NATO’s New Partnership Policy: Evidence of a Diminishing Commitment to Liberal World Order?

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Presented at the annual convention of the International Studies Association
San Diego, California, April 1-4, 2012

Draft Only
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Acting on a pledge taken at NATO’s 2010 Lisbon summit to develop “a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organizations around the globe,”\(^1\) NATO foreign ministers meeting in Berlin in April 2011 adopted a new partnership policy designed to facilitate “more efficient and flexible” partnership arrangements with a growing and increasingly diverse assortment of partners.\(^2\) Indeed, the new strategic concept NATO issued at Lisbon deems partnerships critical to the achievement of cooperative security, which it identifies as one of NATO’s three “essential core tasks.”\(^3\) Although NATO’s commitment to partnership and cooperative security dates back to the early 1990s, the policy adopted in Berlin reflects an emerging consensus within NATO that new, non-European partners are essential to addressing an increasingly global array of security challenges. It also reflects an acknowledgement that both existing and prospective NATO partnerships must become more functional. The new policy therefore was designed, not only to facilitate greater dialogue among partners across and beyond existing partnership frameworks, but also to make available to all partners greater opportunities for practical cooperation with NATO. Notably, however, the new policy also differentiates less between liberal and non-liberal partners, thereby moving NATO in the direction of what might be termed interest rather than values-based partnerships.

\(^{3}\) Active Engagement, Modern Defence.
To some degree, these changes reflect a consistent trend in the evolution of NATO’s partnership policy, dating back to the early 1990s when the Alliance first extended a hand to the states of Central and Eastern Europe, leading to the creation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and, later, Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). These earliest partnership initiatives focused primarily on the democratization of Central and Eastern Europe as a means of enlarging the liberal security order that NATO had constructed internally during the Cold War years. In the wake of September 11, however, the Alliance turned its attention to enhancing relations with existing partners in the Caucasus and Central Asia as well as developing new partnerships in the Middle East as part of a larger effort to equip NATO for increasingly global threats such as terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, illegal arms trafficking, and piracy. Even more recently, NATO has demonstrated an interest in enlarging its growing network of partnerships to include emerging powers such as China and India. In short, NATO has consistently sought to adapt the partnership concept to an evolving strategic environment in which new threats to the Allies’ security increasingly necessitate cooperation with an ever broader range of security actors.

At the same time, however, the new partnership policy reflects three discernable changes in NATO’s approach to partnership. The first is a shift away from the geographically based multilateral frameworks (e.g. EAPC, MD, ICI) around which NATO has historically organized its partnership initiatives in favor of more functional partnerships established on a bi-lateral basis. The second is a shift toward interest rather than values-based partnerships. The final trend, which to some degree follows from the second, is a movement by NATO towards less differentiation between those partners that do and those that do not share its liberal democratic values. Taken together, these trends suggest that the principal function or purpose of NATO’s
partnerships continues to evolve as well. Indeed, while NATO initially characterized partnership as a means of extending eastward the liberal order constructed among NATO members in the aftermath of World War II, it has tended to frame its post-September 11 partnership initiatives in terms of a larger effort aimed at building the capacity and consultative framework necessary to respond effectively to new global threats. The post-Cold War, post-September 11 strategic environment mandates cooperative relationships with a much more diverse assortment of state actors, including many whose values are deeply at odds with those underpinning the liberal security order to which NATO committed itself in the 1990s. NATO’s new partnership policy with its emphasis on bilateral relationships and less differentiation between partners is therefore likely to highlight and potentially exacerbate the tension that exists between NATO’s desire for a diverse assortment of global partners and its ability to sustain the partnership concept as a tool for extending liberal order. Exploring the evolution of NATO’s partnership policy therefore offers one lens through which to evaluate the strength of NATO’s strategic commitment to both the maintenance and enlargement of a liberal world order.

Interestingly, NATO’s assumption of responsibility for Operation Unified Protector in Libya in late March 2011 highlights both the virtues of the new policy, and the challenges that its implementation poses. In important respects, NATO’s intervention in Libya affirmed the direction of the Berlin agreement. Although the policy had not yet been formally adopted at the onset of the mission, NATO found that two of its existing partnership frameworks---the Mediterranean Dialogue (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia) and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) (Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates)---were extremely valuable in facilitating immediate dialogue with key regional actors. NATO’s ability to enlist the substantive cooperation of a number of regional partners also
affirmed the importance of the Berlin agreement and the flexibility that it offers for engaging partners both within and across existing frameworks.

At the same time, however, the revolutionary uprisings associated with the Arab Spring highlight one of the persistent challenges plaguing NATO’s partnership efforts; namely, that of non-liberal partners. Although NATO’s various partnership agreements affirm that the values enshrined in the preamble to the original NATO treaty (i.e., individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law) remain “fundamental” to all of NATO’s partnerships, the reality is that many of NATO’s partners are not liberal democracies. Moreover, democracy initiatives have generally played little to no role in NATO’s relationships outside of Central and Eastern Europe. In Central Asia, for example, NATO has been forced to confront the reality that the success of its ISAF mission in Afghanistan depends to a considerable extent on the cooperation of regional actors, which, despite their participation in NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) and the EAPC, remain repressive, authoritarian regimes and sometimes difficult allies. As NATO seeks to utilize the new partnership policy to engage an ever more diverse set of partners, it will inevitably be forced to wrestle further with the reality that not all prospective partners are enthusiastic supporters of the liberal security order that NATO helped to construct during the Cold War and pledged to enlarge in its aftermath. Furthermore, as NATO has enlarged the scope of its partnerships, the strategic vision underpinning them has become less and less clear. For nearly a decade now, the Alliance has faced internal disagreements over the form and function of its partnerships, which are in turn a reflection of continuing disagreements over NATO’s core function, including the question of whether the Alliance should be a regionally or globally focused institution.
Partnership as a Tool for Extending Liberal Values

