



# RESEARCH PAPER

Academic Research Branch - NATO Defense College, Rome - No. 20 – June 2005

## Contents

<b>Editorial</b> Carlo MASALA	1
<b>NATO and the Middle East Peace Process: Scenarios of Possibilities and Risks</b> Heba NEGM	2
<b>NDC Academic Research Activities</b>	8



### Research Paper

NATO Defense College  
Collège de Défense de l'OTAN  
Academic Research Branch  
Via Giorgio Pelosi, 1  
00143 Rome – Italie

Directeur de publication:  
Jean Dufourcq

Assistante de publication:  
Laurence Ammour

web site: [www.ndc.nato.int](http://www.ndc.nato.int)  
e-mail: [research@ndc.nato.int](mailto:research@ndc.nato.int)

Imprimerie CSC Grafica  
Via A. Meucci, 28  
00012 Guidonia - Rome - Italie

© NDC 2005 all rights reserved

## Editorial

**N**ATO's possible involvement in the Middle East peace process is currently a hotly debated issue in the corridors of NATO Headquarters in Brussels. But so far the discussions and debates about such a role for the Alliance have not acquired the status of in-depth reflections. The answer to the question as to whether NATO should be involved in the search for a stable and lasting settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and if so at what point still sound like wishful thinking. Both those who support a NATO engagement and those who oppose it have not yet developed sound arguments to back up their respective positions.

In addition to this lack of an honest debate there is a lack of public opinion awareness and/or sensitivity to the issue. While the Secretary General's idea of a NATO engagement has aroused some public interest, there has so far been virtually no debate within the so-called security community.

Stimulating such a debate is one of the aims of this research paper. Heba Negm, an Egyptian diplomat, has spent the last four months as a Mediterranean Dialogue Fellow with the Academic Research Branch at the NATO Defense College studying the possibility of NATO's involvement in the Middle East. While the long version of her study will be published as an Occasional Paper in September, we encouraged her to present the key findings of her work in one of our Research Branch Papers.

In this paper Heba Negm fills one of the gaps in the current debate by taking a closer look at its pros and cons. Having identified the different arguments that have been put forward and examined their respective validity, she then turns her attention to the concrete possibility of NATO's engagement in the region. In this chapter she fills a second gap in the current debate. Contrary to the usual approach, she does not analyze NATO's possible engagement in the region solely in terms of flying the NATO flag in the West Bank and/or Gaza Strip but looks at other possibilities of whether and when NATO could become a player in the conflict.

We sincerely hope that this Research Paper will help to put the debate as to NATO's possible engagement in the Middle East on a firm and honest academic footing and we would highly welcome more contributions on this issue. Therefore, those who believe they may have something to contribute to this important debate are urged to send us their contributions for publication in one of our Research Papers or as an Occasional Paper dedicated to NATO's role in the Middle East.

Carlo MASALA, Research Adviser

NB: The views expressed in this publication are solely those of the authors, and should not be attributed to the NATO Defense College or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation.

Les opinions exprimées dans cette publication sont celles de leurs auteurs, et ne peuvent être attribuées au Collège de Défense de l'OTAN ou à l'Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord.

# NATO and the Middle East Peace Process: Scenarios of Possibilities and Risks

Heba NEGM<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

The Arab-Israeli conflict does not only constitute a real challenge in the Middle East region but also militates against any regional security arrangement that might provide constructive solutions to this struggle. For this reason, many critics, politicians and even diplomats perceive peacemaking in the Middle East as an authentic myth or a real illusion. For them, the Arab-Israeli conflict is a long-standing conflict with endless frustrations and irresolvable complexities.

The idea of sending a NATO-led security force to the region recently began to emerge, bringing with it many pros and cons not only within academia but also among top NATO officials. This idea implies the deployment of a NATO-led force first to Gaza and then to the West Bank after the two parties had returned to the negotiating table. Previously dismissed as absurdly ambitious, the idea of a NATO-led force being involved in the Middle East peace process is gradually gaining appeal and support among NATO members.

