



IPS
Institute for
Policy and Strategy



The Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya
Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy
Institute for Policy and Strategy

**Anchoring Israel to the Euro-Atlantic Community:
Further Upgrading and Institutionalizing
NATO-Israel Relations**

Working Paper

Submitted for the Herzliya Conference,
January 21-24, 2007

**Uzi Arad
Oded Eran
Tommy Steiner¹**

¹ Ambassador Dr. Oded Eran is the Head of Israel's Mission to the EU and represents Israel in NATO. Prof. Uzi Arad and Tommy Steiner are, respectively, Chairman and Executive Secretary of the Atlantic Forum of Israel and Director and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Policy and Strategy, IDC Herzliya.

What follows is a contribution commissioned by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) and submitted to the international think-tank conference on "Transforming NATO in a New Global Era" – a companion event to the Riga NATO Summit in November 2006. It reflects solely the personal views of the authors. The authors acknowledge with thanks the assistance of Maya Sion and Skye Montgomery in preparing this paper. They also thank the GMF for permitting the circulation of this revised version.

Major strategic developments across the transatlantic arena and the Broader Middle East coupled with concrete progress in Israel's relations with NATO and the European Union present new opportunities for anchoring Israel to the Euro-Atlantic community.² Israeli and Atlantic establishments recognize that mutual strategic interests and shared values are increasingly tying Israel to the Atlantic community. Perhaps most importantly, the European Union and NATO consider Israel a strategic partner in practice, though this has not yet been formalized.

The following considerations focus on the future of NATO-Israel relations, yet it is embedded in a broad conceptual framework that sets out a new and explicit strategic direction for Israel's foreign relations – *deepening both Israel's association with the Atlantic community and its multilateral diplomacy*. Within this framework, the importance of further expanding and institutionalizing NATO-Israel relations cannot be exaggerated.

NATO is the icon and principal multilateral institution of the Atlantic community. Israel shares with NATO the core values enshrined in the North Atlantic Treaty. More importantly, the current strategic challenges and threats facing the Alliance, namely radical Islam, global terrorism and the proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) are the very same threats Israel faces. In this unfolding challenge, Israel is a natural partner to NATO. The Western civilization and the Atlantic Community, which NATO defends, are Israel's natural habitat.

The timing of the publication of this contribution is opportune for several reasons. Perhaps most concretely, NATO and Israel have only recently institutionalized their bilateral working relations and concluded the first ever Individual Cooperation Program (ICP) offered by NATO. While technical in nature, it resembles in substance and in format equivalent programs that NATO has established with its Euro-Atlantic partners and it is the first ever beyond the Euro-Atlantic arena. Moreover, during the negotiations, NATO expected Israel to assign assets to NATO operations and to take part in the Alliance's "burden sharing". It is, therefore, safe to say that this new program establishes a *de facto* partnership between NATO and Israel. Additionally, Israel stated its desire to attain a formal partnership with NATO in the ICP.

On a broader scale, a politically and militarily transformed NATO is of major strategic importance to Israel as well. There is a growing understanding among a vast majority of NATO allies that the time has come to solidify the decision to transform the Alliance, so as to meet new strategic challenges and threats. NATO's institutional structures, strategic concept and partnerships should be adapted to the new strategic requirements. Israel only stands to benefit from a more robust strategic partner. The recent war in Lebanon and its aftermath show that the Mediterranean and the Middle East need a transformed NATO able to operate effectively and swiftly.

The NATO Riga Summit in November 2006 should have taken the necessary steps towards reforming NATO and laying the foundations for "next generation" partnerships that will assume a "global flexible approach", as suggested by a senior

² The authors borrow the term "anchoring" from Ronald D. Asmus and Bruce Jackson, reflecting the closest possible relationship between Israel and the principal Atlantic institutions. See Ronald D. Asmus and Bruce P. Jackson, "Does Israel Belong in the EU and NATO?" *Policy Review*, February and March 2005.

NATO official.³ The new partnerships should be designed on a case by case, functional and tailored basis, so as to best serve NATO's goals and missions, as well as their perspective partners' interests and capabilities. Such a reform could constitute as an important step forward for upgrading and redesigning Israel's standing within the Alliance. While NATO leaders in Riga took a small step in pursuing a reform of the partnerships' frameworks, its realization is not very likely in the foreseeable future.

Nonetheless, it does appear that there is a strategic opening for anchoring Israel to the Euro-Atlantic community, that is, to achieve a comprehensive association with both the North America and Europe across the political, economic, societal and military spectrums. Notably, the upper echelons in Israel's political and military elites are assigning growing strategic interest to NATO. However, an internal Israeli debate over the future course of relations has not yet taken place and there are serious Israeli concerns and reservations over a significant upgrade of such. The critical domestic and regional challenges notwithstanding, Israel could and should begin this debate at the highest level and seize the opportunities to enhance its standing in NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community.

What follows is an assessment based upon more than two years of targeted activities, informal meetings and seminars in Israel, Europe and North America, co-organized by the German Marshall Fund of the United States (GMF) and the Atlantic Forum of Israel (AFI). This network engaged public figures, senior officials, academics and business people. While these and other exchanges inspired its content, this paper does not necessarily reflect the positions of all the participants, nor does it represent an official policy, though perhaps it should.

Deepening Israel's Multilateral Diplomacy

For the unfamiliar observer, the notion that any country in the contemporary global and networked system should reinforce and build upon multilateralism to attain national interests is a taken-for-granted truism. In the post-Cold War era, multilateral fora have become the major venue for shaping regional and global affairs. In an age marked by enhanced interconnectedness across multiple dimensions, ranging from defense and security, through finance and trade, to health and environmental protection, governments find multilateral cooperation with other like-minded governments a most effective and efficient form of governance. Common threats are dealt with together, or in Anne-Marie Slaughter's succinct argument "*networked threats require a networked response*". The "new world order", as Slaughter argues, is the emergence of a global web of government networks.⁴ Many of these networks are based on regional institutions and governments increasingly rely on regionally-based governance. Governments cultivate regional institutions to foster political dialogue, policy coordination and exchange of information.

Israel, however, has a tradition of managing its foreign relations on a bilateral basis and has limited diplomatic and policy experience with multilateralism. Moreover,

³ A Senior NATO official speaking under "Chatham House rules" at an international workshop hosted by the Atlantic Forum of Israel in November 2005.

⁴ Anne-Marie Slaughter, "A New World Order", Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2004.

there is an ingrained belief that bilateralism ensures broader maneuverability and more freedom of action. Israel's international security relations are a useful case in point. Israel has solid long-lasting working relations with several key members of the Euro-Atlantic community, not only with the United States. However, Israel is literally absent from the multilateral strategic frameworks of this community, which through NATO and the EU, increasingly govern security and defense affairs.

Some argue that Israel is reluctant to engage its international interlocutors multilaterally because of its historical experience. At multilateral levels in comparison to bilateral ones, Israel was unable to get its message across. Consequently, it has come to view many international institutions warily. The overwhelming nominal majority that Arab and Muslim countries muster in international institutions has led Israel to generally perceive these organizations as hostile. The 2001 United Nations World Conference against Racism in Durban, South Africa, is a vivid example of how an official multilateral conference became the center stage for anti-Israeli and anti-Semitic rhetoric de-legitimizing Israel's very existence. Not surprisingly, most of Israel's engagement with multilateral organizations has been confined to countering or trying to prevent such adverse resolutions in an attempt to minimize their damage.

Israel's geopolitical isolation and limited experience with multilateralism is best reflected by its official status in the UN. It was only in 2002 that Israel was accepted to a UN regional group, the Western European and Others Group (WEOG), and only in the New York regional group system. To date, Israel remains excluded from the UN regional group systems outside New York.

The bedrock for multilateralism is regional-based multilateral institutions, but Israel is deprived from the benefits of regionalism in the Middle East for political and religious reasons. Time and again, Israel has proposed the creation of regional institutions, but was repeatedly turned down. The only regional experience Israel can account for is not really "regional". That was the short-lived Madrid-based multilateral track and the various regional forums of the Euro-Atlantic institutions: the EU-led Barcelona Process/Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue and the OSCE Mediterranean Partners for Cooperation. But, the outcomes of these frameworks fell short of their initial expectations and stated potential. For instance, prior to the conclusion of the new NATO-Israel agreement, Israel considered the NATO Mediterranean Dialogue particularly disappointing and frustrating. As it sought to develop meaningful cooperation, it was held captive to the lowest common denominator defined by other Mediterranean partners, who had lower expectations for this dialogue. This experience and similar others have driven home the conclusion that engaging in regional multilateral cooperation in the Middle East and the Mediterranean cannot produce meaningful results for Israel.⁵

As correct as this assessment may be, Israel should not, and cannot afford to, deprive itself of the potential of developing meaningful associations with multilateral frameworks. Hitherto, senior Israeli officials have invariably ignored the opportunities of multilateralism and political associations, citing the shortcomings of multilateral cooperation and governance. Undoubtedly, multilateral cooperation incurs costs, but it

⁵ Oded Eran, "Israel and Europe - Options for Future Relations", *Challenge Europe* Issue 12, September 2004.
<http://www.epc.eu/en/ce.asp?TYP=CE&LV=177&see=y&t=42&PG=CE/EN/detail&l=4&AI=388> .

can also bring substantial benefits. Working through multilateral institutions is time consuming and results in delays in obtaining consensus and in carrying out joint activities due to inherent political divisions and occasional politicking. Nonetheless, certain policy issues mandate multilateral cooperation, while in other cases multilateral action provides domestic and international legitimacy, burden sharing and access to knowledge and information. Multilateralism may indeed limit political maneuverability, but it also substantially enriches the menu of policy options available to the executive leadership. As Charles Krauthammer recently pointed out, there are situations in which “*even the most ardent unilateralist*” would opt for multilateral solutions.⁶

Israel is apparently missing out. While the multilateral course will not always be the most effective, it should be a serious and carefully considered policy option. As discussed below, there is increasing interest in engaging Israel in the multilateral frameworks of the Euro-Atlantic community. There are initial indications that senior Israeli officials are beginning to realize the opportunities of multilateralism. Speaking at a recent NATO-Israel conference, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tzipi Livni, noted the need to bolster Israel’s multilateral diplomacy. Yet to be determined a foreign policy priority, Israel needs to pursue this route far more vigorously.

Deepening Israel’s Association with the Atlantic Community

From an Israeli point of view, the need to enhance and deepen relations with the Atlantic community stems from strategic instrumental reasoning reinforced by a normative perspective of associating Israel politically with its natural habitat of like-minded countries.

First and foremost, and despite the inherent and occasional tensions and disputes, the Atlantic community has been crucial in the shaping of international politics ever since World War II. The Euro-Atlantic community brought about the peaceful and positive resolution of the Cold War and will remain the nucleus of world politics for the foreseeable future. Over the past six decades, tensions and crises befell the community and doubts and skepticism concerning its durability loomed high. Nonetheless, Euro-Atlantic relations have considerably improved over the past two years, or as Under Secretary of State Nicholas Burns said “*we stopped the war of words across the Atlantic*”.⁷ Lawrence Freedman pointed out that recent intensive exchanges between the United States and Europe may have contributed to the development of “*a shared strategy and a multilateral methodology... In different ways the Americans and the Europeans have come to appreciate the limits to what they can do by themselves.*”⁸

⁶ Charles Krauthammer, “The Perils Of Using ‘The Allies’”, *Washington Post*, August 25, 2006, p. A17

⁷ Remarks at the European Institute Gala Dinner, Washington, DC, December 15, 2005, available at <http://www.state.gov/p/us/rm/2005/58488.htm>.

⁸ Lawrence Freedman, “The Transatlantic Agenda: Vision and Counter-Vision”, *Survival*, vol. 47, no. 4, Winter 2005-6, p. 19.

Israel has a vested interest in enhancing its multilateral engagement with the Atlantic community because the Broader Middle East is the main arena affected by the Euro-American rapprochement. Moreover, the United States appears to have been encouraging a higher European profile in the region and in Arab-Israeli relations ever since the formation of the Quartet (consisting of the U.S., EU, UN and Russia) and the formulization of the Roadmap document, in which the United States accepted and underwrote the European approach to the conflict, a *modus operandi* frequently repeated since.

The principal European role in the aftermath of the 2006 war in Lebanon endorsed by the U.S. further reflects the burgeoning relationship evident in several instances of close EU-U.S. cooperation, consultation and coordination. Spearheaded by France and the United States, the international community resolved to end Syria's occupation of Lebanon and to investigate the assassination of Lebanese Prime Minister, Rafik El-Hariri. The United States has also publicly backed European efforts in the EU-3 framework to bring about the cessation of Iran's uranium enrichment program and to halt its march towards military nuclear capabilities. Together, they led the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution to transfer the matter to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The EU even succeeded to sign the United States up to a comprehensive package of trade, technological and political incentives to elicit Iranian consent to halting its nuclear program. Both parties used the harshest terms to denounce Iran's President's recent remarks on the holocaust and Israel. On the Israeli-Palestinian track and through the Quartet, the EU and the United States cooperated closely and together they forged the agreement on Raffah border crossings between Gaza and Egypt, which resulted in the deployment of European monitors.

