
What does NATO need to ‘project stability’ in its neighbourhood?

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Theme

At NATO’s Warsaw Summit in 2016, allied leaders announced not only major changes to their collective defence posture but also their commitment to ‘projecting stability’ beyond their borders.

Summary

NATO’s commitment to ‘project stability’ constitutes an important step in the Alliance’s ongoing adaptation to an increasingly convulsive security environment in the European neighbourhood. This ARI will take stock of NATO’s ‘projecting stability’ agenda, outline some of the potential challenges associated with it and identify some of the initiatives the Alliance can build on. To do so, it will provide an overview of some of the main decisions taken at the Warsaw Summit, analyse how they matter in the context of the Alliance’s stability agenda and discuss the potential of partnerships and capacity building in particular.

Analysis

The many faces of NATO’s ‘projecting stability’ agenda

At Warsaw, Allied leaders declared that ‘if NATO’s neighbours are more stable, NATO is more secure’, highlighting the interdependence between Allied security and that of the wider European neighbourhood. As part of this approach, Allied leaders decided on a series of immediate steps: they agreed to step up in-country capacity building efforts in countries to the South of NATO; offer enhanced assistance to Georgia and Ukraine; launch a new maritime security operation in the Mediterranean (Operation Sea Guardian); and provide AWACS support to the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. Therefore ‘projecting stability’ is in part an agenda of tangible projects, activities and operations designed to shape and influence the stability of NATO’s immediate security environment.

In this context, what is interesting about this approach is that ‘projecting stability’ is seen as a spectrum of engagement, running from partnerships with key states, including capacity building, to crisis management measures relying on military capabilities. This represents an innovation, given the distinction made in NATO’s 2010 Strategic Concept between the core tasks of Collective Defence, Crisis Management and Cooperative Security. Allied leaders have set themselves the objective of thinking holistically across

¹ The views expressed in this paper are solely the author’s.

these tasks and using NATO's instruments in a more coherent manner. In order to do this, it is necessary to make sure that institutions, processes and working cultures are able to support a whole-of-NATO approach.

In line with this, Allied Heads of State and Government also tasked work to review whether NATO's institutions and processes are adequate to this ambition, looking at how efforts could become 'more sustainable, better organised and supported', 'with adequate and sustainable resources and structures'. Therefore, 'projecting stability' also opens up an agenda of institutional change within NATO –to which we will return below–.

Why 'projecting stability' matters

To understand why this approach matters we need to look at the wider context. Ever since Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO has been paying increased attention to high-end, collective defence responsibilities –and updating capabilities and plans to meet these responsibilities after more than two decades of expeditionary operations–. Initiatives like the Readiness Action Plan and Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (adopted at the Alliance's 2014 Summit in Wales) and the Enhanced Forward Presence (adopted at the 2016 Warsaw Summit) bear witness to the Alliance's ability to adapt its collective defence posture to the current threat environment and to strengthen deterrence. However, some observers have speculated whether this change in posture or 'pivot' towards deterrence and defence might not spell a more inward-looking, fortress-like NATO, ie, less deployed out of area and less interested in engaging its partners.²

The Warsaw commitment to 'project stability' counters this 'fortress NATO' narrative. Notwithstanding the renewed importance of defence and deterrence in the context of the Warsaw summit, NATO leaders also chose to make 'projecting stability' one of the summit's key themes. In fact, the Alliance recognises that it does not have the luxury of being able to choose one over the other. As argued by Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at Harvard University in September 2016, NATO is now in a phase in which it has to undertake *both* collective defence *and* crisis management and partnerships.³

NATO is not merely 'rewinding the clock' to Cold War-style collective defence and deterrence in the European continent, ie, by abandoning more than 25 years of experience in cooperative security and crisis management out of (NATO) area. In fact, the Alliance's emphasis on stability is a tacit recognition of the dangers that can come from state weakness or collapse. In this context, the Warsaw Summit also presided over the Alliance's commitment to look both at its Eastern Flank and its Southern neighbourhood.

² See, for instance, Markus Kaim (2017), 'Reforming NATO's partnerships', *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik Research Paper*, January, https://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2017RP01_kim.pdf; and Trine Flockhart (2015), 'Preparing for NATO's Warsaw Summit', *Danish Institute of International Studies Report*, 2015, http://pure.diiis.dk/ws/files/368155/DIIS_RP_2015_16_WEB.pdf.

³ 'The Three Ages of NATO', speech by the NATO Secretary General, Harvard University, 23/IX/2016, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_135317.htm.

