

Redefining NATO's Mission: Preventing WMD Terrorism

Will the United States and Europe succeed in fashioning a common strategy for a global war on terrorism? This question is crucial for the future of the trans-Atlantic relationship. Will we stand shoulder to shoulder, just as we confronted the Soviet Union during the Cold War? Are political leaders on both sides of the Atlantic willing to make the political commitment necessary to hammer out common objectives and policies and to recast our institutions to meet this challenge? We must ask ourselves whether we as leaders are prepared to draw the right conclusions and do what we can to reduce this threat or whether it will take another, even deadlier, terrorist attack to force us into action.

In 1996 I made an unsuccessful bid for the presidency. Three of my campaign television ads depicted a mushroom cloud and warned of the threat posed by the growing danger of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) in the hands of terrorist groups. I argued that the next president should be selected on the basis of a perceived ability to meet that challenge.

At the time, those ads were widely criticized for being far-fetched and alarmist. Recently, national television networks have replayed the ads, which are now viewed from a different perspective. The terrorist attacks of last September on the United States have graphically demonstrated how vulnerable we are. The terrorists seek massive impact through the indiscriminate killing of people and the destruction of institutions, historical symbols, and the basic fabric of our societies. The next attack could just as easily be in London, Paris, or Berlin as in Washington, D.C.; Los Angeles; or New York City; and it could involve WMD.

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The U.S.-led war in Afghanistan has succeeded in destroying many members of Al Qaeda and the Taliban regime. President George W. Bush has made it clear that the United States will extend the military campaign to other countries and to other terrorist cells or governments that support terrorism. As the United States prosecutes this war, it should be mindful of the world from which it has emerged—the Cold War world with its residual instruments of mass destruction.

The sober reality is that the danger of Americans and Europeans being killed today at work or at home is perhaps greater than at any time in recent history. Indeed, the threat we face may be almost as existential as the one we faced during the Cold War, because it is increasingly likely to involve WMD use against our societies.

The Opportunity Ahead

Amid the current signs of crisis, we must not lose sight of the enormous opportunity we have to build a new trans-Atlantic relationship that can be a central pillar of the war on terrorism and the constructive prospects for peace that will follow. Unfortunately, neither side of the Atlantic has embraced this opportunity thus far.

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The opportunity we have is twofold. First, overcoming the division of Europe is within our grasp. NATO and the European Union (EU) will hold summits in Prague and Copenhagen in November and December, respectively, and make

historic decisions on their individual memberships. Both institutions are considering launching rounds of enlargement that will encompass many, if not all, of the countries from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. Both NATO and the EU have also launched new initiatives to expand cooperation with Russia. If done properly, we should be able to say by the end of the decade that the job of securing a new peace in Europe is largely complete—a truly historic accomplishment.

We also have a second opportunity. September 11 showed, in an all too tragic fashion, that we still face existential threats to our societies and our security and that these threats largely come from beyond Europe. For a number of years, experts have been writing about the threats to our security posed by terrorism and the spread of WMD. Such threats seemed too theoretical and too abstract for many people.

A Clear Definition of Victory

We must define what is to be done and then look at what role NATO and our allies can play in helping to achieve success. We need a clear definition of victory in the war on terrorism if we are to sustain the support of the American people as well as that of our allies overseas.

Without oversimplifying the motivations of terrorists in the past, most acts of terror attempted to transform a regime or alter the governance or status of a community or state. Usually, targets were selected to create and increase pressure for change. In contrast, Al Qaeda planned its terrorist attacks on the United States to kill thousands of people indiscriminately. Osama bin Laden was filmed conversing happily about the results of the attack, which exceeded his predictions of destruction. He sought massive destruction of institutions, wealth, national morale, and innocent people. We can safely assume that those objectives have not changed.

We must realize, however, that the next attacks are likely to be different from those of September 11. Most threatening is the nexus between terrorists and WMD. Bin Laden or Al Qaeda doubtless would have used WMD had they possessed them, and the efforts they have made to obtain these weapons are becoming increasingly apparent. As horrible as September 11 was, the death, destruction, and disruption to U.S. society was minimal compared to what a weapon of mass destruction could have inflicted. We must therefore undertake the ambitious goal of comprehensively preventing WMD proliferation. The list of priorities for fighting the war on terrorism is endless. Although we must not relinquish any of these imperatives, we must find a way to organize our mission.

