DOES NATO HAVE A ROLE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST INTERNATIONAL TERRORISM:
ANALYSIS OF NATO’S RESPONSE TO SEPTEMBER 11

Krassimir KUZMANOV 1

Abstract: This article analyzes NATO’s decisions and actions taken in response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States and assesses the probable future role of the Alliance in combating international terrorism. In September-October 2001, the United States chose to lead a coalition against the Al Qaeda terrorists and their supporters in Afghanistan instead of ceding the initiative to NATO. The necessity for rapid decisions and actions, the military capabilities gap between the United States and the European allies, and the lessons from NATO’s air campaign in the 1999 Kosovo crisis, probably led the United States to make this choice. NATO’s contributions to the campaign against terrorism have included sending Airborne Warning and Control Systems aircraft to the United States, deploying naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean, and conducting preventive action against terrorist groups acting within or from the Balkans. Other measures taken by the Alliance include: adoption of a new Military Concept for Defence against Terrorism and a Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism, strengthening the nuclear, biological and chemical defence and civil protection, better cooperation with other international organizations, etc. NATO’s responses to the 11 September attacks, the unconventional and asymmetric threat posed by international terrorism, and the distinct contributions that the military can make in combating terrorism support the main hypothesis of this article: that NATO may be unable to play more than specific limited roles in the fight against international terrorism.

Keywords: Counterterrorism, Active Endeavour, defence against terrorism, DAT, NATO response force.

Overview

The 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks were not the first conducted by foreign terrorists against targets on U.S. soil. The differences, however, between the 2001 attacks and the World Trade Centre bombing in 1993 include the results: the enormity
of the death toll, owing in particular to the demolition of the Twin Towers. The scale of the 11 September attacks revealed the vulnerability of the United States and its allies. Nevertheless, the 1993 bombing and the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City in 1995 had already proved that the United States could not remain safe from terrorism at home.

The West European states have had much greater experience in countering domestic terrorism; they have also encountered several terrorist attacks with international dimensions. Examples of such attacks include the Munich Olympics massacre in 1972 (9 hostages killed), the hijacking of the Lufthansa flight to Mogadishu in 1977 (all hostages rescued), the attacks on the Rome and Vienna airports in 1985 (19 people killed), the Achille Lauro hijacking in 1985 (1 passenger killed), the bombing of Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie in 1988 (270 people killed), and the bombing of the French UTA flight over Chad in 1989 (171 passengers killed).

The world changed on 11 September 2001. This phrase, which has already become a cliché, applies to many areas of public life. Without any doubt, this date will leave a profound imprint on the history of the modern world. It has initiated processes that likely mark the beginning of a new epoch in international relations and global security. One of them is the first invocation of NATO’s Article 5 in the history of the Alliance.

U.S. Decisions in Response to 11 September 2001

Defining the Enemy

A few hours after the attacks against the World Trade Centre and the Pentagon, the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) revealed the identity of the hijackers: fifteen Saudis, two citizens of the United Arab Emirates, one Lebanese, and one Egyptian. The delayed travel bag of Mohamed Atta, the suicide pilot of American Airlines Flight 11 and presumed mastermind of the nineteen terrorists, provided a great source of information about the motives and the mindsets of the attackers.

Immediately after the attacks, suspicions about a possible link between Osama bin Laden and the attacks arose among U.S. officials. The former SACEUR, retired General Wesley Clark, suspected that bin Laden was responsible for the terrorist acts. Al Qaeda was considered the only terrorist organization capable of organizing and conducting such an operation. The “largest operation in the history of the FBI” soon gave results. Coordinated investigations in the United States and Germany discovered links between the attackers and Al Qaeda operatives in Germany. The results of the investigation gave President George W. Bush reason to declare before the Congress on 20 September 2001: “Our war on terror begins with al-Qaeda, but it does not end
there. It will not end until every terrorist group of global reach has been found, stopped, and defeated.”

The location of bin Laden was relatively clear: since 1996 he had enjoyed a safe haven in Afghanistan provided by the Taliban regime. The U.S. administration asked the Afghanistan government to surrender its “guest” to the United States. When it became obvious that the Taliban did not intend to cooperate, the United States started preparations for a retaliatory campaign. The short-term aims of the operation were that Osama bin Laden and the other perpetrators of the 11 September attacks be apprehended and brought to justice, that the Al Qaeda installations in Afghanistan be destroyed, and that the Taliban regime be toppled. The long-term objective was proclaimed by President Bush: a global war on terrorism (GWOT). The four principles, on which the U.S. policy in this campaign has been based, were published in the State Department’s Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001-2003. These principles include:

- Making no concessions to terrorists and striking no deals;
- Bringing terrorists to justice for their crimes;
- Isolating and applying pressure on states sponsoring terrorism to force them to change their behaviour;
- Bolstering the counterterrorist capabilities of those countries that work with the United States and require assistance.

Defining the Mission and the Coalition

The short-term mission required a specific approach in defining the most appropriate coalition. The U.S. administration had to choose between at least three options in regard to the forthcoming campaign:

- The U.S. forces could act alone;
- The United States could organize a broad coalition; or
- NATO could take the lead and conduct the campaign.

The first option had probably been excluded in the very first days after 11 September. The disclosures about the international character of the terrorist network that conducted the attacks and the experience of other countries from their military campaigns in Afghanistan may have influenced the U.S. decision to seek broad international support for a U.S.-led campaign.

