

NATO's Non-traditional Approach to Security Concepts in the Mediterranean Region: Examples relating to Desertification, Seismic Events and Environmental Issues.

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In 1995, NATO established an open forum for discussion, exchange of information and co-operation with seven countries on the southern side of the Mediterranean Region (Egypt, Israel, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, subsequently joined by Jordan and Algeria); the so-called Mediterranean Dialogue (MD). This initiative has developed over the years, and the number of co-operative activities has steadily increased. The Dialogue reflects the Alliance's view that security in Europe is closely linked to security and stability in the Mediterranean. It is an integral part of NATO's external adaptation to the post-Cold War security environment, as well as an important component of the Alliance's policy of partnership and co-operation. The aim of the Dialogue is to contribute to regional security and stability, to achieve a better mutual understanding, and to correct any misperceptions about NATO among Mediterranean Dialogue countries. The Dialogue is based on 5 main principles:

1. It is progressive (both in membership and in content). NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue has indeed evolved at a steady pace since its launch in 1995. In particular, at the Washington Summit in April 1999, Alliance leaders decided to enhance both its political and practical dimensions. Amongst other things, this has created further opportunities for discussion and for strengthening co-operation in areas where NATO can bring added value. This applies particularly in the military field, and in other areas where Dialogue countries have expressed interest. At the Istanbul Summit in 2004, Allied Heads of State and Government decided to strengthen co-operation between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries and, in particular, to establish a more ambitious and expanded partnership.
2. It is based primarily on bilateral relations between each participating country and NATO. However, it allows for multilateral meetings such as the 19+7 meeting held at Ambassadorial level. The Dialogue provides for political and practical co-operation with the participating countries. The political dialogue consists of regular bilateral and multilateral meetings at Ambassadorial and working level, as well as multilateral conferences at Ambassadorial level and visits to Dialogue countries by NATO Senior Officials. These meetings provide opportunities for exchanging views on a range of issues relevant to the security situation in the Mediterranean, as well as on the future development of the Dialogue. The practical dimension covers a wide range of co-operation activities that are offered to MD partners through an annual work programme.

3. The MD initiative is non-discriminatory: it offers all Mediterranean partners the same basis for discussion and for joint activities.
4. In principle, activities proposed in the framework of the Mediterranean Dialogue take place on a self-funding basis. However, experience has shown that without some kind of financial assistance, MD countries find it difficult to participate in most activities. NATO thus provides, on a case-by-case basis, financial assistance to allow participation in activities offered to MD partners.
5. The Dialogue is meant mutually to reinforce and complement other international efforts aimed at enhancing regional co-operation such as the EU's Barcelona Process and the OSCE Mediterranean Dialogue.

Within the framework of the Dialogue, different bodies and agencies of NATO have launched various joint initiatives. The NATO Science Programme (from 2004, the Security Through Science Programme) has played a significant role in this process, with regard to the number of initiatives implemented, the people involved and the quality of the subjects treated.

The scope of the Programme is twofold. On the one hand, from a traditional point of view, it offers scientists of NATO, Partner and Mediterranean Dialogue Countries the opportunity to work together on specific scientific/technical topics related to security in a broad sense (including environmental security, food security, water resources and energy). On the other hand, specific attention is paid to issues that are highly relevant to a region or country.

Since the year 2000, a large number of events have been sponsored and promoted by the Science Programme within the NATO / Mediterranean Dialogue framework.

The main result of such sponsorship has been an impressive involvement of scientists from Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia in NATO Advanced Study Institutes and Advanced Research Workshops. In the 2000 to 2004 period, 332 experts of Mediterranean Dialogue countries were invited to be lecturers at Advanced Study Institutes (ASI) or key speakers at Advanced Research Workshops (ARW). During the same period, 708 Mediterranean Dialogue scientists attended these events as ASI students or ARW participants. This strong participation demonstrates that promoting scientific and technical co-operation is effective in bringing awareness of NATO to a region where its image needs to be improved.

Over the years, topics discussed and assessed at ASIs and ARWs have progressively changed. In the past, they related to basic science, whereas today they are closer to the priorities of the countries and regions concerned (desertification; water resources; environmental issues; social and political stability, etc.). There is a focus on the fight against terrorism, although this issue must be handled carefully since terrorism has different characteristics in different Mediterranean Dialogue countries. In addition, each Mediterranean Dialogue country has specific political sensitivities which should never be overlooked when launching initiatives or promoting NATO-sponsored events.