This paper seeks to achieve *two main aims*. The *first* is to explain the major reasons behind NATO's reluctance hitherto to play a constructive role in the Middle East peace process. This will be achieved by portraying the main debate between two groups: those who support NATO's involvement in this conflict and those who are altogether against it. *Secondly*, the paper will explore the possibility of a potential role for NATO in the peace process, citing different possibilities and risks pertaining to this role and ending with a set of conclusions and recommendations regarding future prospects.

Third-party involvement is an orthodox method for conflict resolution and a conventional response to persistent struggles. Third-party intervention is

constantly seen as an essential technique, especially in hostile situations in which the belligerents are highly antagonistic and distrust each other. In general, this involvement takes different forms and comes about for a variety of reasons depending on the conflict itself and the cultural milieu surrounding it. Nevertheless, any third-party involvement in a given struggle is more complex than a simple calculation worked out in terms of determining the optimal strategy for such action in a given context of a specific conflict. In other words, if involvement is cited in a certain conflict, *how* to intervene in this conflict and what is the most appropriate method that could be chosen for this intervention? (2) If the method has been successfully selected, *who* is the most likely to intervene to achieve the desired outcome? (3) If the method and the actors are ready to become involved, *when* to intervene and what is the proper timing that should be taken into consideration for this task?

## Options and Possibilities

There is an increasingly supported argument that the Israelis want security but do not trust the Palestinians to deliver it. The Palestinians want an end to occupation but lack, at present, the capacity and credibility to run their own affairs. Similarly, every day the outside world condemns the cycle of violence and is desperate to keep the two-state solution alive. As a result, the international community is now fairly convinced that the two parties cannot solve their problems on their own and that a robust international presence is needed to break the current deadlock and to push the two parties back to the negotiating table.

<sup>1</sup> Diplomatic Attaché, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Cairo. From January to April 2005, Ms Heba Negm was a Visiting Fellow with the NDC Academic Research Branch within the framework of the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue Fellowship Programme.

In this respect, six different possibilities were suggested:

- (1) A pure NATO force.
- (2) A multi-national force under a UN mandate.
- (3) A multi-national force without a UN mandate.
- (4) A UN or NATO crisis management presence.
- (5) A tripartite international peacekeeping mission consisting of three parts:
  - (a) a basic security component led by NATO;
  - (b) a civilian peace-building mission led by the UN;
  - (c) a special monitoring presence in Jerusalem.
- (6) A UN-led trusteeship over Palestine.

### Explaining NATO's Reluctance

As mentioned before, NATO is viewed as a viable way forward for putting an end to the Middle East conflict. But can NATO really offer a viable solution? And how can NATO, through its Mediterranean Dialogue, its outreach into the Istanbul Initiative (ICI), or perhaps at a later stage in a more direct sense, be instrumental in playing a role in this region? Although many advocates have begun to emphasise that NATO can play an important role in the Middle East conflict, it is crucial to investigate NATO's reluctance to become involved in the Middle East peace process despite the presence of *six* important facts:

- The *first* one is that a framework already exists that might allow NATO to play a role in this conflict, i.e. the Med Dialogue and the Istanbul Initiative (ICI), which states in Article (2) that "*Progress towards a just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should remain a priority for the countries of the region and the international community as a whole, and for the success of the security and stability objectives of this initiative. Full and speedy implementation of the Quartet Road Map is a key element in international efforts to promote a two state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in*

*which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security. The roadmap is a vital element of international efforts to promote a comprehensive peace on all tracks, including the Syrian-Israeli and Lebanese-Israeli tracks."*