Two lists can provide a simple and clear definition of victory. The first list is of nation-states that house terrorist cells—voluntarily or involuntarily. Those states can be highlighted on a map to illustrate who and where they are. Our stated goal will be to shrink that list nation by nation. Through intelligence sharing, termination of illicit financial channels, support of first responders, diplomacy, and public information, a coalition of nations led by the United States can root out each cell in a comprehensive manner and maintain a public record of success that the world can observe.

The second list would contain all of the states that possess WMD or programs that support them. An international verification body for maintenance and compliance would hold each of these states accountable. Under the rules set forth by this body, the nations would secure weapons and materials from theft or proliferation using funds of that country and, if required, supplemented by international funds. The purpose of these two lists accomplishes the same end: victory comes when we keep the world's most dangerous technologies out of the hands of the world's most dangerous people.

Global Cooperative Threat Reduction

Today, we lack even minimal international confidence about the safety of many weapons systems around the world, not to mention the amounts of materials produced, the storage procedures employed, and the production or destruction programs utilized. Unfortunately, beyond Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union, cooperative threat reduction programs aimed at counterproliferation do not exist. Given the size of the problem, we must do something about it, but the resources needed to accomplish this task necessitate that we cannot do it alone.

Then-Senator Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) and I wrote the legislation creating the Nunn-Lugar Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program in 1991. The program has expended about \$400 million annually to destroy the Soviet detritus of the Cold War and has demonstrated that extraordinary international relationships are possible to improve controls over WMD.¹ Programs similar to Nunn-Lugar should be established in each of the antiterror coalition countries to work toward safe storage, accountability, and planned destruction of dangerous weapons and materials. Pakistan and India, for example, could be future partners in Nunn-Lugar-style threat reduction. Under the right conditions and with the requisite transparency, such programs would certainly advance U.S. national security interests and would give the administration the authority it needs to launch emergency operations to prevent a WMD threat from “going critical.”

Precise replication of the Nunn-Lugar program will not be possible everywhere, but a satisfactory level of accountability, transparency, and safety can and must be established in every nation with a WMD program. When nations resist accountability or when governments make their territory available to terrorists who are seeking WMD, NATO nations should be prepared to apply their collective military, diplomatic, and economic power to ensure cooperation.

NATO's Role

To make a global CTR plan work, the United States will need the support of its allies. NATO should play the lead role in addressing the central security challenge of our time.

The United States needs the Europeans—their political support; police; intelligence cooperation; economic assistance; and, not least of all, military might. Americans do not want to carry the burden of this war alone, nor should they. When the attack was on its homeland, the United States was prepared to respond immediately and do most of the work itself, but a

broader campaign requires a bigger team. NATO must and will become an effective organization in the war on terrorism by addressing those countries directly involved and by isolating those who continue to proliferate WMD.

Broadening NATO's focus will require it to change significantly. The alliance has shown its capacity to adapt to new challenges, particularly when the United States offers leadership. In 1993, after the collapse of communism and the Soviet Union, I was among the first to call for the expansion of the organization. I often said that the task we faced was to reorganize the West to deal with the East. I used the phrase that NATO had to go "out of area or out of business" to capture this shift in alliance responsibility. Many on both sides of the Atlantic said it could not be done, but President Bill Clinton and European leaders set a new strategic direction for NATO. Today, Europe and NATO are stronger and better as a result.

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The time to take the next logical step is now. In a world in which terrorist attacks on our countries can be planned in Germany, financed in Asia, and carried out in the United States, old distinctions between "in" and "out of area" have become irrelevant. We have surpassed the old boundaries and other geographical distinctions that guided our thinking on NATO. If the United States and Europe—the most advanced Western democracies and the closest allies in the world—cannot organize ourselves to meet the new terrorist threat, we will have given the enemy a huge advantage. Those seeking to do us harm would like nothing more than to see the West divided over its own security.

The tragic events of September 11 did bring the United States and Europe closer together, and our cooperation to win this war has been unprecedented. Many Europeans recognize that the threat is real and that Europe is a target. Although unpublicized for security reasons, European support in terms of police cooperation and intelligence sharing is unprecedented and has been essential to our progress. In the earliest stages of the fighting, more Europeans than Americans were on the ground in Afghanistan. As we move into the reconstruction stage, Europe has paid much of the bill for rebuilding the nation.

Unfortunately, U.S. and European views diverge sharply on how to deal with Iraq and Iran. In part, Europeans are preoccupied with their efforts to come together within the EU in the midst of a recession. They worry about the United States going into unilateralist overdrive, citing Bush's "axis of evil" comments in his State of the Union address as evidence.

Some worry that the president went too far, but I would suggest that he did not go far enough. To continue the geometric metaphor, I believe we are facing a “vertex of evil”—an intersection of WMD and terrorism. The threat is greater and the response more sweeping than the debate surrounding the president’s phrase. The United States and our allies must prepare to keep the lines of terror away from nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, materials, and knowledge. We need partners for this effort, and there are no better candidates than our NATO allies.

November in Prague: No Time Like the Present

Our efforts in this war should be measured not by what we think is doable, but by what must be done. The questions of new missions and the war on terrorism must become the focal point of the Prague summit this year. Although NATO enlargement and deepened NATO-Russia coop-

eration will be central to the agenda, they must be complimented by making the campaign against terrorism a central NATO task.

U.S. capabilities would be severely degraded if NATO cannot be redirected in this manner. Indeed, the current military nature of the campaign suggests that the Prague agenda ought to focus on developing a comprehensive plan for restructuring European military capabilities, a task which could extend to rethinking

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completely the current Defense Capabilities Initiative (DCI) that was formulated with Bosnia and Kosovo in mind. In its place should be substituted a “DCI-2”—a capabilities package born of the lessons of Afghanistan. A DCI designed to close the gap between the European allies and United States is no longer feasible, if it ever was. More important now is the redirection of the capabilities initiative so as to create and harmonize counterterrorism and counterproliferation capabilities to serve both U.S. and European interests.

Leaving NATO focused solely on defending the peace in Europe from old threats would reduce it to a housekeeping role. If we fail to defend our societies from a major terrorist attack involving WMD, the alliance will have failed in the most fundamental sense of defending our nations. This possibility is why terrorism must be front-and-center on NATO’s agenda in Prague. We can launch the next round of NATO enlargement in Prague, as well as a new NATO-Russia relationship, and the alliance could still be failing—unless it transforms itself into a new force in the war on terrorism.

The Leadership Challenge

Leadership by the president of the United States is crucial. Bush has declared the need to pursue NATO enlargement. His June 2001 speech in Warsaw that sketched a vision of NATO embracing new democracies was historic. He has also expressed the need to expand the NATO-Russia relationship and to invite Moscow to assume a central role in the war on terrorism. Accomplishing this task would send a clear message to friend and foe that he is prepared to lead a transformation of NATO to meet this new threat.

The president must also identify the critical components of a stronger alliance that, if properly articulated in Prague, can define the foundation for a new NATO. The administration must not be caught playing referee among competing interests as the European nations jockey for influence over the agenda. This summit must assume a grander scale, by identifying the key elements that will reinvigorate the trans-Atlantic alliance and sow the ashes of the World Trade Center and the Pentagon as the foundations of the second postwar order.

NATO has prevented war in Europe for more than 50 years. If the alliance does not address the most pressing security threat to our countries today, however, it will become increasingly marginalized. This outcome is not in any of our security interests. Allowing this opportunity to forge a new trans-Atlantic understanding slip away would be a historic mistake. All U.S. alliances will be reviewed and recast in light of this new challenge. If NATO is not up to the challenge of becoming effective in the new war against terrorism, then our political leaders will be inclined to search for something else that will answer this need.

Leaders on both sides of the Atlantic should focus at this moment on our rich heritage of cooperation and mutual sacrifice. The Prague summit is the place to establish a NATO that clearly defines the requirements of victory in the war on terrorism and organizes to win that victory.

Note

1. See <http://www.senate.gov/~lugar/weapons.htm> for more information on the CTR program.