Activities promoted and sponsored by the Security Through Science Programme form a substantial part of the 2005 NATO / Mediterranean Dialogue Work Programme. This document, approved by NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue nations, includes specific requests for focused initiatives and is the basis for any practical collaboration between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue countries.

Against this background, discussion on ***Desertification and Security*** began a few years ago among representatives of the different NATO countries serving on the NATO Committee on the Challenges of Modern Societies. NATO then put together a group of experts to examine the subject more deeply, and, to this end, a workshop was organised in Valencia (Spain) in December 2003. Official delegations of the seven Mediterranean Dialogue countries contributed to the discussion, together with specialists of European and North American countries. The subject was analysed from different angles, but the common goal was to focus on the inter-linking and effects of various parameters (soil erosion, water management, crop production/loss) on populations in affected areas, bearing in mind that political stability, human dynamics and poverty are all related to the proper management of local resources. Arable land is the most important of these resources.

Following the workshop, NATO received a number of applications for Collaborative Linkage Grants to pursue further research on the issue. This is a clear indication that the workshop represented a chance for the experts involved to establish contacts and share insights into the topic. As a sign of increased interest in desertification, a Collaborative Linkage Grant was awarded in June 2004 for a project on 'Desertification Indicators in the Mediterranean Soil Environments' for collaboration among universities and research institutes in Spain, Israel, Morocco and Italy. The aim of the project was to develop a simple methodology for assessing the status and trend of land degradation/desertification in selected investigation sites representative of the Mediterranean region.

Another Collaborative Linkage Grant on this issue was awarded in November 2004 for a project on 'Bio-Indicators of Desertification and Erosion in Turkey' involving scientists working in Turkey, Russia and the US. This project focuses on the investigation of drought-resistant plants and associated insects, which are considered essential for the scientific description and understanding of the desertification and erosion processes typical of arid regions in the largest part of Turkey. The data obtained may be used for monitoring the desertification and erosion process as well as the dynamics of the ecosystem.

Natural disasters also have a huge impact on the populations they affect and, consequently, on their societies and politics. The earthquake which struck Algeria in 2003, giving rise to more than 1,200 victims, resulted in destabilisation, even at a political level.

The international aid received from all over the world was massive, and greatly appreciated by Algeria. However, some time later, International Organisations had another important role to play; namely, that of providing international political solidarity. In this spirit, NATO made a proposal to the Algerian Government to organise a joint ***International Workshop on the Seismic Safety of Public Buildings.***

This event took place in Algiers in May 2005 (two years after the earthquake), and was attended by representatives of Ministries of the Algerian Government, by engineers of the Algerian Army and by experts of NATO countries, Partner countries and MD countries. NATO's role was to act as a catalyst for future activities on an issue which is of concern to a great number of countries, including allies such as Greece, Italy and Turkey. Additionally, NATO's Security Through Science Programme has, over time, developed considerable experience on seismic evaluation and risk assessment, thanks to several Science for Peace projects on this issue. The general topic discussed at the workshop was how to protect public buildings, such as schools, hospitals and government and administrative structures, from damage caused by seismic events. Plenary sessions focused on presentations given by experts from NATO and Maghreb countries on earthquake hazard assessment, earthquake-resistant design, earthquake performance assessment and earthquake retrofit. Several points were made during the debate and it was stressed that the construction of earthquake-resistant buildings can make the difference between life and death. It was also pointed out that the consequences of the earthquake that struck Boumerdès two years ago underscored shortcomings in the field of seismic risk reduction, and a new plan to reduce such risks was set up in Algeria. This plan recommends further actions in the domain of earthquake hazard assessment and land planning as well as in the organisation of response teams and in raising the awareness of the population.

The main result of the workshop was the opportunity given to local experts to discuss with their international colleagues how to be prepared for facing similar seismic disasters in the future. NATO provided this opportunity, by establishing contacts between scientists, experts, representatives of the Maghreb countries and members of the Algerian Government. This is not something that happens frequently, since these different categories have their own specific fora.

The former NATO Science Programme, now the Security Through Science Programme, has proved, after almost fifty years of experience, to be an efficient tool in enabling a continuous dialogue between the Alliance, the international scientific community and civil society. Moreover, the availability of support mechanisms like the Advanced Research Workshops, the Advanced Study Institutes and the Collaborative Linkage Grants allows people from different cultures and backgrounds and with various skills to address new common threats and challenges and provide answers relevant to security.