

NATO, THE MEDITERRANEAN DIALOGUE, AND THE MIDDLE EAST: IT IS TIME FOR NATO TO GET SERIOUS

This article deals with efforts in seeking to upgrade Israel's relationship vis-à-vis NATO prior to and during NATO's New Strategic Concept Seminars. We, as the MMH Global Strategies, address the earlier need to take Israel from being a Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) participant and strengthen its status within the premier military alliance to serve as a strategic counter balance to an impending nuclear Iran. Additionally, the breakdown of the Israeli-Turkish relationship is touched upon. The reasons why speeches of NATO Secretary Generals and other leading officials often send mixed messages, which are continuously used against Israel in the Middle East Peace Process, are examined... The article concludes with the assertion that NATO should exhibit leadership at this critical juncture and disaggregate the Middle East Peace Process from its support for Israel, a key ally and a MD partner. Instead of perpetuating the problem by linking the ills of the Middle East to the Peace Process, NATO needs to be part of the solution.

Matthew Mark Horn*



* Matthew Mark Horn is the Principal of MMH Global Strategies, based in U.S.

I srael in NATO

In 2007, the American Jewish Congress (AJC) created its NATO-Israel program, in partnership with the Atlantic Forum of Israel (AFI), based on the changing international security dynamic in the post 9/11 world. This establishment was supported with the view that Israel, as a Western democracy and as a country sharing the values of NATO and the West, must be afforded the opportunity to become a true NATO partner – under the Partnership for Peace (PfP), or, even as a NATO member, regardless of its geographical location.

At the time, Israel was –and still is– a participant in NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue (MD).¹ Dr. Ronald D. Asmus² stated to the author the year long process that would culminate in “NATO’s New Strategic Concept” provides the opportunity and forum to articulate the importance of upgrading Israel’s status within NATO.³

The Strategic Concept was approved at the 2009 Lisbon Summit. As subject matter experts, we were invited by NATO’s Secretary General to participate in the “New Strategic Concept” seminars held throughout the world, commencing in Brussels and ending in Washington DC. During these seminars we advocated for upgrading Israel’s status within NATO. Among other sections, we were particularly interested in the section on partnerships being drafted by the Group of Experts, comprised of 12 people, appointed by the Secretary General and chaired by former United States Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright. The United States was in a unique position to exercise its leadership role as a key stakeholder and as one of the founders of NATO in 1949.

During a conversation with the incoming Secretary General, former Danish Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen, at the first Strategic Concept Seminar,

¹ “Mediterranean Dialogue,” *NATO*, www.nato.int. The MD, established in 1994, at the Istanbul Summit, is comprised of seven nations: Israel, Jordan, Egypt, Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia. It has been “...elevated to a genuine partnership through a more ambitious and expanded framework, which considerably enhanced both the MD’s political and practical dimensions,” and its key components. Politically, the MD is based on political dialogue and practical cooperation. At the Madrid Summit in 1997, the Mediterranean Cooperation Group (MCG) was established and supervised by the North Atlantic Council (NAC), until the Political and Partnerships Committee assumed responsibility for the MD in 2011.

² In 2006, the author, shortly after completing his service in the Bush ‘43 Pentagon, had discussed, over lunch, the AJC’ participation in a NATO-Israel project with his late friend and colleague Dr. Asmus. Ron, as the author calls Dr. Asmus, and Mr. Horn had been friends going back to Ron’s DAS days at State and Horn’s OSCE work in the Balkans in the 1990’s. In 2011, at the age of 53, Ron passed away. In the author’s words, Dr. Asmus “was a dear friend, mentor and a sounding board and he is greatly missed!”

³ Based on one of the many long running conversations that the author and the late Dr. Ronald D. Asmus engaged in. Dr. Asmus was the Executive Director of the Brussels-based Transatlantic Center and was the German Marshall Fund’s Director of Strategic Planning. He served as the US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State (DAS) for Europe in US President Clinton’s second term and was widely credited for bringing the former “Eastern Bloc” nations into NATO. He served as an advisor to the Group of Experts chaired by Secretary Albright tasked with preparing the draft working analysis that would become the foundation for NATO’s New Strategic Concept, approved at the Lisbon Summit. Ron was one of the earliest proponents of Israel joining NATO.

