

SECRETARY GENERAL'S SPEECH
AT THE 11th HERZLIYA CONFERENCE

HERZLIYA, ISRAEL – 9 FEBRUARY 2011

Mr. Steiner, thank you very much for those introductory remarks.
Professor Reichman, General Rothschild.
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a particular pleasure for me to be here today addressing the Herzliya Conference, an increasingly prominent event in the international calendar. Over the past few months, most of my speeches were devoted to an issue that is at the heart of European preoccupations: the economic crisis. Today, I'm glad that I won't have to address it, speaking in a country whose economy grew by around 4% last year.

But the last few weeks have seen dramatic events in our immediate neighborhood: in Egypt, Tunisia and across the Arab world. I know many of you in Israel are seriously concerned. Indeed, the situation holds great uncertainties, but I would say also great potential for positive, democratic change.

In times of upheaval such as this, you can count on established partnerships. Indeed, I am here to speak about a better future: the future of NATO's relations with Israel and the other Mediterranean partners. It is my belief that the future depends on three things. Firstly how we define our common threats and challenges. Secondly finding common solutions. Finally, and above all, our understanding that we share a common destiny.

The Mediterranean Dialogue was established in 1994 and since the beginning; Israel has been one of its most dynamic participants. This initiative gathered Israel and its Arab partners around the same table, engaging them in a political and security dialogue, and touching on military cooperation. That was an achievement which we should not underestimate.

However, this dialogue did not appear in a vacuum. It was established soon after the Oslo accords and the Israeli-Jordanian Peace Treaty. You could say that, it was the Age of Optimism in the Middle East. I am an optimist by nature, but I am also a realist. So I attach particular importance to the changing regional dynamics and what they mean for the longer term security of the region.

New threats have become more prominent in the wider region. Issues such as nuclear proliferation, ballistic missile proliferation or terrorism constitute problems for the Middle East and for us all. NATO's New Strategic Concept that we adopted in Lisbon makes it very clear that the proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, and their means of delivery, threatens incalculable consequences for global

stability and prosperity. During the next decade, we expect proliferation to be most acute in some of the world's most volatile regions.

The rapid increase in the deployment of conventional ballistic missiles constitutes a clear danger. Currently, over 30 states have or are in the process of acquiring such weapons. And some of them can already strike NATO Allies. The decision to develop a Missile Defence Capability, taken at the recent NATO Summit in Lisbon, underlines the commitment by the Alliance to acquire the necessary means to address these threats.

Terrorism is another common threat, which attempts to undermine our way of life. The recent attack against Moscow's busiest airport is tragic proof that no country in the world is safe from this scourge. Israel knows this threat well, having been itself too often the victim of terrorism.

And, as I said earlier, a new and different challenge is emerging across the region. The need to address the demand of Arab societies for democratic reforms. Just a couple of weeks ago, few would have predicted such a development – and events are still unfolding.

We monitor the situation very closely – Egypt and Tunisia are valued members of the Mediterranean Dialogue. I have urged all parties to engage without delay in an open dialogue, to ensure a peaceful, democratic and speedy transition with full respect of human rights.

For over 30 years, Egypt has played a key moderating role in the region. And it is imperative for all of us that it should remain a force for peace and stability.

We need to continue seeking common solutions. We firmly believe that Euro-Atlantic security in the 21st century is best assured through a wide network of partner relationships with countries and organisations around the world. This is why NATO has engaged in a fundamental review of its relations with its partners and we hope they will actively contribute in that endeavour.

Though we are only at the beginning, I am confident that our new Mediterranean Dialogue partnership will better address the threats and challenges of tomorrow. I can see three priority areas where there is scope for improvement: political consultations, practical cooperation and operations.

Firstly, political consultations on a bilateral and multilateral basis. The Mediterranean Dialogue provides the tools which allow us to engage in a genuine exchange of views on all the issues of common concern. It is up to us to expand the range and intensity of these discussions. We must take our dialogue further and address those issues that really matter.

Secondly, we have taken the decision to further expand our practical cooperation. We are extending the range of activities that we can offer to all Mediterranean partners from around 700 to more than 1600. When it comes to cooperation projects, there is no longer any distinction between the Mediterranean countries and the Euro-Atlantic partners.

I see several areas where we can work together, for example civil emergency planning, military-to-military cooperation, the fight against terrorism. Concerning, civil emergency, last December several NATO Allies contributed to the Israeli effort to extinguish the fires that ravaged the North of the country. This cooperation could be taken further through joint training, joint exercises and greater connectivity between our emergency centres.

To ensure the protection of its Allies, NATO is developing new capabilities to meet new threats and challenges, such as Missile and Cyber defence. Of course, we want to discuss these issues with partners too, in areas where we face common threats. While at the same time respecting national security policies, and a need for flexibility.

And thirdly, operations. Several Mediterranean partners are taking part in our ongoing operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan. These contributions are important in themselves. However, it is also important to set a clear framework, within which Mediterranean partners could further participate in NATO-led operations.

I do not have illusions about NATO's role in providing security in the region: NATO cannot solve all the problems and it never intended to do so. After all, Mediterranean partners never expected such a thing from NATO. But we can still provide a substantial added value in the region.

And ladies and gentlemen, that brings me to my final point: the common destiny which bonds Allies and the Mediterranean. A strong and dynamic relationship between the Euro-Atlantic countries and Israel is a key part of it. We have much in common, not least a pluralist democracy, a robust public debate and a lively media scene.

But stability and prosperity can only come from within the region. And stability and prosperity will only survive if the regional players want to be engaged.

NATO, through its Mediterranean partnership can help the region by acting as a facilitator, building closer ties between the stakeholders and providing a venue for a security dialogue. Our own countries in Europe have set aside their differences to build security mechanisms that allow them to address the challenges of tomorrow. The Middle East does not have to be an exception and I believe that Israel can play a leading role in that endeavour.

Of course, pending a comprehensive Middle East Peace Settlement, this seems almost utopian. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict may no longer be perceived as the only problem in the region, but it still constitutes a major impediment in addressing other issues that threaten regional stability. The lack of a solution to the Israeli – Palestinian conflict continues to undermine the stability of the region.

NATO is not involved in the Middle East peace process and is not seeking a role in it. The three conditions for any possible NATO involvement are well known: if a comprehensive peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinians was reached; if both

parties requested that NATO should help them with the implementation of that agreement; and if the United Nations endorsed NATO's possible involvement.

Of course, at the moment, those three IF's are far from being met. The lead for the Middle East peace process rests with the parties themselves, with the Quartet and with the UN. But NATO-Allies attach the utmost importance to reaching a just, lasting and comprehensive settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including the Syrian and Lebanese tracks, to achieve a two-state solution in which Israel and Palestine live side by side in peace and security.

As the Quartet made clear at the weekend, further delay in the resumption of negotiations is detrimental to prospects for regional peace and security. We do not have all the time in the world.

There is a new dynamic in the region. We must seize the opportunity to build on it. The foundations of regional cooperation have to be set today, in order to address the challenges of tomorrow.

It is up to us to increase our efforts in order to bring common solutions to common problems, so that our common destiny will be one of freedom, peace and stability.

Thank you.