



NATO – An Alliance for Freedom

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Transformation has become an important concept for NATO and is one of the main points for discussion at the organization's Riga summit at the end of this year.

'Transformation' has become a kind of magical word, used for many purposes and in different circumstances. Obviously, there are military and technical dimensions of transformation. But what I shall focus on below is the strategic approach of the Alliance. In November 2005, I presented a report calling for a fundamental transformation of NATO. The report, 'NATO: An Alliance for Freedom', was the result of months of practical work at the Foundation for Social Studies and Analysis (FAES) and stemmed from deep concerns, dating back to 1989, about the state of Atlantic relations, which were thrown into question by the 11 September attacks and badly damaged by the 2003 invasion of Iraq.

So far this year, I have heard powerful arguments that NATO is dead, and equally forceful statements that NATO is more effective now than it has ever been. What is indisputable is that NATO is, today, more active than ever before. Fifteen years ago, who would have predicted that NATO would deploy troops in the Balkans, run a reconstruction operation in Afghanistan, or would give support to the African Union in Darfur? Against all odds, NATO has risen to contemporary challenges, leaving its Cold War agenda well behind.

Yet, despite all its recent successes and high level of activity, NATO is in a real and very deep crisis.

NATO's Strategic Holiday

The 1990s was, for NATO, a 'strategic holiday'. NATO members celebrated the demise of the existential threat the USSR represented to us, whilst engaging confidently in various intervention operations to end civil and ethnic conflicts. As Sir Winston Churchill said once, 'they were all pygmy wars' to the most powerful military machinery of all times, NATO. In its collective mind, NATO came to believe that it could be a stability-exporter organization.

But we took our eye off the ball in the 1990s. We missed the signs of a new enemy preparing to hit us with a fatal blow. The attacks of 11 September did not mark the beginning of hostilities, just as D-Day did not mark the beginning of the Allied fight-back in the Second World War. But it was a seminal moment: we discovered that instead of living in a benign world, we were facing extraordinary dangers that no one had predicted or prepared for – mass terror.

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And this, radical Islamist terror had a clear strategic vision and plan which was – and is – incompatible with our way of life.

9/11 was also a revolution for NATO. Traditional concepts like containment and deterrence were no longer viable, and NATO could no longer rely, as it had done for more than four

decades, on passive defence. To do so would be to risk the lives of countless citizens. But equally, NATO was not prepared to go on the offensive or take preventative measures.

The attacks on New York and Washington prompted NATO to invoke Article 5 – which states that 'an armed attack against one or more [NATO members] in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all' – for the first time in its history. But NATO did little in practice, leaving to its members the choice of whether or not to co-operate bilaterally with the United States in Operation Enduring Freedom.

Some argue that it was impossible, without the assets and means, for NATO to do something tangible on a major scale; others point to the US reluctance to replicate the 'war by committee' which we saw in Kosovo. The debate is still ongoing.

In any case, as we witnessed during the Iraq crisis, NATO's lack of commitment was not always due to a lack of military capabilities, but to deep political and strategic divergences. Of course NATO members, particularly the Europeans, should do more and better in defence co-operation; but bridging the capability gap won't, by itself, solve the crisis within the Alliance.

Global Terrorism

NATO is in crisis because we are now living in a war, although I accept that many would dispute this characterization. We are facing an enemy who declared war upon us, and we must fight in a conflict in which a stalemate is not possible. The determination of our enemy is such that the outcome must be total: it's them or us, our victory or our defeat. The Global War on Terror is something more than a slogan: it reflects the fact that the attacks on New York and Washington, Bali and Madrid, London and Baghdad, Amman and Mumbai, are all connected.

To others in the Alliance, the Islamist extremists do not represent an existential threat to the Western world. They believe that political Islam is a

phenomenon to be dealt with by intelligence services and police forces. Extremists are to be considered as criminals rather than combatants or warriors.

I do not share this view. In my judgement, we are in fact facing a mortal enemy. And I believe that those who prefer to see the Islamic terrorists as a problem that can be contained are wrong in their assessment.

NATO, therefore, faces a paradox: its presence and missions have expanded



Former Spanish Prime Minister, José María Aznar (right) on panel to discuss WMD at NATO headquarters on 9 March 2006. Speaking is Supreme Allied Commander, General James Jones. Photo courtesy of NATO

enormously in the last decade, yet the feeling of vulnerability and insecurity of its member states is growing. Is it reasonable that in the current environment, while people are blown apart in trains and buses on European soil, any politician should be arguing for the multi-deployment of NATO in far away places?

NATO was created to increase the security of its members, and for protecting our freedom and prosperity. In the 1990s, it moved beyond its borders to keep peace on its periphery, but perhaps it is time to rethink, once again, what NATO is for.

The fundamental changes I would call for are as follows:

- NATO must become the venue where members – liberal democracies – clearly affirm their commitment to defend collectively our freedom and values, and our

collective strategic interests. We should be proud of what we are and we should not accept any blackmail or pressure from the terrorists or their ideologues to renege on our heritage and principles. NATO cannot be an aseptic institution, value-free.