As suggested above, the scope and function of NATO’s partnerships has changed enormously since the early 1990s when the Allies first invited their former Warsaw Pact adversaries to establish diplomatic liaisons to NATO and later created institutional frameworks for dialogue and military cooperation in the form of PFP and the NACC. At the time of their inception, these institutions were designed to serve largely as political instruments for encouraging the growth of liberal democratic values beyond NATO’s borders and building a new, integrated, and democratic Europe. No longer was NATO content to defend an existing security order. Rather, the Alliance vowed to transform itself into an “agent of change” focused on the construction of a new security order, grounded, not on the balance of power that prevailed in Europe during the Cold War years, but rather on the liberal democratic values articulated in the preamble to the original NATO treaty: democracy, individual liberty, and the rule of law.⁴

Reaching out to former adversaries constituted an essentially political means of encouraging these values beyond NATO’s borders and externalizing a concept of security that had previously been internal to NATO.

Although NATO had depended during the Cold War on a balance of power sustained by military force to provide for its collective defense against external threats; internally, the Allies had relied on a shared commitment to liberal democratic values and institutional processes to ensure that any differences among them were resolved through purely peaceful means. The end of the Cold War offered an opportunity to reconcile these two approaches by working to enlarge the community of states committed to NATO’s values. NATO would now move from simply defending liberal democratic values to actively promoting them beyond its traditional sphere of

collective defense. Security came to be “identified with the cultural and civilisational principles now held to be the foundation of NATO itself,” while threats were understood to derive from the “absence of such conditions.”

Although partnership began as a means of engaging the states of Central and Eastern Europe, short of permitting them full entry into the Alliance, once the enlargement decision had been taken, PfP and the EAPC also came to serve as critical instruments for assisting prospective members in implementing the liberal democratic practices expected of NATO members. In part, NATO utilized its partnership frameworks to facilitate a variety of conferences, workshops, seminars, and other educational opportunities designed to assist aspirant states with the political and defense-related reforms necessary to fulfill NATO’s membership expectations. These initiatives allowed military and civilian personnel from participating states considerable contact with their counterparts from well-developed democracies, thereby also providing them with an opportunity to experience the culture and practices associated with liberal democracy. As Alexandra Gheciu has suggested, what NATO ultimately sought was not merely new institutions and practices, but “broader cultural change,” including a new understanding of “appropriate norms of conduct in the domestic and international arenas for liberal democracy.” In short, NATO focused its partnership initiatives as much on states’ internal affairs as it did on their foreign policy practices. Given that the democratization and integration of Europe remains an unfinished process, NATO will continue to utilize its enlargement and partnership mechanisms to shape the domestic practices of those PfP/EAPC member states still seeking NATO

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The Impact of September 11

The September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States prompted a significant shift in the focus and function of NATO’s partnerships as the Alliance sought to improve its capacity to address new threats, including terrorism, weapons of mass destruction, and failed states. While NATO’s partnership efforts in Central and Eastern Europe focused on “projecting stability” eastward, largely through changes in the internal behavior of prospective member states, in the wake of September 11, the partnership concept has been utilized to project stability beyond Europe, partly by encouraging partners—both those with and those without membership aspirations—to contribute in some capacity to NATO’s military missions, including Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq. This later partnership function overlapped with the earlier integrative mission in so far as those prospective member states who had not yet acceded to the Alliance were put on notice that their membership applications would be evaluated in part based on their demonstrated ability to act as security producers and not simply as consumers of NATO assistance. From NATO’s perspective, partnership was no longer focused on what the Alliance could do for its partners. Rather, the attention shifted to those that had demonstrated a willingness to participate actively in efforts to enhance or build security beyond the Euro-Atlantic area. As former NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson observed, the nature of the new strategic environment required a shift away from the “geographic” approach to security that prevailed during the Cold War and toward a more “functional” approach.8

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7 Those states still in the NATO pipeline include the Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina. NATO also continues to maintain special partnership arrangements with both Georgia and Ukraine in the form of the NATO-Georgia and NATO-Ukraine Commissions. However, the Alliance has not yet agreed to extend invitations to either Georgia or Ukraine to join NATO’s Membership Action Plan (MAP).

**NATO Goes South and East**

Geography was not irrelevant, however, in shaping NATO’s partnership priorities in the post-September 11 era. Given the dramatically heightened strategic significance of areas to NATO’s south and east, the Alliance moved during its 2002 Prague summit to enhance both the political and practical dimensions of the MD by making available to its states (Egypt, Israel, Morocco, Mauritania, Tunisia, Jordan, and Algeria) participation in select PfP activities. Although it had been established in 1994, the MD was not initially considered to be a full-fledged partnership on a par with PfP. During its 2004 summit in Istanbul, however, the Alliance took steps to elevate the MD to a more formal partnership framework, accompanied by efforts to develop further dialogue and practical cooperation between NATO and MD members. The perceived success of this partnership also prompted NATO’s launch in 2004 of the Istanbul Cooperative Initiative (ICI), a new program aimed at developing practical bilateral security cooperation between the Alliance and the states of the Greater Middle East in such areas as defense reform, defense planning, civil-military relations, information-sharing and maritime cooperation. 9

NATO’s assumption of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan also prompted the Alliance to devote greater attention to the five Central Asian members of PfP (Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan) all of which provided various forms of assistance critical to NATO’s ability to operate effectively in Afghanistan, including military bases, transit routes, re-fueling facilities and cooperation on

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To a significant degree this cooperation was facilitated by political and military ties developed through PfP, which all of the Central Asian states had joined in 1994, with the exception of Tajikistan, which was admitted in 2002. Not surprisingly then, NATO’s 2004 summit in Istanbul began with a “special focus” on partners “in the strategically important regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia.” As part of the effort to expand and deepen cooperation with these states, NATO designated a special representative for the region and launched a Partnership Action Plan (PAP) aimed at facilitating defense reform.

