

Partnership – an Alternative to Enlargement?

Karl-Heinz Kamp

Security Policy Coordinator
Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung
Berlin

The division of history into various phases always raises suspicion – particularly among historians. For the sake of the argument and as an introduction, let me try it anyway and describe three phases of NATO.

The first phase was the by far longest one. It ranged from the foundation of the Alliance to the fall of the Berlin Wall. During that time, NATO was primarily an instrument of Western self-assertion and self defense.

The second phase took from the collapse of the Berlin Wall to September 2001. It was characterized by NATO's interest in shaping the political order in Europe. Partnership, membership and not at least military action in the Balkans were crucial for transformation in Eastern Europe and beyond.

9/11 marked the beginning of the third phase, in which we are now. This phase is characterized by NATO's evolution from a Eurocentric defense alliance into a global stability provider. Given the global character of the threats, NATO has to act globally. In that sense, NATO was not going to Afghanistan but Afghanistan was coming to NATO. The requests for NATO's stabilization missions or peace support operations are likely to mount. Thus, NATO has to improve its capabilities for political and if needed for military action.

If we take stock now, with regard to the strategic picture, then we have good news and bad news:

The good news is that NATO's evolution towards a global stability provider strengthens the transatlantic ties. The US will not lose its interest in NATO, simply because the alliance is now increasingly in a shape the Americans always wanted NATO to be: namely military usable and globally deployable. And a NATO being present close to the Chinese border is pretty much global. That's why the doomsayers of the transatlantic divorce were always wrong and will remain wrong in future.

The bad news is that evolutionary processes always come with competing visions, with heavy debates and with fierce disagreement over the proper way to go. NATO is in the thick of that process and Riga was not a terribly successful summit, simply because it indicated, how much the views between the allies differ.

For our today's discussion, let me focus on two particular areas of disagreement within the Alliance – partnership (or GP) and membership.

To start with the Global Partnership

NATO's approach in phase II to shape the political order in Europe via partnerships was extremely successful. When the Wall came down, the fundamental idea of NATO's partnership concept was to stabilize the former Warsaw Pact region. At its core, partnership consisted of a mix of three elements:

- *Cooperation* – not only with NATO but also among the partnership-countries to reduce possible conflicts and tensions
- *Reform in partner countries – not only militarily but also politically*
- *Education* – which means concrete support and training by NATO for the partners

A fourth element was added a little later, namely *membership* – as result a successful performance in the first three steps.

As successful the partnership concept had been, today there are two major problems, which make an overhaul necessary.

On the one hand, the initial idea of partnership has mushroomed into an entire "partnership industry". More and more for a and sub-groupings where added The number of acronyms for the various partnerships is vast: (PfP, EAPC, PAP, IPP PARP, PMF, OCC, IPAP, PAP-T, MD, ICI, SEEI, NRC, NUC). It is an endless number of forums, groups and committees, in which different partners are pooled. Some have forfeited much of their meaning, since they have been directed primarily to the enlargement process. Hence, reform is long overdue

The second problem is that phase three of NATO's evolution has a fundamental impact on the scope and the purpose of NATO's partnerships. At the times when partnership was a means of shaping the political order in the East, the military capabilities of the partner countries did not always count that much. Some of the new members were taken for political reasons, although they could hardly contribute to NATO's overall military performance. Fortunately, the job of

shaping the political order in Europe and beyond is at least partly done. With ten new members in NATO and others on their way to join, the Alliance has achieved a lot of its initial goal of a “Europe whole and free”.

Today NATO has to respond to global challenges by peacekeeping tasks, anti-terrorism operations, or humanitarian missions, this is different. The measuring rod for NATO’s success and survival is no longer the political transformation of Eastern Europe but how NATO performs in current and forthcoming military operations. NATO badly needs capabilities to perform successfully.

This is where the idea of the Global Partnership comes in. Outside the traditional partnership framework – on the global scale - there are numerous likeminded countries which have significant military capabilities – some already provide valuable support to NATO’s current operations. New Zealand has a PRT in Afghanistan. Australia – also engaged in Afghanistan – is going to buy C-17 transport aircraft. Argentina, Brazil, Japan, Singapore and others are further potential “Global Partners”. With some, the so called Contact Countries, NATO already has loose forms of partnerships. Others, which supply forces for NATO operations meet regularly in the so called “Troop Contributors Forum”.

