of the armed forces, including parliamentary oversight. PfP partners' commitment to democracy and human rights was formalized in the signing of the original framework document.⁴

In the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD)⁵ and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI)⁶, established in the context of NATO's "Broader Middle East Initiative", this political input is not prominent. Both tend towards a politically neutral approach, meaning that there is no emphasis on democratization and human rights – the focus is on dialogue and military cooperation. Not surprisingly, the MD and ICI hardly played a visible role in the Arab Spring, but they were able to help the NATO Allies establish contact with new actors. In addition, some members of the MD (Jordan) and ICI (Qatar, United Arab Emirates) gave critical support for Operation Unified Protector, NATO's mission to Libya.

Of emerging significance today is the more informal but growing group of "partners across the globe" (PAG, formerly called Contact Countries), which include Australia, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea and Pakistan. These countries cooperate closely with NATO on a bilateral basis, and some of them contribute significantly to its missions. In the future, Mongolia and other special partners such as Afghanistan and Iraq might become part of this group.⁷

² Since 1994 the Partnership for Peace (PfP) has promoted dialogue, transition and practical cooperation between NATO and the partners in the Euro-Atlantic region: former Soviet Republics (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan), former Yugoslav States (Bosnia and Herzegovina, FYROM*, Montenegro and Serbia), EU members (Austria, Finland, Ireland, Malta and Sweden) as well as Switzerland. (*Turkey recognizes the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name)

³ Bosnia-Herzegovina, FYROM*, and Montenegro. (*Turkey recognizes the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name)

⁴ <http://www.nato.int/docu/comm/49-95/c940110b.htm>

⁵ The Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) was set up in 1994, to enhance cooperation, mutual understanding and security and stability in the Mediterranean and Northern Africa. The MD focuses on dialogue and practical military cooperation. Its members are Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. Libya is not yet a member.

⁶ The Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) was set up in 2004. Four countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council accepted the invitation to join: Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates.

⁷ Mongolia would have been a potential PfP partner but, as membership of the OSCE is a prerequisite for admission to the PfP, has so far not been included. In the case of Afghanistan and Iraq it is mainly a question of funding regulations, as expensive NATO training missions there are based on different funding arrangements than the commonly funded partnership programmes.



This approach to cooperative security is still in line with the original intention of NATO's partnership policy, when the Alliance wanted to contribute to maintaining stability in potentially shaky regions such as the Balkans and parts of the post-Soviet space. As US President Bill Clinton emphasized at the PfP initiating Summit in 1994: "The threat to us now is not of advancing armies so much as of creeping instability. The best strategy against this threat is to integrate the former communist states into our fabric of liberal democracy, economic prosperity, and military cooperation."⁸

THE NEED FOR REFORM

Over a period of many years a whole partnership industry evolved, to the extent that the "fabric" of partnership programmes needed more and more maintenance. It had become a jungle of different mechanisms, acronyms and tools. For example: PfP worked with the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Work Plan (EAPWP), MD with the MD Work Programme (MDWP), and ICI with the Menu of Practical Activities (ICIMPA). Some items of the individual partnerships' work plans were open to others, some were not (PfP-only, MD-only, ICI-only). Within the PfP, the Individual Partnership Programmes (IPP) constituted the major tool, complemented by specialized programmes such as the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) and the Planning and Review Process (PARP), not to mention the submenus. The Mediterranean Dialogue, the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative and the PAG partnerships used different tools, or the same tools given different names, accompanied by different procedures. For some years there had been universal recognition that this mushrooming business needed streamlining.