Afghanistan had historically been a graveyard for foreign invaders. Both the British and the Soviets had had bitter experiences in their campaigns in that country. A new foreign invasion could be used by the Taliban regime and the religious leaders to motivate large segments of the population to resist the invaders. Such resistance could
significantly complicate the tasks of the U.S.-led forces while giving additional time to the key Al Qaida leaders to evacuate.

These facts, the operational need for bases close to Afghanistan, and the risk that some terrorists might flee to neighbouring countries defined the need for coalition partners not only among Afghanistan’s neighbours but also on a broader basis. The United States recognized that it could gain an important internal ally – the Northern Alliance, an armed group resisting the Taliban regime. The Northern Alliance was able to provide forces for the land offensive and could frustrate the Taliban’s efforts to unify the population and organize national resistance against the foreign forces.

The U.S. decision to favour a U.S.-led coalition instead of a NATO-led coalition is one of the central themes of this article. The U.S. administration decided that the mission had to determine the most suitable coalition. The decision about the mission and the coalition was taken within a week after September 11. On 20 September 2001, Richard Armitage, the Deputy Secretary of State, informed the North Atlantic Council (NAC) of President Bush’s efforts to arrange a grand coalition, which meant that the United States had decided to take the lead in organizing the impending campaign.

At least three considerations may have played a role in the U.S. decision to organize a U.S.-led broad antiterrorist campaign instead of a NATO-led operation: (1) the need to involve in the coalition a broad range of partners from all over the world – both states and sub-state actors (such as the Northern Alliance); (2) the preference to avoid constraints on U.S. latitude that might arise in a NATO-led operation and to guarantee the speed and freedom of an independent action through a U.S.-led campaign, i.e., to implement the lessons learned from the NATO-led Operation Allied Force in Kosovo; and (3) the capabilities gap between the United States and the other NATO allies.

International terrorism cannot be defeated by the unilateral efforts of a single country. In the words of the former U.S. Secretary of State, Colin Powell,

> In this global campaign against terrorism, no country has the luxury of remaining on the sidelines. There are no sidelines. Terrorists respect no limits, geographic or moral. The frontlines are everywhere and the stakes are high. Terrorism not only kills people. It also threatens democratic institutions, undermines economies, and destabilizes regions.5

An efficient fight against international terrorist organizations requires common and coordinated contribution in a wide range of areas: legislative, judicial, law-enforcement, military, financial, religious, etc. This option could provide the United States an opportunity to select which of the offered assets to accept and to request support in specific areas of the campaign against terrorism. Another important aspect in regard to the coalition participants was the United States to gain support and partners among
the Muslim states. This would prevent possible misinterpretations and speculations that might present the campaign against terrorism as a conflict between Christianity and Islam or as a war of Western civilization against Islamic civilization.

NATO’s Cohesion versus Independent Action: Implications from Operation Allied Force

The strikes against Al Qaida and the Taliban military installations had to be fast, surprising, and effective in order to prevent Taliban forces from re-grouping and to prevent terrorists from escaping. Some of the targets (e.g., the top Al Qaida leaders) were dynamic and their capture was expected to be heavily dependent on intelligence support. Swift changes in the required strategy and tactics could also be expected. All these factors would demand rapid decisions. On the one hand, a NATO-led operation might increase the cohesion of the Alliance and provide NATO with new roles and missions for the 21st century. Additionally, NATO could increase its importance as a factor for international security, especially after conducting a successful operation far beyond its traditional area of responsibility. On the other hand, the United States had the experience and the lessons learned from its participation in Operation Allied Force in the Kosovo conflict in 1999.

The forthcoming campaign in Afghanistan “was not the kind of war that required large numbers of military personnel, and the command and control problems of a multilingual force away from familiar NATO terrain would have been challenging.”

Only the British had the sealift and in-flight refuelling capabilities to get troops to the region under their own steam and to keep them supplied once in place… Allies might also have proved restrictive on American freedom of action, as NATO allies had an occasion been over target selection during the Kosovo bombing campaign.

During the preparation and execution of Operation Allied Force, the United States faced several difficulties with the European allies. Some of these allies had internal policies or military capability constraints affecting their participation in the operation.

Several Alliance members lacked domestic support for an offensive operation in Kosovo. In Greece, domestic opposition ran as high as 90 percent, and the Italian government feared that internal divisions over the operation could shatter its ruling coalition.

The target approval process was another area in which different national policies and bureaucratic procedures affected the speed and the effectiveness of the operation and even the safety of the allies’ aircraft. For instance,

When Operation Allied Force commenced, NATO’s Master Target File included 169 targets, of which 51 were initially approved. By the end of the operation in June 1999, it had grown to include more than 976 targets, enough to fill six volumes. Because NATO had not anticipated a long campaign, the newly nominated targets had not been developed fully in advance. Each of the additional 807 targets
had to be proposed, reviewed, and approved by NATO and national authorities before being added to the master list. This cumbersome process revealed major divisions among the NATO allies and limited the military effectiveness of the operation.9

In addition, “parallel U.S. and NATO command and control structures and systems complicated operational planning and maintenance of unity of command.”10

The United States also had concerns about sharing secret information with its NATO allies:

Even when the United States decided to share information with its allies, the process of clearing and distributing that information did not flow smoothly. Delays and restrictions consistently hindered this process, which made it hard for the NATO allies to have a full operational picture.11

The Military Capabilities Gap: Implications from Operation Allied Force

The gap between the military capabilities of the United States and those of its European allies, which became obvious during Operation Allied Force, provoked concerns and debates in the Alliance. In his remarks at the Defence Week Conference, held in Brussels in 2000, Lord George Robertson, then NATO Secretary General, stated:

The Kosovo air campaign demonstrated just how dependent the European Allies had become on U.S. military capabilities. From precision-guided weapons and all-weather aircraft to ground troops that can get to the crisis quickly and then stay there with adequate logistical support, the European Allies did not have enough of the right stuff.