The close EU-U.S. engagement in the region stems from the fact that the Middle East is home to the major threats facing the Euro-Atlantic community including radical Islam, terrorism, WMD proliferation and illegal immigration. These threats, aimed at Israel as well, mean that the latter is more than ever before on the Euro-Atlantic side. History, particularly the history of the Euro-Atlantic community, proves that common threats can create closer allies. The major institutions operating in the sphere of the Euro-Atlantic community, the G8, NATO and the EU are increasing their engagement in the region to confront, *inter alia*, these threats. Their actions and policies might well have substantial strategic effects on Israel. It is, therefore, in Israel's interest to be part of this process. The format and visibility of this involvement may fluctuate, as will the ability to affect decision making, yet, Israel should be at the table to share its experience, understanding and certain capabilities that could support an effective effort on behalf of the community's institutions.

The above notwithstanding, some parts, if not the major part, of the Israeli strategic and foreign policy establishment question and doubt the necessity to develop a comprehensive strategic partnership, let alone alliance, with both the United States and Europe. They would argue that Israel should retain and upgrade its special strategic relationship with the United States alone. According to them, seeking to expand this relationship to encompass the entire Atlantic community would not only be useless and highly unrealistic, it would also considerably impede Israel's strategic freedom of action.

The position espoused by the authors is that pursuit of a strategic and comprehensive partnership with both the United States and with Europe does not discount the vital strategic alliance with the former. Quite the contrary. Britain's strategic posture is a useful case in point. Most observers consider British integration in the European Community since the 1970s as a factor that has enhanced Britain's strategic value for the United States, not diminished it.⁹ Dealing with mutual misperceptions and misunderstandings between Europe and Israel could improve Israel's political and strategic relations with Europe. This in turn, could contribute directly to improving the state of transatlantic relations, as Israel and the Middle East Peace Process are one of the main sources of discord between the United States and Europe. Solid political relations between Israel and Europe will only add to what makes Israel today a strategic asset for the United States in the Middle East.

Moreover, Europe's international diplomatic and strategic profile is on the rise. While it is still difficult to consider the European Union as a major unitary political power, it has made substantial progress in enhancing its diplomatic and strategic international role, particularly in the Middle East. The United States expects European countries to increase their "burden sharing" in carrying out Euro-Atlantic missions and not to rely solely on U.S. military resources. This corresponds with the above noted European role in shaping the Euro-Atlantic approach to the Broader Middle East, through the Quartet and its Roadmap, through NATO and the enhanced Mediterranean Dialogue and the new Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) and finally, through G8 activities to promote political and economic reforms in the Broader Middle East.¹⁰

Several statements appear to reveal changing attitudes in Europe. Most recently, the NATO Deputy Secretary General noted that with the conclusion of the new agreement between Israel and NATO the relationship "*has acquired a strategic value in its own right.*"¹¹ A senior European official also pointed out that the common strategic threats facing both Europe and Israel establish a strategic partnership between them.¹² The Head of Israel's Mission to the EU recently observed an EU-Israeli rapprochement concluding that this relationship is undergoing a "quiet revolution."¹³ A senior NATO official went as far as stating that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict should not become an "alibi" for not further developing NATO-Israel relations. These statements and concrete progress may reflect the understanding that the European contingent of the Atlantic community appreciates the need to take steps to deepen political and institutional relations with Israel without explicitly assigning preconditions related to the peace process.

While the aforementioned positions are not yet consensual in Europe, Israel could take advantage of the opportunities they create by pursuing an ambitious strategy that

⁹ Gideon Rachman, "Is the Anglo-American Relationship Still Special?", in *Washington Quarterly*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2001, pp. 7-20.

¹⁰ On the role and performance of the European Union and the Israeli-Palestinian issue, particularly on relations with the United States, see Martin Ortega (ed.) "The European Union and the Crisis in the Middle East", Chaillot Papers, no. 62, Institute for Security Studies, Paris, July 2003.

¹¹ NATO Deputy Secretary General, Alessandro Minuto Rizzo, speaking at an international conference held at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, October 24, 2006, available at www.nato.int/docu/speech/2006/s061023a.htm.

¹² Ambassador Marc Otte, European Union Special Representative to the Middle East Peace Process, speaking at an international conference held at the Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya, October 26, 2004.

¹³ Oded Eran, "Israel and Europe Must Nurture Détente", *Financial Times*, December 16, 2005.

could offer it a stake in the Euro-Atlantic community, thereby providing itself the most fundamental of international political association and strategic guarantees. The recently concluded NATO-Israel ICP could provide the essential springboard for pursuing such a strategy.

The *de facto* NATO-Israeli Partnership

Upon reflection, though, the track record of the past twelve to eighteen months in NATO-Israel relations presents mixed results. The obvious highlight is the conclusion of the new NATO-Israel ICP. Also, the practical profile of the relationship has been enhanced substantially with unprecedented Israeli participation in NATO activities. Nonetheless, both the institutional framework and the possibilities for practical cooperation fall short of Israeli expectations, and arguably, also of that of some NATO allies.

Cooperation between NATO and Israel first developed within the framework of the multilateral Mediterranean Dialogue (Israel, Egypt, Jordan, Morocco, Tunisia, Mauritania and Algeria). Initially, marginalized and limited to official-level meetings, only in 2002 did bilateral meetings between NATO and the individual countries take place. However, actual cooperation was limited mostly to the multilateral framework. But, while Israel considered itself a natural partner for NATO, it was nonetheless restricted to the joint agenda of the other Mediterranean Dialogue countries, some of which from the outset were not interested in the enhancement of NATO's presence in the area. The ICP is meant to reduce the current restrictions imposed by the multilateral framework, while preserving it.

The turning point in NATO's attitude to the region and the Mediterranean Dialogue can be traced back to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. NATO's Secretary General, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, stated repeatedly that most of the threats currently facing the Alliance originate from the Broader Middle East. Therefore, the level of cooperation within the Mediterranean Dialogue should be expanded. This stance was officially expressed at the 2004 Istanbul Summit. In the Istanbul Communiqué, NATO leaders announced their desire to transform the Mediterranean Dialogue into a "genuine partnership". The official status of the Mediterranean Dialogue, however, remained a framework for cooperation.

The idea of utilizing the Istanbul Communiqué to establish bilateral relations between Israel and NATO came during a visit of a delegation of the AFI and GMF to NATO Headquarters in September 2004 (shortly after the Istanbul Summit). At a meeting with NATO's Secretary General, a senior NATO official encouraged those present to ensure that Israel be the first country to submit an individual cooperation program. Following this meeting, Israel submitted a formal proposal for a cooperation program in January 2005 and negotiations between both parties started later that year.

Israel and NATO concluded the first ever ICP in October 2006. Israel is the first country outside of the Euro-Atlantic arena, and the first among NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue countries, to conclude such an agreement. Yet, at the formal meeting marking the new agreement, the Ambassador representing Israel in NATO revealed that the final outcome fell short of Israel's expectations noting that "*Israel*

and NATO are natural partners and this agreement formalizes at least some of this partnership. The potential is vast and we have not concealed our desire for an upgrade that will enable a more robust realization of this potential.”¹⁴

In the ICP, Israel stated that building on the experience to be gained from this new mechanism, it will examine, along with NATO, the possibility for establishing a partnership between Israel and NATO. An official partnership would constitute a formal upgrading of Israel's stature within the organization, equal to that of the European non-member partners of NATO. The wording of the statement was a compromise, reflecting the reluctance of some NATO allies towards a more concrete declaration by Israel stating that it seeks a full and official partnership. Israel also announced that one of its objectives is to contribute to NATO's collective effort in confronting the threats facing both parties including terrorism and the proliferation of non-conventional weapons and their means of delivery.

The ICP essentially institutionalizes the Israel's ability to deepen the already burgeoning bilateral cooperation it has shared with NATO since mid 2004:

- Israel participated in NATO naval maneuvers in the Black Sea and NATO infantry exercises in Ukraine (sending a platoon from the Golani Brigade);
- Shortly before finalizing the ICP, NATO and Israel reached an agreement on the modalities for Israel's contribution to NATO's naval counter-terrorism operation in the Mediterranean Sea (Operation Active Endeavour), stationing an Israeli naval officer at the Operation's headquarters in Naples, Italy;
- Israel previously announced its intentions to place its Home Front Command Search and Rescue unit at NATO's disposal for civilian emergencies;
- Israel joined the NATO cataloguing system. The agreement, signed in June 2006, grants Israel associate membership in the system and full membership within three years. The NATO cataloguing (codification) system is designed to create a uniform framework of inventory and equipment for all NATO allies, facilitating interoperability.

The ICP is broad-ranging and creates a framework that allows for expansion of the scope of current cooperation. Detailing twenty-seven areas of cooperation, the ICP includes response to terrorism, intelligence sharing, armament cooperation and management, nuclear, biological and chemical defense, military doctrine and exercises, civilian emergency plans and disaster preparedness.

The ICP presents an unprecedented opportunity to enhance practical and mutually beneficial cooperation between Israel and NATO. Israel should make the most of this opening. Notwithstanding, Israel should not view enhanced relations with NATO as an end in itself. This would reflect the somewhat prevalent and conservative approach in Israel and elsewhere that focuses mainly on practical military benefits, important as they may be. NATO, however, is not just a military alliance. It is also a multilateral political institution, where negotiation, clubbing and networking are increasingly more important. Moreover, supported by the United States and Germany, NATO's Secretary General is leading the effort to resurrect NATO as the main political forum of the Atlantic community, focusing to a large extent on the Broader Middle East.

¹⁴ Cited in Itamar Eichner, "Join Golani and Fly to Europe," *Yediot Ahronot*, October 20, 2006, p.6 (in Hebrew).

Israel should, therefore, consider and approach enhancing relations with NATO as a building-block in forging a new multilateral relationship between Israel and a transformed Euro-Atlantic community. The ICP may also enhance Israel's capacity to influence NATO's agenda.

The Road Ahead: Formal Partnership with a Transformed NATO

Enhancing Israel's partnership with NATO within the Mediterranean Dialogue and ICP frameworks is necessary, but not sufficient for anchoring Israel to the Euro-Atlantic community. In other words, Israel should aspire to a partnership *de jure*, assuming that NATO achieves its stated objective of transforming the Alliance politically and militarily. Israel has a vital interest in NATO insofar as it remains relevant and effective as an alliance.

Israel has already stated publicly its desire to pursue a formal partnership. In a ground-breaking public statement, Vice Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs, Tzipi Livni, announced that Israel seeks to be included in NATO's official partnership framework, the Partnership for Peace (PfP).

While it is commonly known that Israel is currently ineligible to become a NATO member and accede to the North Atlantic Treaty, it is maybe less well known that Israel is not even eligible to join NATO's official partnership framework.¹⁵ More importantly, NATO is still officially governed by the 1999 Strategic Concept that confines it to the seemingly less relevant geographic frontiers of the European continent alone. These are useful illustrations of the current strategic and institutional out-datedness of NATO frameworks. Arguably, the Alliance's inability to sustain and deliver on transformation does not enhance the case for closer relations between Israel and NATO.

It appears that to tackle the challenges of the 21st Century and the principal threats posed by radical Islam, terrorism and the proliferation of WMD, NATO must undergo a conceptual transformation. This in itself would redefine the geographical parameters of the Alliance, placing it on functional-strategic and value-based foundations. NATO has moved in this direction by adopting at Riga Summit the "Comprehensive Political Guidance" document detailing priorities capability issues, planning disciplines and intelligence for the next 10-15 years. Focusing on the need to further develop NATO's expeditionary forces, it falls short of providing a new Strategic Concept and operational agenda that ought to enable much greater efficiency in marshalling capacities, capabilities, and resources and in adjusting those to specific objectives and needs on a global basis rather than on a narrow continental basis. When such a conceptual rearrangement takes place, the concept of membership and partnership will also take a new shape and meaning, as will the idea of interoperability. There might be additional added value in such a transformation because it could eliminate, at least partially, the conflict with the EU's ESDP.

¹⁵Article 10 of the North Atlantic Treaty invites "any other European State in a position to further the principles of this Treaty and to contribute to the security of the North Atlantic area to accede to this Treaty". According to Article 12 of the Basic Document of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council that governs the PfP, it is only open to accession to OSCE Participating States. Israel is an OSCE Partner for Cooperation.

This reasoning also forms the basis of the platform put forward by former Spanish Prime Minister, José María Aznar, in a report entitled “NATO: An Alliance for Freedom”. In his treatise, President Aznar advocated that NATO should become the security provider for the entire Western world and should promote democracy and freedom. As part of a total reconfiguration of the Alliance to tackle current strategic threats, President Aznar suggested to invite Israel, Australia and Japan to join. Noteworthy, a senior U.S. official also recently argued that NATO should become the “core of the Global Democratic Security Community.”¹⁶

Despite its somewhat over-ambitious nature, President Aznar’s report has set the tone of the debate over the next step in pursuing NATO’s transformation. In this respect, one of the main issues on the agenda is that NATO must tackle the framework for its partnerships. Most NATO allies (at the very least), and surely the NATO international staff, recognize the problematic nature of NATO’s current partnerships. The out-dated geographical underpinning that lumps together advanced democratic Western nations with developing Central Asian countries in the PfP is no less odd than the grouping of Israel with a non-Mediterranean African country in the Mediterranean Dialogue or than affording the same status to both Australia and China.

NATO partnerships should be designed on a case by case, functional, flexible and tailored basis, so as to best serve both NATO’s goals and missions and the partners’ interests and capabilities. A new institutional and strategic conceptual framework, will allow NATO partners to contribute much more than they are asked or willing to do at present. This was the conceptual underpinning of the ambitious agenda of the U.S.-UK “Food for Thought” on “Global Partnerships” that also seeks to bring Australia, Japan and New Zealand closer to the Alliance. While the U.S.-UK agenda was not achieved in Riga, US officials were apparently pleased with the attained minimal progress on this front – namely offering more flexibility and looking into the possibility of opening more programs for the MD countries.

Nonetheless, it is rather clear that in the next few years NATO will have to remake the framework for its partnerships. Within such a new framework Israel, along with other NATO partners, would be far more interested in nurturing partnerships with the Alliance. The recognition that Israel and NATO are “natural allies” can fully materialize when both sides not only acknowledge, but are also willing to invest in moving this relationship ahead, something both have yet to do. Such a relationship would necessitate a willingness on NATO’s part to formalize Israel’s status. This is not just a ceremonial decision as it would also require the Allies’ willingness to associate Israel to activities and frameworks, hitherto, closed to it.

Yet the burden for further development and formalization of Israel’s relations with NATO rests equally upon Israel showing willingness and putting forward concrete commitments to invest and share military, human, technical and financial resources. Israel could have been more forthcoming in its commitments to consign assets to NATO within the ICP. As suggested by the NATO Deputy Secretary General, Israel could assist in NATO’s operations by providing technical teams to support

¹⁶ Daniel Fried, “European and Eurasian Affairs”, *E Journal USA*, available at <http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itps/0906/ijpe/europe.htm>.

reconstruction efforts. Israel might also be able to provide on occasion strategic airlifting, one of the assets most lacking from NATO's current capabilities.

The present political circumstances are sufficient to sustain such a relationship, which would be mutually advantageous, considering the common interests, albeit without bringing up more profound issues, the kind which full membership might raise.

Israel's Road to NATO Membership

In their article entitled "Does Israel Belong in the EU and NATO?" cited above, Ronald D. Asmus and Bruce Jackson review the pros and cons of Israel's membership in NATO.¹⁷ The position advocated herein, clearly an Israeli perspective, is that taking into account various considerations, three principles should be met to facilitate Israel's admission to NATO.

First, Israel should preserve and enhance its bilateral strategic alliance with the U.S. – irrespective and independent of any relationship with NATO. While NATO membership will *de jure* enhance Israel's official ally status from non-NATO Ally to NATO Ally, this would manifest that NATO membership does not replace, but rather complements, the special U.S.-Israel relationship. For that matter, opening up Israel's strategic relations to the multilateral scene should not create, nor lead to, any adverse effects on Israel's important bilateral relations with European NATO members.

Second, NATO membership does not necessarily connote a loss of independent strategic freedom of action. Multilateral organizations and alliances limit certain capabilities and options, but do not eliminate them. Israel is able to defend itself and capable of maintaining a deterrent posture, though NATO membership may indeed enhance that posture. Therefore, Israel as a self-reliant ally is a valuable strategic asset rather than a liability. Moreover, the strategic understandings between the United States and Israel, which were formulated between then-Prime Minister Netanyahu and President Clinton and subsequently ratified by their successors, including President Bush's letter of commitment from April 2004, successfully anchor Israel's right to defend itself on its own.¹⁸

Third, NATO membership will be the institutional-political foundation of Israel's alignment with the Euro-Atlantic community, and reflect a substantial strategic and diplomatic improvement in its relations with the European Union.

The foremost example, a country that incorporates all three principles in its international positioning and strategic posture, is the United Kingdom. It maintains the closest possible strategic relationship with the United States. They share exclusive strategic relations and intelligence exchanges administered by official agreements.¹⁹ These unique and exclusive relations have weathered the United Kingdom's integration into the European Union and participation in the evolving Common

¹⁷ Ronald D. Asmus and Bruce Jackson, *op cit*.

¹⁸ Uzi Arad, "Is Israel Headed for NATO?" *YnetNews*, February 1, 2006, available at http://www.herzliyaconference.org/Uploads/2151nato_uzi.pdf.

¹⁹ Those include the 1948 UK-USA Agreement and the secret 1958 US-UK Mutual Defense Agreement.

Foreign and Security Policy, while reserving independent capabilities. As noted above, conventional wisdom has it that British integration into the European Union has increased its strategic value for the United States. Moreover, these three principles are the main sources of Britain's contemporary international power and role.

At this stage however, the majority of Alliance members will be reluctant, if not object, to offering membership to a country that is still at war. The discussions within the framework of the GMF-AFI network have indicated two possible scenarios that could "open NATO's door" to Israel.²⁰ The first scenario, as part of a peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians, NATO membership would be offered to Israel as a security assurance. This scenario is regrettably beyond reach at this point in time. Nonetheless, most Europeans engaged in the GMF-AFI network have pointed out that when a comprehensive peace is reached, Israel's place in NATO and the Euro-Atlantic community should be at the very least seriously considered.

The second, and currently more relevant scenario, is the nuclearization of Iran. The basic idea held by some Americans and Europeans is that since the Atlantic community would most likely defend Israel from an Iranian nuclear threat, it would be only logical to ratify this commitment explicitly and unambiguously by admitting Israel to NATO.²¹ This idea was echoed by former Italian Defense Minister, Antonio Martino, who stated, "*In the light of the serious and worrying Iranian position the time has come to think of admitting Israel into NATO, so that an eventual attack against Israel would be regarded as an attack against the whole of NATO.*" In this sense, it is possible that NATO could contribute to regional stability. Should such an offer present itself, Israel would have to consider whether this would provide it with an additional layer of deterrence above and beyond its current level.²²

Conclusion

The Euro-Atlantic community is Israel's natural habitat and logical neighborhood. This is the fundamental premise for the arguments set out above. While the Atlantic community bears a considerable burden of responsibility for achieving the above objectives, Israel should assertively state its long-term objectives vis-à-vis the Euro-Atlantic community. Senior Israeli decision-makers are becoming more actively interested in these issues, an impressively positive development. However, Israel has yet to devise a comprehensive, explicit and long-term Euro-Atlantic strategy.

The ICP with NATO is an important step in the right direction and realizing the ambitious practical agenda and work plan it provides is a pre-condition for any further progress. In pursuing this agenda, the Israeli side should take the initiative and actively work to concretize the opportunities provided by the ICP.

While senior officials have played an important role so far, so has the GMF-AFI unofficial network. This network has been instrumental in increasing policy awareness of NATO-Israel relations, and in enhancing Israel's relations with the Euro-Atlantic community. The discussions that the GMF-AFI relationship has

²⁰ Ronald D. Asmus, "Contain Iran: Admit Israel to NATO", *Washington Post*, February 21, 2006, p. A15.

²¹ Ronald D. Asmus, *op cit*.

²² Uzi Arad, "Israel en route to a Defense Pact?" *Ynetnews*, October 25, 2006.

fostered have led to an understanding that positioning or anchoring Israel in the Euro-Atlantic community could be a considerable contribution to regional stability and to the peace process. In this sense, this network can account for the increasing importance of unofficial networks for international governance. As Anne-Marie Slaughter argues, this is a new world order. Israel should recognize this new multilateral order and engage with it.²³

²³ Anne-Marie Slaughter, *op cit.*