Apart from organizational structures, the need for a new wind of change in the whole of the Alliance's partnership policy was felt by all. The Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) can be seen as a case in point, even on the basis of a cursory examination. As times changed, so did the composition of the EAPC. In 1997 it replaced the North Atlantic Cooperation Council, which was limited to former adversaries – i.e. former Warsaw Pact states and former Soviet republics. The EAPC's aim was to function as a political framework for the Partnership for Peace programme. In the EAPC, NATO mixed long-term partners like Austria, Finland, Sweden and Switzerland with former Warsaw Pact countries and with the newly independent states after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. This forum was, in the 1990s, extremely valuable as a means to start dialogue and

cooperation with new nation states that had yet to define themselves and find their way in a totally changed political environment.

For the neutral European Union partners and Switzerland, this was never the ideal platform to define and develop their relations with the Alliance. They mostly saw their role in the EAPC as contributing to "military development policy" and pursued their own relationship with NATO on a bilateral basis. As noted previously, twelve partners became members of the Alliance. Russia, and later Ukraine and Georgia, did not want to be simply partners in such a melting pot. They wanted to express their understanding of their special relationship with NATO through the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and the NATO-Georgia Commission respectively. Today the EAPC lacks the drive of the actively participating nations who were eager to achieve NATO membership. Experienced participants dread these meetings, which they see as having become boring and meaningless. The EAPC gives the impression that it is a dish made with leftovers, in need of texture and spices to make it tasty.

REVOLUTION OR EVOLUTION?

For some years the reform of partnerships was on the Alliance's internal agenda, but overcoming inertia and reluctance to modify familiar programmes was difficult. The likelihood of revolutionary reform was in any case low, given the diverse interests of the NATO Allies and the differing expectations of partner nations. The other stumbling block was that there were plausible arguments for and against the whole range of approaches, from "leaving everything as it is" to a completely new design of partnership tools and discussion forums.

The structure as it still exists emphasizes the regional specifics as well as the political spirit in which the programmes were set up. Over the years these programmes have become increasingly sophisticated, with more and more branches intertwining in an unkempt mass. But wielding the axe, or at least the garden shears, would inevitably have meant that somebody would lose something. Any attempt to introduce a completely new design, in other words a single overall partnership policy doing away with the jumble of different labels as well as with the traditional formats like the PfP and MD, would have created endless bureaucratic discussions and frustration. As a result, a number of initiatives to reform the dialogue panels came to nothing. For example, the idea of creating a "global partnership forum" had no

⁸Bill Clinton in a speech at the North Atlantic Council summit, NATO HQ, Brussels, Belgium, January 10, 1994. U.S. Department of State Dispatch Supplement, January 1994, Vol. 5, No. 1.



chance of winning consensus among all Allies, as some have an aversion to NATO becoming a global actor.⁹ The idea of a single dialogue panel would thus have proved impracticable, because of its inevitable unwieldiness, and even the introduction of new alternative formats (e.g. with European, Asian etc. partners) would have been difficult to implement.

NATO'S APPROACH TO REFORM

At the Lisbon summit the decision was taken to define a new partnership policy. NATO's Secretary General gave guidelines and reviewed the first draft. The Foreign Ministers, at a meeting in April 2011, approved a "Berlin package" of basic documents outlining the reform. In a nutshell, this is based on the following points: (1) NATO's partnership policy is to become more efficient and flexible; (2) the management of the partnerships is to be thoroughly streamlined by introducing a single set of partnership instruments; and (3) the force contributions of partners in NATO missions are to be clarified and reshaped.

Here are the key components of the new partnership policy in greater detail:

- There will be one major actor: the **Political and Partnerships Committee (PPC)**, established in 2010 as the successor of the Political Committee (PC), is the central hub for implementation of the reform and management of partnerships.
- The reform introduces a **single set of instruments** with three main components. First, all the work plans of the different programmes will be consolidated in a single **Partnership Cooperation Menu (PCM)**. This will list a huge variety of events and activities, open to all countries which have a partnership programme with NATO. With this single pool of activities and events, the different approval procedures for the various work plans will disappear. The PCM will be a "rolling" document. After periodic approval of revisions in the PCM by NATO's Military Committee, the PPC will give the go-ahead to the International Staff on behalf of NATO's supreme political decision-making body, the

North Atlantic Council (NAC). The delay of a whole plan because of disagreement over a single item can thus be avoided in the future.

