

**The House Committee on Foreign Affairs' Subcommittee on Europe and Subcommittee  
on the Middle East and South Asia  
“Europe and Israel: Strengthening the Partnership”  
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**THE CASE FOR ISRAEL FULL MEMBERSHIP INTO NATO**

Chairman Wexler, Chairman Ackerman, distinguished members of the Subcommittee on Europe and the Subcommittee on The Middle East and South Asia, it is a privilege for me to have been asked to make a contribution to this hearing on “Europe and Israel: Strengthening the Partnership”.

Three years ago I co-authored a report called *NATO: An Alliance for freedom*. I have deposited an electronic version of it just in case you may be interested in incorporating it into the records.

What I defended on it was very simple, and can be summarized as follows:

- 1.- Jihadism -or islamist terrorism- represents an existential threat to the West;
- 2.- NATO was created back in 1949 to defend the West, from the threats that may pose a mortal danger to us. In sum, to defend our way of life, our freedom and our institutions;
- 3.- NATO should be the primary tool to combat the threat posed by the global jihad;
- 4.- In order to do so, some essential changes were needed, like:
  - a) To adopt a new strategic orientation expressed in a new strategic concept, and to place the war against terror as the main priority of NATO;
  - b) To develop a homeland defense component within NATO, given the increasingly blurred frontier between internal and external security;
  - c) The need to expand NATO beyond its traditional boundaries and areas of responsibility in order to fight effectively a global threat;
  - d) Accordingly, NATO should expand its enlargement policy, and invite nations willing and able to make a clear political and military contribution to the collective defense. I'm referring to countries such as Japan, Australia and Israel.

I have to say that some points of the report were easier to accept than others. While getting a new strategic concept is a need openly discussed nowadays in NATO HQ, and the threat of terrorism was recognized to some extent in the Comprehensive Political Guidance adopted in the Riga Summit at the end of 2006, defending Israel membership in NATO has proved to be a much harder task.

When I started preparing the report *NATO: An Alliance for freedom*, almost everyone was dismissive of any relation between the Alliance and Israel. I remember many people arguing that the mere idea of bringing the two parts together was a non-starter. It could not fly.

However, four years later, today, NATO Secretary General has visited Israel officially for the first time; NATO and Israel have signed an Individual Cooperation Program (ICP); Israeli and NATO members forces have trained together in joint exercises; and, even more important, Israel is actively participating in NATO's mission Active Endeavour, being carried out since 2001 in the Mediterranean waters.

I would like to mention that to my own satisfaction I discovered in 2005 that there were some influential people also thinking in the same way as I did. Perhaps we may have disagreements on the nature and timing of NATO/Israel closer relations, but we were all defending the idea that strengthening the strategic relation between NATO and Israel was not only a sound option, but an indispensable one. I would like to make a special mention here to the work carried out by people like Ron Asmus, from The German Marshall Fund, Matt Horn, from the American Jews Congress, and Professors Uzi Arad and Tommy Steiner from the Atlantic Council of Israel, among others. I also want to express my gratitude to President José María Aznar, who has been ardently promoting the ideas defended in the report before many world leaders, from DC to Canberra, as well as for my colleagues at the Strategic Studies Group (GEES) in Madrid, as they were instrumental in developing my own thinking on the subject.

Having said all that as background of what I am going to express here today, the idea I would like to defend in front of you, distinguished members of the House, is also very simple: despite all practical arrangements achieved in the last three years between Israel and NATO, I still believe that the most beneficial arrangement, for NATO as well as for Israel, is full membership. Less than that, neither side may enjoy all the potential strategic benefits of being together.

Let me start by delineating the rationale of Israel's full membership into NATO for both sides, Israel and the Alliance.

