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Partnership for Peace: A Personal View from NATO

MICHAEL RÜHLE and NICHOLAS WILLIAMS

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Manfred Wörner, the late Secretary General of NATO, often joked that had someone told him in 1988 that only four years later he would chair meetings with the Russian or Ukrainian foreign ministers present, he would have urged that individual to immediately have his head examined. Today, meetings of this sort have become a regular feature of NATO's activities--so regular in fact that we sometimes forget how significant these changes are.

Perhaps this latter fact explains why Partnership for Peace (PfP), a NATO initiative aimed at deepening security cooperation with non-NATO countries, has attracted so much public interest since it was launched at the NATO Summit in January 1994.[1] For some, it reflected a significant step forward in bringing the countries of Central and Eastern Europe closer to NATO. For others, it was nothing more than a security placebo, offering secondary benefits but withholding the primary one: full membership in the Alliance. In the United States in particular, PfP became an issue for the op-ed pages, where its merits were either hyped or ridiculed. Partnership for Peace thus suffered the same fate as does many a coffee table book: people talk about it, many have strong opinions about it, yet few know its content.

The misleading assertion that PfP is a weak compromise gained credibility because of the timing of the Partnership's initial discussion in October 1993 by then-Defense Secretary Les Aspin at an informal meeting of NATO defense ministers in Travemünde, Germany. Aspin introduced it as an idea for intensifying cooperation with the Partners. He acknowledged that it was still in its initial stage, but indicated that once further developed by the Allies it could form a major part of the January 1994 NATO Summit.

Support for NATO expansion had grown during 1993, publicly driven by political enthusiasm both in the US Congress and in the Visegrad countries--Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The bandwagon for expansion had picked up momentum in the summer when Russian President Yeltsin had apparently agreed in Warsaw that Polish membership in NATO would not be against Russian interest. It was checked in the fall by the specter of chaos and civil war in Russia, as Yeltsin struggled to protect democracy, paradoxically by sending in the tanks against the parliament. Even though there was never a real prospect for early NATO expansion, PfP appeared to many as an attempt to evade the membership question and buy time.

Initially the Visegrad countries felt betrayed: they thought the Allies were dancing to the Russian tune, first in apparently favoring expansion when Yeltsin seemed to have no objection, then in finding an apparently half-formed idea like PfP as a substitute for membership when the going got rough in Russia. In a letter to several NATO Allies in September 1993, Yeltsin had explicitly warned against the effect of NATO's expansion on Russian public opinion; these circumstances thus gave additional weight to the theory that PfP was a weak compromise.

There is a saying among British journalists: "Never check a good story; inconvenient facts might get in the way." The inconvenient fact for those who see PfP as a weak compromise is that it was born out of a genuine desire to expand and intensify the military cooperation already under way between NATO and its partners in the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC).[2]

The origins of PfP thus lie in the realization that it was time to move beyond Cold War assumptions, policies, and structures. The military contacts program fostered by creation of the NACC was more dialogue than cooperation: it had met its aim of better understanding astonishingly quickly. Its general, undifferentiated approach was seen to have run its course, in NATO as well as by the PfP Partners. Something more closely tailored to the several Partners' detailed requirements was needed. Supreme Headquarters, Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) first appreciated the need for a decisive evolution of NATO contacts with Partners in early 1993 and developed ideas for individual Partner programs.

Planners in the Pentagon picked the ideas up as they prepared for the Defense Ministers Meeting at Travemünde and beyond that for the January 1994 NATO Summit. The PfP idea itself was given greater form and political substance during intensive discussions by all 16 NATO members as they worked collectively toward that meeting of NATO heads of state.

Partnership for Peace is, of course, not the only means that has been devised to enhance security in Europe after the Cold War. Rather, it should be seen as part of a broader outreach by Western institutions to their eastern neighbors. There are parallel efforts by the European Union and the Western European Union (WEU) to engage the countries of Central and Eastern Europe through "Europe agreements" and the granting of associate status. These are important incentives for stabilizing democratic change, as those countries concerned prepare for eventual membership in the European Union.[3] Finally, membership in the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) and the Council of Europe helps establish a set of commonly agreed norms of behavior and--over time--may help bring about a common security culture which has never existed in Europe.

NATO, through Partnership for Peace and other initiatives, reinforces these ongoing efforts by supplementing the transformation to market-oriented democracies with a parallel transformation in the military sphere. The rationale for closer military-to-military cooperation, however, is not only domestic. It also serves to orient the new democracies on a more cooperative approach in their foreign and security relations.