Second, for all partners there will be only one generic partnership document, the **Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP)**. This will be structured in four categories: NATO's strategic goals, the Partner's National Policy on Cooperation with NATO, Priority Areas of Cooperation, and Principal Activities.

- NATO's specialized programmes, the Planning and Review **Process (PARP)** and the **Individual Partnership Programme (IPAP)**, remain active. They will, however, be open to all partners. This intensive cooperation was previously limited to PfP countries. Now all interested partners can enrol after accepting certain PfP commitments,¹⁰ and after NAC approval.
- Side by side in missions: new security challenges outside the Alliance's territory have created an obvious need for NATO to cooperate in missions with partner countries and organizations. The previous guideline from 1999, when NATO systematically started to include non-members in missions, therefore needed rewriting by the PPC.¹¹ The revised **Political-Military Framework (PMF)**¹² clarifies the procedures for all potential partners that want to contribute to a NATO-led mission. Partners are also welcome to play a bigger role in shaping strategy and decisions. This means that they will have a bigger say in the preparation of operational planning decisions than before, although the NAC alone still has the last word in decision-making in NATO-led operations. In addition, the prerequisite of certification for troops from partners remains intact – i.e., they must be accepted by NATO's strategic military command, the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), before participating in operations.

IT'S THE MANAGEMENT, STUPID!

From a NATO point of view, the reform of partnership policy has mainly been accomplished. "Partnership policy" is therefore not on the agenda at the upcoming NATO summit in Chicago, in May 2012. Some Allies, as well as partners, are

⁹ Some years ago a small number of Allies, mainly the United States and Great Britain, were interested in such a global partnership with like-minded countries. See Stephan Frühling and Benjamin Schreier, Creating the next generation of NATO partnerships, in: *The RUSI Journal*, February/March 2010 Vol. 155 No. 1, pp. 52-57 (reference here to p. 53f). A number of countries, especially France and Germany, nevertheless remain sceptical toward the Alliance being considered a global actor. See Karl-Heinz Kamp, Partnerschaftsagentur NATO: Wie kann das Bündnis auf die Veränderungen in der arabischen Welt reagieren? Und wie entwickelt sie ihre globalen Partnerschaften?, in: *Internationale Politik*, Juli/ August 2011; and Merkel ist gegen eine "globale NATO", *Der Tagesspiegel*, 26.03.2009.

¹⁰ These commitments are expressed in the PfP Framework Document, which outlines the basic tenets of the PfP such as respecting the principles of democracy and international law, and fulfilling in good faith the obligations of the Charter of the United Nations and the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

¹¹ Since 1995 NATO had included more than a dozen non-member countries in its IFOR – and then SFOR – mission.

¹² www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf.../20110415_110415-PMF.pdf



asking themselves: is that it? They expected further – and more political – steps, but for the time being this is the new basis for future cooperation.

This reform does not follow a political approach, but it is a management reform with intended or unintended political effects. The first important step to prepare this reform was taken by creating the PPC, which took charge of its implementation after NATO's Secretary General had shaped the main direction of the reform. This committee became the central mechanism of all partnership issues, also having responsibility for the day-to-day work on partnerships. Partnership management has thus been delegated to a level below the NAC, which approves only the principal directives. Dealing with partners has become less political and more technical – a question of management. This is an important step to pave the way for further development, as it does not lead to navel-gazing and can encourage a focus on coordinated multilateral action in response to international security challenges.¹³

From a management point of view, the new regulations will be very efficient if the Alliance does not allow exceptions to the new model. The centrepiece of the reform, the introduction of a single set of instruments (the PCM and the IPCP), will tremendously simplify the "cycle" of the partner making choices of activities and events, agreeing with NATO on an individual programme and executing it. The reform could thus become a sound basis for all partners to develop their cooperation individually. It emphasizes the partners' free choice of priorities and level of ambition, as they can now choose items from the full list of partnership activities and events without the former restrictions of specific partnership formats.