he informed us of his priorities,⁴ and we felt confident that he recognized the importance of strengthening the MD. We believed that strengthening the MD and ICI, early in his tenure, was critical given the dynamics of Middle East and the region. Secretary General Rasmussen stated that he would meet bilaterally, with the MD members as soon as possible. Those of us concerned with the optics of the meetings expressed our desire that a multilateral meeting attended by all seven MD participants would send a strong, powerful and unified message to Iran and other state sponsors of terror. During his first press conference on 1 August 2009, Rasmussen set forth his top priorities and among them was building stronger relations with the 11 participants of the MD and the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative (ICI).⁵

A Resolution calling on NATO to upgrade its relationship with Israel, was introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives during the 110th Congress.⁶ The House Committee on Foreign Affairs (HCFA) held the first-ever, joint Europe Subcommittee and Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee Hearing devoted solely to the upgrading of Israel's relationship in NATO to that of a PfP-type or even including Israel on the Membership Action Plan (MAP), in order to consider the possibility of its NATO membership.⁷ The legal and political impediments to the aforementioned were well known but, somewhere along the way, a stronger partnership, a real partnership between Israel, NATO and the MD was opted for.⁸

"The opportunity to develop the MD into a sustainable partnership equipped to face the 21st century challenges presents a unique opportunity for its members to collectively address some of the most pressing and challenging issues of our time."

Strengthening Israel's status within NATO, the greatest military alliance in history, stood as a promising step, which would potentially serve as a strategic

⁴ Author's conversation with incoming NATO Secretary General to whom he was introduced by then-Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer at the first seminar titled "NATO's new Strategic Concept: Launching the Process," held on 7 July 2009, in Brussels, Belgium.

⁵ H.E. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO Secretary General, "Press Conference," *NATO*, 1 August 2009, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/opinions_56776.htm.

⁶ "H.Res.235," U.S. Library of Congress, 110th Congress (2007-2008), <http://thomas.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/z?c110:H.+Res.+235:>

⁷ Joint Congressional Hearing, "Europe and Israel: Strengthening The Partnership," *U.S. House of Representatives Committee On Foreign Affairs*, 9 July 2008, http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing_notice.asp?id=1015.

⁸ For further analysis, also see the author's article: "NATO's New Strategic Concept: A Strategic Opportunity for Israel," *Europe's World*, 18 November 2009, www.europesworld.com.

counterbalance to an impending nuclear Iran. This was the opportunity to anchor the Middle East's only democracy firmly to the West. Former Spanish Prime Minister H.E. Jose Maria Aznar and Dr. Ronald D. Asmus wrote forcefully, eloquently, and articulately about the importance and necessity of Israel becoming part of NATO.⁹

In a 16 July 2009 interview with Ha'aretz, Dr. Uzi Arad, Prime Minister Netanyahu's national security advisor, stated the following,

“[w]e must also strive to join NATO and conclude 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, a nation that maintained an eighteen-year clandestine nuclear weapons program.¹⁰

At the Second Annual NATO-Israel Symposium held in Herzilya in October 2007, Binyamin Netanyahu, then the opposition leader, 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.”¹¹

At the time, current Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu did not know that his vision of a formal partnership would come to fruition.

Iran was making such incendiary remarks by stating that “it would wipe Israel off

⁹ H.E. Jose Maria Aznar, “Israel and NATO,” *Congress Monthly*, (September/October 2007), p.3-4; Dr. Ronald D. Asmus, “Contain Iran: Admit Israel to NATO,” *Congress Monthly*, (September/October 2007), p.5.

¹⁰ Matthew Mark Horn, “NATO’s New Strategic Concept: A Strategic Opportunity for Israel,” *Europe’s World*, 18 November 2009, www.Europesworld.com/quote/Ha'aretz.

¹¹ Matthew Mark Horn, “NATO’s New Strategic Concept, A Strategic Opportunity for Israel,” *Europe’s World*, 18 November 2009, [www.Europesworld.com/quote/PM Netanyahu's published remarks](http://www.Europesworld.com/quote/PM%20Netanyahu's%20published%20remarks).

the map [if it acquired nuclear weapons]”, and this threat was, and is, to be taken seriously. As of now, in February 2012, the international community may shortly be facing the need to come to a decision to destroy Iran’s uranium enrichment facilities in order to stop, even if it would be temporarily, its quest to develop a nuclear weapon. Iran’s rhetoric violates the UN Charter and international law and its pursuit of a nuclear weapon violates conventions and treaties in force, as well.

NATO’s New Strategic Concept

NATO’s New Strategic Concept, adopted at the 2009 Lisbon Summit, sets forth “cooperative security” as one of the key priorities for NATO, and creates the opportunity for partnerships to “move to the next generation.”¹² The previous Strategic Concept was a decade old and outdated. It did not contain new threats that NATO currently confronts, such as threats to cyber and energy security, piracy, terrorism and the proliferation of WMD to name a few. It is stated in the New Strategic Concept that “the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and Partnership for Peace are central to our vision of Europe as a whole, free and in peace. We are firmly committed to the development of friendly and cooperative relations with all countries of the Mediterranean and we intend to further develop the Mediterranean Dialogue in the coming years...”¹³

The opportunity to develop the MD into a sustainable partnership equipped to face the 21st century challenges presents a unique opportunity for its members to collectively address some of the most pressing and challenging issues of our time. Challenges include an impending nuclear Iran and possible military action to thwart its nuclear weapons program, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), proliferation of ballistic missiles and the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood and other organizations hostile to regional peace and security to name a few. The commonality between the aforementioned is that they are all centered around the Middle East.

NATO Secretary Generals are well acquainted with the problems of the Middle East. In February 2005, in an address by then-Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer in Israel –the first ever address of such by a NATO Secretary General–, the importance of the NATO-Middle East nexus was underscored:

¹² “Mediterranean Dialogue, “Political Dimension,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, www.nato.int, additionally NATO reports: 3 NATO & MD Foreign Ministers meetings in December 2004, 07 & 08 in Brussels; 2 meetings of NATO & MD Defense Ministers; 10 meetings of the Chief of Defense of NATO (CHOD-N); a 1st ever NAC+7 in 2006 & the 1st MD Policy Advisory Group meeting with all 7 MD participants in 2011.

¹³ “Strategic Concept for the Defense and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, Partnerships, Section 35,” NATO, www.nato.int.

“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 (WMD), transnational organized crime affect us all and require a common response. How this region will evolve will affect the Euro-Atlantic security in a fundamental way. So, the Middle East and the transatlantic community are – to use a fashionable term – increasingly interdependent...”¹⁴

NATO Holds a Meeting with CHODs and MD Partners

“NATO must take the necessary and critical leadership role in the facilitation of the resolution of the peace process and in quelling Iran’s nuclear ambitions.”

Mr. de Hoop Scheffer’s words are as relevant today as they were when he uttered them in Israel seven years ago. On 18-19 January 2012, the NATO Defense Chief (CHOD) held meetings in Brussels where each of the MD nation’s CHOD or senior military representative met with their counterparts from sixty-seven NATO member and partner nations. The meetings, chaired by General Bartels, Chairman of NATO’s Military Committee, were fruitful and lively: passionate discussions were held.¹⁵ The wide-ranging discussions

on a variety of topics at these meetings paved the way for the NATO Defense Ministerial held on 2-3 February 2012, during which the framework for the May 2012 NATO Summit, to be held in Chicago, Illinois, USA, was prepared.¹⁶

Attendees revealed that regardless of the passions over certain issues, when dealing on a military-to-military basis, “there was a camaraderie and shared set of values that only those serving in uniform, at their level, understand and relate to.”¹⁷

It was further reported¹⁸ that during the MD session, developments in the Middle East and the Mediterranean, where there continues to be “great strife and turmoil,” were discussed. The conversation quickly turned to issues of nuclear weapons

¹⁴ Professor Uzi Arad, Matthew Mark Horn and Tommy Steiner, Statement for the Record, Joint Congressional Hearing, “Europe and Israel: Strengthening The Partnership,” *U.S. House of Representatives Committee On Foreign Affairs*, 9 July 2008, p. 49, http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/hearing_notice.asp?id=1015.

¹⁵ The author was personally informed about the dynamic of these meetings.

¹⁶ “NATO and Partner Chiefs of Defense conclude two days of meetings at NATO,” NATO, 19 January 2012, www.nato.int.

¹⁷ Information gained through a conversation the author had with an attendee who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

¹⁸ Author continues to mention the information he personally gained from an attendee.

or WMD that could cause mass casualties. One of the participants uttered the “I” word – Iran. Concern about these weapons possibly getting into the hands of non-state actors or rogue regimes was also raised. The MD session picked up on the language of the Strategic Concept of the Lisbon Summit and the MD CHODs and the CHODs of other partner and member nations stressed the need for building upon the partnership in the region.

The Middle East and Iran, in particular, are expected to be the key agenda items during the May 2012 Chicago Summit. Additionally, there was a discussion/briefing on an interim-basis of lessons learned during Operation Unified Protector (Libya), which provoked several questions in the context of Syria.¹⁹

Turkey and Israel: Friends No More?

Turkey’s relationship with Israel has rapidly deteriorated, both on the military-to-military side where it was a robust relationship, and on the political front. It was reported in Haaretz that Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu stated that “an Israeli strike on Iran would be disastrous and should not be an option.” The foreign minister further stated that they “expect good news from the Israeli side. Unfortunately, until now, Israel has not given positive messages, not to the region, not to the U.S. administration. Settlement construction is continuing and provocative messages continue.”²⁰

During recent calls with Israeli officials, they explained that ever since the incident at Davos and the Mavi Marmara ordeal, relations with Turkey are not as they were before. However, Israel remains optimistic. During his meetings on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., senior Members of the House Foreign Affairs Committee expressed deep concern to foreign minister Davutoğlu over some of Turkey’s actions and comments directed towards Israel and the United States.²¹

Following her 9 February 2012 meeting with Foreign Minister Davutoğlu, Representative Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL), Chairwoman, United States Congress’ House Committee on Foreign Affairs (HCFA) stated, “...Also, through Turkey’s sponsorship of radical Islamist flotillas to Gaza, its ties to violent extremist groups, and its unwillingness to pressure Iran, Turkey risks facilitating more instability in an already fragile region. I urge Turkey to reconsider its policies and actions

¹⁹ “NATO and Partner Chiefs of Defense conclude two days of meetings at NATO,” *NATO*, 19 January 2012, www.nato.int.

²⁰ Natasha Mozgovaya, “Turkey FM: Israeli Military Strike on Iran would be a Disaster”, *Haaretz*, 2 February 2012, <http://www.haaretz.com/news/diplomacy-defense/turkey-fm-israeli-military-strike-on-iran-would-be-a-disaster-1.412251>.

²¹ Author’s “off the record” conversation with Members of Congress present at the meeting.

toward Israel, and to do everything it can to pressure Iran to abandon its nuclear ambitions.” Additionally, NATO Secretary General Rasmussen in a recent interview with the *New York Times* stated that he was concerned about the tensions in the Mediterranean over oil exploration and a “newly assertive Turkey and Cyprus and that both “were a matter of concern.”²²

Pursuant to the New Strategic Concept, MD participants continued to work with NATO at their own pace and on their individual programs. Furthermore, on 1 January 2012, all MD participants became eligible to participate bilaterally in more than 1,500 programs, just as the Euro-Atlantic Partners do. While there is a desire to work on a multilateral basis, there remains a considerable amount of skepticism and mistrust between many of the MD partners. On the one hand, they believe that working together on a multilateral basis may dispel some of the fears and suspicions. However, when the author expressed his frustration to MD representatives and NATO Member Permanent Representatives regarding the need for more multilateral exercises, meetings, operations he was told on more than one occasion that regardless of 18 year history of the MD, it will take generations to change certain mindsets and preconceived ideas that the MD and ICI partners have toward each other.

MD participants on the military level would like to do joint military exercises but the “unresolved issues of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process or any movement to get back on the road map looms like a dark cloud.”²³

Mixed Messages

When one searches and reads through many of the speeches of Secretaries General (SG), Deputy Secretaries General (DSG), and remarks and official statements of NATO military officials and senior civilian officials, seeking to find the commonalities and ways to address mistrust, misperception and skepticism of MD partners, he/she will find out that while the remarks, depending on where they are delivered and tailored for, contain mostly the same statements, and do not deviate from a specific message. It seems that at some juncture in the speech, the ills of the Middle East all appear to focus attention on the Peace Process.²⁴ The failure of the Peace Process to yield fruit seems to be the clarion call that Iran and others seize upon.

²² “Anders Fogh Rasmussen, NATO leader, worried by Turkey’s rifts with Cyprus and Israel,” *New York Times*, 1 October 2011.

²³ Author’s interview with a high-ranking official of a MD nation, who spoke “off the record” and insisted that any remarks are not for attribution.

