



NATO vs. Islamist Terror

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The North Atlantic Treaty Organization was created in 1949 in order to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilization of Western nations. It was built upon the principles of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and as such is equally vital today. The alliance was able to protect our freedom from the Soviet threat. Now it is imperative to defend us against the threat of Islamist terror.

It is true that NATO reinvented itself in the '90s, moving from its Cold War agenda to a kind of "stability-exporter" organization, a desirable outcome bearing in mind the conflicts in the Balkans. Nonetheless, the '90s were years of strategic holidays -- all celebrating the demise of the existential threat that the USSR represented -- and of

confidence that we were so powerful that we could intervene and put an end to all civil and ethnic conflict in NATO's periphery.

We were overconfident: The '90s were also the years in which a new enemy was preparing to hit us. On Sept. 11, 2001, we discovered that we were not living in a benign environment, and that another mortal threat was challenging us again. Not only because terror became mass terror, but because Islamist terror has a clear vision that is incompatible with our liberal democracies, our way of life.

Sept. 11 was also a strategic revolution for NATO. Traditional concepts like containment and deterrence were no longer viable in the face of global jihadism; relying on passive or reactive defense, as

NATO did for more than four decades, meant, in fact, putting at risk the lives of our citizens. Yet going on the offensive, or taking preventive measures against Islamist terror, was something NATO was not prepared to deal with even after activating its collective defense provisions: It had never done so; it had never needed to. But now it is time to change. Islamist terror has struck many of us: the U.S., Spain, Turkey, the U.K., Russia, to name just the countries which are members of, or related to, NATO.

NATO has put in motion an internal transformation process in order to make the organization more effective. The summit at the end of 2006 will address the changes and will picture what sort of NATO its members want for the next 15 years. The alliance is still fixated on the agenda of the '90s. Thus a bold jump into the future is needed if NATO wants to be as relevant to its members as it was in the past. Here is my road map:

- First, accept that we share a new existential threat in the form of Islamist terror. This threat is global and multifaceted; its elimination requires a collective effort. NATO must recover its original collective-defense orientation and help to preserve the security of our people, values and interests. Jihadism has replaced communism, as communism replaced Nazism, as a mortal danger, so NATO must put defense against Islamist terrorism at the center of its strategy.

- Secondly, we must accept that it is

impossible to draw a clear line between international and homeland security. Artificial boundaries, born of administrative tradition, are making us more vulnerable. I believe that NATO must develop a homeland security dimension if it wants to remain relevant to the strategic demands of our time. I propose that interior and homeland security ministers meet at the North Atlantic Council level, together with their foreign affairs and defense counterparts. NATO must become the meeting point of those responsible for our security, irrespective of portfolio. Beyond that, the allies should consider the creation of a functional command dealing specifically with counterterrorism.

- Thirdly, acknowledging that NATO is a gathering of liberal democracies, we should invite to join the organization those countries who share the values and systems and that are in the forefront of the fight against terrorism. Expanding its geographical base is the best way to defeat Islamist terror. NATO should invite Japan, Australia and Israel to become full members, as well as offer a strategic association to Colombia and India. Regional partners will bring the expertise needed to fight a global enemy. Also, NATO should transform its Mediterranean Dialogue into a Partnership for Freedom, where cooperation is linked to the promotion of political freedom, economic liberalization and religious tolerance in North Africa and the Middle East.

- Finally, some changes must take

place in the internal functioning of the alliance. For years we have been discussing the difficulty of managing an ever-growing membership. It is time to move beyond unanimity and consensus in decision-making. NATO should borrow from the concept of constructive abstention from the European Union and allow moving forward when a majority of nations so decide.

There are many practical steps to improve NATO's operations. And as far as I know the current secretary

general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, is pushing in the right direction. I support the idea to create a common fund to finance NATO operations. But the essential value of NATO is to increase its members' security. If they cannot count on NATO to preserve their security, NATO will be in deep trouble. Its *raison d'être* today is to defeat Islamist terror. That's why NATO must transform itself into an Alliance for Freedom, willing and able to collectively secure our liberties and democracies before it is too late.