However, a side effect of the new flexibility will be a reduction in NATO's ability to guide the individual partnership through institutional settings. The previous system allowed NATO to offer certain activities to certain partners. For example, if a MD country was interested in a Pfp event, NATO could make an exception and open the event to the country concerned. If NATO regarded such an exception as undesirable, the activity remained a Pfp-only item. This bureaucratic steering instrument, which worked without a lot of explanation, has been eliminated. As a result NATO's partnership policy has shifted slightly from a supply to a demand orientation, as the partner's array of options has expanded.

But what about NATO's priorities and level of ambition? The Alliance has to develop informal mechanisms to better steer resources towards its interests and priorities. So far only a few instruments are available. One example can be found in

the introductory remarks in each of the newly created IPCPs, covering NATO's plans for the country concerned. This item, entitled "NATO's strategic goals," is probably new wording for the heading "overarching guidance," under which additional orientation was provided in the previous system. In addition, the Alliance plans to focus more on feedback and assessment. That means that both sides – those who implement an activity and those who take part – will report back once it has taken place. These instruments may sound better on paper than they are likely to prove, because they will probably be labour-intensive, tricky to use, and difficult to communicate.

PARTNERSHIPS AND VALUES

Critics of the reform were concerned that the new one-size-fits-all programme structure (the single set of instruments, the PCM and the IPCP) would turn out to be a politically neutral option in which priorities such as democratization and human rights would be neglected. To some extent this is true, in that the pool of activities and events is no longer structured and steered according to the regional formats.

NATO focused especially, in the early years of its Pfp Programme, on the promotion of democratic political values and good governance. This was very successful: the countries interested in becoming fully fledged members of the Western community accepted the challenge of reform and many of them are today in NATO and the EU. Others perceived such programmes only as having to bite the bullet in order to access more practically needed "military development" projects and activities. Some Pfp partners saw dealing with NATO as a means to balance the influence of other political actors in their region (e.g. in Central Asia). In addition, it was prestigious to sit at the table with great powers. The value of NATO's political prestige, especially to leaders under fire, gave the Alliance the opportunity to bring democratic values into otherwise closed state systems.

Of course signing the Pfp Framework Document and participating in an activity promoting "democratic control of the Armed forces" did not change the political practice of authoritarian regimes, but it was a signal that this was the way to go. It nurtured awareness of what is right and wrong in terms of democratic standards and was thus an important step for those who attributed moral authority to the Western world. Last but not least, this approach was important for NATO's legitimacy.

Today this aspect has moved into the background, although interaction with NATO can still act as a stimulus to move

¹³ See http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_51103.htm?



towards the common values of the Alliance. But sharing the same political values is no longer a prerequisite to becoming a partner of NATO. A willingness to support NATO operations, geographical location or the contribution of needed capabilities can suffice today. This was NATO's approach to MD and ICI partners from the beginning. To extend this approach now to all partners highlights the shift of attention from Eastern Europe and beyond to the highly dynamic MENA region in general.

But in order to counterbalance this "light" political approach, NATO has taken a bold initiative by opening the flagships of cooperation, IPAP and PARP, to all interested partners. These special programmes reach far beyond the military sphere and into the political, albeit following tried and tested regulations. As a result, opening them to all partners also means extending the political approach of the PfP to all interested partner countries. In the light of the Arab Spring these programmes might be relevant for countries like Libya and Tunisia.

NATO's former political "mission" to promote democratic values, which was the approach in Eastern Europe, the Caucasus and Central Asia, has been transformed into an offer extended to those interested. In other words, it has moved from compulsory to optional status. The general emphasis has shifted to different areas – in terms of region and content.