On paper, Europe has 2 million men and women under arms – more than the United States. But despite those 2 million soldiers, it was a struggle to come up with 40,000 troops to deploy as peacekeepers in the Balkans. Something is wrong and Europe knows it.12

Operation Allied Force demonstrated the imbalance between the U.S. and the European capabilities. The share of the U.S. contribution to the operation is impressive:

- 60% of all sorties;
- 80% of all weapons delivered;
- 95% of cruise missiles launched;
- 650 of 927 participating aircraft;
- 70% of all supporting missions;
- 320 B-52, B-1, and B-2 sorties dropped half of the total of bombs delivered;
- 90% of all EW (electronic warfare) assets;
- All stealth assets;
- All Airborne Command and Control facilities;
• Most of the equipment and manpower for the Combined Air Operations Centre in Vicenza;
• Most of the Air-to-Air Refuelling capability;
• 90% of the employed and vital mobile target acquisition capability;
• Most of the Air-to-Air Refuelling capability.\textsuperscript{13}

According to David Yost, “European contributions in Operation Allied Force were particularly strong in combat air patrol; air-to-ground strike operations in good weather; and in surveillance, reconnaissance, and battle-damage assessment with unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and manned aircraft.” \textsuperscript{14} However, “an average of three American support aircraft was required for each European strike sortie.” \textsuperscript{15}

These facts suggest that in a possible Alliance military operation far beyond Europe the burden for providing support to the allies would be much greater for the United States and could degrade the speed and the effectiveness of the operation.

\textit{Coalition Dynamics and Operation Enduring Freedom}

The U.S. imperative in regard to the campaign in Afghanistan had been, in the words of the Defence Committee of the British House of Commons, “to strike quickly and with force against terrorists in Afghanistan and… the reality of the situation was that it would have been difficult to get all 19 NATO countries to act within the four week period which the US was able to achieve.” \textsuperscript{16}

The military phase of the campaign in Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom, began on 7 October 2001 with cruise missile and air strikes on Taliban military installations and Al Qaida training camps. Great Britain was the only NATO ally that took part in the missile attacks and the air strikes at the beginning of the campaign. Another U.S. ally on the ground was the Northern Alliance. With U.S. air support and the assistance of small numbers of U.S. special forces, by 9 November 2001 the Northern Alliance captured the key city of Mazar-e-Sharif in Northern Afghanistan. On 14 November, the Northern Alliance entered the capital, Kabul. “Only after more than a month of fighting did the White House accept the allies’ offers of thousands of combat and support troops, and then only in limited numbers and outside NATO’s chain of command.” \textsuperscript{17} In this regard, Tomas Valasek wrote:

Perhaps the most surprising aspect of the current counterterrorist operations is that the world’s strongest military alliance, NATO, is nowhere in sight. The formerly 16, now 19, allies spent decades planning for jointly defending one another from an attack. Yet when the military operations began, the White House essentially asked NATO to stay out of the conflict, despite its offers of help and the gallant gesture of evoking the mutual defence clause in its founding document, the 1949 Washington Treaty, for the first time ever.\textsuperscript{18}
NATO’s Practical Support to the Campaign against Terrorism

The Article 5 Invocation

Immediately after the terrorist attacks, in the evening of 11 September 2001, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) declared that “the United States can rely on its 18 Allies in North America and Europe for assistance and support.” At that critical moment neither the U.S. government nor the NAC had reliable information about the origin of the attacks. The motives and the perpetrators were unclear; there was no claimed responsibility; and nobody set demands or conditions. The obvious facts were that three of the hijacked planes had completely demolished the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centre in New York and the west wing of the Pentagon in Washington, and had thereby caused thousands of deaths. The terrorist attacks were surprising and shocking; their enormity and barbarism were sobering for all; and the success of the attacks against the strongest NATO member revealed the vulnerability of each state and its institutions.

However, some of the European allies have had a greater experience than the United States has had in tackling domestic terrorism, and they knew that no one is assured against terrorist attacks. The perception of vulnerability, the solidarity with the United States, and the anger and indignation at the brutal terrorist acts unified NATO allies and their partners in their resolve to support the United States in the response to the challenge of terrorism. The lack of information about the terrorists and their motives and identity led to the conditional invocation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. The allies had to wait for the results from the investigation, which was to reveal whether the attacks were directed from abroad. This was set as a condition for the effective invocation of Article 5.

Article 5 defines the conditions upon which the principle of collective defence could be applied:

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area.

Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall immediately be reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.
The applicability of Article 5 to terrorist attacks against the United States requires additional analysis. Article 5, referring to Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, foresees the right of individual or collective self-defence in case of an armed attack against one or more allies. The condition for effective application of Article 5 in response to the 11 September attacks was a confirmation to be presented to the NAC that the attacks were directed from outside the United States.

The case was complicated because the attacks were conducted within the United States with U.S. civilian aircraft. The hijackers used box-cutters to intimidate and neutralize the crews, and then directed the aircraft toward their designated targets. Could this be considered an armed attack against the United States?