NATO’s interest in encouraging domestic political reform in the Central Asian and Caucasus states, and potentially other states not yet eligible for, or not interested in participating, in NATO’s Membership Action Plan (MAP), had also prompted the adoption of a new initiative during NATO’s 2002 summit in Prague, known as the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP). Similar to the MAP, the new program offered partners the opportunity to draft national plans detailing specific reforms that were to be implemented and then receive country-specific advice and assistance from NATO on meeting these reform objectives. Although the Allies were hopeful that the Central Asian partners would embrace this opportunity, to date the only participant from the region is Kazakhstan.

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12 Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution Building (PAP-DIB), Brussels, June 7, 2004 at [http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/b040607e.htm](http://www.nato.int/docu/basictxt/b040607e.htm) [accessed 10 January 2012].

13 IPAPS are drafted every two years rather than annually as is required under MAP.

Indeed, while NATO continues to identify liberal democratic values as central to all of its partnership efforts, the reality is that its partnerships in the Middle East, the Mediterranean and Central Asia are fundamentally different from those NATO established in Central and Eastern Europe during the 1990s. The fact that these states have not aspired to NATO membership has meant that NATO’s leverage with respect to domestic reforms is considerably less than it enjoyed with Central and Eastern Europe. As suggested earlier, however, it was the need to equip NATO for the increasingly global challenges of the post-September 11 world, not an interest in democracy promotion, which provided the principal incentive for the further development of partnerships outside of Europe.

**The Impact of ISAF**

NATO’s assumption of responsibility for the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission in Afghanistan has had a particularly significant impact on the evolution of NATO’s partnership policy, as evidenced by a 2010 decision to offer both Pakistan and Afghanistan additional access to NATO’s partnership activities or “toolbox,” as MD and ICI partners had also come to enjoy. Although NATO’s relations with Pakistan are currently strained due in part to a friendly fire incident in November 2011 that resulted in the death of 24 Pakistan soldiers from a NATO airstrike, the earlier agreement did pave the way for Pakistani officers to participate in select NATO training and education courses in the areas of peace support operations, civil-military cooperation and defense against terrorism. NATO has also established a framework for long-term engagement with Afghanistan in the form of a

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15 Pakistan responded to the friendly fire incident by shutting down NATO’s supply routes to Afghanistan and removing the U.S. from an air base used to facilitate drone attacks. Anne Gearan, “Pakistan, U.S. Assume Less Cooperation in Future,” Associated Press at [http://hosted2.ap.org/APDEFAULT/3d281c11a96b4ad082fe88aa0db04305/Article_2012-01-02-US-Pakistan-US/id-3734a5528d454a6d6db26974bc2093d4ae](http://hosted2.ap.org/APDEFAULT/3d281c11a96b4ad082fe88aa0db04305/Article_2012-01-02-US-Pakistan-US/id-3734a5528d454a6d6db26974bc2093d4ae) [accessed 10 January 2012].

Declaration on an Enduring Partnership signed during the 2010 Lisbon summit, which includes a series of agreed programs and partnership activities in such areas as capacity-building and professional military education, civil emergency planning, and disaster preparedness. NATO foreign ministers endorsed an initial list of activities at their 2011 meeting in Berlin, at which time they also agreed that NATO and Afghanistan would “pursue a partnership dialogue” aimed at determining the scope and content of their co-operation beyond 2012.

The demands of NATO’s ISAF mission have also prompted the Alliance to develop closer relations with liberal democratic allies in Asia, including Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea, all of which emerged as key contributors to ISAF at a time when many NATO members were reluctant to provide the troops or other resources deemed critical to the success of the ISAF mission by NATO commanders. Although these states have not been part of any of NATO’s formal partnership structures (e.g. PfP, EAPC, MD, ICI), unlike the vast majority of NATO’s Central Asian and Middle Eastern partners, they do share NATO’s liberal democratic values. It is their operational relevance to the ISAF mission, however, that is largely responsible for NATO’s efforts to enhance its relations with these and other non-NATO, non-EU states, which have been variously labeled, “contact countries,” or “other partners across the globe,” but which are now more commonly known as “global partners.” Prompted by the expressed desire of Australia, in particular, for a greater voice in NATO’s decision-shaping and operational planning for the ISAF mission, NATO committed, beginning at its 2006 summit in Riga, to open up established partnership tools and activities to a broader range of partners and give those partners a greater voice in NATO’s operational decision-making and planning by providing new opportunities for dialogue and practical cooperation across the various partnership

frameworks as well as between NATO and those partners not participating in any formal partnership framework. NATO facilitated further practical cooperation with global partners in 2008 through the introduction of Tailored Cooperation Packages (TCPs) with Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea. Similar to the Individual Cooperation Programmes (ICPs) that had been offered to MD and ICI partners, TCPs were essentially lists of cooperation activities tailored to serve both the interests of partner states and NATO’s priorities.

Although the Allies have demonstrated varying degrees of enthusiasm for further formalizing NATO’s relations with these global partners, the 2010 Strategic Concept reflects a broad consensus within NATO that, if the Alliance is to respond effectively to global threats such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, cyber warfare, and piracy, it must facilitate consultation on global security issues through a worldwide network of security partnerships, largely consistent with Zbigniew Brzezinski’s vision of a “globe-spanning web of various cooperative-security undertakings among states with the growing power to act.”