THERE IS NO FREE LUNCH: MISSIONS

NATO's partnership programmes offer interested countries beneficial programmes and political leverage. The new management of partnerships not only opens the Alliance's cooperation programmes to all partners, but – above all – invites practical cooperation, a pragmatic building of capabilities and the strengthening of interoperability. Participation in a NATO-led mission is a step in the same direction and encourages countries to contribute actively, thereby potentially providing capabilities that NATO needs. This can be seen as turning a one-way traffic flow into a mutually beneficial two-way exchange.

The inclusive approach to missions is appropriate for many traditional partners. The neutral EU members and some of the "partners across the globe", such as Australia and Japan, never needed any political tutoring. Their military and financial contributions to NATO-led missions have

been significant and therefore it is overdue to engage them more in the decision-shaping process and also to adjust partnership policy toward their expectations. Among like-minded countries, Australia is already a longstanding partner in NATO-led missions, and has taken part in ISAF since the very beginning. Today it is the tenth largest contributor to this mission. The engagement of such an important partner in the decision-shaping process is most appropriate. NATO has shown remarkable flexibility and openness in this regard. On some occasions the NAC meets in the morning, but excludes the topic of Afghanistan/ISAF because it is on the agenda of a NAC meeting in the "ISAF format" (NATO members plus non-members contributing troops) in the afternoon.¹⁴ This is far removed from a "closed club" mentality. In practical cooperation in missions, the distinction between being a member or being a partner thus seems to be fading.

These positive achievements have also raised some unanswered questions. What can partners expect from NATO if they are ever in trouble? What will the partnership look like after 2014, or beyond the military engagement in Afghanistan, for a partner such as Australia? Does being a partner of NATO mean above all participating in operations? With a like-minded country such as Australia this might not be a life-and-death question, as various ties on different political levels would guarantee an unproblematic restart after a pause in military cooperation. Things might be different with countries in transition. In such cases an ad hoc approach may not be workable, but a consistent and transparent strategy is needed.

As important as what is to be reformed is the question of what is to be retained. Although some observers would regard the partnership frameworks (PfP, MD, ICI and PAG) as no longer necessary, they will continue to exist. However, an important side effect of the previous regional partnership programme structure, the Alliance's ability to steer the direction and tools of cooperation, has been lost in the introduction of a single set of instruments. As a result, the traditional partnership frameworks may in the future be limited to a rather modest – or even token – existence. This also draws attention to an unmodified area of NATO's partnership policy.

The institutions of political dialogue – the EAPC, NRC, NUC and NGC – remain largely untouched. The texture of the EAPC was described earlier, while the NUC and the NGC are somewhat dormant, since Kiev and Tbilisi are for

¹⁴ Today 49 nations contribute to ISAF, including all 28 NATO members.

¹⁵ It should, however, be noted that Georgia is an active partner and takes its participation in various partnership activities, and especially its troop contributions to NATO operations, very seriously. The performance-driven partnership policy could be a challenge especially for Russia. Since its military commitment in the Balkans ended in 2003 and its current contribution to ISAF is mainly in the form of transit options for ISAF troop contributors, there is a gap between Russia's intended political weight and its (in)ability to implement practical cooperation.



different reasons not close to membership.¹⁵ As Russia is a core political partner to NATO, the NRC still has the greatest potential, although it has never been called into action when it was most needed – for example, during the 2008 Georgia crisis. Without a political or practical brush-up, these vehicles for dialogue and cooperation may languish or even face the danger of slow death by bureaucracy.