If the civilian aircraft were used as powerful guided missiles against U.S. targets with the intention of causing a maximum of casualties, the answer is that this would be an armed attack against the United States. However, the aircraft were American; they did not come from abroad; they took off from U.S. airports.21

The first official indication about the identity of the perpetrators of the 11 September attacks was presented to the NATO Secretary General and to the NAC by the Deputy Secretary of State of the United States, Richard Armitage, on 20 September 2001. This was the information necessary to effectively invoke Article 5. Despite Lord Robertson’s reiteration of the Alliance’s determination to contribute to the campaign in response to the terrorist attacks, the message of the Deputy Secretary of State was clear: “I didn’t … come here to ask for anything. I came here to share with good Allies the information we have.” 22 U.S. statements and actions made it clear that the campaign would be conducted by a U.S.-led “coalition of the willing”—which also might be called a “coalition of the chosen”—and that NATO would not be expected to play a leading role in the forthcoming operation.

Washington made it clear that the counterterrorist campaign will be led by the United States, not NATO. “If we need collective action, we’ll ask for it,” said U.S. Deputy Secretary of Defence, Paul Wolfowitz. Campaign decisions are made in the Pentagon, not in Brussels.23

However, the Alliance would have been put in a delicate situation if the invocation of Article 5 were not applied in practice. Most of the measures requested by the United States and adopted by the NAC on 4 October 2001 relate to the provision of support from individual allies. In other words, the United States could achieve a considerable part of the requested support on a bilateral basis: intelligence sharing, blanket over-flight clearances, access to airfields and seaports, increased security for the U.S. facilities abroad, etc.
NATO Operations in Support of the Campaign against Terrorism

The most significant collective measures, among the eight adopted by the NAC, are the deployment of seven NATO AWACS aircraft to the United States (Operation Eagle Assist) and the deployment of NATO Standing Naval Forces to the Eastern Mediterranean (Operation Active Endeavour).

Operation Eagle Assist (9 October 2001 – 16 May 2002) was aimed at enabling the United States to use its own AWACS aircraft in the campaign against terrorism, “to enhance NORAD’s capability to continue combat air patrol missions and to lower the operational tempo of the U.S. AWACS fleet.” In response to the U.S. request and in fulfilment of the NAC decision of 4 October, the NATO Airborne Early Warning and Control Force (NAEW&CF) deployed seven Airborne Warning and Control Systems aircraft (AWACS) to the United States from their main base in Geilenkirchen, Germany. Within the operation, in which 830 crewmembers from 13 NATO nations took part, the NATO AWACS aircraft flew nearly 4300 hours in over 360 operational sorties.

Since the end of Operation Eagle Assist, the NAEW&CF provided airborne surveillance over more than 30 special events, including the funeral of Pope John Paul II in Rome, the Spanish Royal Wedding in Madrid, the 2004 Olympic Games in Athens, Greece, and the European football championship in Portugal, as well as the 2006 Winter Olympic Games in Turin, Italy.

While Operation Eagle Assist had some practical applicability to the campaign against terrorism (relieving U.S. AWACS aircraft for participation in Operation Enduring Freedom), Operation Active Endeavour has had a more symbolic character so far – “providing presence and demonstrating resolve,” according to official statements, as noted above.

The eastern rim of the Mediterranean Sea is shaped by the coastlines of Greece, Turkey, Cyprus, Syria, Lebanon, Israel, Egypt, and Libya. While two of these states are NATO members and two are participants in NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue, two other countries, Libya and Syria, are presented in the U.S. State Department’s Patterns of Global Terrorism 2001-2003 as supporters of terrorism. However, both Libya and Syria condemned the 11 September attacks and, in different ways, have recently tried to divest themselves of ties to terrorism. Citizens of Egypt and Lebanon participated in the 11 September suicide terrorist attacks.

On one hand, sending naval vessels to the Eastern Mediterranean could be considered as a warning and expression of resolve against states sponsoring terrorism. However, at that time it was unclear what kinds of operations these ships would be able to perform against diverse international terrorist organizations. The types of ships com-
prising Task Force Endeavour (TFE) differ from those designated to destroy land-based targets. The first STANAVFORMED group participating in Operation Active Endeavour consisted of seven frigates and one destroyer. The primary purpose of such ships is conducting maritime interception activities; and they are armed with ship-to-ship, ship-to-air, and anti-submarine weapons. From present point of view, the main TFE’s task has been to present a deterrence posture so as to prevent possible terrorist attacks similar to that against the USS Cole in 2000. In practice, TFE has been engaged in monitoring the merchant vessels in the region. In conducting this task, TFE could possibly identify ships illegally trafficking in weapons or immigrants. However, it has not had legal ground to seize such ships; it could only inform NATO and the flag states about illegal activities conducted by these ships. In general, Operation Active Endeavour could be qualified as a maritime interdiction operation.

In March 2003, NATO expanded Operation Active Endeavour by providing escorts to non-military ships from Alliance member states through the Straits of Gibraltar. In April 2003, the operation scope was further expanded to include systematically boarding suspect ships. These boardings take place with the compliance of the ships’ masters and flag states in accordance with international law. In March 2004, the operation area of responsibility (AOR) was expanded to cover the entire Mediterranean. At the June 2004 Istanbul Summit, NATO accepted the Russian and Ukrainian offers to support Operation Active Endeavour. Russian ships are expected to join TFE in the middle of 2006.