One interesting development in NATO's agenda is the increasing association of the 'projecting stability' theme with the Southern neighbourhood. Traditionally, NATO's efforts to 'project stability' through partnerships and defence reform have focused on Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. This has not gone away: at Warsaw, the Allies agreed on new steps to support Ukraine and Georgia build up their capabilities and resilience. However, since the so-called Arab Spring, NATO has seen a gradual but steady increase in work with its Middle East and North Africa partners. A lot of this has been through the channels of its individual partnerships with countries in NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue. For instance, since 2014 Jordan has been one of the first recipients of an integrated package of defence capacity building (DCB) consisting of enhanced training, assistance and advice.

Many of NATO's southern partners have also been brought together in a new partnership forum, the Interoperability Platform, which is designed to maintain and deepen operational connectivity between NATO and its partners for future crisis and stability operations.

The Warsaw decisions confirmed this trend and produced new initiatives such as the launch of a training and capacity building activity in Iraq. Building on this trend, the Allies and Kuwait inaugurated earlier in 2017 a centre in Kuwait to serve its Gulf partnerships. Some of these decisions show the Southern neighbourhood's newfound importance in the context of the Alliance's stability agenda.

What NATO can build on

NATO is not a stranger to 'projecting stability'. Indeed, the Alliance can point to a strong, post-Cold War track record of contributing to stabilisation beyond its core task of collective defence. Its crisis management operations in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan (plus Iraq until 2011) were essentially stabilisation missions, often with a strong training component. Furthermore, NATO has more than a quarter of a century's experience in advising, supporting and mentoring partner states to achieve defence and institutional reform, build capabilities and strengthen interoperability. Its network of partners is now more than 40 strong, and reaches around the world. Beyond political dialogue, the practical reality of these relationships is often focused on building capacity, through strategic advice, education, training, exercising and evaluation, both at the level of institutions and of individual units.

Every year, NATO offers thousands of opportunities for education and training –and dozens of NATO officer teams fly out to partner states to conduct on site tailored training–. NATO has a rich toolkit of programmes for this work, as well as dedicated civilian and military staffs to carry it out and track it over time. For instance, NATO participates in a dense network of cooperation between defence academies to help support nations who wish to transform their defence and military education. NATO has also established a unique programme to build integrity and fight corruption in the defence sector.

To do this work NATO can count on established relationships of trust as well as on the 'soft power' of its credibility as the world's premier military alliance, bringing together 28 of the most militarily and technologically advanced countries in the world. NATO and its

partnerships also act a platform through which Allies and partners have established advanced networks of cooperation, such that many partners choose to help other NATO partners through NATO-associated programmes, trust funds and other channels.

NATO's cooperation and capacity-building programmes are actually quite modestly resourced in relative terms to its overall budget and certainly in absolute terms in comparison to the aid and capacity-building programmes managed by national bilateral programmes or those managed by the UN and EU. Likewise, programmes are administered by a relatively small number of staff, again both in relative and absolute terms. However, the 'networked' nature of NATO's partnerships and cooperation programmes enables Allies, partners, civil society and educational institutions to 'plug in', thus generating a resource multiplier effect.

These programmes deliver, for two reasons. First, despite their small size they are relatively concentrated –they focus largely on defence, military and security matters–. Secondly, the nature of the programmes is geared towards encouraging the recipient nations to do most of the resource-heavy lifting. Partner recipients have to meet the goals and objectives set by NATO programmes, but NATO offers relatively little –with a few exceptions– in terms of funding or in-kind aid to meet those standards.

Finally, these programmes have all contributed to and supported NATO's 'Open Door' policy of enlargement and integration, which has arguably been one of the most powerful factors of stability projection of the 1990s and 2010s. The prospect of NATO accession provided a powerful 'conditionality anchor' to support reforms in Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

Projecting stability: a way forward?

The Alliance's renewed commitment to projecting stability opens a series of questions about the sustainability, structures and capabilities it has to carry out such activities. These questions will need to be addressed in the months and years ahead.

At Warsaw, NATO leaders set in motion a process to review how well prepared NATO is to 'project stability', tasking work at NATO HQ on how to ensure that efforts could become 'more sustainable, better organised and supported', 'with adequate and sustainable resources and structures'.⁴ This commitment was confirmed in December 2016 when Allied Ministers of Foreign Affairs agreed on a roadmap to consider how to develop NATO's capacity to project stability.