WHATEVER WORKS

The new partnership policy is, in many ways, a pragmatic compromise: for the time being the discussion panels are left in place, and flexible formats such as 28+n and ad hoc meetings are used whenever necessary. One extreme of these flexible 28+n formats is the so called “big tent” meeting, which can bring together a huge number of nations and organizations (up to 70, ranging well beyond NATO’s committed partners) and gives a taste of extended family life. These big tent meetings offer the possibility of including a wide range of actors and can be very useful for information sharing. This format is often used for dialogue with ISAF contributing partners (nations and organizations involved in non-military contributions), to keep them on track and pay tribute to such contributions. The first gathering in this format was launched at a meeting of NATO Defence Ministers in Noordwijk in 2007 – not under the heading of “Partnerships” but under that of the “Comprehensive Approach”. If rapid results are needed, a big tent meeting is of course not the first choice. The most efficient meetings may be smaller subject- and task-oriented gatherings, like 28+n meetings to which NATO invites countries that are involved and/or interested. For example, if piracy is the issue NATO needs to have countries like China and India at the table; landlocked countries would be less concerned. These flexible formats are most efficient without any political rhetoric. They are customizable across and beyond existing structures, and are most useful in troubleshooting. They work well when special expertise is needed, and they tend not to create political expectations. They are therefore going to be of central importance for the dialogue process and for cooperation with partners in the future.¹⁶

With the current reform NATO’s partnership policy is now catching up with political practice. The wording “management of partnerships”¹⁷ indicates the direction of the reform. In contrast to the aspiration for new security contracts or the creation of more architectures and structures, it reflects a focus on overcoming the limitations of institutionalized

structures in favour of flexible solutions. This development is neither new nor surprising. In recent years coalitions of the willing and the capable were often the only way to cope with new challenges and financial shortfalls, and to manage the diversity of topics and partners.

This reform is a lot more than a relabelling of partnership tools. It opens NATO’s outreach to interested countries worldwide and offers them the possibility to work closely with the Alliance without any membership ambitions or political lip service. It offers support for shaping and creating capabilities, as well as for contributing to security and being part of the solution to upcoming security problems. While NATO’s door remains open to new members, its partnership policy has shifted from a “partner for membership” to a “partner for partnership” approach in a positive practical sense.

The political vision of promoting democratic values through cooperation may move into the background as NATO concentrates on what it can do best: multilateral military action. The “community of values” may make room for the “cooperative approach to security”.¹⁸ There may be regret in some quarters, although the change does justice to many partners and provides greater flexibility for responding to political momentum.

... but where is it going?

NATO has more than enough tools for a new era in partnership policy at its disposal: bilateral, multilateral and regional frameworks, and flexible cooperation and dialogue. Indeed, the new management system allows NATO “to work on more issues, with more partners, in more ways”.¹⁹ But the political idea beyond this cooperation is not entirely clear. The flexible new approach to partnerships makes the long-standing question concerning the limitations of NATO as an international organization and the urgent need to set priorities even more visible. Working together in missions and taking common responsibility constitute credible tactics for today and tomorrow. However, this does not answer the question of what comes after the current missions are ended. What, for example, should NATO’s partnership with Central Asia look like after the end of ISAF? What role will ISAF troop-contributing partners play for NATO after 2014? What is the vision for the MENA region after the Arab Spring?

¹⁶ For some time 28+n has been the ideal dialogue format with MENA. Here, individual partners can develop their dialogue with NATO, avoiding what for them is the challenge of sitting at the same table as Israel.

¹⁷ NATO Document PO(2011)0125 “improving the management of our partnerships – Menu of cooperation and individual programmes”, 11 April 2011.

¹⁸ See NATO homepage on partnerships: http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_51103.htm

¹⁹ NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at a press conference on the meeting of NATO Foreign Affairs Ministers in Berlin, 15 April 2011, available under http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_72764.htm



Will NATO actively reach out to future key players, including China and India?

The idea of NATO being a military tool-box might work in a practical sense but, without the traditional, built-in emphasis on the Alliance's stature as a community of values, its political legitimacy will erode. This reform pragmatically reorganizes the work in the engine-room of partnership policy. It is now time to address the longstanding, as well as the newly created, political questions.