By the end of February 2006, TFE had monitored more than 75,000 vessels and conducted 100 compliant boardings. A total of 488 vessels had been escorted through the Straits of Gibraltar. Operation Active Endeavour provided also assistance to the Greek government to ensure the safe conduct of the 2004 Olympic and Paralympic Games.28

**NATO’s Engagement in Afghanistan**

International contributions to the U.S.-led military campaign in Afghanistan and to the UN-led ISAF achieved significant dimensions. According to the U.S. Department of State, as of June 2002, 69 nations had supported the campaign against terrorism, and 20 nations had deployed more than 16,000 troops to the U.S. Central Command’s region of responsibility. The total number of non-Afghan forces in the country was about 15,000, of which 8,000 belonged to U.S. coalition partners.29

In fulfilment of the eight measures for expanding the options in the campaign against terrorism, adopted by the NAC on 4 October 2001, the NATO allies provided, both individually and collectively, the following contributions:
• All 19 NATO Allies and the 9 NATO “aspirants” (without the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Slovenia) have provided blanket overflight rights, ports/bases access, refuelling assistance, and increased law-enforcement cooperation.

• 16 Allies now support Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan and the global campaign against terrorism. 14 Allies have deployed forces in the region. 9 Allies are participating in combat operations.

• Allies and other partner countries have deployed nearly 4,000 troops to Afghanistan and also provide 95% of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), led first by the United Kingdom.30

The Afghan Interim Authority took office on 22 December 2001. In order to provide support to the new government and to create conditions for the post-Taliban recovery of the country, on 20 December 2001 the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1386 to launch the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) with a peace-enforcement mandate under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. Despite ISAF was established by UN, it was not an UN force. ISAF was manned by the coalition of the willing, supported by NATO, and financed by the troop-contributing nations. The primary task of the force was to assist the Afghan Interim Authority in the maintenance of security in Kabul and its surrounding areas so that the Transitional Authority and United Nations personnel could operate in a secure environment.

NATO first became involved in ISAF in response to a request from Germany and the Netherlands for support in the planning and execution of the third force rotation. In that period, it became clear that the smaller participating countries had difficulties in acting as ISAF lead nations on a six-month rotational basis and providing forces at the same time. On 11 August 2003, NATO took over command of the ISAF with a schedule to continue the operation until 2007. In fact, this was the first Alliance mission beyond the Euro-Atlantic area.

NATO has been increasing its presence in Afghanistan by creating and expanding Provincial Reconstruction Teams (PRTs) in addition to the 14 PRTs acting under Operation Enduring Freedom. These teams, consisting of international civilian and military personnel, work in Afghanistan’s provinces to extend the authority of the central government and to provide a safer and more secure environment in which reconstruction can take place. NATO also agreed to deploy extra troops in support of the electoral process in October 2004. At the time of the election, NATO had more than 10,000 troops in Afghanistan, including quick reaction forces both in and out of theatre. Currently, NATO has nine PRTs in North and West Afghanistan and is expanding its presence in south by establishment of four more PRTs.
Despite the fact ISAF is not a counter-terrorism operation, it has a strong impact on international security. In the words of NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, “Afghanistan is a top priority for NATO. Our own security is closely linked to the future of Afghanistan as a stable, secure country where citizens can rebuild their lives after decades of war.”

Nevertheless NATO has not played a leading role in the campaign against terrorism since 11 September 2001, its support has been vital. In the words of Ian Lesser, “the Alliance played and continues to play a critical consensus-building role. The multinational operations in Afghanistan have clearly been facilitated by the planning capabilities and habits of cooperation developed by the Alliance.”

The military role that NATO has had in the campaign against terrorism has been mainly supportive, but the experience that the allies have gained as a result of their common work for decades within the Alliance provides them with a solid basis for effectively participating in military operations outside NATO’s chain of command. As Philip Gordon of the Brookings Institution has noted,

> While NATO’s formal military role was necessarily very limited in the first weeks of the military campaign, the alliance’s political solidarity was highly significant, as is the military interoperability that will allow some allies to participate in later stages of the campaign.

**NATO’s Political Efforts in Support of the Campaign against International Terrorism**

**Prague Summit Decisions Related to NATO’s Role in the Campaign against Terrorism**

At the Prague Summit in November 2002, NATO leaders approved a package of measures to defend and protect their populations, territory and forces from any armed attack from abroad, including by terrorists:

- A new Military Concept for Defence against Terrorism;
- A Partnership Action Plan on Terrorism;
- Five nuclear, biological and chemical defence initiatives: a deployable nuclear, biological and chemical analytical laboratory; a nuclear, biological and chemical event response team; a virtual centre of excellence for nuclear, biological and chemical weapons defence; a NATO biological and chemical defence stockpile; and a disease surveillance system;
- Enhanced protection of civilian populations, including a Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan;
- Enhancement of missile defence capabilities;
- Cooperation with other international organisations;
• Enhancement of cyber-defence of NATO and national critical infrastructure assets, including information and communications systems;
• Improved intelligence sharing.

One of the most important aspects of the Military Concept for Defence against Terrorism is that nations have the primary responsibility for defence of their populations and infrastructures, so the Alliance should be prepared to augment nations’ efforts. The Concept outlines four roles for NATO’s military operations for defence against terrorism: anti-terrorism (defensive/passive measures), consequence management, counterterrorism (offensive/active measures), and military cooperation. The Alliance could either lead or support counterterrorism operations. Most importantly, the Concept defines the possible NATO military role in the fight against terrorism: “NATO needs to be ready to conduct military operations to engage terrorist groups and their capabilities, as and where required, as decided by the North Atlantic Council.”

The Partnership Action Plan against Terrorism is the main platform for joint efforts by Allies and Partners in the fight against terrorism. It provides a framework for cooperation and expertise sharing in this area through political consultation and practical measures, such as:
• Intensified consultations and information sharing;
• Enhanced preparedness for combating terrorism;
• Impeding support for terrorist groups;
• Enhanced capabilities to contribute to consequence management;
• Assistance to partners’ efforts against terrorism.