Partnership for Peace: The Goals

The goals of PfP are both political and military in nature. They are explained in the PfP Framework Document in a rather straightforward manner:[4]

- to facilitate transparency in national defense planning and budgeting processes
- to ensure democratic control of defense forces
- to maintain the capability and readiness to contribute, subject to constitutional considerations, to operations under the authority of the UN and/or responsibility of the CSCE
- to develop cooperative military relations with NATO, for the purpose of joint planning, training, and exercises in order to strengthen their ability to undertake missions in the fields of peacekeeping, search and rescue, humanitarian operations, and others as may subsequently be agreed
- to develop, over the longer term, forces that are better able to operate with those of the members of the North Atlantic Alliance

PfP is addressed to a wider audience than that defined by NACC membership. It is open to all states participating in the NACC and to other CSCE countries able and willing to contribute to this program. Slovenia became the first non-NACC country to join the Partnership, in early April 1994, and Finland and Sweden did so at the beginning of May. The acceptance of the Partnership by such countries extends the Alliance's efforts into new areas. It underlines the point that Partnership for Peace is not about reducing divisions and misunderstandings between old adversaries. It has a new agenda, looking forward rather than back.

The increased opportunity for bilateral cooperation between NATO and individual Partners is one of the distinctive features of this initiative. It is essentially for Partners to decide individually the pace and scope they want to give to their programs with NATO, and thereby determine the development and scope of their Partnership with the Alliance.

The Partnership, in short, offers equal opportunity for all, allowing each Partner to develop progressively closer relations with the Alliance on the basis of its own interest and actual performance. This is not a kind of competition or race, however. It simply reflects the reality that countries develop in different ways and at varying rates. The range of cooperative possibilities and interests with a country as large as Russia will be greater than with smaller countries. Hence, the need to tailor cooperation programs to each Partner.

Partnership Opportunities

Activities and contacts among the Partners are set to increase significantly. Before PfP, Partner countries sent representation to NACC meetings and activities either from their capitals or from their embassies in Brussels. But as

the intensity of the work increases, so will the need for frequent, even daily contact. The NATO Summit therefore invited PfP Partners to establish their own liaison offices at NATO Headquarters in Brussels to facilitate their participation in NACC/Partnership meetings and activities. Most of the countries that have joined the Partnership for Peace have indicated their desire to take up NATO's offer of permanent offices at NATO Headquarters.

Another feature of the Partnership for Peace is the establishment of a Partnership Coordination Cell (PCC) at Mons, Belgium, where SHAPE is located. The PCC will carry out, under the authority of the NATO Council, the military coordination and planning necessary to implement Partnership for Peace programs. PfP Partners have been invited to send permanent liaison officers to the PCC.

One of the main focuses of Partnership for Peace is the development of greater cooperation in the field of peacekeeping. NATO and Partner countries find themselves side-by-side with increasing frequency in responding to and implementing UN and CSCE mandates. The need for systematic preparation for peacekeeping undertakings has grown more urgent as a result of the increased risks and greater demands for military forces for such operations as those in former Yugoslavia.

Field exercises to promote closer peacekeeping cooperation and interoperability will therefore be a major aspect of Partnership for Peace. In mid-September 1994, the first exercise, involving 13 nations, was held in Poland. A second was held in the Netherlands, and a maritime exercise was held in the Baltic Sea. These ventures are intended to exercise and simulate common peacekeeping tasks from planning through deployment to improve the ability to work together in actual missions.

The concept of interoperability in peacekeeping is aimed at ensuring compatibility in approaches and procedures, not at sharing common or standardized equipment. For example, exercises seek to improve communications and operational procedures among participants. Since peacekeeping is a field of activity where both Allies and Partners have experience to offer and share, cooperation in this field is breaking new ground. This is genuinely a two-way street.

In launching the Partnership, NATO's leaders also made a commitment to consult with any active participant if the Partner perceives a direct threat to its territorial integrity, political independence, or security. The outcome of any consultation cannot be predetermined, nor can any supportive action be presumed to follow. The offer is therefore far from being a "security guarantee." However, in the face of a direct threat, consultations with the Alliance can give a powerful signal that a Partner is not facing the threat in isolation. Such consultations also could be the basis for coordinating policies and action for defusing the crisis. So the offer of consultation under PfP is of great significance. For it to retain its value it would have to be exploited only in real need. And its potential could be fully explored only in the face of a real crisis.

