

## **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 (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia); the so-called Mediterranean Dialogue. This initiative has developed over the years, and the number of co-operative activities has steadily increased. At the Istanbul Summit in 2004, Allied Heads of State and Government decided to strengthen co-operation between NATO and Mediterranean Dialogue (MD) countries and, in particular, to establish a more ambitious and expanded partnership.

Within this framework, different bodies and agencies of NATO have implemented various joint initiatives, either at the bilateral level (NATO + 1), or at a regional or multilateral level (NATO + n/NATO + 7). The NATO 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.

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.

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 governmental 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. 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 and local politicians and members of the Algerian Government. This is not something that happens frequently, since these different categories have their own specific fora.

The NATO Science Programme proved to be an efficient tool for this purpose: forty years of experience has helped to make possible a continuous dialogue between the Alliance, the International Scientific Community and Civil Society.