Science is another area for cooperation between NATO, Partner- and Mediterranean Dialogue countries in decreasing the terrorist threat. The NATO Security through Science Programme provides opportunities for exchange of scientific and technological knowledge on topics relevant to the fight against terrorism: chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear threats; explosives detection; energy security; information security; social and psychological consequences of terrorism; and analysing the roots of terrorism.

The Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan aims to improve civil preparedness against, and manage the consequences of, possible terrorist attacks with chemical, biological and radiological agents. As a first step, NATO Allies and Partners have established an inventory of national civil and military capabilities that could be made available to assist stricken nations.

The necessity of enhanced missile defence has been determined in response to the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery, including
missiles of all ranges. NATO is considering by 2010 to have the capability to protect its deployed troops against short- and medium-range ballistic missiles. In this regard, the Alliance is conducting activities in three directions:

- Developing a Theatre Missile Defence (TMD) capability to protect troops, wherever deployed, against short- and medium-range ballistic missiles;
- Examining options for protecting Alliance forces, territory and populations against the full range of missile threats;
- Conducting activities under the NATO-Russia Council to support potential future joint NATO-Russia theatre missile defence operations during crisis response missions.37

The international organizations NATO has closer cooperation with in defence against terrorism are the European Union and the UN. The Alliance and the European Union have exchanged civil emergency planning inventories. NATO contributes actively to the work of the United Nations Counterterrorism Committee. There are regular consultations between the Alliance and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe. The Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre works closely with the UN agencies that play a leading role in responding to international disasters and in consequence management—the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons—and other organisations.

Istanbul Summit Decisions Related to NATO’s Role in the Campaign against Terrorism

In June 2004, additional measures to increase the Alliance contribution to the campaign against terrorism were approved at the NATO Summit in Istanbul. These measures included: enhanced intelligence sharing, mechanisms for more rapid response to member countries’ requests for support in case of terrorist attacks threat, and a research and technology programme of work for better forces’ and populations’ protection against terrorist acts.38

Mechanisms for more effective intelligence information sharing included optimizing the intelligence structures at NATO and more effective use of the NATO Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit, which was established as a permanent structure to analyse terrorist threats aimed at NATO.

The AWACS fleet, Operation Active Endeavour elements, and the NATO multinational chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defence (CBRN) battalion (established in December 2003) were made available to any member country requesting assistance in case of terrorist threat or while hosting major events. Some examples of such assistance were provided above.
When approved, the research and development programme of work included eight major areas for rapid fielding of technology solutions for defence against terrorist attacks:

- Protection of large-body aircraft against man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS);
- Protection of harbours and vessels against surface and underwater threats;
- Protection of helicopters against rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs);
- Countering improvised explosive devices (IEDs);
- Capabilities for precision airdrop for special operations forces;
- Detection, protection and defeat of CBRN weapons;
- Technology for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and target acquisition of terrorists;
- Explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) and consequence management.

In 2005, two more areas were added to the programme: Defence against Mortar Attacks and Protection of Critical Infrastructure.

Post-11 September NATO-Russia Relations

The terrorist attacks against the United States on 11 September 2001 gave a new impetus to NATO-Russia relations. The cooperation in countering terrorism has proven to be of importance to both parties.

Although on 11 September 2001 a new page in NATO-Russia relations was opened, the process of rapprochement started after the appointment of Vladimir Putin as Acting President of Russia on 31 December 1999. In March 2000, a meeting of the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council was held with an agenda broader than peacekeeping in the Balkans. Since then, despite Western unease with Russia’s operations in Chechnya, cooperation has become more intense.\(^{39}\) According to Martin Walker, after September 11, despite the opposition of much of Russia’s security establishment, including his old KGB colleague, Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov, Putin agreed to an unprecedented and far-reaching support of Bush’s war on terrorism. He ordered Russian Intelligence (FSB) to share information on the Taliban and opened Russian airspace to American logistics aircraft. He overruled the earlier statements of his military establishment to accept a U.S. military presence in Uzbekistan, and helped rearm and equip the anti-Taliban Northern Alliance.\(^{40}\)

Russian diplomacy seized the opportunity and undertook moves to put Russia and the Chechnya problem in the context of the campaign against terrorism. “[T]he al-Qaida network and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan had long been accused by Russia of aiding and radicalising rebel groups in Chechnya and fomenting instability along
Russia’s southern rim. The notion of ‘common interests’ had never been clearer, on either side.” ⁴¹

Russia joined the anti-terrorist coalition and the allies welcomed this step. However, they have chosen to revise their stance toward the Chechen conflict. Apparently for the allies it might be more important to have Russia as a partner than to insist on supporting the various Chechen “freedom fighters.” At the NATO-Russia Conference on the Military Role in Combating Terrorism, Lord Robertson stated, “The terrorist threat is not new. Our Russian colleagues, who have seen the tragic loss of countless military and civilian lives at the hands of terrorists over the past decade, can bear witness to that.” ⁴²

At the same event, the Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, set forth Russia’s conditions for further cooperation in the struggle against terrorism: “If somebody still finds it beneficial to render ‘hearty welcome’ to representatives of the Chechen terrorist groups… then we state it firmly that all talking about our unity and solidarity may remain ‘empty words.’” ⁴³

Since October 2001, NATO and Russia have launched several initiatives related to the common struggle against terrorism. Some of these initiatives include “regular exchange of information and in-depth consultation on issues relating to terrorist threats, the prevention of the use by terrorists of ballistic missile technology and nuclear, biological and chemical agents, civil emergency planning, and the exploration of the role of the military in combating terrorism.” ⁴⁴ The NATO-Russia Council (NRC), which in 2002 replaced the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council, has focused its efforts on the following areas: terrorism, crisis management, non-proliferation, arms control, theatre missile defence, civil emergencies, military cooperation and defence reform, new threats and challenges, and search and rescue at sea.

