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NATO's Role in Democratization Processes: Lesson Learned and Way Forward

The scope of this *Analysis* is to analyze NATO's contribution to democratization processes following a regime change (such as in Central Europe in the 90's and Northern Africa in 2010), as well as in post-conflict reconstruction efforts (Balkans from 1995 and Afghanistan from 2003). The author researches NATO's recent history to find converging paths and proposes the way forward with partners in the Mediterranean.

NATO and sustainable democratization

Welzel¹ developed the concept of *sustainable democratization* as the process that heralds the introduction of democracy in a non-democratic regime, sustains the deepening of the democratic practices in a regime and protects the survival of democracy. Democracy can be defined² as a competitive political system in which competing leaders and organizations define the alternatives of public policy in such a way that the public can participate in the decision-making process. This definition highlights two important features of democracy: alternation/competition and participation/inclusion in the decision making process. Democracy progresses as a pendulum that oscillates between competition and inclusion in the allocation of resources, targeting the middle course in between. The struggle for locally available resources is what determines the direction of this pendulum. Natural resources, such as arable land, cattle, water and metals, as much as financial military and educational ones, shall be distributed across groups within the society avoiding the pendulum to slant towards competitive social behavior erupting into violence and unrest. Instead, the excessive widespread attribution of

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Abstract

This analysis examines the role of NATO in democratic transition processes. The author argues that a lower level of threat to national security and a more cooperative approach with neighbors help stabilize democratic institutions and structures in countries in transitions. NATO has the tools to increase collaborative security and to assist countries in the development of national security strategies compatible with regional stability. These tools range from military assistance programs, to political dialogue initiatives.

The author researches the recent history of NATO to fine converging paths between NATO's contribution to stability in former Eastern Europe, in the Balkans and more recently in Central Asia. Finally a section is dedicated to the identification of policy recommendations for NATO that could increase national and regional security across the Middle East. Following the recent regime changes

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¹ C WELZEL, *Modernization, Cultural Change, and Democracy*, New York, Cambridge University Press, 2005.

² E.E. SCHETTSCHEIDER, *The Semisovereign People: A Realist's View of Democracy in America*, Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960.

The opinions expressed herein are strictly personal and do not necessarily reflect the position of ISPI.

resources across groups can cause inefficiency and irresponsible behaviors, driving the system to the same path of violence. This process was stopped in Central and Eastern Europe, but did occur in Afghanistan with unfortunate development for the democratic process in the country. Sustainable democratization encompasses a great amount of variables and there is consensus only on as few as 7 of them:

1. Accountability: the extent to which country's citizens are able to participate and select their government, as well as freedom of expression, of association and of press;
2. Effectiveness: the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development, as well as the ability of a government to provide for its citizen;
3. Political stability and absence of violence: perceptions of the likelihood a government could be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, including civil strikes and terrorism;
4. Democratic control of Armed Forces: the norms and standards governing the relationship between the armed forces and society, whereby the armed forces are subordinated to democratically-elected authorities and subject to the oversight of the judiciary as well as the media and civil society organizations;
5. Corruption: the capacity of a country to attain a high level of governmental integrity by controlling dishonest practices;
6. Rule of law: perception of the extent to which people have confidence in and abide by the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence;
7. Mutually beneficial regional security frameworks: bilateral or multilateral arrangements, (i.e. confidence building measures, demilitarized zone, fact finding missions, early warning) that increases the security of both parties, as well as the regional stability.

NATO's contribution to sustainable democratization will be analyzed from two points of views: democratization processes in regime change and in post conflict reconstruction efforts.

NATO's role in *regime change* depends on the definition given to the latter. Regime change is a sudden change in the organization of the society that last for substantial period of time and that changes the internal dynamics and feedbacks of a society, preventing it from returning to a previous regime. Regime change is usually the result of a combination of gradual changes in society with an abrupt shock. An unfortunate corollary of regime change is the 'hysteresis' or the response of a complex system to a varying force, which can cause the system to return to its original status (the "rubber band" phenomenon). NATO has never had any role in the actual shocks, as these are purely internal processes, but has been instrumental in contributing to gradual changes that would make it hard to go back to the previous regimes, as was the case in Central Europe in the nineties and will likely be the case in North Africa.