To understand this task, it is important to consider the spectrum of tasks covered by NATO's 'projecting stability' mission. These range from political engagement with third states, through partnerships, capacity building and training, to military deployments in the context of crisis management operations.

⁴ NATO Heads of State and Government (2016), 'Warsaw Summit Communiqué', 9/VII/2016, para. 85, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm.

When it comes to crisis management, the Warsaw commitment to 'projecting stability' confirms that the Allies wish to retain NATO's ability to conduct crisis management operations rather than just refocusing only on high-spectrum collective defence. This is in itself significant –for reasons of defence and force planning and capability development– but this paper will not dwell deeper on this aspect of 'projecting stability'. However, the reality is that crisis management approaches (ie, involving deployed military forces) will always be the subject of *ad hoc* case-by-case decisions by the Allies in a particular political and military context.

Setting crisis management aside, the bread and butter of NATO's work to 'project stability' in the future will continue to revolve around prevention: the patient, slow, upstream work of building partnerships through political engagement, cooperation and the strengthening of institutional capacity in its neighbouring states.

This will never be as visible as other aspects of NATO's engagement –but it remains essential–. Indeed, former SACEUR General Breedlove said as much in July 2016, when he argued that when it came to the Middle East NATO's 'main strategy should be to invest in institution building and education, among other measures, to stabilise the poorly governed spaces that give rise to terrorism and displaced populations'.⁵ Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has also consistently argued for investing in developing local institutions and forces as a cost-effective and preventive means to fight terrorism and destabilisation.

Building on these advantages, NATO will need to reflect on the overall ends, ways and means that it will use to 'project stability' through partnerships and capacity building in the years to come.

Ends

'Projecting stability' through partnerships and capacity building projects will need to be based on, and serve, an overall political project, some kind of *finalité*. In the 1990s and early 2000s NATO's Partnership for Peace and its enlargement were underpinned by the overarching notion of a 'Europe whole and free': a cooperative, peaceful, post-Cold War European order. This vision is still relevant and guides NATO's relationship with all or some of NATO's European partners, especially in Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. But the question must be posed: does NATO –or the West as a whole for that matter– have an equivalent vision or *finalité* for its regional partners in North Africa and the Middle East? Surely creating the conditions for defeating terrorism would be part of an answer, but is it enough? In any case, political visions matter for a number of reasons.

First, the nature of the 'neighbourhood' has changed. Much of NATO's focus on 'projecting stability' in the 1990s and 2000s was on a relatively homogeneous group of countries, bound by their post-Communist heritage and common desire to join –and prospect of joining– Euro-Atlantic structures. In the 1990s NATO and EU enlargement worked in tandem, creating a powerful mix of conditionality and incentives to shape the

⁵ Philip Breedlove (2016), 'NATO's Next Act', *Foreign Affairs*, July, p. 105.

transformation of states and societies in Eastern and Central Europe, which by and large worked.

Now, NATO's neighbourhood is a much more diverse –and contested– environment. The milieu matters –geopolitics is back–. Unlike the 1990s, the environment is marked by the rise of powers (on the international scene) and movements (domestically) that contest the liberal rules-based order that NATO has defended. When it comes to the Middle East, the very nature of the regional order is perceived to be in play, and many outside powers are investing significantly in building and deepening relationships with some of NATO's partner states. At the same time, enlargement –and its powerful conditionality machine– is not on the table for most of these partners. After Montenegro joins, only three of NATO's 40+ partners remain official candidates for membership: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The overall diversity of NATO's partner relationships means that some of the more 'wholesale' mechanisms of partnership and capacity building of the 1990s –designed to guide more than a dozen states into NATO– will need to become more 'niche' to suit a much more diverse set of circumstances in each of NATO's partner countries, and where conditionality could be much more elusive.

In this, political relationships will continue to be key, because transforming institutions and mentoring change is not a technocratic project but one that needs to make political sense to decision-makers in recipient states. Transforming state institutions so that they are effective providers of security to their citizens requires significant political capital. All the more so because NATO's model of capacity building relies heavily on national ownership of adjustment costs. This is a deeply political project –and will need to be finely calibrated to the prevailing circumstances in each of these countries–. In some countries, elites and public opinion will embrace NATO; in others, a subtler, arms-length relationship will need to be cultivated.