As Michael Ruhle has put it, “the nature of today’s security challenges makes NATO’s success increasingly dependent on how well it cooperates with others.” NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen similarly asserted during the 2010 Munich Security Conference that “transforming NATO into a globally connected security institution is not a matter of choice” but a “necessity.” Significantly, Rasmussen also called for NATO to strengthen its evolving “network of

consultation and cooperation” through the establishment of a “security dialogue” with both India and China.

A New Partnership Policy

Indeed both the 2010 Strategic Concept and the new partnership policy adopted in Berlin, reflect an agreement that enhancing NATO’s partnerships with non-European allies is essential if NATO is to respond effectively to global threats, as well as an emerging consensus in favor of more functional partnerships. The Berlin agreement in fact aimed, not only to “deepen” and “broaden” NATO’s partnerships, but also to “increase their effectiveness and flexibility.” The emphasis on more effective and flexible partnership arrangements is itself an acknowledgement of the deficiencies of NATO’s existing partnership structures, especially the EAPC, which has been significantly challenged by the accession of many of its initial members to the Alliance. That process has over time led to a framework comprised of two disparate groups of partners with very different interests; namely, the non-NATO, European Union states and the far less democratic and less developed former Soviet republics. Given the absence of common interests and values, the EAPC has come to be perceived as a forum for dialogue, but only very limited practical cooperation.

As noted earlier, NATO’s ISAF mission in Afghanistan has been particularly instrumental in the evolution of the new partnership policy. However, despite their recognition of the growing importance of non-European partners in addressing global problems, the Allies have been slow to deepen their relations with global partners in meaningful ways. In particular, NATO has devoted very little attention to the potential role of partners outside the context of Afghanistan, partly due to the time, energy, and resources, demanded by the ISAF mission.

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Progress has also been stymied by disagreement within the Alliance as to the precise form or structure of NATO’s relations, dating back to the 2006 Riga summit.

In recognition of the importance of global partners to the ISAF mission, the United States and Britain had used the Riga meeting to advance a proposal calling for the creation of a new political framework designed to draw global partners—in particular, Australia, Japan, South Korea, Finland, and Sweden—closer to NATO. The proposal, however, generated significant opposition among key Allies for a variety of reasons. To some, the fact that the U.S. Ambassador to NATO at the time had identified as likely members of such a framework, two states (Sweden and Finland) that were already PfP/EAPC members suggested a unilateral effort on the part of the United States to undermine the EAPC. A number of allies were also uneasy with the prospect of deepening political ties between NATO and states well beyond the transatlantic area, fearing that such arrangements would transform the very nature of the Alliance and turn its focus away from Europe. Finally, the proposed framework represented a significant departure from NATO’s existing partnerships in so far as it sought to structure partnership on a functional rather than geographical basis.

The new partnership policy unveiled in Berlin thus represents significant progress in moving the Alliance beyond these earlier disagreements, although not all have necessarily been resolved. Indeed, both the 2010 Strategic Concept and the new partnership policy state that the “specificity” of NATO’s existing partnership frameworks will be preserved—meaning that the Alliance currently has no plans to eliminate or merge any of its existing partnership structures (e.g. PfP, EAPC, MD, ICI). At the same time, however, the new policy asserts that NATO will engage and encourage dialogue with “key global actors and other new interlocutors beyond the

Euro-Atlantic area with which NATO does not have a formal partnership arrangement.” Additionally, the policy broadens the definition of partner to include, not only states, but also international organizations such as the European Union and the United Nations, and nongovernmental organizations—all of which NATO recognizes as possessing the civilian expertise and resources so critical to the processes of stabilization and reconstruction in contexts such as Afghanistan.

In the interest of promoting dialogue with this broader range of partners, the new policy offers additional opportunities for all partners to consult on issues of common concern with NATO as well as with other partners “across and beyond existing frameworks,” utilizing what the Alliance refers to as its “28+n” format (the “28” being the 28 NATO members). Moreover, the new policy supports greater practical cooperation with partners by committing NATO to a single Partnership Cooperation Menu aimed at consolidating and harmonizing the various partnership activities (e.g. military-to-military cooperation and exercises, defense policy and planning, training and education, and civil-military relations) that comprise what the Allies refer to as NATO’s “toolbox.” As a result, partnership tools once available to members of only one of NATO’s formal partnership frameworks are now potentially available to all partners. NATO also agreed to harmonize the process through which partner states identify partnership activities in which they wish to participate, by creating a single Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme (IPCP) to replace earlier cooperation programs that were unique to individual partnership frameworks, including the Individual Partnership Programme (IPP), established for PfP/EAPC members; the Individual Cooperation Programme (ICP) extended to NATO’s MD and ICI partners; and the Tailored Cooperation Packages (TCP’s) made available to NATO’s

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27 Ibid.
28 Ibid.
global partners. Under the new policy, NATO is also considering extending to partners outside of PfP/EAPC, “on a case by case basis,” its IPAP program as well as the Planning and Review Process (PARP), either of which might offer NATO at least some opportunity to influence political and military reforms in states not aspiring to NATO membership.

Notably, the above decisions also have the potential to assist NATO in expanding and deepening dialogue with emerging powers such as China and India, utilizing the 28+n formula. Additionally, the consolidation of NATO’s partnership tools into one menu permits states that presently have no formal connection to NATO the opportunity to participate in certain unclassified partnership activities should they choose to do so. As a result, both existing and potential partners now have an opportunity to define their own relationships with NATO, based on the degree to which they show interest in participating in partnership activities or engaging in dialogue with the Alliance.