Post conflict stabilization, instead, is a multi-stakeholder effort to archive reconstruction, good governance, justice, sustainable development and human security in a society affected by diffuse instability due to previous armed conflict between social groups. NATO's role in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Afghanistan saw the Alliance deeply committed from an early stage of conflict, aiming at protecting the civilian population, guaranteeing a minimum level of security, enhancing the peace conditions and supporting reconstruction and development efforts.

In both these processes, NATO's approach has been complementary to that of other international organizations, such as the European Union and the United Nations, whose political and financial resources are larger than NATO's. The Alliance has a rather large role in security sector reform while others international institutions have a larger role in development assistance. As a political-military Alliance whose principal mission was – and still is – to *safeguard the freedom, common*

*heritage and civilisation of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law*³, NATO developed the tools to activate political dialogue (enhancement of UN mandated missions, partnership programs) and military instruments (training, education, sharing of best practices and capabilities) to protect and expand democracy. The author believes that NATO has played positive role in democratization processes by leading international efforts in the following indicators:

1. Disarmament, demobilization and reintegration of former combatants,
2. Demining of terrains and small arms and light weapons trafficking reduction,
3. Direct and indirect support to economic stabilization and reconstruction efforts by channeling financial resources from members and by ensuring the security of economic operators,
4. Security Sector Reform by promoting accountability, democratic control of armed forces and transparency,
5. Protection of vulnerable groups and minorities,
6. Reconciliation measures, by supporting directly or indirectly meetings and dialogue across ethnic groups,
7. Regional stability, by creating regional cooperative frameworks acceptable across parties from regions in conflicts.

NATO's contribution to regime change

Regime change has deep roots and is the result of small but profound changes in the society following an abrupt shock that cause the regime to collapse. That was the case with Central and Eastern European countries after the Fall of the Berlin Wall (November 9th 1989), the Unification of Germany (October 3rd 1990) and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact (February 25th 1991).

NATO's appeal to CEE countries was not adamant in 1990. Despite being successful in winning the Soviet bloc without firing a bullet, NATO's membership appeal by CEE countries was low and almost no reference was made during the first democratic elections in Poland, Czechoslovakia or Hungary. Ambitions for a more neutral stance and for a transformation of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe into a collective security organization were the main policy priorities of CEE countries during 1989-1990.

The impetus of partnering with or joining the Alliance became a policy priority following the difficult transition in the Baltic, the violence in Yugoslavia and the *coup d'état* in Moscow. At the 1990 London Summit in July, the Alliance has extended "*a hand of friendship*" to the countries of the East. In December 1991 the North Atlantic Partnership Council, a consultative body between NATO members and 9 CEE countries was established. A few months afterward, local Atlantic Councils, NGO-type organizations active in the civil society segment begin supporting the Euro-Atlantic integration process. These Councils were established from Poland to Bulgaria as NATO became the only viable option to guarantee their independence from Moscow and started to anchor the security and stability of the region to the West. The new fast speed of the Euro-Atlantic integration process was enacted by several factors:

- the shared cultural, linguistic, ethnic, social and historical backgrounds of NATO members with CEE countries, also thanks to a multitude of CEE individuals living in the West before the Iron curtain descended;

³ Preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty, 4 April 1949.

- the successful intertwined relation between development, economic growth and political stability on the Western bloc, which represented the model to follow, causing swift reforms to liberal economy, as well as large immigration trends westward;
- the unity of intent between national elites and the citizenry. New leaders and national “heros” emerged, from Czech Vaclav Havel to Polish Lech Walesa. The unity made it possible to avoid violent transition from one regime to the other, unifying the army with the political establishment, the economic and intellectual elites and the citizens.

NATO’s role in regime change was not direct, but the extension of a “*hand of friendship*” was instrumental in triggering the change, in supporting it and anchoring it in each country. NATO's North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991 and its successor Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council in 1997 established the proper political framework, while the Partnership for Peace (PfP) program defined the strategy and implementing steps. Within PfP framework, each NATO partner developed a tailor made bilateral relation with NATO based on:

- military cooperation in joint planning, peacekeeping, joint exercises, confidence building measures, training, and humanitarian operations in order to ensure interoperable forces, and
- political dialogue to ensure consultation on issues of common concerns and democratic oversight of armed forces.