Joining the Partnership

Countries join the Partnership simply by signing the Framework Document. This is done by a representative of the Partner country at a meeting of the North Atlantic Council. The Framework Document is a public document, issued at the January 1994 Summit and common to all Partners. Signing it is only the beginning of a process: it is the first step. It is a public affirmation that the country accepts the objectives of the Partnership and the goals and values that underpin it: the preservation of democratic societies, their freedom from coercion and intimidation, and the maintenance of the principles of international law.

In the second step, the new Partner submits a Presentation Document which addresses the various political and military aspects of the Partnership. For example, the document lists the steps undertaken by the applying nation to promote transparency in national defense planning and budgeting processes, and to ensure the democratic control of defense forces. It also indicates the kind of cooperative activities of interest to the Partner and the military forces and other assets that it might make available for Partnership activities. The document not only addresses short-term possibilities for cooperation but also covers longer-term planning factors that could affect a Partner's future involvement, such as changes in the structure of the armed forces or the setting-up of special peacekeeping units.

The third step is the development of Individual Partnership Programs (IPP) setting out a range of cooperative activities

specific to each Partner. These IPPs will be developed and agreed individually between NATO and each Partner. To assist in the development of the IPPs, NATO has elaborated a directory of possible activities called the Partnership Work Program, which is in essence a menu of possible activities. It is another typical characteristic of PFP that this menu is not exhaustive but remains open to input from Allies and Partners alike.

By the fall of 1994, three IPPs had been agreed and 11 were at various stages of development. They indicate a range of different interests and emphases, confirming the relevance of PFP's innovative differentiated approach. Finland and Sweden, for example, are interested primarily in developing a common approach to peacekeeping with the Allies. The countries of Central Europe want to move their forces toward greater interoperability with NATO. The Baltic States are looking for practical help in establishing their joint peacekeeping force.

One of the prime challenges in implementing PFP is how to reconcile its strong bilateral element with the concurrent need to avoid suspicions and misunderstandings among Partners. In keeping with the basic principles of PFP, each Individual Partnership Program is developed solely between NATO and the specific country involved. Once programs are agreed, however, they are circulated to all other Partners. There is thus no reason for suspicion about hidden agendas among Partners nor for vetoes on the level of participation of anyone else. It may take time and accumulated practical experience to allay anxieties on this score, but the success of PFP depends on these fundamental facts being understood and accepted by all participants.

The arrangements for overseeing and managing the Partnership for Peace are flexible and varied. A Political-Military Steering Committee (PMSC) was established after the January 1994 Summit under the chairmanship of the Deputy Secretary General to work further on the details of Partnership for Peace and prepare for its implementation. It will continue to function in various configurations as the Partnership develops. It will meet at 16 + 1 to address issues related to Individual Partnership Programs.[5] It also will meet with several Partner countries relative to specific activities of interest to those Partners. This might happen, for example, when an exercise is being planned in which only a limited number of parties express an interest in participating. The Steering Committee also will meet with all NACC/PFP Partners to handle common issues of Partnership for Peace. In this format, the PMSC provides the main forum for the transparency of individual Partnership programs.

PFP and NATO Enlargement

Perhaps the main reason why Partnership for Peace remains controversial in some quarters is the allegation that its principal purpose was to somehow prevent the entry of new countries into NATO. Indeed, this verdict had been accepted by some even before PFP had been officially launched, and the vocabulary applied by some critics ranged from appeasement (Richard Perle) to "echoes of Yalta" (Zbigniew Brzezinski).

It is evident that PFP, which is aimed at intensifying military cooperation, cannot fully satisfy those who still advocate a rapid expansion of NATO to the east. But as explained earlier, it should be equally evident that the Partnership is neither the result of a "Russian veto" over such an expansion, nor a surrogate for membership. By fall of 1994, 23 states, including Sweden and Finland, already had joined the Partnership, proving the validity of NATO's preference for functional cooperation over institutional quick fixes.

But there is a link--clearly expressed--between PFP and NATO's expansion. It was agreed at the 1994 Summit that active participation in Partnership for Peace will play an important role in the evolutionary process of the expansion of NATO. And NATO expansion is not some remote possibility in the future. As the Partnership for Peace Invitation stated, Allies "expect and would welcome NATO expansion that would reach to democratic states to our East, as part of an evolutionary process, taking into account political and security developments in the whole of Europe." [6] Partnership for Peace can and will lead to NATO membership for some countries, though, of course, this need not be a goal for all Partners.

