

Beyond Afghanistan NATO's Global Partnerships in the Asia-Pacific

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One of the major issues on the agenda of NATO's next Summit in Chicago in May 2012 will be the ongoing transition in Afghanistan. The goal of transferring full security responsibility from the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) to Afghan forces by the end of 2014 also increases the necessity for the Alliance to define its future relations with what it calls 'partners across the globe' in the Asia-Pacific region. Until now, the focus of NATO's relations with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and the Republic of Korea was very much on operational co-operation. In other words, the value of these partnerships has largely been these countries' contributions to the Afghanistan mission.

However, with the ISAF operation gradually coming to a close, the question is how these relationships can be further developed beyond Afghanistan. The loss of the global partnerships' main rationale will require finding other interests in continuing cooperation on both sides. Otherwise chances are high that these ties will wither away. The strategic power shifts taking place in the Asia-Pacific region will lead these nations to concentrate their security efforts even more on this area in the post-Afghanistan world. However, NATO so far has not played any significant role in Asia-Pacific, and geographic distance alone suggests that it is unlikely to do so in the foreseeable future.

The Alliance has a significant interest in preventing an erosion of ties with key global partners from the Asia-Pacific region such as Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. Not only have NATO and some of these countries invested significantly in their relationships since 2001. Moreover, particularly in times of financial austerity NATO's ability to develop a comprehensive global network of reliable and capable partners will be critical to ensure the goal identified in the 2010 Strategic Concept to maintain a global outlook and to enhance international security through partnerships with relevant countries. Simply put, an alliance facing increasing budgetary restraints requires stronger and complementary defense partnerships as these provide not only greater legitimacy to operations but also make them more cost effective.

So what then is the future of NATO's relations with 'partners across the globe' after Afghanistan? This paper examines the relationships with four partners from the Asia-Pacific region: Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. It first traces the evolution of NATO's global partnership concept. Secondly, it identifies the interests of these four countries in developing ties with NATO beyond Afghanistan. The final section draws some conclusions and provides recommendations on how to further advance the relationships, which could help to inform the debate on this topic at the Chicago Summit.

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The Evolution of NATO's Global Partnerships

NATO's relations with 'partners across the globe' in the Asia-Pacific region have come quite a long way since the Alliance discovered their increasing importance after the September 2001 terror attacks on the United States. Asia-Pacific democracies Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea not only shared common values. In an era of 'globalized security', they also had overlapping interests in addressing old and emerging security challenges such as extremist terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, access to energy, piracy or cyber threats. Moreover, apart from New Zealand all of them were allies of the United States² – NATO's most powerful ally – which made them also interesting from a broader alliance perspective given their mutual interest to contributing to the US-led effort in the 'war on terror'. The NATO-led ISAF operation became the major platform for the Alliance's cooperation with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea.

However, NATO for quite some time was far from clear about the 'level of ambition' for its partnerships with Asia-Pacific countries. Following the 9/11 attacks, some US analysts advocated for these countries to constitute the core of NATO expanding into a 'global Alliance of democracies'.³ In the run-up to NATO's Riga Summit in 2006, Anglo-Saxon allies lobbied for the establishment of an institutionalized 'global partnership forum' with other US allies, especially Australia and Japan. Yet, this met with opposition by allies such as Germany and France which perceived such a global reach as far too ambitious and which wanted to restrict these relationships to practical cooperation in operations such as ISAF.⁴

As a result, NATO official language remained rather vague when it came to defining the objectives of these relationships. At NATO's 2002 Prague Summit, the first Summit after "9/11", the Summit Declaration did not mention Asia-Pacific countries and only briefly addressed the need for new partnership initiatives. The next meeting in Istanbul in 2004 was a bit more specific. While it did not mention Asia-Pacific as a region with which to intensify relations it singled out Australia as a country of increased relevance as an operational partner. It also coined the somewhat awkward term 'contact country' to describe countries outside NATO's other existing partnership frameworks, the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD), and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). The 2006 Riga Summit emphasized the growing 'political and operational value' of working with 'contact countries'. At the

meeting in Bucharest in 2008, allies reconfirmed the predominant value of what they now called 'partners across the globe' in terms of their contribution to the Afghanistan operation. It also mentioned the important role played by Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. This was reiterated in the Kehl/Strasbourg summit communiqué in 2009.⁵