By joining the PfP countries agreed to support democratic principles, refrain from the threat or use of force against any neighbor, settle the dispute by peaceful means, maintain the principle of international law and abide by the principle of United Nation Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

NATO’s contribution to post conflict stabilization

Radically different is NATO’s contribution to democratization processes in post -conflict stabilization, such as in the Balkans from 1995 and Afghanistan from 2003. The Alliance was deeply involved in the ground and played an active role in the stabilizing the national path to democracy, as a supporter of national driven processes and as a direct contributor through its confidence building measures, training and assistance programs. NATO’s contribution to democratization processes in a post-conflict environment focuses on:

- Stabilization efforts in order to stop violence and fighting and guarantee peace,
- Enhance the conditions for stable peace agreements by encouraging confidence building measures,
- Coordinate demilitarization measures, including efforts towards former militias and combatants,
- Assist the economic and human development process my coordinating security measures with local communities, donors and NGO.

The complexity of post-conflict stabilization operations derives from the need to simultaneously tackle the democratization process, the stabilization and reconstruction needs of the people as well as the national-building processes. In Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo, for example, the legitimate needs for security by the civilians involved in conflicts, as much as by the military personnel, required strong influence over internal politics and economic processes of these countries, retarding the process of internal development caused by international aid distorting economic processes. Moreover, the contrast between an internationally-assisted national-building process and the principle of alternation creates the so called “dilemma of persistence” , according to which elites can present themselves as successors of past regimes or the unique holder of new democratic credentials, and thus reduce the capacity of democratic institution to function, as it is the case in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

The chart below shows the correlation between NATO's presence in the country (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo and Afghanistan, the three largest ground missions of NATO) and its democratization indicators⁴.

Larger democratic indicators, such as the level of accountability of political leaders or the level of corruption, demonstrate how democratic achievements in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Afghanistan and Kosovo – have had mixed results, with most of the indicators failing to improve throughout the years. Afghanistan situation is of particular concern and the “rubber band” phenomenon described above might turn real in a foreseeable future.

Indicator (and its definition) <small>(Range between -2.5 [weak] to 2.5 [strong], average standard error of 0.20)</small>	B&H 1996	B&H 2011	Kosovo 1998	Kosovo 2011	Afghanistan 2003	Afghanistan 2011
<u>Accountability</u>	0.18	-0.21	-1.33	-0.26	-2.24	-1.49
<u>Effectiveness</u>	-1.26	-0.76	-0.37 (2006*)	-0.49	-1.18	0.23
<u>Political Stability and absence of violence</u>	-0.64	-0.90	1.04 (2008*)	-1.13	-2.24	-2.51
<u>Rule of law</u>	0.24	-0.31	-1.07 (2003*)	-0.58	-1.67	-1.94
<u>Corruption</u>	-0.35	-0.27	-0.81 (2003*)	-0.62	-1.55	-1.55

*Earliest year of availability

Instead, international data prove that indicators under almost exclusive NATO's responsibility improved consistently across the life span of the operation. These indicators, albeit smaller than those pursued by the broader international community, contribute to sustainable democratization processes. Military expenditures dropped a 3.5% in Bosnia Herzegovina across 1996-2011 and 1.5% in Afghanistan⁵. Casualties for land mines dropped from 662 to 14 in Kosovo and from 846 to 422 in Afghanistan across the same time span⁶. A multinational 2,500-strong Kosovar Security Force is now effectively performing emergency response, explosive ordnance disposal, management of hazardous material, and civil protection. Afghan Armed Forces have been rebuilt and can now count of 164,000 trained soldiers, compared with the 13,000 of 2003. Democratic control over Armed Forces by the Afghan Parliament is now in place. NATO's contribution to security made democratization process in Kosovo and Bosnia more sustainable. In Afghanistan the harsh conditions in the ground, as well as opposing interests in the international community are hindering the advancement of sustainable democracy.