However, this will not be enough to keep these potent allies engaged in NATO’s activities. If these countries risk the lives of their soldiers to support NATO in military operations, they should be able to express their views in NATO’s discussions and decision making processes. This should not be limited to concrete missions. Since NATO is a politico-military organization and not only a military fire brigade, “global partners” should be included into NATO’s general discussions when necessary. This is the idea of a global partnership and of a so called “Stability Providers Forum” – something in between membership and partnership. Hence, the idea of global partnership is much less the result of Washington’s intention to instrumentalize NATO in the global war on terrorism. Instead, it is the logical consequence of NATO’s evolution towards a military efficient organization with a global horizon

Despite its logic, this proposal earned a lot of criticism, not at least because the term “global” has a negative connotation. Some concerns were raised that NATO could expand on a global level or could become the “globo cop”. Others critics pointed to the fact the criteria for the new partners is far from clear. The list of clients for global partnership suggested by some in

Washington consist countries like South Korea, Singapore and – Pakistan. It goes without saying that the proposal of Pakistan does not find unanimous support – to put it mildly. So what is the criteria to be chosen as “global partners”: is it the level of political closeness to NATO, the magnitude of the force contribution or the strategic relevance of the respective country (and relevance for whom)? What if a potential partner is military potent but not likeminded?

Moreover, will Global Partnership become a “partnership of the rich”? Will the global partners receive a VIP treatment in NATO whereas old NATO partners will become backbenchers? Neither of there questions is answered so far – nor is there an answer to the question of the connection between partnership and membership

Second Point: Enlargement

Let me start with simple observation: Within the EU, there is a fierce debate on the impact of enlargement and on geographical or cultural boundaries of the EU. We don't have anything similar in NATO. Is this a good thing? Or is the absence of such a debate a sign that NATO enlargement has become rather irrelevant in security terms. Has enlargement as a key NATO official asked in Berlin recently - turned into a kind of social policy by other means?

Indeed, things have fundamentally changed. Enlargement is doubtlessly on NATO's agenda. Only two years ago, seven countries were taken in one fell swoop. Three were left in the pipeline: Albania, Croatia, Macedonia. Others on the Balkans like Bosnia or Serbia will knock at the door as well. And the US suggestion to seriously consider Ukraine and Georgia to be taken into NATO has caused eyebrow rising among most European NATO partners. However, if we compare the heavy battles over enlargement in the 1990s until 2004, where we had lobbying allies and Russian generals threatening military action in case of membership for the Baltics, this time its remarkably quiet. But the lack of a discussion does not disburden NATO from coming to a political consensus. Thus, it makes sense to take a look on our previous experiences and check what conclusions can be drawn for forthcoming decisions on potential new members.

-> Make three points: 1. lessons from the previous enlargement steps; 2. What are the consequences from the recent debate over Ukraine and Georgia, 3. Conclusions for future enlargement decisions

Lessons learned from previous enlargement steps

If we recall the arguments which were brought forward by proponents and opponents of enlargement since the issue came up in 1993, at least two arguments on each side have proven wrong.

1. Opponents of enlargement (I belonged to them) were wrong in their contention that the increasing number of full members would render decision making in NATO more difficult. In fact, NATO agreed remarkably quick to go to war in Kosovo, although three new members had just been taken into the Alliance. By the way, it is a safe assumption that military action on the Balkans was not the main reason why Poland, Hungary and Czech Rep. wanted to join NATO. In fact, NATO's decision making processes were much more frequently spoilt by the old members than by new ones.

2. Opponents were also wrong in their concern that Russia would drive completely nuts should NATO expand towards the East. Instead, NATO managed to enlarge and the evolve its relationship with Russia at the same time and only recently there were a common NATO-Russia exercise on missile defense and on anti terrorism operations.

However, supporters of enlargement were also wrong in two respects:

First, unlike popular assessments, integration of new members is not an easy thing.

Particularly the military adaptation to NATO standards and structures proved very tricky even for those countries which seemed to be far ahead on their path to political and military transformation.