The Berlin agreement also fulfills a pledge made in Lisbon to review and update NATO’s 1999 Political Military Framework for Partner Involvement in NATO-Led Operations (PMF). The revised framework establishes a more structured role for non-NATO contributors to NATO-led missions such as Australia and New Zealand—generally referred to as “operational partners”—by enhancing and formalizing their decision-shaping and operational planning roles in NATO-led missions. It also specifies the process, both for recognizing a non-NATO state as an operational partner, and for determining which partners will be consulted and involved in “shaping” operational decisions.

Ibid. and author telephone interviews with U.S. Department of State official, February and August, 2011.
Political Military Framework for Partner Involvement in NATO-Led Operations. NATO insists that the “NAC retains the ultimate responsibility for decision-making.”
**Prospects for New Partnerships**

As suggested earlier, NATO is particularly interested in expanding and deepening dialogue with both China and India. Although neither state currently participates in any of NATO’s formal partnership structures, the Alliance has been working to develop relationships with both on the basis of common interests.\(^{32}\) With respect to India, NATO has identified a number of shared security interests and challenges, including Afghanistan, terrorism, and maritime security. The fact that India is both an emerging power and a liberal democracy also makes it a particularly attractive partner. Presently, however, the relationship remains very much underdeveloped. Indeed, while NATO would like to engage India in more functional cooperation, it also recognizes that it has yet to clear the hurdle of persuading India that NATO is no longer a traditional Cold War era alliance, but has evolved significantly since the end of the Cold War and currently shares with India a significant number of common interests and concerns.\(^ {33}\)

Although the NATO-China relationship is somewhat more developed than the NATO-India relationship, China’s interest in the informal dialogue that it maintains with NATO is also likely driven to a significant extent by its desire to learn more about the Alliance and its activities. NATO and China, however, have exchanged both high and working-level visits on a

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\(^{33}\) For a helpful assessment of the status of NATO-India relations, see “NATO-India: Prospects of a Partnership,” NATO Research Paper No. 73, February 2012.
range of security issues, including Afghanistan, North Korea, proliferation, counter-piracy operations in the Gulf of Aden, and other emerging security threats. China also maintains a military liaison to NATO in Brussels and has sent military delegations for meetings at both NATO Headquarters in Brussels and SHAPE (Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe), NATO’s military headquarters near Mons, Belgium. China’s participation in counter-piracy efforts and limited cooperation with the Alliance off the Horn of Africa and in the Gulf of Aden, where NATO maintains a counter-piracy mission known as Operation Ocean Shield, also led to its inclusion in a counter-piracy meeting held at NATO Headquarters in September 2011. This meeting marked the first of its kind in so far as it involved representatives from 47 states, including various global partners, and utilized the 28+n formula and “flexible frameworks” mechanism offered by the new partnership policy.

One of the virtues of NATO’s new partnership policy is that it has the potential to facilitate dialogue and practical cooperation with a broad and diverse assortment of partners by blurring the line or differentiating less between the states that participate in NATO’s formal partnership structures and those that are not members of these frameworks. The consolidation of NATO’s partnership tools also permits all states seeking a relationship with NATO the possibility of participating in certain unclassified partnership activities. NATO may, for example, accommodate China’s expressed interest in training opportunities at the NATO

34 Author interviews with U.S. Department of State official and NATO International Staff, February 2011.
Defense College and NATO School in Oberammergau. In so far as the new partnership policy offers new mechanisms for engaging a diverse assortment of global partners, it also constitutes significant progress in moving NATO beyond earlier intra-alliance disagreements regarding both the structure and function of its partnerships.

**The Purpose of Partnership?**

At the same time, however, the direction of NATO’s partnership policy raises legitimate questions about the Alliance’s commitment to a liberal security order and the continued utility of partnership as a tool for extending such an order. Indeed, even NATO’s engagement with global partners that do share its values has been driven more by their willingness and capacity to contribute to NATO’s military missions than it has by their allegiance to liberal democratic values. Potential partners such as China also constitute a very different sort of partner than any that NATO has engaged to date. Not only does China not share NATO’s commitment to liberal democratic values; it also has the potential, given its growing economic and military power, to undermine NATO’s efforts to maintain and extend a liberal security order.

Although some NATO members clearly worried during the 2006 Riga summit that the emphasis on global partners might constitute a first step toward a NATO with non-European or global members, the new partnership policy appears to move the Alliance in a very different direction. At the time of the Riga summit, a number of scholars/commentators, including the current U.S. Ambassador to NATO, Ivo Daalder, had explicitly called for opening NATO’s door to any liberal democratic state willing to contribute to NATO’s responsibilities and, in the words

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37 Author telephone interviews with U.S. Department of State officials, February 2011 and February 2012 and NATO International Staff member, February 2011 and January 2012.
of former Spanish Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar, “open and liberal way of life.”

Appeals for a more global NATO have also been linked to calls for an Alliance or Concert of Democracies, such as that proposed in 2004 by Daalder and James Lindsay. Indeed, John McCain, in a speech at the Hoover Institution in May 2007 spoke favorably of NATO’s promotion of “global partnerships,” and, in the same vein, urged the United States to “go further and start bringing democratic peoples and nations from around the world into one common organization, a worldwide League of Democracies.” Such an institution, McCain argued, would “form the core of an international order of peace based on freedom.”

The current direction of NATO’s partnership policy, however, suggests that the Alliance is moving in a different direction. For now, at least, NATO has opted clearly for global partners rather than global members, while at the same time broadening the scope of those partnerships to include additional non-liberal as well as liberal states. As Noetzel and Schreer have observed, “this is an inclusive, pragmatic approach to building up NATO’s nodes in an emerging global security network, potentially comprising a wide array of cooperation partners,” which is “markedly different from previous attempts to perceive the alliance as an exclusive club of like-minded global democracies.”

The question remains, however: Do recent trends with respect to NATO’s evolving partnership policy reflect a waning commitment on NATO’s part to the

38 See Ivo Daalder and James Goldgeier, “Global NATO,” *Foreign Affairs* 85, no. 5 (September/October 2006): 106, and NATO: An Alliance for Freedom: How to Transform the Atlantic Alliance to effectively Defend our Freedom and Democracies, FAES (Fundacion para el Analisis y los Estudios Sociales, 2005), 40.


promotion of liberal order? Moreover, how might the inclusion of non-liberal states in a NATO-centered network of partnerships influence NATO’s own identity, which, since the end of the Cold War, has increasingly been linked to the liberal democratic values it has, from its inception, pledged to defend?

**What Kind of Liberal Order?**

To some degree the answer to these questions depends on the operative definition of liberal order. In his recent book, *Liberal Leviathan*, John Ikenberry broadly defines liberal order “as order that is open and loosely rule-based,” while at the same time observing that its specific features can “vary widely.” Indeed, he notes that, while liberal order in the nineteenth century revolved largely around “a commitment to open trade, the gold standard, and great power accommodation,” in the twentieth century, it has been characterized by “notions of cooperative security, democratic community, collective problem solving, universal rights, and shared sovereignty.”

In many respects, the effort to construct a NATO-centered global network of partnerships can be understood as fully consistent with the notion of liberal order building broadly defined, in so far as it constitutes an effort to facilitate a rule and institution-based, non-exclusive, cooperative security order. Indeed, as noted earlier, the new partnership policy is deliberately inclusive rather than exclusive in so far as it moves the Alliance toward functional rather than geographically-based partnerships and opens up opportunities for cooperation with NATO to virtually any state seeking a closer relationship. The decision to move toward less differentiation between partners, however, might be construed as reflecting, not so much the values-based

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conception of security that NATO sought to promote during the 1990s but rather a realist orientation in which the emphasis is on shared interests rather than common values.

Importantly, the security order that NATO established internally and sought to extend eastward during the 1990s was not simply an open, rule-based system. Rather, it was an order in which liberal democratic values were absolutely integral. Indeed, the promotion of these values has been, and continues to be under the new partnership policy, a stated objective of NATO’s partner relations. The centrality of these values to NATO’s conception of security has also meant that the order to which it has aspired is one that is grounded on a commitment to individual rights and, consequently, not particularly deferential to the Westphalian principle of non-intervention. In the context of NATO enlargement, in particular, the partnership process was in fact, highly interventionist. States’ internal affairs were presumed to be as of much consequence for international peace and security---and therefore enlargement decisions---as their external affairs. Perhaps the relevant question then is this: What is the role of liberal democratic values in NATO’s cooperative security relationships and the security order to which it currently aspires?

Although Ikenberry has expressed strong optimism that even illiberal states such as China can be integrated into the existing liberal order,43 others such as Robert Kagan have questioned how non-liberal states can “enter the liberal international order without succumbing to the forces of liberalism.”44 Indeed, if NATO seeks to maintain and extend the values-based security order that it has pledged to defend since its inception, it will have to find a way to reconcile its desire to integrate a diverse assortment of actors into an expanding network of security partnerships, and its commitment to a security order in which liberal values can flourish. The fact remains

that a number of NATO’s desired partners, including both China and Russia, reject the liberal democratic values so central to the way in which NATO has conceived security since the end Cold War and the interventionist approach that follows. The reality of that opposition has been manifest recently in the willingness of both states to utilize their veto to prevent passage of United Nations Security Resolution 10534, which supported an Arab League plan aimed at facilitating the departure of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. China, in particular, appeared willing to utilize the vote as a means of registering its support for the principle of non-intervention.45

NATO’s efforts to engage a broad range of states in cooperative security relationships may very well constitute a means of integrating non-liberal states into an existing NATO-centered security order, but it is not at all clear that these relationships will actually support the principles at the heart of the order that NATO has pledged to defend. Indeed, as noted earlier, one of the principal frustrations confounding NATO’s efforts to enhance relations with non-liberal partners in Central Asia and the Middle East stems from the absence of common values, which has, in turn, hindered both a common political agenda and practical cooperation within existing partnership structures. This is precisely why the trend at NATO has been in favor of more bi-lateral relationships aimed principally at practical cooperation. The danger, however, is that the pursuit of bilateral relationships focused primarily on practical cooperation may ultimately render partnership a far less influential instrument for shaping rather than merely responding to the emerging security order.

NATO partnerships with non-liberal states are also likely to have implications for NATO’s own identity as an alliance grounded on liberal democratic values and the way in which

it is perceived by others. NATO’s relations with partners in Central Asia, for example, have led critics to charge the Alliance with shoring up repressive regimes through the provision of economic and military assistance in exchange for their cooperation in anti-terrorism efforts.\textsuperscript{46} NATO has typically responded to such criticism by arguing that all of its partnership tools are in one way or another imbued with liberal democratic values, offering the Alliance at least some opportunity to encourage political and military reform. However, as NATO’s looks to broaden the scope of its partnerships, it is likely to confront this dilemma more rather than less frequently. Efforts to engage China, in particular, are likely to present identity-related challenges. As one scholar has observed, “any attempt to sacrifice a values-based approach for closer cooperation with Beijing will face resistance from both inside NATO and from other partners.” A “semi-hostile relationship” or a refusal “to face the choice,” on the other hand, could undermine NATO as a global political actor.\textsuperscript{47} Indeed, NATO will inevitably have to grapple with the fact that China not only eschews the liberal values at the core of its identity; as a rising power, it also has far greater potential than other non-democratic partners to shape the international order in a decidedly less liberal direction.

\textit{Looking to Chicago}

That said, it is also well understood by NATO members that the Alliance has little choice but to reach out to China and other emerging or reemerging powers, whose cooperation is vital to addressing new global security challenges. As the 2010 Strategic Concept observes, NATO’s partnerships must serve a diverse set of functions, including providing support for \textsuperscript{48} See, for example, Pauline Jones Luong and Erika Weinthal, “New Friends, New Foes in Central Asia, \textit{Foreign Affairs} 81, no. 2 (March/April 2002) and Quentin Peel, “America’s Muddle in Central Asia,” \textit{Financial Times}, April 1, 2004.
military missions, and enhancing international cooperation on a broad range of global issues. If NATO is to be relevant in shaping a truly global security order, it has no choice but to engage a broad set of partners, including those that do, and well as those who do not, share its values.

Indeed, the role of partners in NATO’s Libya mission affirmed the importance of its new partnership policy, including the decision to offer operational partners a more formal role in NATO-led missions. NATO’s partner states of Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Morocco, Jordan, and Sweden all participated in the operation, prompting NATO foreign ministers, meeting in Berlin in April 2011, to acknowledge and express appreciation for the contributions of regional partners to the mission. The ICI and MD frameworks, though criticized in the past as lacking focus and producing little in the realm of practical cooperation, also proved useful to the Alliance in facilitating contributions and support from regional partners. The opportunity to meet with partners and prospective partners utilizing flexible formats also served to facilitate prompt dialogue with relevant partners and institutions. Indeed, the extent to which NATO was able to quickly establish high-level contacts with the UN, EU, Arab League, African Union, and Gulf Cooperation Council bore out the utility of engaging as partners, not only states but other international institutions as well.

At the same time, however, developments associated the Arab Spring drew attention to NATO’s associations with non-democratic regimes, lending possible support to charges that NATO has, in some parts of the world, focused on “stability” rather than democratic reform as

48 Active Engagement, Modern Defence.
51 Ibid, 7.
the foundation for security. U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, in fact, alluded to the difficulties inherent in partnering with the region’s regimes in her remarks to the Munich Security Conference in February 2011. Noting that the United States had built “strong security partnerships” across the Middle East, she also acknowledged that security and democratic development had yet to “converge in the same way.”

The conundrum of how to broaden NATO’s partners beyond Europe while at the same time remaining true to the Alliance’s own identity as an institution grounded on liberal democratic values is one that will invariably persist. As Alexander Vinnikov, who served as Central Asia adviser to the NATO Secretary General’s Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia, has observed, there remains a “tension….between the dual requirements of pragmatic present-day realpolitik” and the desire to uphold the “enduring democratic values upon which the Alliance was founded sixty years ago and which are also enshrined in its PfP.” The result “is a complex and somewhat uneasy policy, which seeks to reconcile these at times conflicting or contradictory elements.” Similarly, Bunde and Noetzel observe that “tensions between exclusive and inclusive variants of liberal order-building are here to stay.” As they put it, the West cannot afford “a stubborn focus on universal institutions as the only framework for Western security policy.” However, a Concert of Democracies will also fail in advancing a liberal order if it “does not take into account its impact on the non-democratic world.” “No alternative” therefore exists, Bunde and Noetzel conclude, “to the daunting task of trying to console exclusive and inclusive forms of liberal order-building.”

As evidenced by NATO’s recent experience in Libya, however, partnerships may also permit the Alliance to seize opportunities for advancing liberal democratic values that might not otherwise exist. As NATO foreign ministers observed during a meeting in Brussels in December 2011, the Arab Spring offers new opportunities for the Alliance to utilize its partnership mechanisms to encourage reform throughout the region. In particular, NATO officials recognize an opportunity to build on the Alliance’s experience in promoting democratic control over the militaries of Central and Eastern Europe by encouraging security and defense sector reform in the Middle East. Such an effort might even include utilizing NATO’s PARP process—as provided for in the new Partnership policy—as a tool for encouraging defense reform. NATO could also conceivably push for domestic political reform by extending to interested states the opportunity to develop an IPAP, although this idea remains at a purely hypothetical stage.

It’s also true, however, that the opportunities for promoting democratic reform in the Middle East may not be as promising as they’ve been elsewhere. As Isabelle François observes, while NATO has the potential to help African and Arab partners “build their own capacities,” the “countries of North Africa and the Gulf region…are not Central and Eastern Europe. They are not bound by a common objective to join the Alliance.” Indeed, the absence of a link between partnership and enlargement in this region means that NATO’s influence is likely to be much more limited than it was in Central and Eastern Europe. NATO diplomats, in fact, suggest that while NATO can play a role in a larger democracy promotion effort, ultimately the Alliance must focus on its own expertise in the area of defense reform. The Alliance will also have to

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55 Final Statement, Meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the Level of Foreign Ministers, December 7, 2011.
56 Ibid.
57 Author telephone interview with U.S. Department of State official, August 2011.
58 François, 11.
confront the fact that the region historically has been suspicious and mistrustful of NATO. Therefore, even in the aftermath of Libya, NATO will need to reach out beyond its MD and ICI partners if it wishes to influence regional security developments. As François puts it, “one does not win many hearts through air strikes even in the case of a successful outcome.”

The Alliance does, however, view its experience in Libya as an opportunity to reach out--on a case-by-case basis to potential new partners throughout the Mediterranean, Middle East, and Persian Gulf region, including Libya. Looking ahead to NATO’s upcoming Chicago summit, where partnership is expected to be a key agenda item, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen, in fact, expressed hope that, by the time of the summit, “a new, democratic Libya will be among [NATO’s] partners in the region.”