By that stage, it had become clear that NATO ties with 'partners across the globe' would focus on practical cooperation, particularly in the context of Afghanistan, and on developing the relationships bilaterally. An institutionalized 'global partnership forum' neither met with approval by all allies, nor was it necessarily in the interest of Asia-Pacific partners.⁶ Instead, NATO adopted a 'customer approach' which left it to the Asia-Pacific countries' to define their individual level of ambition in cooperating with the Alliance. As a result, the Alliance developed 'Tailored Cooperation Programmes' (TCPs) with these countries (introduced at the 2008 Bucharest Summit) which focused on a range of activities, including exchange of information, participation in training activities, joint exercises, intelligence and technology exchange. Politically, leaders met in the framework of the '28+1' format, addressing the North Atlantic Council (NAC) on issues of common political interest. Moreover, Australia and the other Asia-Pacific countries met with NATO on the context of the Afghanistan troop contributor forum. Moreover, regular staff talks with these countries were held, usually involving representatives from the foreign and defense ministries of these countries together with the NATO International Staff (IS), International Military Staff (IMS) and the strategic commands (Allied Command Operations, ACO, and Allied Command Transformation, ACT) as appropriate. In 2010, NATO's various outreach programs were also brought under the roof of one politico-military committee, the Political and Partnerships Committee (PPC), to allow for better coordination.

However, despite the evolution of an impressive web of individual cooperation at the practical level, relations with Asia-Pacific countries still suffered from at least one important caveat. The absence of a NATO policy towards Asia-Pacific security in combination with the aforementioned 'customer approach' rendered the relationships with 'partners across the globe' vulnerable to a post-Afghanistan era. In other words, these relationships were not well equipped to deal with a situation where Asia-Pacific partners would refocus their strategic attention to their own region and where a joint operation no longer existed to provide a strong rationale for continued cooperation.⁷

² After New Zealand in 1985 refused a port-visit request by the United States of the USS Buchanan on the grounds that this ship was capable of launching nuclear weapons, Washington suspended its obligations under the Australia-New Zealand-US (ANZUS) defence treaty. However, in recent years defence relations between the two sides have markedly improved. See Ernest Z. Bower et. al., *Pacific Partners: The Future of the U.S.-New Zealand Relationship*, A Report of the CSIS Southeast Asia Program and the New Zealand Institute of International Affairs, Washington, D.C., 2011.

³ See Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeir, 'Global NATO', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 5, pp. 105-13.

⁴ See Karl-Heinz Kamp, "'Global Partnership': A New Conflict Within NATO?", *Analysis and Arguments*, no. 29, 2006, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, 2006.

⁵ See the Riga, Istanbul, Bucharest and Kehl/Strasbourg Summit declarations on the NATO website (www.nato.int).

⁶ On the later point see Ron Asmus (ed.), *NATO and Global Partners: Views from the Outside*, Riga Papers, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, D.C., 2006.

⁷ See Stephan Frühling and Benjamin Schreer, "NATO's New Strategic Concept and US Commitments in the Asia-Pacific", *RUSI Journal*, vol. 155, no. 5, pp. 52-7.