- The *second* is that NATO has a good track record in peacekeeping missions and has played an important role in conflicts which are relatively similar to the one in the Middle East, i.e. the Balkans.
- The *third* fact is that there is a firm indicator of growing support among top NATO officials, including Americans and Europeans, both at the formal and the informal level (Istanbul Initiative, Madrid ministerial conference, Munich conference, Vilnius meeting, etc). For instance, NATO defence ministers recently discussed this proposal informally. Similarly, a number of US senators and officials, including some on the National Security Council, are known to support this idea.<sup>2</sup> NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer himself has stated bluntly that "we should not shy away from starting to think about a potential role for NATO in supporting a Middle East peace agreement..... There is a logic to support a role for NATO in fostering security and stability in the Middle East."<sup>3</sup>
- The *fourth* is the fact that NATO provides a unique natural divide between Europe that tends to be more sympathetic to the Palestinians and the US which is more sympathetic to Israel.
- The *fifth* is the current unprecedented attention given by NATO to the Middle East region as a whole and the myriad of plans presented to "remodel" the region, ranging from the efforts to implement regional reforms to a Greater Middle East initiative.
- The *final* one is the inescapable fact that this conflict not only inhibits a firm regional security structure but also poses - both directly and indirectly - security threats to NATO's members.

<sup>2</sup> Everts, Steven, "The Ultimate Test Case: Can Europe and America Forge a Joint Strategy for the Wider Middle East?", *Foreign Affairs*, 80:4, July 2004, p.671.

<sup>3</sup> *Jerusalem Post*, "NATO Chief Plans Israel Visit", February 12, 2005. available at: the following address: <http://www.jpost.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=JPost/JPArticle/Printer&cid=1108178564922&p=1078113566627>

Based on the above-mentioned facts and after having conducted a number of interviews at NATO HQ in Brussels, it can be argued that, notwithstanding growing support for increased NATO involvement in the region, the Middle East peace process is not at the top of NATO's agenda at the moment, given the risks involved, the acute division over this issue and insufficient political will on the part of Alliance members to reach a consensus. Nevertheless, it is quite useful to understand the ongoing debate surrounding this issue and the arguments put forward by the two groups concerned, those who support NATO's involvement in the conflict and those who are against it.

### **First Group: Those in favour of NATO's Role in the Middle East Peace Process**

In general, this group speaks confidently about NATO's potential and capabilities. Its advocates see a *high possibility* of NATO playing a successful role in the region. They base their arguments on the following ideas:

1. With the Israeli plan for disengagement, Israel cannot unilaterally withdraw from the occupied territories, so a NATO-led peacekeeping operation could do a great job, not only in helping the Palestinians to manage security in Gaza but also in creating a climate that would encourage further substantive Israeli withdrawals.
2. Since the Americans and the Europeans have great strategic interests in the Middle East region and are now moving together towards a common definition of the new threats they face (terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, etc.), it follows that NATO, the institutional cornerstone of the transatlantic Alliance, should reorient itself to confront the threats posed by the Middle East conflict.
3. Day after day, the parties involved in the conflict are showing a more flexible stance vis-à-vis the Alliance; for instance, Palestine very recently made a formal request for NATO's assistance. Similarly, Israel has declared its willingness to join NATO, and Israel's former Ambassador to the UN has stated that his country is not against an international

presence in the region, provided it is established within the context of a comprehensive bilateral agreement. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that an Israeli and Palestinian group visited NATO HQ for the first time ever on 20 March 2005 to meet with the NATO Secretary General and participate in a briefing programme on the Alliance's current policies and objectives, as well as its Mediterranean Dialogue.

4. From this group's point of view, strengthening security cooperation with NATO will give the conflicting parties several advantages: diplomatically, strategically, militarily, technologically, and economically.

5. This group refutes the argument that NATO will not be able to perform this task with its troops deployed in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo, and maintains that capabilities will be available once there is the political will to provide them.

6. Even if NATO members are divided and currently lack the political will, they will eventually consent, as in the case of the divide over Iraq. For this group, it is just a matter of time.

7. NATO is the strongest alliance in the world at the moment. For them, it is powerful enough to provide security guarantees to facilitate a negotiated two-state solution for the parties better than any other organization.

8. This group argues that building stronger ties with Israel would speed up the resolution of the Middle East conflict and also permit better coordination in regional security matters; especially as Israel has declared its willingness to join NATO, which would pave the way for a constructive role for NATO in the conflict.