- NATO members must accept the need for an organization of collective defence, because we are under attack from outside our borders as well as from within. Jihadism has replaced communism, as communism replaced Nazism as an existential threat to liberal democracies. NATO should recognize this new strategic environment in a new Strategic Concept, and the sooner the better.
- We must accept that there is no clear line between international security and internal or homeland security. Mohamed Atta came from Frankfurt to the United States; the perpetrators of the 11 March bombing in Madrid were living in Spain for many years; and the terrorists who blew themselves up in London on 7 July last year were Britons.

By establishing a homeland security dimension, NATO will be able to address these changes more effectively. A first positive step might involve a meeting of Interior and homeland security ministers at North Atlantic Council (NAC) level, together with their foreign affairs and defence counterparts. Bureaucratic and vested interests must not prevent this from happening. NATO must become the meeting point of those responsible for guaranteeing our security, irrespective of their portfolio.

The co-operation in this field among EU members should be welcomed. Our homeland security cannot be effective unless it is transatlantic, if not global, in scope. Beyond that, member states should consider the creation of a functional command dealing specifically with counter-terrorism.



- Terrorism is not limited to isolated acts of cruelty and violence. It is something more. It is the tip of the iceberg of a radical and extremist Islam that, in essence, forms a global insurgency. Furthermore, terrorism cannot be separated from the problem of proliferation. Islamic extremists have no red line; they are willing to kill as many people as they can. That is why an effective counter-terror policy must be global and must integrate with counter-proliferation measures. Acting collectively is essential, as no nation – not even the mighty United States – has all the elements at hand to prevail alone in this struggle.

NATO is the best collective organization available to Western democracies to meet this challenge. But this challenge can only be met by a new NATO, not the one we have today.

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To win this battle against global terrorism, NATO must improve the workings of its internal functions. The difficulty of managing an ever-growing membership has been discussed ad nauseum. It is time to move beyond unanimity and consensus in the decision making process. NATO should borrow from the EU its concept of constructive abstention and allow forward steps to be taken on the basis of majority consent.

Perhaps more importantly, NATO must also expand its geographical scope. In our FAES report, this was the second major change we advocated. In recent years, NATO enlargement has focused on Eastern Europe as a consequence of the wish to overcome the unnatural division of the continent from the Cold War years. It was a historical debt we all owed to the East.

But now it is time to change direction. What NATO needs is to expand in order to more accurately reflect what we are: nations willing and able to cooperate to eliminate the real and present threat of Islamist terror; nations willing to defend our values, prosperity and freedom. In that regard, the next enlargement process ought to open NATO's doors to countries like Japan, Australia and Israel, and build a strategic partnership with other nations like Colombia – all of which are at the forefront of fighting terrorism.

Israel and Enlargement

I am fully aware that Israel's proposed membership would throw up a number of political problems, certainly more so than Japan and Australia. Nevertheless, it is my fervent belief that the continuing reluctance of some members to treat Israel as an integral part of the Western world is a deep mistake that will affect our ability to prevail in this Long War. It is in our mutual interest to have Israel as a formal ally.

The current circumstances in the Middle East, the aggression against Israel and the military activity in Lebanon, must obviously be taken into account. What it demonstrates to me, however, is that Israel is at the centre of the global struggle between the West and the darkest forces of Islamism. Israel is perceived by its enemies as an implant in the Arab world of modern values, a democratic system, and a model of economic efficiency. They are hostile to Israel because that country exemplifies a better alternative in which to live.

The current *casus belli*, the hostage taking by Hezbollah and Hamas, is not what is at stake in the current conflict. It is the right of Israel to exist. It is the right of the West to repel aggression and to resist a mounting campaign by the Islamists against us.

It is for this fundamental reason that I believe we must support Israel in its fight against terror. We must recognize that although the Israelis are fighting for themselves, they are also fighting for all of us.

NATO has been absent from the Middle East. Its presence in Iraq is nominal, given the circumstances in the field. But it is beginning to talk about strategic partnership in the region. That is a good start. But we need to be more than just partners. NATO needs allies well beyond its traditional geographic sphere.

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Fighting terrorism cannot and should not be equated with being anti-Islam. That must be made clear. What we should seek is the promotion of political freedom, economic liberalization and religious tolerance in North Africa and the Middle East, and one way to do that is through the transformation of NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue into a Partnership for Freedom.

Conclusion

I still have great faith in the Atlantic Alliance. But it must rise up to meet today's challenges, and adapt to the new strategic environment. NATO has been through a period of severe crisis. Iraq cast NATO's problems in sharp relief, because divisions over that war were really just an expression of deeper maladies. It is time to face reality. The capabilities gap between Europe and the US, NATO's relations with the EU, and questions about enlargement must be tackled head on. Above all, we must ensure that NATO is a collective security organization, and one that, collectively, accepts and understands that we have a new, declared enemy. All free societies are at risk. NATO must stop thinking, and acting, like it's still business as usual. ■