To begin with, NATO and Israel share many and very important strategic interests. The broader Middle East is where the strategic tectonic plates of our world are colliding now. The inter-German border was the central front of the Cold War for many decades; today if there is a central front between civilization and barbarism it runs through the Middle East. It is no longer just a cause of nationalism, what we see in the region today is a matter of freedom versus fanaticism; of respect to the international norms versus rogue behaviors; of mutual coexistence versus mutual destruction.

Israel has been fighting for its own existence since its creation. But Israel's enemies today are different than in the past. Israel security is not threatened by the neighboring regimes; instead it is progressively confronted by new non-state forces, with a radical fanatic agenda, unwilling to compromise, and seeing Israel as one obstacle for their more expansive ambitions. The evolution of Hezbollah, the Party of God in Lebanon, and Hamas in Gaza, represent clearly what I'm saying.

I do believe it is in the interest of the West that these forces of radical Islam are contained and undermined.

Take Iran as another example of strategic convergence. It is in the interest of the whole international community to put an end to the Iranian nuclear ambitions, as well as to make the regime in Teheran to behave responsibly. The game the Iranian leaders have been playing is to try to create divisions between the US and Europe, among the Western nations and Russia

and China, and to isolate Israel as much as possible. Actually they will love to see Israel isolated and disconnected from the West, politically and militarily.

If presenting a cohesive front against Iran is an indispensable diplomatic tool in order to thwart its nuclear program, I cannot imagine a stronger signal to Teheran than to have Israel as a NATO ally. Also, Israel in NATO could complicate too much any calculus to be made by the ayatollahs in the future vis a vis Israel. Being a part of a formal political-military alliance eliminates some of the more risky ambiguities that may drive Iran into a major strategic mistake.

I know that Israel traditional defense policy has been to rely on its own national capabilities; I also know that its best has been the US. Acting alone, or backed by the US, Israel has been able to fight and win all the conventional wars that have been forced to fight. But as I suggested before, we are now entering into a new Middle East. Adding an extra dose of deterrence can only add predictability and stability into a very volatile region.

Thus, the strategic benefit of having Israel as a full member in NATO will be a reinforced deterrence posture, both for Israel and NATO.

Secondly, all the alternatives to full membership have a clear limit to what can be achieved at the operational level. It is true that many things can be done through individual cooperation plans, from intelligence sharing to joint maneuvers. But if we look at the history of NATO, we can only conclude that technical cooperation agreements are used either to move candidates to full membership or, alternatively, to keep the country signing such kind of agreements as a second-class citizen compared to the rest of the allies. Though if we listen to the current complaints of nations whose forces are operating along NATO forces in NATO missions but they are not NATO members, it is evident that nobody wants to be second-class citizens for long.

Partnership for Peace was created intelligently to help the Central and Eastern Europeans make the transition from the Warsaw Pact to democratic westernized regimes with modern and civilian controlled armed forces. For some there was a fast track; for other, the path took longer. But if the goal to become member of NATO at some stage was removed, the PfP ceased to have any meaning and attraction at all. So, to me, this is not the path Israel should be considering (bearing in mind the fact that it has to be first a member of the OSCE).

There are so many important fields for technical cooperation that limiting Israel to a program by program approach seems to be a non desirable option either. One thing is to collaborate in programs like sensors, antisubmarine warfare, or counterterrorism detection methods; and a very different one to do it on ballistic missile defenses. It is the difference between tactics and strategy. If the threat from all kind of ballistic missile is growing; if this threat will become more acute given the WMD proliferation trends, it is quite unreasonable to think of NATO and Israel as two distinctive and disconnected bubbles. Counter proliferation and BMD will be more and more central to our security needs and fighting them will require more than mere tactical or technical agreements. Actually, having just a single security zone will be safer than the alternative to fight them separately.

Furthermore, if we talk about operations, and NATO nowadays is all about operations, not being a member is a clear disadvantage. For many years Spain contributed forces to NATO missions without being in the military command structures, so receiving orders without

having a voice in shaping the operations. Paying all the price and enjoying none of the benefits of being on the top. Australia has expressed similar discomfort about its role within NATO structures and procedures in Afghanistan. The lesson here is that if one nation makes a significant contribution of the ground, it should have a voice in the command structures, military and political, no matter if it is a member state or not. I can imagine an expanded North Atlantic Council meeting, open to members of different coalitions in different missions. But couldn't be wiser to open up the club to those willing to be an active part on it?

If we agree that both Israel and NATO have many things to learn from each other, as well as many core issues where to collaborate closely, why not to exploit the full potential of the relationship?

Beyond the strategic and operational areas, there is a third field calling for Israel full membership in NATO: the defense industrial sector. We all know that an effective defense requires a competitive and modern defense industrial sector. Taking aside the US whose market is big enough to sustain open competition and innovation, the size of national markets either in Europe or in Israel are too small for producing the goods that will be required in the future without multinational collaborative projects. If you look at the recent history of weapons acquisition in Europe, you won't find major systems produced nationally.

Israel has the know-how and many attractive technologies that could be integrated in NATO Europe projects if we were able to remove many of the bureaucratic obstacles that give a premium to NATO members.

Defense industrial capabilities are also very dependent on exports to third countries. That's the case of Europe major producers as well as Israel. For Israel, the expansion of NATO means, de facto, a shrinking defense market, since any new member or partner will be inclined to buy following NATO standards, procedures, thus opening their market first to member states firms. For NATO members, joint ventures with Israeli companies could give them an edge in competing in the global market. But in order to exploit fully this commercial/industrial relation, Israel has to share all the procedures and NATO standards. At that point, why not recognize Israel as a full member?

Finally, I see a strong political reason for making the case of Israel in NATO. While NATO has been acting well beyond its original mission and geographical scope, it has also lost the clarity of its funding purpose. Today's NATO is actively engaged in actions, because it is activity what gives NATO its meaning. We have lost track of the original goal of the Atlantic alliance: building a permanent arrangement for defending our values, our political system, our open markets, and our freedom. NATO in the 40's and 50' was about preserving freedom for the West. Despite some imperfections, NATO was essentially a democratic alliance defending itself from the totalitarianism of the USSR.

NATO still is a democratic club 60 years later. We don't need to buy the theory of a world divided between democratic and autocratic powers to recognize that fact. We don't need to argue in favor of a league of democracies, because we, NATO members, are democratic nations, expanding constantly the camp of democracies. Don't forget that democratic criteria are strictly applied to candidates during the enlargement process.

With all the imperfections we may find, it is a fact that NATO is the only forum democratic powers have to discuss strategic issues. Why not bring other democratic countries like Japan,

Australia, and Israel to the table bearing in mind that they are willing and able to make significant contributions to our common security across the globe? If we were to stress the democratic nature of the Alliance, there is no point in keeping the distance between us and our natural allies in other regions of the world. A world that we must be aware is constantly shrinking in strategic terms.

Up to here why Israel in NATO is needed. But is it possible? Is it feasible?

I have to admit that in today's NATO there is not room for Israel as a full member. But at the same time, I'm fully convinced that today's NATO is not sustainable for the future unless we are happy with putting the Alliance aside from the central strategic issues of our time. NATO must change dramatically if it wants to be relevant. And it is in that process of change where Israel can be fitted in. Actually, Israel can contribute to the very process of change in the good direction. Israel can bring to NATO what the Alliance is looking for: willingness to act, capabilities, and a clear strategic vision.

There are two obstacles that are always mentioned when talking about Israel in NATO: the first one, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its possible implications for article 5 collective response; the second, the potential negative reaction in the Arab world. Though both have some merits in their arguments, I do believe they can be overcome without major problems, really.