Second, taking new members into NATO is not always a "win-win" scenario – even if political Sunday speeches argue that way. Among the ten new members in NATO there are some which certainly have won through membership but they contribute hardly anything to NATO's needs and requirements. Hence the "win"-aspect for NATO is rather limited. There are even cases in which new members create problems in a sense that a security sector reform

in these countries did not take place. As a result, parts of the old Nomenklatura is still in key administrative positions, causing severe problems for NATO's handling of critical and confidential information.

In result: three lessons need to be drawn.

1. There is no maximum number of members for NATO to function properly. A club can work with 13 or 30 members depending on a common interest and on efficient structures.
2. Russia is an important partner but the political or strategic preferences of Russia are not a measuring rod for NATO's decisions on new members.
3. Enlargement is not a value in itself. Instead every new member should provide a net benefit to the efficiency of NATO. This was already a key request of the NATO enlargement study of 1994, but apparently has been dismissed in some cases for political reasons.

Second major questions: Lessons learned from the debate over Ukraine and Georgia
After the big bang of 7 new members in 2004 there was no rush in NATO for further enlargement steps. Notwithstanding the "Open Door" pledge, there was a tacit consensus among most allies that NATO would require some time for digestion. This consensus crumbled when Washington brought up the membership issue again. However, the US did not lobby for one of the three countries sitting in NATO's waiting room. Instead, President Bush and Senator McCain argued in favor of a quick entry of Ukraine and Georgia. The key argument brought forward was the geo-strategic relevance of both countries. Furthermore the democratic movements in both countries appeared very compatible with the freedom rhetoric of the Bush administration. (cheering crowds in George) Poland and a few others support this idea.

Nevertheless, despite such a prominent advocacy, the idea was flawed for three reasons

1. both countries are far from being ripe for NATO membership. Particularly Ukraine as the second largest country in Europe is a huge chunk to be digested. Furthermore, as the

recent political developments have proven, the majority in the politically divided country appears not to be willing to join NATO at all.

2. Secondly, a quick addition of Georgia and the Ukraine would put the cart before the membership horse. It would be politically hard to imagine accepting the two concerned countries for entry without admitting the three longstanding candidates, Albania, Slovenia and Croatia, as well. In result, we would have another big bang with 5 countries, from which only Croatia at best might comply with current NATO standards.
3. Thirdly, Washington's hasty push for enlargement threatened the delicate process of transatlantic reconciliation. Simply put, the present constructive behavior of NATO members on both sides of the Atlantic seems to rest on an implied deal: Washington ceases speaking of NATO as its "Tool Box" and rather actively works on the formation of joint NATO policies with Europe. In return, Europe accepts the American concept of a globally engaged NATO, or "Global Partnership". This fundamental consensus which serves to heal the wounds of the Iraq crisis, must yet be finetuned in the run up to the summit. If Washington burdens one side of the scale with an additional debate about controversial applicants, the painstakingly found balance could tip.

Meanwhile, at least the State Department has confirmed that Ukrainian membership is off the table.

The lesson to be learned from the entire debate certainly is, that the enlargement question is way too important to be dealt purely from a political perspective or as a means to broaden the support for certain NATO allies.

What does all this mean for forthcoming membership decisions?

In future, NATO will only be able to carry out *enlargement* if at the same time that means *enrichment*. New member must bring *added value* and not *added problems*. If they take a look on the three countries in the pipeline, hardly anyone is currently meeting these criteria – not mentioning Ukraine or Georgia. Croatia might have the best perspective.

The situation is further complicated by the developments in the EU. Given the current debate there, Bulgaria and Romania are the last countries to become EU members for many years to

come. Hence, unlike in the past, there is no longer a coupling of the NATO membership with a perspective of joining the EU.

Both developments might be disappointing for those in the waiting room, but it does not make sense to raise expectations which can hardly be met.

To conclude

Partnership and membership are closely intertwined but are two different pairs of shoes. Enlargement remains important but has lost much of its relevance for NATO's strategic future – not at least due to its own success. There has to be a shift in the criteria for choosing new members away from the purely political reasons to the capabilities of the applicant countries.

Much more important for NATO's evolution in phase III is the global partnership idea. It will be crucial to enable NATO to act on a global scale. Global partnership has nothing to do with global membership – to expand NATO globally is not in the cards (Art. 10 of NATO treaty!) – and there is no interest among the global partners, to become full members. However NATO badly needs the capabilities of these likeminded countries. That is why the topic will remain on the agenda for the next summit in 2008.