In June 2002, Lord Robertson outlined the importance of the NATO-Russia partnership as follows:

Countering terrorism is at the heart of NATO’s new relationship with Russia… We need Russia to face new and common threats, just as much as Russia needs us. Russia is now willing to play an honest, cooperative role in working with us. ⁴⁵

In that period, the U.S. administration declared a shift in the U.S. position regarding Chechnya and terrorism. On 28 February 2003, the U.S. Secretary of State designated three Chechen organizations as terrorist groups in view of their direct involvement in the hostage-taking at Moscow’s Dubrovka Theatre in October 2002. However, the U.S. government stated clearly that it does not consider all Chechen fighters terrorists. ⁴⁶
On 7 September 2004, following the series of terrorist attacks on the Russian Federation, the NATO-Russia Council met in extraordinary session. The Council strongly condemned the terrorist acts which caused the death of hundreds of children and other civilians in Beslan, North Ossetia. NATO-Russia Council also declared its determination to strengthen and intensify common efforts to fight terrorism. One of the immediate results was the approval of an action plan to coordinate practical cooperation under the NATO-Russia Council (9 December 2004). The plan aims to enhance Allied and Russian capabilities to act individually or jointly in preventing terrorism, combating terrorist activities, and managing the consequences of terrorist acts.

**NATO’s Future Role in Countering the Terrorist Threat**

In a series of statements, NATO clarified the definition of its future roles and missions regarding the fight against terrorism. On 6 December 2001, the NAC reiterated the Alliance’s determination to play an active role in this struggle. In this statement the NAC envisaged some important practical measures related to NATO’s future roles and missions for combating terrorism:

Disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation can make an essential contribution to the fight against terrorism. We will enhance our ability to provide support, when requested, to national authorities for the protection of civilian populations against the effects of any terrorist attack… We reaffirm our willingness to provide assistance, individually or collectively, as appropriate and according to our capabilities, to Allies and other states which are or may be subject to increased terrorist threats as a result of their support for the campaign against terrorism.47

On 18 December 2001, NATO declared its resolve to adapt its capabilities to the new challenges to international security. However, in this statement the allies did not assign the military the primary role among the other possible means of countering terrorism:

[W]e are especially concerned to ensure that the Alliance military concepts evolve in keeping with our clear appreciation of the menace posed by terrorism. Such action must of course make use of a wide range of national and international means, of which military ones are only a part.48

On 31 January 2002, in response to critics who argued that NATO has no role in dealing with the new threats, Lord Robertson stated that “the Alliance is becoming the primary means for developing the role of the armed forces to defeat the terrorist threat.” 49 This does not mean that the Alliance will become a primary tool for combating terrorism. It means, however, that NATO will provide coordination and a framework for appropriate training of the armed forces for possible anti-terrorist tasks.
On 14 June 2002, Lord Robertson declared some “fundamentally important decisions” made by the NAC that outline the areas in which NATO can contribute most effectively to the fight against terrorism:

NATO should be ready to help deter, defend, disrupt and protect against terrorist attacks, or threat of attacks, directed from abroad against our populations, territory, infrastructure and forces, including by acting against these terrorists and those who harbour them. Similarly, if requested, we should be ready to provide assistance to national authorities in dealing with the consequences of terrorist attacks, particularly where these involve chemical, biological, radiological or nuclear weapons. We agreed that NATO should be ready to deploy its forces ‘as and where required’ to carry out such missions. And we agreed that, following a case-by-case decision, NATO might provide its assets and capabilities to support operations undertaken by or in cooperation with the EU or other international organisations or coalitions involving Allies.

However, some analysts have expressed reasonable concerns about significantly broadening NATO’s roles in combating terrorism:

The formulation of a broad response to the challenges posed by transnational terrorism is beyond NATO’s capabilities or its appropriate functions. The EU and G-8 have developed an extensive network of inter-agency cooperation in combating transnational crime and subversive organizations; it makes more sense to build on that than to extend NATO into an ‘anti-terrorist alliance,’ as some have suggested in the wake of the attacks on New York and Washington.

The analysis of NATO’s current participation in the campaign against terrorism and the assessment of the appropriate role of the military in combating terrorism and winning asymmetric conflicts suggest key findings about the future possible role of the Alliance in the struggle against international terrorism.

First, NATO has historically concentrated on defence capabilities relevant to its main goal – assuring peace and security in Europe. Most of the European allies do not have significant force projection capabilities and must rely on U.S. assets. The new threats require new responses, including new force structures and new capabilities. However, the new responses also call for new strategies, tactics, priorities, training, and resources.

Second, NATO has developed several mechanisms for reducing the threats posed by the huge stockpiles of small armaments and light weapons in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet republics. It also has politico-military tools for reducing the risk of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) through active cooperation with its partners in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Third, the winning strategy for the strong actor in asymmetric conflict, at least in some circumstances, is to apply the same approach as the weak one. In the case of combating terrorist cells this might mean covert operations, low-intensity conflicts,
surprise raids, and other unconventional methods. NATO forces do not fully meet the requirements for conducting such operations and therefore need additional preparation and equipment.

Fourth, the law-enforcement and intelligence agencies have the main responsibility for countering internal threats posed by domestic and/or international terrorist organizations. In principle, the military should be used only as the last possible option for restoring public order, or as a military support to the civil authorities – for preventing terrorist attacks and/or for dealing with the consequences of possible terrorist attacks, including attacks conducted with WMD.

