

NATO's New Strategic Concept, A Strategic Opportunity For Israel

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Several years ago, we created AJCongress' NATO-Israel Program based on the changing international security dynamic in the post 9/11 world, coupled with the fact that Israel as a Western democracy should be afforded the opportunity to become a NATO partner or member regardless of its geography. We forged a unique partnership with the Atlantic Forum of Israel, then-headed by Dr. Uzi Arad, who currently serves as Prime Minister Netanyahu's national security advisor, and its executive director Prof. Tommy Steiner. We are the first and only Jewish organization to undertake a project that advocates for an upgrade in Israel's formal relationship within NATO from that of a Mediterranean Dialogue participant (currently there are 7 participants) to that of a full-fledged NATO partner.

In early July 2009, I attended the launch of NATO's new Strategic Concept held in Brussels which laid the foundation for how NATO will conduct itself over the next decade (the last one is ten years old and now dated). As the then-Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer stated, [the purpose of the new strategic concept is to] "determine how our needs and capabilities can be tailored to meet the challenges now really important for the security of our allies." This year-plus long drafting process of the new Strategic Concept provides us with the opportunity to seek a change in NATO's partnership structure that allows democracies such as Japan, Israel and Australia to become partners and perhaps even members. As NATO prosecutes a war outside of its traditional Euro-Atlantic area of operation in Afghanistan, it is only fitting that new partnership requirements for democracies outside Europe are incorporated in the new Strategic Concept.

The new Strategic Concept is overseen by a 12-person committee of experts appointed by the Secretary General and chaired by former Secretary of State Dr. Madeleine K. Albright. The United States is in a unique position to **exercise** its leadership role as the key stakeholder in NATO and vigorously advocate for changing the rules for partnerships. This will not be an easy task by any means, but it is a critically important one for NATO's future. Currently NATO's sole partnership framework, the Partnership for Peace (PfP) is governed by the Basic Document of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). Pursuant to Article 12 of the Basic Document, accession to the PfP is only open to Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) participating states. It is time to take geography out of partnerships and make the alliance truly global - an alliance of global democracies based on the ability to satisfy the conditions set forth in the Membership Action Plan of 1999.

On 1 August 2009, former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen took up his new post as NATO's Secretary General. At his first press conference two-weeks ago he stated, "It is often said that NATO is the most successful Alliance in history. That's been true for 60 years, and it's just as true today. NATO is doing more, in more places than ever before. Because it is a family of nations that can trust and rely on each other, at any time, against any threat and in any weather. It is a community of democracies defending common values: freedom, peace and security. And NATO

remains the ultimate insurance policy for almost 1 billion (actually 900 million) people in 28 countries.”

Among his top priorities are building stronger relations with the 11 participants in the Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI). This is very important because Israel, Egypt and Jordan are among the Mediterranean Dialogue countries. It is not necessary to disband the Dialogue because it serves as an important forum for bringing officials into direct contact with each other. However, I do believe that the Mediterranean Dialogue is only the starting point and must not hold its participants back should they satisfy the requirements for partnership or even membership in NATO.

I met with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak and foreign minister Gheit on August 17th and had the opportunity to discuss Secretary General Rasmussen’s priority of strengthening NATO’s relations with the MD and the ICI nations with them. I also informed them that the Secretary General will be meeting with the MD and ICI ambassadors in the upcoming weeks and asked “isn’t in our collective interest if the Secretary General used his “good offices” to advance the peace process through the existing MD and ICI NATO framework?” The President and foreign minister Gheit seemed receptive to this approach.

The events of September 11, 2001, coupled with the impending threat of a nuclear Iran put the Middle East high on everyone’s radar screen along with the issues surrounding Israel, the Palestinians and the quest for lasting peace in the region. The fact that it became a major issue for NATO provided the opportunity to anchor the Middle East’s only democracy firmly to the West and to its most important defensive military Alliance—NATO.

A February 2005 address by then-NATO Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer in Israel, the first ever by a NATO Secretary General, underscored the importance of the NATO-Middle East nexus:

“It is not difficult to see why building closer relations between us has become a strategic imperative... The interplay of Middle Eastern and transatlantic security is becoming ever more evident. New threats-such as terrorism, the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction, and transnational organized crime-affect us all and require a common response. How this region will evolve will affect Euro-Atlantic security in a fundamental way. So the Middle East and the transatlantic community are – to use a [fashionable](#) term – increasingly interdependent...”

The Secretary General’s position was officially expressed some months earlier at the 2004 Istanbul Summit where the NATO Allies agreed to transform the Mediterranean Dialogue into a bona fide partnership; yet the official status has never been elevated and the rights, duties and privileges of the Dialogue do not rise to those of the Partnership for Peace (PfP).

In a 16 July 2009, interview in Ha’aretz, Dr. Uzi Arad, Prime Minister Netanyahu’s national security advisor stated, “... [w]e must also strive to join NATO and concluded a defensive alliance with the United States...” “...Membership in NATO is a logical step and can provide us with a guarantee of mutual security and even add a layer to our deterrence if the Middle East goes nuclear... It is possible that membership in NATO or a defensive alliance with the United States will be a condition of a regional settlement.” Dr. Arad is referring to an impending nuclear Iran who maintained an 18 year clandestine nuclear program to produce a nuclear weapon. Iran is a nation whose President has vowed on more than one occasion to “wipe Israel off of the map,” a statement that the United States, her allies and the entire international community must treat credibly.

At the 2nd Annual NATO-Israel symposium in October 2007, then-leader of the opposition Netanyahu stated, "Israel is NATO-we are the West. We are the same. If Israel disappeared, radical Islam would still hate the West..." "The same way Nazism destroyed millions of lives, we have limited time before radical Islam does the same. This job falls to the nexus of a few countries-NATO countries- and Israel is a natural partner for this vital task. Giuliani and Aznar have called for membership; however, Israel wants to reserve the right to defend itself. It would be wise to take a mid-position: to aim for Israel to be a formal strategic partner by 2010, but not necessarily a member."

At the same conference then-Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni, now leader of the opposition stated, "Israel seeks a formal partnership relationship with NATO..." "It's time to upgrade the bilateral relationship between Israel and NATO, broaden the scope of cooperation and promote joint activity. While NATO realigns itself according to functional needs and global requirements to meet the challenges of our generation, it will find Israel a willing and reliable partner." It is clear that support for an upgrade in Israel's relationship within NATO transcends party politics.

A senior ministry of defense official told me that 'Israel can no longer afford to go it alone' and that it realizes that it must integrate itself in multi-lateral organizations such as NATO and the European Union to face the challenges and 21st century threats.' Israel has long come to grips with the sad reality that as a Western democracy in the Middle East it faces the same dangers posed to the West, given its values and freedoms. As former Spanish Prime Minister Aznar, the original advocate for Israeli membership in NATO put it, "Israel is the West." But for geography Israel could become a NATO partner and even a member should it so desire. The defense official further explained that the Mediterranean Dialogue provides Israel with an important forum, but that Israel can contribute to its full potential as a partner or member of NATO.

Israel was the first non-European and first Mediterranean Dialogue nation to conclude an Individual Cooperative Program (ICP) agreement with NATO. While the ICP was upgraded in December 2008, to include 6 new areas in technical and military cooperation, it is still not a partnership. Each of Israel's requests under the ICP II will be examined on a case by case basis and each request is subject to approval and even to negotiations. While the ICP II puts Israel ahead of the other Mediterranean Dialogue participants, it is not an upgrade in Israel's formal relationship within NATO and it does not address the Status of Forces agreement.

The benefits of Israel becoming a formal NATO partner include:

- * A Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) legally establishes the rules of the road that protect a nation's military forces operating outside its [home theatre](#). This agreement goes a long way in resolving the issue of posting officers and troops under the NATO flag. For example, it took nearly 2-years of negotiations for an Israeli officer to be posted at Operation Active Endeavor headquarters due to the ineligibility of Mediterranean Dialogue participants to negotiate SOFA's;

- * The right to establish an official accredited mission at NATO Headquarters. Currently, Israeli officials participating in NATO are accredited to Israel's Mission to the European Union;

- * Regular participation in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC), the consultative body in which the NATO members and partners meet regularly to consider cooperation activities and current political and security questions. The Council deliberates on important strategic issues that could affect Israel's security. Being on the Council provides Israel with a voice at the meetings, which are convened much more regularly than MD multi-lateral meetings;

* Access to all joint programs and agencies, including forging a relationship with NATO's Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA), which would inure tangible benefits to Israel, and

* Strengthening Israel's relationship within NATO and other Euro-Atlantic institutions will play a major role in ending Israel's political and diplomatic isolation. Upgrading the relationship to that of a partner strengthens the relationship between Israel and the member and partner nations.

Article 5, regarding collective security is considered the most important provision of the NATO treaty and the new Strategic Concept must address it. While it is purposefully vague, it states, "The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all... [they] will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force..." This could effectively serve as a deterrent against potential bad actors, especially Iran whose president threatens "to wipe Israel off the map."

As stated in our joint AJCongress-AFI July 2008 Congressional Hearing statement, [as a NATO partner] "Israel would no longer be compared to, or held back by, other Mediterranean countries. The advantages of a NATO-Israel formal partnership, however, extend beyond practical benefits, important as they may be. Simply put, formal partnership would normalize Israel's international status in one of the most important structures in the Western world."

We are working closely with Representative Robert Wexler (D-FL), Chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee's Europe Subcommittee and Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Ranking Member, House Foreign Affairs Committee, both strong supporters of Israel, to reintroduce a Congressional Resolution calling on NATO to upgrade its relationship with Israel from a Mediterranean Dialogue participant to a NATO partner. The Resolution also enumerates some of the MAP requirements that Israel already satisfies as a justification of the upgrade, such as civilian oversight of the military; respect for political rights and liberties of minority groups; a market-based economy; strong democracy and a willingness to contribute militarily to the alliance. The time to do it is now. While the road to partnership and membership is steep, the opportunity to weigh in on the drafting of the new Strategic Concept makes the road less steep and the odds less insurmountable. It is incumbent on all of us to participate in the process by informing our elected officials about the importance of ensuring that changes in the way partnerships are structured are addressed as global partnerships, and that all democracies-regardless of geography are eligible. The stakes are high and nothing less than the future of Israel's security is at stake.

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