Allies recognized the challenge to provide a post-Afghanistan basis for its relationship with contact countries prior to the last summit in Lisbon in November 2010, which also adopted the Alliance's first Strategic Concept since 1999. While the issue of Afghan transition dominated the summit itself, the Alliance also made progress regarding global partnerships. First, the new Strategic Concept identified 'cooperative security' as one of NATO's three essential tasks. It thus emphasized the Alliance's ambition to retain a global outlook and to work with global partners beyond Afghanistan. Second, while still not mentioning Asia-Pacific as a region of interest for the Alliance, the new document announced the intention to 'develop political dialogue and practical cooperation with any nations and relevant organizations across the globe.' Conceptually, this opens up the potential for future cooperation with Asian countries such as China, India or regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Strategic Concept also vowed to strengthen existing partnerships and to give operational partners a 'structural role in shaping strategy and decisions in NATO-led missions to which they contribute.'⁸

The months following the Lisbon Summit saw some major steps towards implementing this partnership agenda. For example, NATO and its partners negotiated a new Political Military Framework For Partner Involvement in NATO-Led Operations which now provided partners with the much wanted ability to 'shape decisions' in such missions.⁹ At the NATO Foreign Ministers Meeting in Berlin in April 2011 NATO also launched a new 'partnership package' in the context its new Active Engagement in Cooperative Security document. Among the 'strategic objectives' identified are the goals to

- Promote regional security and cooperation;
- Facilitate mutually beneficial cooperation on issues of common interest including international efforts to meet emerging security challenges;
- Enhance support for NATO-led operations and missions;
- Enhance awareness of security developments, including through early warning, with a view to preventing crisis; and
- Build confidence, achieve better mutual understanding, including about NATO's role and activities, particularly through enhanced public diplomacy.¹⁰

Furthermore, the new policy included a somewhat revised format of the '28+n' formula. Political consultations with partners were now focused on thematic issues and no longer tied to a specific partnership framework. NATO also moved towards replacing the TCPs with a tailored 'Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP). The main difference is that the IPCP aims to

include a preamble which defines the strategic objectives of the partnerships. This acknowledged the need to provide a better common understanding of the broader political framework within which the practical cooperation with partners takes place. Finally, the Australian government proposed to augment the Berlin partnership package with joint political declarations to support this process.

Global Partners in the Asia-Pacific Region – Different Levels of Ambition

Against this background, what is the current state of NATO's relations with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea, and how do these countries assess the scope and need for a 'more efficient and flexible partnership' beyond Afghanistan?

Of course, NATO has established a number of relationships with other Asia-Pacific countries, including Singapore, Mongolia and Malaysia who all have contributed to the ISAF operation. However, the focus in this paper is on the ties with the four countries mentioned above, not least because they are formally recognized by the Alliance as 'partners across the globe' (apart from Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan). The first thing to recognize when analyzing these relationships is that while these nations have some overlapping interests in working with the Alliance, they also differ significantly in terms of their degree of cooperation with NATO and their level of ambition in taking the relationship further. This has important implications for NATO's future dealings with these Asia-Pacific countries.

Australia

Australia's relationship with NATO is by far the most advanced. Given its significant commitment to the ISAF operation and the high degree of interoperability between NATO forces and the Australian Defence Force (ADF), Australia rightly sees itself as playing in the same 'league' as European non-NATO members such as Sweden when it comes to the relations with NATO. In other words, Australia places significant importance on its bilateral relationship with NATO which recognizes its status and which provides arrangements commensurate with its commitments and capabilities.

Australia's ties with the Alliance reach back to the Cold War. During that period, and mostly through bilateral cooperation with Anglo-Saxon NATO allies, the ADF became familiar with NATO doctrine and operating procedures, publications and standardization agreements, and various NATO working groups and technical bodies. During the 1990s, Australia participated in several UN operations alongside NATO members and became member of NATO forums dealing with interoperability

⁸ *Active Engagement, Modern Defence*, Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Lisbon, 19-20 November 2010, pp. 26-7.

⁹ See NATO, *Political Military Framework For Partner Involvement in NATO-led Operations*, 2011, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_04/20110415_110415-PMF.pdf

¹⁰ See NATO, *Active Engagement in Cooperative Security: A More Efficient and Flexible Partnership Policy*, 2011, http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2011_04/20110415_110415-Partnership-Policy.pdf



issues such as the Sea Sparrow Consortium, Munitions Safety Information Analysis Centre and the Multinational Interoperability Council. At the same time, however, the degree of mutual interests was still fairly small, even so Australia did for example deploy troops to the NATO-led Stabilization Force (SFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996.