Concerning the article 5 of the Washington Treaty, though all NATO members are required to contribute to the collective defense if one of the allies is attacked, it is worth considering that nowhere in the wording of the article there is such thing as an automatic military response. Actually, the procedure must be, first, initiated by the concerned member state; second, the rest of the allies will respond according to their national will. So it may be the case that an ally under attack will not bring the issue to NATO; and also that if he does, he will not seek –or find- necessarily a strong military backing. Two brief examples: when Morocco took by force the small Spanish islet of Perejil, in 2002, Spain considered herself able to deal with the situation, and did not rise the issue to NATO instances. Similarly, when art. 5 was for the first time activated after 9 /11, the support given to the US was relatively modest in military terms.

If there is nothing automatic in article 5, it will be possible to arrive to an understanding between NATO and Israel in order not to bring the Palestinian conflict as a case for collective defense. I think the problems with the West bank could be seen as a domestic problem of Israel. And even if the Israeli government's declaration of Gaza as a hostile territory makes less clear that particular case, still an agreement to leave this problem outside NATO is viable.

The second argument out of the fear of Arab reactions is also manageable to my own view. The real problem, though, is not the entire Arab world, but the moderate and responsible Arab regimes. If bringing Israel into NATO could put them in an untenable position, weakened in front of the more radical alternatives, the case for Israel would have no merit whatsoever. But I am convinced we could find ways to avoid that while bringing Israel into NATO.

The more logical solution could be to strengthen NATO's Mediterranean dialogue. In the report *NATO: An alliance for freedom* I was bolder than that, calling for the establishment of

a Partnership for Freedom in the Mediterranean. Without the need to do so, bearing in mind the little enthusiasm left today for the freedom agenda, it would be perfectly feasible to favor special status and partnerships with different Arab countries, according to their specific needs and NATO interests. Jordan is a case in point; Algeria, another.

So, there are ways to diffuse possible negative reactions from the region. Nonetheless, it must be clear that NATO's enlargement in whatever direction may take place should not and cannot be hostage of third parties' decisions. It wasn't the case with Russia prior to the acceptance of Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic in 1997, and it should not be the case in the future. As a matter of principle, NATO enlargement should rely exclusively on NATO's interests and decisions.

There is a final argument, critical of Israel in NATO, which I would like to address, although very briefly, before concluding my remarks. It usually comes from Israelis themselves. It revolves around Israeli fears that being part of an alliance will undermine their freedom of action to defend themselves. I really think that argument can only be understood by the loneliness Israel has felt so many times after seeing many Europeans embracing the Palestinian cause, and falling into anti-Israelis and anti-Semitic stances. It is comprehensible, but I do believe also it is an illusion. Nothing in NATO will preclude any of its members to act whenever, wherever, and in a way it believes necessary. Actually, political criticism may be dealt with in a more benign way within NATO structures.

NATO has proved to be very flexible indeed in accommodating different ways of integration. For instance, the current French policy of bringing France back into the military command structures, has several requirements like that French nuclear forces should and will be always kept under national command, entirely outside NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. NATO is an Alliance full of creativity for institutional arrangements.

Dear chairman, distinguished members of the committee, I perfectly understand that bringing Israel into NATO is a complex issue. I just tried to show that it is worth to explore for the strategic benefit of Israel and the democratic world. Three years ago we were able to initiate a debate that was really impossible before. NATO is going to celebrate its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary in a few months, in April 2009. If we want NATO to succeed in the next 60 years, we should better prepare NATO for the emerging strategic environment.

It is likely that the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary summit will be more of a symbolic nature, given the fact that the new US Administration will be just a few weeks old, and other electoral process in Europe will also interfere. In any case, it could open the discussion on critical issue for the 2010 summit. A new strategic concept is badly needed; a reflection on the meaning of article 5 in the post 9/11 world is urgent; a clarification of allied solidarity is vital; finding ways to incorporate non-allied powers into the decision making machinery is required; thinking about global partnerships is also indispensable.

It is within that context that we must discuss the merits and the ways to bring Israel closer and into NATO. It is our window of opportunity. I believe it should be done, and can be done if we push for it.

Thank you very much.