9. NATO has peacekeeping experience in Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan. So, NATO has a good track record in that respect. In addition, peacekeepers have never been the main target in the Occupied Territories.

10. If NATO members agreed to play that role, a UN mandate could easily be obtained from the UN Security Council, in accordance with Chapter 8 of Article 53.



## Second Group: Those Against any NATO Role in the Middle East Peace Process

This group views a NATO role in the peace process from a more regional perspective. For them, there is a *high risk* pertaining to any involvement in the region at the moment. They base their argument on the following premises:

1. The Middle East is a region that has historically divided the EU and the US for far longer than any other region in the world, and this group feels that it will continue to do so. Hence, it is extremely difficult for 26 countries to reach a consensus on this specific issue. And, even if they agreed to achieve one goal, they would disagree on how to achieve it.

2. The unfeasibility of NATO being able to offer sufficient security guarantees given the formidable obstacles means that it would not even be prudent to raise expectations about what might be achieved in this conflict.

3. The political sensitivities associated with the dialogue and cooperation in the region. It would even be counterproductive to NATO's main aim in the region at the moment, which is building trust and improving the Alliance's image in the region.

4. Bearing in mind Iraq, some NATO countries may be reluctant to send troops to the conflict area, as they would not want to face an angry public should the mission fail and entail many losses.

5. This group challenges the optimists by confirming the difficulty of promoting sub-regional cooperation similar to the multilateral model pioneered under the Partnership for Peace in Europe.

6. The existing frameworks that bind NATO and the parties involved will not allow smooth coordination, especially with Palestine which is an incomplete international actor. In addition, with the absence of a national army, NATO will not be able to provide adequate arrangements for Palestine.

7. The problem of NATO's credibility in the region and its distorted image as an organization under American influence. So, any international force or peacekeeping troops would become a target for terrorist attacks.

8. Peacekeeping operations would need Special Forces, vast intelligence resources, and capabilities strong enough to withstand the highly sophisticated Israeli army.

9. Any NATO deployment between Israel and Palestine is completely unpredictable at the moment, because in some respects this proposal would depend to a large extent on the outcome of some current operations, like Afghanistan and Iraq.

10. The deployment of additional forces in Israel and Palestine would necessitate enormous numbers of troops that would have to remain engaged for an indefinite period of time – troops which may not necessarily be available at the moment with the Alliance being engaged in Iraq, Afghanistan and the Balkans. In an interview with a NATO official, it was very clearly stated that some NATO countries would even oppose sending their troops to the conflict region.

11. Although NATO provides a natural divide between Europe that tends to be more sympathetic to the Palestinians and the US which is more sympathetic to Israel, this is reinforced by partisans on both sides that take an extreme view of the rights and wrongs in the conflict. Moreover, it also acts as a dilemma in the sense that, for the Israelis, NATO is too European while for the Arabs it is too American.

12. From a more practical point of view, this group maintains that the parties concerned have no direct interest in NATO's involvement in the region, especially Israel. From a purely Israeli foreign policy perspective, with its strong relations with the USA, Israel already enjoys the status of an informal ally within the organization. Moreover, building stronger ties with NATO will not contribute to Israel's deterrent capability. On the contrary, Israel would find it very unattractive to support any international presence in the Occupied Territories.

## Can NATO be a Real Partner in the Middle East Peace Process?

Henry Kissinger stated once that struggles should be treated when they are hot and ripped. And, despite the fact that the Middle East conflict is relatively ripe for resolution, from both a political and

an operational point of view, NATO cannot play a role in this conflict, at least at the present time. This statement is based on four main arguments:

1. The lack of the three conditions put forward by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer. After his meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas, Scheffer declared at a summit in Egypt that NATO is not involved in solving the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and that the conditions were not yet right for NATO to go in. Scheffer also mentioned that any involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict will depend on *three conditions*:

- A. a working peace deal between the two sides;
- B. a UN mandate;
- C. a request by the Israelis and the Palestinians for the alliance to play a role.

Scheffer further acknowledged that NATO needs to improve its image in the region before any involvement in the conflict.

2. With the unending cycles of violence in the region, the timing is inappropriate at the moment. In this context, the NATO Secretary General stated on 9 February 2005: "let the parties, let the quartet, have their negotiations. It has now started with positive developments between Prime Minister Sharon and Abu Mazen. Let's give the process its time. Let's have the responsibility where I think it should be, and that is first of all with the parties concerned, assisted by the people who want to assist."<sup>4</sup>

3. Despite NATO members' mounting interest in the region – both at the political and the strategic level – the lack of real political will among NATO's members and the difficulty of reaching a consensus on this issue – at least at the present time – are impeding NATO from becoming involved in the conflict. It also goes to show that all the talk in NATO about this

issue has not yet been elevated to the status of a concrete official stance.

4. The regional milieu does not welcome this involvement, especially in view of NATO's negative image in the region. This also reflects the fact that some regional countries which are involved in the conflict and used to be essential mediators are not in favour of this role, including Egypt. All in all, these countries envisage the high risks pertaining to this involvement.

## Conclusions and Main Recommendations

The aim of this paper has been to examine whether NATO has a role to play in the Middle East peace process and, if not, what steps and arrangements it could make to contribute to resolving the conflict. The paper concludes that there is no place for such a role, at least for the time being and for a variety of reasons. First of all and most importantly, there is the statement by the NATO Secretary General and the three specified conditions, which support the arguments set forth in this paper. Also, the timing of this involvement is inappropriate given the Alliance's negative image in the region. Moreover, both the international and the regional context do not welcome such a role at the moment. In this respect, NATO can only play a secondary role in the Middle East conflict.

However, some suggestions may be made on this subject:

### 1. *The Neutrals*

It has been mentioned that "the power of a small state as a mediator usually resides in its neutrality."<sup>5</sup> The Oslo Accords proved that a neutral country can mediate effectively between two rivalries. Thus, becoming involved in the conflict could be balanced

<sup>4</sup> Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, following the working lunch of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Foreign Ministers, NATO HQ, 9 February 2005, available at the following address: <http://www.nato.int/docu/speech/2005/s050209a.htm>

<sup>5</sup> Cited in Kleiboer, Marieke, "Understanding success and failure of international mediation," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 40:2, June 1996, p. 371.

through the assistance of some neutral countries, especially Finland and Austria, that have considerable experience in peacekeeping.

## **2. Extending Legitimacy**

It is better for NATO not to be the sole actor in any activity aimed at resolving the conflict. Also, if NATO decided to be involved by any means, this should be done under a UN mandate so as to have the required legitimacy. Also, the parties involved could be involved in any step, not only in peacekeeping but also in the peacemaking phase.

Avoiding involvement under a NATO flag; creating a parallel Arab force, that would be under the command of a high-profile Arab figure, who then would coordinate with the NATO leadership would be a viable option if the parties concerned found this option acceptable and necessary.

## **3. Transatlantic Rapprochement**

Reviving American-European relations could act as a catalyst for solving the regional conflict. Aware of the deep rift since the US involvement in Iraq, Washington has announced that one remedy might be to find common ground for the Alliance in the Middle East. This might partly explain the recent

interest in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict inside NATO circles.

## **4. Consultation with the parties involved is of high importance.**

In this regard, the regional actors are indispensable for any regional conflict. This can be attributed to the fact that neighbouring countries are usually aware of the conflict's regional context. In addition, they may coordinate more smoothly between the conflicting parties. In this regard, a tripartite negotiating system could be developed between the regional actors and other powerful or neutral states for conflict resolution.

## **5. Give Peace a Real Chance**

Finally, the Middle East conflict needs strong political will and multidimensional assistance to solve its substantial complexities. So let us give peace a chance and maybe the parties will succeed in reaching a bilateral agreement among themselves with the assistance of the Quartet. At that point, there will be no need for any militarized involvement. However, if the parties failed to reach a solution, including also on the Lebanese and the Syrian track, a multinational force under UN auspices would intervene to assist the conflicting parties.

## NDC ACADEMIC RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

### Internal activities

#### Visiting Fellows

**Dr. Leila ALIEVA**, (Azerbaijan), Director, Centre for National and International Studies, Baku.

Research Topic: "*The Nature of Post-Soviet Integration of the Caucasus and its Implications for Security*".

#### Internship

**Ms Wafaa MEBROUK**, June-July 2005.

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Mediterranean Dialogue Workshop

"The Mediterranean Dialogue, One Year after the Istanbul Summit", NDC, Rome, 17 June 2005.

### External activities

#### 14<sup>th</sup> Annual Partnership for Peace International Research Seminar

"The Role of the Wider Black Sea Area in the Future European Security Space", Constanta, Romania, 6-7 June 2005, in co-operation with the NATO Studies Center (Bucharest).

#### Jean DUFOURCQ

"Une contribution à la théorie réaliste des alliances", jury de thèse de doctorat en Sciences politiques de Mlle S. Ulrich, université de Paris-Sud XI, faculté Jean Monnet, 3 juin 2005, Paris.

#### Peter FABER

*Geopolitical Perceptions of the Wider Black Sea Area*, 14th NDC Partnership for Peace International Research Seminar, 6 June 2005, Constanta, Romania.

#### Carlo MASALA

*NATO and the Wider Black Sea Region*, Harvard Black Sea Security Program Conference, 6-8 June 2005, Chisinau, Moldova.

#### Lionel PONSARD

Participation in the ACT Seminar, "*Accelerating the Transformation Agenda*", 1-3 June, Norfolk, USA.

#### Jean DUFOURCQ and Lionel PONSARD

Meeting with prospective Russian Fellows at the NATO Military Liaison Mission, 22-24 June, Moscow, Russia.

### External Publications

**André BANDEIRA**, "A Proliferação das Ameaças" in *Revista Diplomática*, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Portugal, May 2005.

**Peter FABER and Carlo MASALA**, "Iraq - Lessons to be Learned", *Internationale Politik Transatlantic Edition*, Vol. 1, No. 2 (Summer 2005), pp. 74-77.

### NDC Publications

#### Next Issues

#### RP 21, June 2005

**Laure BORGOMANO-LOUP**, *The NATO Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative. Prospective of Evolution.*

**Carlo MASALA and Peter FABER**, *Istanbul Cooperation Initiative: The Next Steps.*

#### Volume 23

*Quelle approche pour l'OTAN dans les Balkans à la lumière des évolutions de la sécurité dans la région?*, by Gheorghe CIASCAI (PiP Fellowship Programme, Romania).

#### NDC OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 6

*Le Maghreb stratégique (première partie).*

#### NDC OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 7

*Long-Term Possibilities for NATO-Russia Naval Security Cooperation*, by Col. Igor TARASENKO (NATO-Russia Fellowship Program).

#### NDC OCCASIONAL PAPER No. 8

*NATO's Uncertain Pursuit of the Middle East Peace Process*, by Heba NEGM (NATO Mediterranean Dialogue Fellowship Program, Egypt).

#### Previous Issues

#### RP 19, May 2005

**Cees COOPS and Peter FABER**, *Kosovo. Strategic Options for the Future?*

#### RP 18, April 2005

**François GERE**, *Capacités et complémentarités entre l'OTAN et les forces de la PESD pour la gestion de crise.*  
**Carlo MASALA**, *NATO Response Force and Battle Groups: Competition or Complementarity?*

#### RP 17, April 2005

**Lionel PONSARD**, *A Road Map for Ukraine.*

#### RP 16, March 2005

**Şule NIŞANCI**, *Turkey's Role in NATO in the Post-Cold War Security Environment.*

#### RP 15, February 2005

**Peter FABER**, *Thinking about Geography: Some Competing Geopolitical Models for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*  
**Vasile Vasile SECĂREŞ**, *The New Strategic and Security Landscape of Southeast Europe: The Case for a Wider Black Sea Area.*

#### NDC OCCASIONAL PAPER No.5, March 2005

*Security Strategies: NATO, the United States and the European Union.*