The limited interaction changed when both sides extended their operational reach after 2001. The operation in Afghanistan became the focal point of increased political, operational and technical cooperation. Politically, senior Australian government officials addressed the NAC on a regular basis from 2004 onwards, including former Prime Minister John Howard and former Foreign Minister Kevin Rudd. Both sides reached an agreement on the exchange of classified information in 2005 when Canberra also appointed a military attaché to NATO to facilitate political and operational cooperation with the Alliance. There is now also a senior military representative to NATO (and the EU) at the two-star level, demonstrating the growing importance of the relationship. Moreover, Australia recently for the first time sent a Voluntary National Contribution (VNC) to work with NATO Headquarters.¹¹ Finally, as indicated above, work is under way on an 'Australia-NATO Joint Political Declaration' which would clarify the political objectives behind the relationship.

This increase in political cooperation reflects Australia's significant operational role in the context of ISAF. With some 1,500 troops deployed in Uruzgan province, Australia is the largest non-NATO contributor to ISAF overall, currently ranking 9th out of 49 participating nations. NATO allies have been impressed by the high standard and performance of the ADF, as evident in repeated statements by senior NATO officials singling out Australia's contribution to the operation. At times, Australia found it quite cumbersome to work through NATO's operational planning procedures for ISAF as a non-NATO partner. NATO's aforementioned April 2011 guideline to provide partners with a role in shaping decisions in joint operations met one of Australia's key objectives in this regard. Moreover, the Australian navy is currently cooperating with NATO's Counter Piracy Task Force off the coast of Somalia. Finally, Australia and the Alliance increased their technical cooperation. This included cooperation related to anti-terrorism, research and technology, non-proliferation initiatives, and logistics.

However, despite the intensified cooperation with NATO since 2001, Australia's core strategic interests are in the Asia-Pacific region, not least given the major power shifts currently affecting this part of the world. It should not be forgotten that its cooperation with NATO in Afghanistan resulted out of

an intention to support its US ally as part of paying a bilateral 'alliance premium' in return for continued American security commitments much closer to home. In other words, Australia's cooperation with NATO so far is only a 'temporary complement' to the US alliance relationship; and the foreseeable end of the ISAF mission does not necessarily warrant greater political or technical integration.¹²

This has implications for how Australia sees its future relationship with the Alliance. While it has agreed on negotiating a 'Joint Political Declaration' it does not have an interest in joining an institutionalized political NATO format as this might in fact reduce Australia's policy flexibility in a highly dynamic Asia-Pacific security architecture that demands an increasing delicate balancing act between its US ally and a rising China.¹³ As long as the Alliance does not increase its security profile in the Asia-Pacific, the commonality of interest from an Australia perspective will remain limited in the post-Afghanistan period. It should also be noted that Canberra is wondering what global role the Alliance is really willing and able to play in the near future, given the massive pressure on European defense budgets.

Nevertheless, Australia will continue to have an interest in pragmatic cooperation with the Alliance. It recognizes that in all operations outside the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in Africa and the Middle East, Australian forces will probably operate alongside NATO allies or even within a NATO-provided framework. There is thus an interest in maintaining the knowledge, structures and habits which allow for future joint operations. This includes sending Australian personnel to NATO training activities and to other thematic working groups related to increasing interoperability. Further, Australia has an interest in intensifying cooperation with NATO regarding emerging security challenges, particularly in the areas of cyber defense, counter-proliferation, and threats to energy supply. Moreover, as former Foreign Minister Rudd made clear in an address to the NAC in January 2012, Australia would encourage the Alliance to seek intensified political engagement with Asian countries. He stressed that Asia-Pacific strategic dynamics would 'directly affect both sides of the Atlantic' and that NATO would have 'much to gain from a deepened understanding of and engagement with the security policy challenges that confront us across the Asia and its surrounding oceans and seas.'¹⁴ This implies that Australia might welcome NATO efforts to establish closer ties with China, India and ASEAN as a means to increasing mutual understanding about international and Asian security issues.

New Zealand

New Zealand has the smallest defense force of the four

¹¹ Apart from Australia, NATO has VNC agreements with New Zealand, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland, Ireland and Austria.

¹² See Stephan Frühling and Benjamin Schreer, 'The 'Natural Ally'? The 'Natural Partner'? Australia and the Atlantic Alliance', Håkan Edström, Jaane Haaland Matlary and Mangus Petersson (eds.), *NATO: The Power of Partnerships*, Basingstoke 2011, pp. 40-59.

¹³ See Jeffrey Grey, 'Future Directions for NATO: An Australian Perspective', Ron Asmus (ed.), *NATO and Global Partners: Views from the Outside*, Riga Papers, German Marshall Fund of the United States, Washington, D.C., 2006.

¹⁴ The Hon Kevin Rudd, 'Europe, Asia and Australia: New Imperatives for Cooperation', Address to the North Atlantic Council of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 20 January 2012, available at http://www.foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/2012/kr_sp_120120.html



Asia-Pacific partner countries, comprising just over 9,000 troops. Yet, being part of the Anglo-Saxon community of allies it has a similar strategic outlook to Australia and its forces are used to working alongside NATO. While its strategic focus is also on the Asia-Pacific region, particularly on stability in the South Pacific, New Zealand has a history of making limited, but well-trained contributions to international missions. For example, it deployed a 250-strong infantry company to support the United Nations Protection Force (UNPROFOR) in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1994 and subsequently took also part in SFOR.

Still, like in Australia's case, Afghanistan also was the trigger for Wellington to intensify relations with the Alliance. After 2001, then Prime Minister Helen Clark visited NATO Headquarters several times. New Zealand sent a 200-strong task force to Afghanistan to lead a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Bamyan province. In the context of the ISAF operation, it has since been involved in regular meetings and discussions related to the mission at ministerial, heads of state and government and working level. Furthermore, in 2006 New Zealand and NATO signed an agreement on the protection of classified information which permits the exchange of classified operational information on a regular basis. Wellington has held discussions with NATO on issues such as arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, disaster relief and crisis management, and education and training. It has also participated in NATO technical activities, mostly related to peace support operations.

In looking beyond Afghanistan, New Zealand will most likely assess its relationship with NATO in ways fairly similar to Australia. The strategic dynamics in the Asia-Pacific mean that New Zealand will invest its scarce resources into initiatives related to regional security. Indeed, increased pressure to save costs in the already small New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF) might make Wellington even more selective when it comes to cooperation with the Alliance. Like Australia, it has no desire to formalize NATO's global partnership settings. That said, New Zealand would probably be interested in the conclusion of a New Zealand-NATO Joint Political Declaration, similar to the one in the making between Australia and the Alliance. A future visit (the first) by a NATO Secretary General to New Zealand would provide a good occasion to announce such a declaration. Further, Wellington could also see value in NATO engaging with other Asia-Pacific countries, notably China, India and Singapore, and potentially regional security institutions as a way increase mutual understanding about common security problems.

Finally, in terms of more practical cooperation with the Alliance, the NZDF would certainly be interested in building on the working relationship developed over recent years. One particularly interesting area for New Zealand is to become more involved in NATO training activities. Moreover, consultation and

cooperation on counter-piracy and cyber defense is also on the priority list. In the end, New Zealand sees the Alliance as a useful mechanism for selective participation in global operations.

Japan

Unlike Australia and New Zealand, Japan is not a troop contributor to ISAF or other NATO-led missions due to the restraints imposed by its Constitution regarding the use of armed force. Its primary motive for working with the Alliance is also more political than operational in that Tokyo sees NATO as a useful tool through which to raise awareness in Western countries about pressing strategic developments in Northeast Asia, i.e. the North Korean nuclear and missile program as well as the rise of China. Yet, Japan is also seeking within limits to increase its practical cooperation with the Alliance.