NATO has to adapt itself to the new international security environment; otherwise, it may become a regional political-military organization with some peacekeeping functions. Currently, the military capabilities of most of the allies do not allow them to rapidly deploy forces far beyond NATO’s borders. The forces and assets which the allies are ready to contribute are much more prepared to participate in peace support operations than in high-intensity combat or long-range power projection. The fact that the United States allotted the Alliance a secondary, supportive role during the initial phases of the post-11 September campaign against terrorism has led the allies to redefine NATO’s future role in countering international terrorism. NATO has a future role in the struggle against international terrorism, but it must also continue to support the significant non-military efforts to neutralize the terrorist threats.

Conclusion

The Atlantic Alliance’s solidarity and the perception of a common threat were the leading factors for the Article 5 implementation. However, NATO as a whole was not prepared to take part in the campaign in Afghanistan. In September-October 2001 the United States had to choose between a NATO-led and a U.S.-led campaign. Some American analysts appear to have perceived it as a choice between the political advantages of NATO-led action and the operational advantages of U.S.-led action. The necessity of fast decisions and rapid action, the military capabilities gap between the United States and the European allies, and the experience from NATO’s Operation Allied Force in the 1999 Kosovo crisis defined the United States’ decision, in the words of Secretary of Defence Donald Rumsfeld, that “The mission must determine the coalition.” That is, Washington chose to lead a coalition of states having the necessary anti-terrorist assets with sufficient sustainability and their own airlift and sealift capabilities.

This decision reveals one of the major problems which NATO has yet to solve: defining the Alliance’s roles and missions for the twenty-first century. At this stage contradictions exist between declaring the campaign against terrorism as one of
NATO’s main goals and the limited opportunities for realization of this goal. The asymmetric threat that terrorism poses requires asymmetric responses. Massed military power cannot be fully effective against dispersed terrorists who are difficult to distinguish from ordinary citizens. Additionally, since terrorism has both internal and external dimensions, domestic law-enforcement and intelligence agencies bear major responsibilities for dealing with terrorist threats domestically.

In practice, the involvement of NATO as a military alliance in the campaign against terrorism has included sending Airborne Warning and Control Systems (AWACS) aircraft to the United States, sending naval forces to the Eastern Mediterranean to demonstrate NATO’s solidarity and resolve, conducting preventive action by NATO’s peacekeeping forces against terrorist groups acting within or from the Balkans, and taking the lead of ISAF in Afghanistan.54

The scope of NATO’s reaction to the 11 September attacks, the characteristics of international terrorism as an unconventional and asymmetric threat, and the relatively small contribution that the military could make in combating terrorism constitute factors that support the main hypothesis of this article: that NATO may be unable to play more than a limited role in the fight against international terrorism. However, the Alliance may yet be able to make greater contributions in preventive and protective functions. The decision to create the NATO Response Force (NRF) was approved at the NATO Summit in Prague in November 2002. It has to achieve full operational capability no later than October 2006. NRF could be used not only for collective defence but also for implementation and enforcement of decisions of the United Nations Security Council directed towards neutralizing threats posed by terrorism.

Notes:

1 The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not reflect the official policies or positions of NATO, the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Bulgaria, or any other Bulgarian institution.


3 The term war on terrorism seems to be imperfect. A war is presupposed to have a beginning and an end. If the end of the war on terrorism is to be marked by defeating all terrorist groups of global reach, this endeavor could be open-ended. Martha Crenshaw argues that “terrorism may be a ‘cycle of vengeance,’ leading to its self perpetuation.” (Martha
Crenshaw, “Decisions to Use Terrorism: Psychological Constraints on Instrumental Reasoning,” *International Social Movements Research* 4 (1992): 29-42. In this article, the term *campaign against terrorism* is more applicable.


7 Walker, “Post 9/11: The European Dimension.”


13 According to one source, the United States provided 90% of this capability. David S. Yost, “The NATO Capabilities Gap and the European Union,” *Survival* 42, no. 4 (Winter 2000-2001), 97-128.


15 Yost, “NATO’s Contributions to Conflict Management,” 103.


21 It is out of the scope of this analysis to determine what applicability Article 5 might have if the hijackers were Americans but directed from abroad, or if the hijackers were foreigners but directed from within the United States by Americans.
26 Patterns of Global Terrorism.
27 Patterns of Global Terrorism, 67-68.
34 <http://www.nato.int/ims/docu/terrorism.htm> (6 January 2006).
35 <http://www.nato.int/docu/basicetxt/b021122e.htm> (6 January 2006).
Does NATO Have a Role in the Fight against International Terrorism


51 Lord George Robertson, Speech by NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson at the conference on “International Security and the Fight against Terrorism.”


---

LTC KRASSIMIR KOUZMANOV is currently serving on the International Staff, NATO HQ, Brussels, Belgium, responsible for coordinating the NATO Programme of Work on the Defence Against Terrorism (POW DAT). His previous professional experience includes assignments in both the Defence Policy Directorate and the former Euro-Atlantic Integration Directorate, Bulgarian MoD, numerous assignments associated with the national defence industry, as well as service with the 9th Armoured Brigade, Bulgarian Armed forces. LtCol Kouzmanov has a Masters degree in International Security and Civil-Military Relations from the Naval Postgraduate School, Monterey, California, a Masters degree in Economics and Organization of Defence Industry from the University of National and World Economy, Sofia, Bulgaria, and a Bachelors degree in Armoured Vehicles Mechanics from the Army Academy, Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria.