

"NATO seen adapting to terror war; Alliance used only sparingly after attacks," *The Washington Times*, Aug 18, 2002, page A8*

by Louis Golino,

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The war on terrorism requires significant internal reform of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, according to U.S. and European officials.

The transformed NATO alliance will have a new command structure and military concept, and capabilities better suited to the challenges of counterterrorism and weapons of mass destruction (WMD).

Some key decisions on adapting NATO for the war on terrorism are expected to be made at a NATO summit in the Czech Republic this November.

Thirty hours after the September 11 terrorist attacks last year against the United States, NATO for the first time in its history invoked the collective-defense clause of its founding treaty (Article 5 of the Washington Treaty). Article 5 says that an attack against one NATO ally is an attack on all allies.

But in the weeks and months that followed, the Bush administration chose not to run its global war on terrorism through the alliance's integrated command structure, and gave NATO and its European allies a relatively minor role in the war.

is NATO still relevant?

Analysts on both sides of the Atlantic question whether NATO is still relevant in light of the supporting role it has played to date in the war on terrorism and what appears to be waning U.S. interest in NATO.

Former government analyst and NATO expert Stanley Sloan, a visiting scholar at Middlebury College, said: "Some Pentagon officials privately dismissed NATO's formal invocation of the alliance's mutual-defense provision and complained that the alliance was not relevant to the new challenges posed by the counterterror campaign."

Mr. Sloan added that Washington "may have been wrong about the potential utility of at least making a nod in the direction of the NATO offer and using it as a platform for future construction of a more relevant role for the alliance." Besides requesting only a limited activation of Article 5, the United States rejected some initial European offers of military assistance and was slow to accept others, according to press reports. According to Undersecretary of Defense Douglas Feith, the United States was so busy developing its war plans in the early stage of the conflict that it did not have time to focus on coordinating Europe's military role.

NATO's limited role

Undersecretary of State Marc Grossman added that the United States initially "blew off a little bit"

NATO's direct role in the war on terror, which included the deployment of airborne warning and control system surveillance (AWACS) planes, naval vessels and other measures.

But Bush administration officials also say that the United States greatly appreciated NATO's historic Article 5 invocation as a demonstration of allied political solidarity and trans-Atlantic commitment to common values.

According to U.S. Ambassador to NATO Nicholas Burns, President Bush told NATO Secretary-General George Robertson that the invocation of Article 5 was the first sign of international solidarity with the United States after September 11, and that he greatly appreciated this action and "the help of our NATO friends."

Analysts on both sides of the Atlantic also explain that while the United States overwhelmingly has dominated the war in Afghanistan, European countries played a more substantial role than they are publicly given credit for by U.S. officials.

For example, French planes have flown the second-highest number of air missions in Afghanistan after the United States. In addition, special forces from the United Kingdom and other European countries were deployed to Afghanistan soon after September 11, and European countries have formed the core of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

NATO framework

NATO analysts add that although the alliance has not played a very large direct role in the current conflict, NATO provided the framework that allowed the United States to call on those countries that are involved in the war.

This is because NATO allies share joint-force planning and training, integrated and interoperable military forces and habits of cooperation that have been developed through decades of working together.

Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld has noted that the war on terrorism would not be possible without NATO.

Adds Philip Gordon, director of the center on the United States and France at the Brookings Institution: "While the anti-terrorism campaign changes NATO's character and carries many risks, it also demonstrates NATO's continued utility."

He added that there "were also good reasons not to turn to NATO structures," including the need for tactical surprise and operational security and because only the United States, and to a lesser extent Britain, had the type of military forces needed in the early stages of the conflict.

In 1999, NATO sought to address the growing gap between U.S. and European military capabilities with its Defense Capabilities Initiative. The DCI identified 58 areas in which European military forces required significant improvement to become more flexible and rapidly deployable.

New capabilities initiative

Because relatively little progress has been made to date in achieving the goals of the 1999 capabilities initiative, NATO officials recently launched a new, more-focused plan. It is designed to enable the alliance to play a greater role in combating terrorism - both directly if necessary, and more likely indirectly by supporting non-NATO operations.

The current initiative focuses on four goals: secure, modern communications and information systems; the ability to organize and deploy forces quickly; the ability to work together seamlessly; and defenses against chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear attacks.

NATO officials have suggested that the best way to implement the initiative is through firm national commitments, target dates, and role specialization in which each country would focus on areas in which it excels.

For example, the Czech Republic, has special biological and chemical weapons-detection units, and the UK's Special Air Service (SAS) are widely considered the best special military forces in the world.

Preparing for Prague

Many other ideas for NATO military reform are being discussed in advance of the Nov. 21-22 NATO summit in Prague.

At Prague NATO will issue membership invitations to as many as seven countries from Central and Eastern Europe.

During the Prague summit, NATO will also formally endorse a review of NATO's command structure that was launched in June and is expected to be completed next summer.

The new, streamlined command structure will probably be organized functionally rather than regionally as is the current system. It is also supposed to give NATO greater ability to plan and direct missions outside the boundaries of current NATO members.

Another idea currently being debated is to replace the Supreme Allied Commander Atlantic (SACLANT) position based in Norfolk with a new U.S.-based NATO command devoted to closing the U.S.-European military capabilities gap.

This is one of several reform proposals detailed in a trans- Atlantic study group report to be released in Washington by the U.S.- Center for Research and Education on Strategy and Technology in the coming weeks.

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*The newspaper version of this article included two graphics - one on NATO candidates and the war on terrorism and another on NATO's role in the war on terror.