The mixed success of democratization processes made necessary for the Alliance to draw some lessons learned from the stabilization and reconstruction missions that have been conducted in the past 15 years. On 11 June 2010, NATO Defense Ministers decided to “task preparation of political

⁴ All data from World Bank Statistical Services.

⁵ Data from Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) yearbooks.

⁶ Data from United Nations Mine Action Service.

guidance on ways to improve NATO's involvement in stabilization and reconstruction"⁷. The resulting "Political Guidance on ways to improve NATO's involvement in Stabilization and Reconstruction"⁸

- Attaches great relevance to a comprehensive approach to security based on complementary, coherence and coordination between international military and civilian experts and local actors,
- Highlights the priority role of public security, basic services, humanitarian aid, governance and economic infrastructure from the very early stages of interventions, in order to archive sustainable stability and reconstruction,
- Gives an important role to the regional security context and to the need to take into account that security must not be a zero-sum game and that no major player must be left outside,
- Re-affirms the crucial importance of stabilization and reconstruction efforts since the early stages of the mission, even while military operations are still underway,
- Empowers local actors, including the national authorities, to take ownership of the initiatives, thus reducing the impact of foreign presence and the distortion it causes.

NATO's contribution to democratization processes in Arab Spring countries.

First of all, the revolts in several Arab countries in North Africa and Middle East have similar root causes but different processes from those experienced in CEE. From Tunisia and Yemen to Egypt and Syria, local governments were un-able to perform the complex tasks that are requested to manage an increasingly demanding population. Lavish public spending programs, such as those that have stopped the revolts in Saudi Arabia, were not possible in Tunisia or Yemen where poorly educated masses were unable to improve their human conditions *vis-a-vis* increasingly corrupted and inefficient governments. Increasing assertiveness was fueled by other protests from Kyrgyzstan in 2005 to Iran in 2009 and by the incredible role played by Arab mass media such as Al Jazeera. Yet similarities with CEE democratic changes are as large as their differences:

1. Demonstrators have been protesting against a regime and not against a system of values. They agree with the values their societies hold, but they feel poorly represented by their leaders, perceived as corrupted and distant. Ideology (communism vs. liberalism) and international issues (i.e. Palestinian-Israeli conflict) were not part of the protests, since the overwhelming majority of demonstrators were asking for more jobs and more dignity, as recognized by an African Bank of Development Report of June 2012.
2. There is no shared model to appeal to or example to follow. CEE countries saw in the United States and Western European Allies an anchor of stability and a model to follow; the same does not apply to Arab countries, whose closer model is far from being the Turkish one.
3. The upper classes and elites haven't had a leading role in the protests. Their contribution to the break-ups of the regime was minimal, their support to the demonstrators was late and they never managed to conquer the majority of protestors, leaving them to the influence of more extremist or authoritarian characters.
4. The economic situation in CEE and Arab Spring countries was disastrous with few advanced industry sectors, substantial protectionism, lack of skilled labor and work opportunities. Yet the economic cycle in the developed world began upturning only a few years afterwards, while the global economic outlook for the next years looks rather gloomy, thus reducing the possibility for speedy economic development.

⁷ Declaration by NATO Defense Ministers following Ministerial Meeting in Brussels on 10 and 11 June 2010, paragraph 14.

⁸ Issued on 14 October 2010 by the NATO Defense Ministers.

5. Armed Forces role in the uprisings was totally different across countries: the Army played a very limited role during the regime change in CEE countries, while the heavy involvement of the Egyptian and Libyan armies during the uprising polarized positions and created further divisions.
6. Shared ethnic and cultural identities are not a reality in countries like Libya or Syria as they were not in Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia. Sources of tension on how to address the issue of national representation, autonomy and regional government authorities in each state are already emerging.
7. A distinct Arab background as opposed to European or Turkish culture has emerged, thus signaling an encouraging cultural confidence, which could lead to positive development (tighter regional cooperation) as much as to negative process (refusal of minorities and global assertiveness).