For PFP to play its part in preparing countries for membership, it must be given time to work and time to develop its potential. The Partnership for Peace restores the membership question to its proper place, namely at the end rather than at the beginning of an evolutionary process.

PFP and Russia: A Partner More Equal than Others?

One does not have to suffer from "Moscow myopia" (Senator Mitch McConnell's term) to come to the conclusion that Russia, the strongest military power in Europe, will continue to require careful handling. This does not translate into a Russian veto on NATO's policies, yet it emphasizes that Russian perceptions have to be taken seriously. NATO, which made a tremendous effort to contain the Soviet Union for four decades, cannot afford to suddenly pretend that it does not care any more about what is going on in Russia. Moreover, as a member of the UN Security Council, the Russian Federation has a special weight in deciding on crisis management activities which involve NATO. For this reason, Allies attached great importance to engaging Russia constructively and to bringing it into the Partnership for Peace.

This proved to be anything but easy. Although it was clear that many leading figures in Moscow were sympathetic to PfP, NATO officials dealing with Russian interlocutors had to do a tough selling job, explaining the merits of the program but also dispelling doubts among some members of Russian political and military elites. These doubts included Russian fears that by promoting "interoperability" with Partners, NATO would try to force these countries to buy Western equipment, thus minimizing Russia's chances for lucrative arms exports. They also included suspicions that by engaging the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States, NATO was somehow trying to undermine the viability of that grouping.

Russia finally signed onto the Partnership in June 1994. In doing so, it accepted the same conditions as any other Partner country. There was, however, a clear understanding on both sides that the size and weight of Russia would require some sort of special recognition. Along with the signature of the PfP Framework Document, therefore, NATO and Russia also published a so-called "Summary of Conclusions," which foresees the initiation of a "broad, enhanced dialogue and cooperation" in areas where Russia has a unique contribution to make. While the elements of such a relationship will still have to be worked out, it seems clear that issues such as nuclear nonproliferation or nuclear safety, as well as close consultation and cooperation in UN-mandated peacekeeping missions, are natural topics of such a dialogue.

At the time of this writing, work on the Russian IPP had not yet started. Nevertheless, much work remains to break down the hostility and suspicions toward NATO that still seem to exist in large parts of the Russian military. It remains a fact that NATO's military contacts program made less progress with the Russian military from 1991 to 1994 than with the forces of many other states.

The Way Ahead

Perhaps the most innovative, yet at the same time the most problematic, aspect of PfP is its mission to evolve. It is innovative because for the first time in NATO's cooperation effort the initiative for managing the evolution of cooperation lies both with the Partners and with NATO. The Alliance has thus embarked on a course of action whose outcome is unforeseeable because it will be determined as much by Partners as by Allies.

It is problematic because NATO countries are not yet clear about how far they are willing to go in the process of moving Partners closer to NATO. Some countries have a broad idea of the eventual scope of cooperation, expecting that it will lead to military cooperation of the forms and intensity that evolved through 40 years of hard work among Allies in the integrated military structure. Others are more hesitant. These would see the main focus of PfP as remaining in the sphere of peacekeeping at the military end of the spectrum, and general discussion of defense organization at the defense end.

There are also differences of perception and expectation of PfP to be resolved between Allies and Partners. Partners' desires to see visible progress exceed their resources and the capability of the system to achieve it. If, for whatever reasons--lack of resources, differences between Partners' expectations and NATO's response--Partners start to believe that NATO is not living up to the rhetoric of PfP, they may well become disillusioned. They could then insist that NATO membership is the only real benefit that NATO has to offer. Already some Central European countries have pointed to the lack of political content in PfP, contrasting their primarily military cooperation within PfP with Russia's broad political dialogue beyond PfP. There is an inevitable gap between Partners' expectations in the short term and PfP promise over the longer term. This cannot grow too wide if PfP is to achieve its aims.

These aims are wide-ranging and lack a degree of coherence. In a way, PfP resembles a Cuban life raft, constructed of

diverse materials and lacking any consistency in its various parts. At first sight it is difficult to see how the intended ends can possibly be achieved by the means at hand. For instance, how exactly can stability and democracy be strengthened in the east through military cooperation in peacekeeping, search and rescue, and humanitarian missions? Moreover, NATO countries have very different approaches to civil-military relations and provide a broad range of models, all rooted in their particular histories and forms of democracy. Consequently, much of the practical advice given by NATO on the organization of, for example, defense departments or budgets is just as likely to confuse as to enlighten. More specifically, it is not clear to Partners how they are to get closer to NATO through peacekeeping--especially as the NATO they would like to join is the old one of collective defense, not the new model of cooperation and peacekeeping.