Japan first engaged with the Alliance in the early 1990s. In 1993, a high-level dialogue was launched which is still ongoing. Japan also became a major donor nation in the Balkans, indirectly contributing to NATO's engagement there. After 2001, ties intensified and led to more structured contact. Largely to support its US ally, Japan deployed naval vessels to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea to provide fuel and water to ships as part of the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). Co-operation in Afghanistan became 'a catalyst for NATO and Japan to work together.'¹⁵ While Japan did not send troops it provided funds to support activities of PRTs and deployed development experts to the Lithuanian-led PRT in Ghor province. Moreover, Tokyo contributed money to a Partnership for Peace (PfP) Trust Fund project on munitions safety and stockpile management in Afghanistan, the Helicopter Trust Fund and the NATO-Afghan National Army Trust Fund. Finally, Japan currently also contributes to counter-piracy efforts off the coast of Somalia and the Gulf of Aden.

Japan made an attempt to foster much closer political ties between 2005 and 2007 when NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer visited Tokyo twice and Prime Minister Abe addressed the NAC in 2007. As a result, the scope of the political dialogue expanded and now included issues of non-proliferation, weapons of mass destruction, missile defense, counter-terrorism, cyber defense and maritime security. Still, the relationship did not evolve politically as much as the government at the time hoped for. Its concept of creating an 'arc of freedom and prosperity' and the intention to use NATO as 'an additional venue to raise international, particularly European, awareness of the Asian security situation'¹⁶ failed to gather momentum since the allies internally were at odds about promoting a 'global alliance of democracies.' Still, Japan increased its practical cooperation with the Alliance beyond Afghanistan. Officers of the Japanese Self-Defense Force (JSDF) and civilian officials from the foreign

¹⁵ See Michito Tsuruoka, 'NATO and Japan', *RUSI Journal*, vol. 156, no.6 (2011), p. 64.

¹⁶ Michito Tsuruoka, 'Asia, NATO and its partners: complicated relationships?', *NATO Review*, February 2010, http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2009/Asia/nato_partner_asia/EN/index.htm



and defense ministries participated in NATO activities in the context of TCPs; including civil emergency planning, terrorism, non-proliferation and crisis management, as well as military-to-military exchanges. In 2010, both sides also concluded an agreement on classified information exchange.

Looking beyond Afghanistan, a challenge will be to marry different strategic interests between Japan and the Alliance. Japan continues to emphasize the importance of discussing the implications of a rising China for the regional and global order. While dialogue about such issues could be viewed as a good in itself, it is nevertheless not quite clear what NATO could do about it. On the other hand, NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept proposed that Russia should redeploy its nuclear weapons further east – not exactly reassuring for Japan. It seems that the political momentum behind the relationship has somewhat receded. A key for improving the relationship could thus be a greater focus on cooperation regarding emerging security challenges and in the area of defense technology. In fact, Japan's 2010 National Defense Guidelines mention the goal to increase cooperation with the Alliance (and the EU) to address global security challenges such as maritime security, cyber space, disarmament and non-proliferation.¹⁷ Another potential area of fruitful technical cooperation is missile defense where Japan and the US are jointly developing a new SM-3 (Block II-A) missile which could be deployed as part of the European missile defense architecture. However, from Japan's perspective, the focus on operational co-operation would still leave the relationships' potential underutilized in the post-Afghanistan era.

South Korea

South Korea's relationship with NATO is the most recent one of the four countries, starting in 2005 when then Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon addressed the NAC. Like the other three countries, Seoul also established a TCP with the Alliance to provide the basis for practical cooperation, predominantly focusing on peace-support operations. Similarly, Afghanistan also was the driver for increased operational cooperation. To demonstrate commitment to its US ally, in 2002 Seoul deployed medical and engineering units to lead a PRT in Parwan province. This contingent was pulled out in 2007 after the loss of two Korean church workers. In July 2010, South Korea sent a contingent of about currently about 350 staff, including infantry troops to the Parwan PRT. The country is also working together with NATO in anti-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden. Finally, South Korea signaled its interest in engaging with NATO in technical cooperation, specifically in the area of non-proliferation, terrorism and piracy.¹⁸ This is in line with its interest to incrementally broadening its footprint in the international security arena.

Still, South Korea's core security focus understandably is on North Korea and Northeast Asian strategic stability more generally. Strengthening the political dialogue with NATO would thus need to include discussions on the North Korean nuclear program as part of a more concerted international effort to influencing Pyongyang's perception. The Alliance also needs to recognize that the relationship with Seoul is still quite embryonic when compared with the other three partnerships. While South Korea could in principle envisage the negotiation of Joint Political Declaration with NATO much more groundwork would be required before the relationship could be moved to the next level. As it is slowly developing a more international strategic perspective Seoul is interested in technical cooperation related to counter-piracy, arms control and disarmament, and education and training.

The Way Ahead

Some commentators have argued that because of overlapping interests the NATO-Asia relationship will become a growing factor in international security beyond Afghanistan.¹⁹ This might well be the case. But there is no automatism that ensures such a development. In fact, despite their sometimes differing ambitions each of the four countries is fairly content with the relationship at the moment. As they redirect their strategic focus on the major strategic shifts occurring in the Asia-Pacific region, they wonder what value NATO could bring to the table in addressing these challenges. Certainly, they are interested in continuing their pragmatic, bilateral cooperation with the Alliance as a means to interact with NATO joint operations beyond the Asia-Pacific theatre. For example, their selective participation in anti-piracy and peace support operations in Africa and the Middle East will warrant ongoing practical cooperation. Still, for these nations it is not self-evident that the mantra of 'global security challenges require a global response' will automatically provide the blueprint for continued, substantive interaction.

Nevertheless, there are a couple of steps to move the relationships forward towards implementing some of the objectives of the above mentioned 'partnership package':

- **Developing a vision for NATO's engagement with Asia.** If NATO's goal is indeed to develop closer, more effective ties with partners from the Asia-Pacific region beyond Afghanistan it will need to develop an internal consensus on the relevance of Asian security dynamics for the Euro-Atlantic region and carefully develop a stronger profile in Asian security.
- **Recognition of differentiation.** NATO should continue to emphasize the bilateral nature of the individual

¹⁷ *National Defense Program Guidelines* FY 2011 and beyond, approved by the Security Council and the Cabinet on December 17, 2010, http://www.mod.go.jp/e/d_act/d_policy/pdf/guidelinesFY2011.pdf

¹⁸ See Jose Luis Arnaut (Rapporteur), *NATO and the Contact Countries*, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2010, <http://www.nato-pa.int/default.asp?SHORTCUT=2077>

¹⁹ See Carlo Masala, 'NATO and Asia', *Panorama*, no. 2, 2010, Konrad-Adenauer Foundation, p. 34.



relationships. This will accommodate the different levels of commitment that these countries have displayed. For a strongly committed contact country such as Australia, for example, the Alliance should continue to seek arrangements that are commensurate with Canberra's engagement and capacities. Such advanced partners could also be invited to closely participate in NATO's emerging discussions about 'smart defence' to identify possible areas for military technological cooperation. As the recent Secretary General's Annual Report 2011 makes clear, 'smart defence' will be key to maintaining allies' capability to operate effectively in times of declining defense budgets. But the idea is not yet linked with cooperative security and global partnerships.²⁰ Bringing key global partners such as Australia into this picture might provide additional avenues for cooperation. Another possibility might be to offer countries such as Australia better access to NATO bodies concerned with operational lessons learned.