As with any relationship, this must be a two-way street. While the notion of 'projecting stability' provides an overarching concept, it may not be enough to describe relationships with certain partners only in these terms –they need to appeal to the security interests not only of NATO but also of the partner concerned–. The vision needs to appeal to both sides of the equation. As Sven Biscop has pointed out in the case of the EU, focusing on 'resilience' alone in partnerships with third states risks raising the spectre of countries being used merely as 'buffer states'.⁶

NATO would do well to take a page out of its own history book: the 1994 'Partnership for Peace' is not only an effective programme but also a strong brand, summing up the notion of partnership for something greater. For many of NATO's partners, that brand still matters –as a way to explain why they cooperate with NATO–. NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue –launched in 1994 to create confidence-building dialogue

⁶ Sven Biscop (2017), 'A strategy for Europe's neighbourhood: keep resilient and carry on?', ARI nr 4/2017, Elcano Royal Institute, 16/1/2017, http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/portal/rielcano_en/contenido?WCM_GLOBAL_CONTEXT=/elcano/elcano_in/zonas_in/ari4-2017-biscop-strategy-europe-neighbourhood-keep-resilient-carry-on.

around the Oslo Peace process— while worthy, may not quite capture the heightened level of ambition of NATO's deepened relationships with Southern partners. Could an effective narrative be found for the kinds of deepened relationships that NATO will want to develop in the years to come, especially to its South? This remains one of the key challenges going forward.

Ways and means

As noted above, NATO has a wealth of experience and expertise to draw on. On the flipside, 25 years of partnerships and capacity building programmes have created a complex set of programmes and procedures. Lightening and streamlining these could result in administrative cost and time savings. That said, one-size fits all solutions or programmes will not necessarily help –given the diversity of countries and relationships that NATO now enjoys, as explained above–. What will matter is the degree to which NATO's instruments can be tailored to the unique circumstances of the established and emerging relationships it will need to nurture to its East and South.

NATO's partnerships and capacity-building programmes are not resource intensive. This resource use is not likely to change in the near future. In an era of tight budgets, and increased pressure for defence spending, making a case for resource increases is not easy; but at the same time, there is a case to be made for some funding increases will probably be necessary, especially if NATO is to complement its mature support and capacity-building programmes for Eastern European and Balkan nations with increasing attention towards the Middle East and North Africa.

NATO's integrated command structure is one of its unique assets. Already, a large part of the day-to-day advisory and training work with partners is conducted by teams of military officers operating out of NATO's commands. As 'projecting stability' is taken forward as an approach, it will be important to think about how this Command Structure's role in 'projecting stability' can evolve. Already, in February 2017, NATO Defence Ministers agreed a new 'Hub for the South', to be based in Naples, which will support NATO's deeper engagement with its Southern flank. Future work on the NATO Command Structure will no doubt provide other opportunities for adjustment.

Finally, two key tests for this approach will lie in NATO's ability to work well with others—in particular with national programmes and the programmes of the EU.

There are significant cost savings and synergies that could be generated by aligning NATO programmes more effectively with bilateral capacity-building and defence assistance programmes offered by Allies and some partners. Some of these programmes might plug well into NATO programmes. NATO already has a very well developed network of national education, training and research centres. A good use of new NATO structures and human resources would be to invest them into managing clearing houses and networks of cooperation, thus acting as multipliers for national efforts.

How NATO can develop links with the EU's institutions and agencies in this area will be a key test. 'Projecting stability' is an ideal area for deeper cooperation with other

organisations, notably the EU. Both organisations have established partnership programmes with countries in their neighbourhood. The joint declaration signed by EU leaders and the NATO Secretary General in Warsaw lists closer cooperation on capacity-building for a common neighbourhood among its seven priority areas. Finding ways to align NATO's defence and security sector expertise with the EU's programmes and funding instruments could reinforce political conditionality when it comes to engaging partners.

Conclusions

'Projecting stability': putting it all together

As we have seen, NATO's emerging 'projecting stability' approach makes sense given the current threat landscape. It provides a powerful vision that can be used to focus a variety of its activities in pursuit of a proactive agenda of stabilising the neighbourhood. NATO can also build on solid foundations –the experience and expertise of a quarter century of partnerships and capacity-building–.

At the same time, this is only the beginning. Making 'projecting stability' an effective project will mean investing deeply in political relationships with neighbouring states, in a much more tailored manner, and perhaps shaping new narratives and political projects; it will require further adaptation of NATO's resources and structures, enabling them to provide targeted advice, capacity building and training to a variety of countries. Finally, it will require exploring how to network with what Allies and partners are doing in the field of stabilisation, as well as seeking synergies with the EU.