²⁴ Information based on author’s conversation with a NATO Member Perm Rep who stated that everything dealing with the MD or NATO in the Middle East is “unfortunately” linked to the Peace Process and a review of speeches at www.NATO.int

Secretary General Rasmussen's speech at the 11th annual Herzliya Conference in February 2011²⁵ is quite instructive. He underlined that Israel is a major participant in the MD since its inception, spoke of shared values as a democracy, pointed out the key issues of proliferation of terrorism, nuclear weapons and WMD, and discussed the future threats set forth in the Strategic Concept. He further stated the need for common solutions and praised the MD writ large as some partners are serving in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

Secretary General Rasmussen stated:

“...The Israeli-Palestinian conflict may no longer be perceived as the only problem in the region but it still constitutes a major impediment in addressing other issues that threaten regional stability. The lack of a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict continues to undermine stability in the region... Then, there are the three “If”s: NATO is not involved in the Middle East peace process and is not seeking a role in it. The three conditions for any possible NATO involvement are well known: if a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians was reached; if both parties requested that NATO should help them with the implementation of the agreement; and if the United Nations endorsed NATO's possible involvement.”²⁶

“Of course, at the moment, those three “If”s are far from being met. The lead for the Middle East peace process rests with the parties themselves, with the Quartet and with the UN. But NATO-Allies attach the utmost importance to teaching a just, lasting, and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict...”²⁷

This sends a mixed message to those seeking to hijack the peace process and use the lack of progress as the main cause to blame the Israelis. In the words of a Middle Eastern leader “Iran does not care about the Palestinian people or their issues, but uses the lack of peace process progress to wage their jihad, build support and stir the pot.”²⁸

²⁵ H.E. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Speech delivered at the 11th Herzliya Conference,” 9 February 2011.

²⁶ H.E. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, NATO Secretary General, “Opening Remarks at Carnegie Endowment: NATO's Evolving Role in the Middle East,” speech given on 3 June 2005, in Washington, DC. Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer introduced the three Ifs in this speech. This explanation was utilized throughout his tenure and is currently used by NATO Secretary General Rasmussen and his staff.

²⁷ H.E. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, “Speech delivered to the 11th Herzliya Conference,” 9 February 2011.

²⁸ This quote is from a conversation the author had with the mentioned Middle Eastern leader.

Time for NATO to Take the Lead

Europe has equity in the outcome of the Middle East Peace Process. There are twenty-eight NATO members and twenty-seven are European. The United Nations has lost its credibility and other nations generally taking the lead are, for one reason or another, not getting any traction. NATO is comprised of 68²⁹ member and partner nations that collectively have the resources to constructively engage the parties, yet time and time again the Alliance fails to do so. NATO's inaction and lack of leadership is puzzling given Secretary General Rasmussen's further assertion at the 11th Herzliya Conference, "NATO, through its Mediterranean partnership can help the region by acting as a facilitator, building closer ties between the stakeholders and providing a venue for security dialogue..."³⁰ I do not doubt for a moment that the current or previous Secretary Generals do not wish for a Middle East like Europe "whole, free and at peace." As a former head of state Mr. Rasmussen knows full well that it takes much more than wishes, platitudes and speeches to resolve a problem. It requires action, leadership and difficult and, sometimes even painful work, but that is how the task is accomplished.

So, while there is plenty of "Dialogue" in the Mediterranean, there is a pressing need to see NATO as a military organization and through the Secretary General's 'good offices'. Endeavor to curtail an impending nuclear Iran Actively! I understand that the Secretary General does not want to get involved in the Middle East peace process and that the three Ifs are not satisfied, but if what I was told on many occasions during my nearly two dozen trips to the region over the past few years about the lack of peace process progress leading to all the ills; how do you explain the current challenges raging throughout the Middle East, North Africa and the Gulf?

While I remain cautiously optimistic about the outcome of the Arab Spring, these are challenging times: Syria is coming apart at the seams and the Assad regime is guilty of a plethora of crimes against his people; Libya, Tunisia and Egypt are in dire straits, and in Palestine Fatah has formed a unity government with Hamas, an organization deemed to be a terrorist entity, and as such undermines its own credibility, its progress and laudable economic development in the West Bank. These actions have nothing to do with the lack of peace process progress.

It is high time for NATO to disaggregate the Middle East Peace Process from public statements made by the Secretary General and other key officials, its regarding Israel, a key Western ally and a MD partner. NATO must take the necessary and critical leadership role in the facilitation of the resolution of the peace process and in quelling Iran's nuclear ambitions. In short, NATO must be part of the solution.

²⁹ 28 NATO Members, 22 Euro-Atlantic partnership Council (EAPC), 7 MD, 4 ICI, 7 Partners across the globe, "Partners" North Atlantic Treaty Organization, www.nato.int.

³⁰ H.E. Anders Fogh Rasmussen, "Speech delivered to the 11th Herzliya Conference," 9 February 2011.