Hillary Clinton also observed at the Munich Security Conference in February 2012 that NATO needed to “build [its] capacity to work with partners such as Sweden, Japan, Australia, members of the Arab League, and many others” to ensure that NATO remains “the hub of a global security network with a group of willing and able nations working side-by-side with us.”

The key question that remains, however, has to do with the substance of these relationships and the ends to which they will be directed. As NATO prepares for its upcoming Chicago summit, the Allies are reportedly considering how partners might play a greater role in responding to emerging security challenges, such as piracy, energy security, and cyber threats. However, NATO has yet to elaborate on a role for those global partners that share its liberal democratic values in supporting a liberal security order. Yet, as NATO discovered in the context

59 Ibid.
60 Author telephone interviews with U.S. Department of State official and NATO International Staff, February 2012.
62 Hillary Clinton, Speech at the 48th Munich Security Conference.
63 Author interview with U.S. Department of State official, February 2012.
of its Libya mission, the political support that partners offer is often of as much value as the operational support they provide. In Afghanistan as well, global partners such as Japan have proven their utility, not in the form of troop contributions, but rather in terms of the political and economic support they have offered the Alliance. However, NATO has devoted little attention to the role of partnership with Japan and others in contexts beyond Afghanistan. Indeed, Michito Tsuruoka in calling for NATO “to build a strategy for using Japan as a multifaceted partner,” observes that NATO has yet engage in “full-fledged efforts to formulate a political strategy for using new partnerships outside the Euro-Atlantic region, including Japan, in shaping a new world order.”

NATO’s new partnership policy and the upcoming Chicago summit offer the Alliance an opportunity to consider more fully how it might utilize its partnerships with liberal democratic states outside of Europe to promote greater political dialogue and cooperation among liberal democracies, particularly at a time when the rise of new powers has the potential to challenge the existing liberal order. Calling “shared values” the “bedrock” of the transatlantic community, Clinton suggested during the 2012 Munich Security Conference that the United States and Europe needed “to vigorously promote these [values] together around the world, especially in this time of transformational political change.” Given the fact that the community that shares these values extends well beyond NATO, however, it is arguably in the Allies’ interest to engage other members of that community in defending and extending the liberal security order most conducive to both the defense of NATO territory and the values central to their way of life. As Ikenberry suggests in Liberal Leviathan, in a world in which new powers are rising and threats

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64 Ibid.
are increasingly diffuse and uncertain, the security of the United States and others will be best served by a milieu-oriented grand strategy aimed at “planting the roots of a reformed liberal international order as deeply as possible.”

The pursuit of cooperative relationships with non-liberal democratic states is not necessarily inconsistent with such an approach. Indeed, given that the vast majority of contemporary security challenges will now emanate from outside of Europe, NATO has little choice other than to engage a broad and diverse group of partners and to promote cooperative relationships where mutual interests exist. Utilizing partnership as a means of securing and strengthening the foundation for a liberal security order, however, will also require that NATO engage in some differentiation between partners.

Given the challenge of limited resources, which promises to be a focus in Chicago, NATO will also need to think seriously about how limited partnership resources should be allocated. Although the new partnership policy suggests that NATO will consider a number of factors in determining how to allocate its resources, including whether the partner aspires to join the Alliance, whether it shares NATO’s values, and whether it is “engaged in defense and larger reforms based on these values,” the list of priorities also includes considerations such as “whether the partner is of special strategic importance for NATO.” The challenge of distributing partnership resources therefore offers NATO an opportunity to identify priorities, speak with greater clarity about the purpose of partnership, and reconnect it to some larger vision of NATO’s core purpose.

Conclusion

67 Ikenberry, Liberal Leviathan, 348-352.

68 Active Engagement in Cooperative Security.
The virtue of NATO’s new partnership policy is that it moves NATO beyond the disagreements over the form and function of NATO’s partnerships that have troubled it in recent years. It also offers a number of new tools to facilitate the cooperative security efforts deemed so critical under the new strategic concept. Under the new framework, partnership is no longer limited by geography or constrained by outdated structures. NATO has in effect redefined what it means to be a partner. Although the Alliance will continue to reach out to those with whom it wishes to establish closer relations, the new policy also opens the door for potential partners to shape their relationships with NATO, by expressing a desire for dialogue or participation in the Alliance’s menu of practical cooperation activities. The policy remains vague, however, as to the larger vision that partnerships are intended to serve, in part because NATO has yet to resolve clearly whether it is still primarily a regional alliance or whether the defense of NATO territory requires a much more global orientation. Indeed, NATO has yet to articulate clearly the scope of its responsibility for liberal democratic values in a world in which those values have now been embraced well beyond the transatlantic area. Who merits inclusion in the NATO community? Should NATO devote greater attention to those partners that share the Alliance’s interest in maintaining a values-based security order?

NATO’s earliest partnership efforts aimed at extending eastward the liberal security order established in Western Europe during the Cold War. In the wake of September 11, the focus shifted to equipping NATO politically and militarily for the war on terror. More recently, NATO’s assumption of new missions beyond Europe has created new ties to like-minded allies well beyond Europe. The Alliance should not waste the opportunity to identify a role for these partners in furthering the liberal values that have always been at the core of NATO’s larger mission. Indeed, the rise of China and other non-Western powers makes it imperative that
NATO take full advantage of its relationships with liberal democratic partners to shape the emerging security order rather than merely respond to it. Although an analysis of the recent evolution of NATO’s partnership policy does not in any way suggest that the Alliance is completely abandoning partnership as a mechanism for the maintenance of liberal order, the trend toward bi-lateral relationships and less differentiation between partners, does not yet reflect any consensus in favor of a more strategic role for NATO’s non-European, liberal democratic partners in advancing a values-based, liberal security order.