PfP's emphasis at the outset on multinational peacekeeping and humanitarian operations is understandable. Everyone can agree on the value of peacekeeping cooperation, and NATO is better placed than any other organization to motivate it. The difficulties may arise when the militaries seek to exercise or develop skills for more demanding defense or peace enforcement scenarios. Would this be within or beyond the scope of PfP?

This brings us specifically to the question of the ways in which PfP can evolve. One important element of PfP announced at the Summit is a planning review between Allies and Partners. The wording in the Framework Document indicates that the members of the North Atlantic Alliance will "develop with the other subscribing states a planning and review process to provide a basis for identifying and evaluating forces and capabilities that might be made available by them for multinational training, exercises, and operations in conjunction with Alliance forces." [7]

Of all the elements of PfP, this is potentially the most substantial and the one most likely to bring Partners closer to NATO--particularly if it went beyond peacekeeping and covered defense planning. Within NATO there is a long-standing defense planning and review process which involves both a detailed exchange of information on existing military capabilities and a system for setting improvement goals and evaluating implementation. This has played a significant role over time in ensuring the coherence of both the political goals and military means of collective defense. The habits of NATO's planning process also have been an important element in NATO's overall cohesion.

The discipline of defense planning within a multinational environment achieves more in understanding and transparency than is possible through any other means. But for progress to be made there must be frank discussions of the threats to security and agreement on the ultimate purpose of that planning, defense against a potential threat. It is possible to plan in a threatless environment, but it is not possible to do so if there is no free exchange of views or evaluation of risks. On the positive side, peacekeeping is neutral ground for military cooperation: a common endeavor toward a common requirement. However, a planning process which confined itself to peacekeeping cooperation would not bring Partners' military forces noticeably closer to those of NATO.

Any move toward force planning under PfP creates a dilemma. A review process that covered wider defense questions could not function with all Partners because of the need for frank discussion of potential threats, and a process that dealt selectively or individually with the most "active" Partners could run counter to the principle of transparency and would raise questions on the objective of such planning. The more demanding the planning scenario, the more problematic the political questions posed. Against whom is the defense capability being developed?

The above points suggest that some of the conceptual problems of PfP will have to be resolved during implementation. These problems are not insurmountable. The security environment in Europe and its periphery is such that peacekeeping is a highly more probable contingency than defense, collective or individual. PfP may thus evolve in response to the need for military cooperation in that area. However, the questions to be resolved in developing PfP may be more difficult than those in launching it. Having started well, it needs sufficient resources and continuing high-level support if it is to continue well.

With its offer of enhanced military cooperation through Partnership for Peace, NATO has drawn the right conclusion from a security environment that is still in flux. Rather than pretending that PfP is a final answer, we should see PfP as a preliminary one: a framework for an evolving process. To view PfP for what it is, rather than for what it is not, will ultimately serve European security better than creating myths about weak compromises.

NOTES

1. Countries which have joined the Partnership in chronological order: Romania, Lithuania, Poland, Estonia, Hungary, Ukraine, Slovakia, Latvia, Bulgaria, Albania, Czech Republic, Moldova, Georgia, Slovenia, Azerbaijan, Sweden, Finland, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russian Federation, Uzbekistan, Armenia. Of the countries of the former Soviet Union only Belarus and Tajikistan have not joined the Partnership. Other CSCE countries can join, subject to the agreement of all NATO Allies.
 2. The North Atlantic Cooperation Council (NACC) was founded at NATO's initiative in December 1991. It consists of NATO countries and countries of the former Warsaw Pact and former Soviet Union. It meets at least once a year at foreign minister level and sponsors an annual workplan of political consultations and military contacts. PFP is set within the framework of NACC.
 3. The nine countries that have signed agreements with the European Union and become associated partners in the WEU are: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Slovenia.
 4. Partnership for Peace: Framework Document, reprinted in *NATO Review*, February 1994, pp. 29-30.
 5. "16+1" is a meeting of the 16 NATO Allies with one (as opposed to several or all) of the Partners.
 6. Partnership for Peace: Invitation, reprinted in *NATO Review*, February 1994, p. 28.
 7. *Ibid.*, p. 30.
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