NATO's experience with regime change, democratization processes, crisis management and post conflict operations can be extremely useful in the different national and regional contexts. In all circumstances, the starting point must be to give priority to *local ownership* and to the *empowerment for the Arab Masses*, as described by the United Nation's Arab Human Development Report of 2012. NATO's contribution to democratization processes in North Africa shall be focused around three priorities:

1. South-South cooperation, as a way to fulfill the expectations defined in the latest NATO Strategic Concept. Within this framework, the 1994 Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) must be enhanced to a strategic partnership, where the bilateral relations, guided by Individual Partnership Programs with each country can be sustained by a proper regional approach based on:
 - Increased level of interoperability and training of partner's armed forces, as they could contribute to future exercises or operations;
 - Expansion of military cooperation to maritime security, in order to fight terrorism, trafficking and piracy;
 - Support to confidence building measures across countries in the region, such as border demining, reduction of forces at the border, training of high ranking officers at the NATO Defense College and even the creation of small joint forces (maybe at the sub-regional level) for intelligence sharing, civil protection, or coast guards.
2. Expansion of NATO tools to other areas of Security Sector Reform. At its best, NATO is perceived as a "service provider" by governments from the region, which is, by itself, not bad news. The Alliance shall not only provide partners with training, military expertise and information sharing on issues of particular interest. NATO must also seek opportunities for activating larger cooperative security programs with officials at the Ministry of Justice and Economy/Trade. Transitional justice, energy security and critical infrastructure protection are key priorities for the countries in the region and NATO shall take a larger stake in those, in order to support the creation of a sustainable democracy, and not just a "one man, one vote, one time" type of democracy.
3. Tailor made partnerships based on individual country needs. In Tunisia, the most advanced country in this democratization process, priority must be given to Security Sector Reform, training and assistance, by creating opportunities for Tunisian Armed Forces to become more interoperable with NATO forces. In Libya, NATO has an extensive political capital to use, thanks to the support given to former insurgents who defeated the Gaddafi regime. Yet disarmament, demobilization and transitional justice are serious challenges for the Armed Forces and political authorities in the country. A genuine Strategic Partnership based on political consultation and Individual Partnership Action Plan that provides real benefits for the Libyan Security Sector should be sought with (and by) Libyan authorities. The underlying political message could be groundbreaking as it opens the door for further agreements with countries across the region. NATO can also play a larger political role of counterweight to other forces that are influencing

the decisions making process in North Africa. Arab Gulf countries profligate their financial resources into the public budgets of “Arab Spring” countries and buy consensus for their conservative policies, creating social and judicial tensions from Morocco to Jordan. NATO can be seen as an attractive leverage by Mediterranean partners.

Conclusion

In the last 15 years, the Alliance has been experiencing an intense operational phase. NATO's missions and operations have stretched the Alliance's human and financial resources. With operations in the Mediterranean, Kosovo, Indian Ocean, and Afghanistan – just to mention the largest – the Alliance's focus has been on managing operational goals. Despite the future being impossible to predict, new major operations are not at sight and the largest one, Afghanistan's ISAF, will shortly be over. Therefore, it is the time to focus on the strategic future of the Alliance, looking to those partners and neighbors who share similar challenges and threats. The starting point is defined by the latest Strategic Concept approved in Lisbon in November 2011 which identifies the three key tasks of NATO: collective defense (or the reaffirmation of Article 5), crisis management and collective security (the dialogue with partners).

Sustainable democratization is the results of an effective crisis management, as the recent events in North Africa demonstrate. NATO's collaborative security and assistance programs made it possible to archive positive direct and indirect results for democratization processes. NATO's regional cooperative policies, both on the ground and at the higher political level, created those confidence building measures that made democracy more stable and allow it to permeate different segments of the society, especially those more highly involved in previous conflicts.

The prospect for a similar development in Northern African countries has to be supported and tailored to the different situations on the ground and to the level of ambition. Yet NATO's mission to *safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of their peoples, founded on the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law*, requires a strong and genuine cooperative framework with partners from the Arab World and Middle East, as this is the area from where major sources of threats to Allies security will come from in the foreseeable future. Genuine partnership must be an overarching exercise which involves not only the Alliance, but also the European Union, the United Nations and the other global international organizations in a spirit of joint ownership, mutual trust and sub-regional cooperation.

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