• **Deepening political security dialogue about Asia-Pacific security.** The Alliance could initiate a gradual approach towards more regular and structured dialogue with these countries on Asia-Pacific security affairs. Obviously, the emerging security challenges would be the place to start given the overlap of interests in these areas. Counter-piracy, cyber defense, energy security, and humanitarian disaster relief are areas of concern to both NATO and Asia-Pacific countries. Joint Political Declarations with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea could state the intention to include regular discussions on Asia-Pacific security issues and could identify practical steps of cooperation to address emerging security challenges. Moreover, by holding regular conferences and workshops on these topics the Alliance could simultaneously build closer ties with China, India, Singapore, Mongolia and Indonesia. India and China have already participated in discussions on counter-piracy and cyber defense at NATO headquarters. Other promising areas could involve technical cooperation on non-lethal weapons.²¹ At the same time, however, allies need to be realistic about the degree to which discussions on emerging security challenges can nurture future cooperation with Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. Not only do some of these nations have different approaches and sensitivities regarding topics such as cyber defense. Moreover, as the analysis has made clear, the core strategic focus of all four countries is on traditional security threats in the Asia-Pacific region, i.e. the rise of China and the potential for great power conflict, or the North Korean nuclear challenge.

• **Establishing ties with Asian multilateral security institutions.** In line with the new Strategic Concept, the Alliance could also pursue a gradual approach in fostering ties with Asian security institutions. One candidate could be the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) which was inaugurated in 2010 and which includes the ASEAN members plus Australia, China, India, Japan, South Korea, New Zealand, Russia and the United States. This forum thus comprises all the key players in the region and will most likely focus on non-traditional security challenges. Political dialogue on emerging security challenges such as piracy, cyber defense, and energy security between NATO and this grouping could lead to enhanced awareness and mutually beneficial cooperation in meeting these challenges.²² Given the sensitive nature of Asian multilateral security dynamics, such a relationship would require careful groundwork. One idea could be to propose a '1.5 Track Dialogue' between NATO and ADMM-Plus, similar to the model of the 'ASEAN Regional Forum's Experts and Eminent Persons Group' which works towards promoting consensus building and problem solving. In this context, NATO could also offer its immense experience in organizing multilateral security mechanisms and processes such as in the areas of conventional arms control and munitions safety. The annual 'Shangri-La Dialogue' in Singapore would be ideally suited for floating the proposal for such cooperation. NATO could therefore now lay the groundwork for sending the Secretary General or his deputy to this meeting in 2013.

• **Increase public diplomacy in Asia-Pacific partner countries.** To support this process, NATO should also enhance its public diplomacy efforts in contact countries. This should start from a recognition that very little knowledge about NATO still exists in these countries (and Asia in general), apart from a very small group of officials working on these issues in the bureaucracies, those involved in working directly with ISAF, and a tiny group of academics interested in NATO affairs. To build the knowledge base about NATO among the elite and broader public and to facilitate the dialogue about prospects and limits of practical cooperation, more efforts could be put into building up local capacity to do this, for example by strengthening the recently established NATO Contact Point Embassies in the contact countries. This would include close interaction between them and the relevant NATO, regular speaking tours by high-level NATO officials, and the development of high-profile roundtables and symposia. One might also investigate the possibility of setting up a Contact Point Embassy in Singapore as a means to recognize Singapore's

²⁰ See NATO, *The Secretary General's Annual Report 2011*, available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_publications/20120125_Annual_Report_2011_en.pdf

²¹ Robert Karniol, 'Nato looks to counter new threats', *The Straits Times*, 9 November 2011, p. A31.

²² Note, however, that this would also require the alliance to develop "coherent policies to define its role in addressing the emerging security challenges". Michael Rühle, "NATO and Emerging Security Challenges" Beyond the Deterrence Paradigm", *American Foreign Policy Interests*, vol. 33, no. 6, 2011, p. 81.



contribution and as a central hub for the Southeast Asian security debate.

In the end, as Zbigniew Brzezinski has pointed out, reaching out to Asia will require ‘time, patience and perseverance.’²³ Yet, the new imperatives of international security require the Alliance to increasingly engage with this region in the post-Afghanistan environment.

²³ Zbigniew Brzezinski, “An Agenda for NATO: Toward a Global Security Web”, *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2009, p. 19.