

# Frost on NATO

Two roads diverge and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) cannot travel both. Unfortunately, instead of taking the right road, the path to overcoming Islamist terrorism, NATO is instead choosing to defend itself against supposed danger from the Russian Federation. It is not concentrating its attention and its forces on terrorism in general or on the group that glories in the name of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS), a name that British Prime Minister David Cameron says is a perversion of a great religion.

What is this thing called NATO, this funny thing called NATO? The North Atlantic Treaty was signed on April 4, 1949 by 12 countries resolved to unite their efforts for collective defense and for the preservation of peace and security. They pledged, in Article 3, to maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack. A plausible, if not wholly accurate, justification for this is that the security of the alliance was indivisible.

However, Article 5, the article known as “one for all and all for one,” limits the extent of that capacity. It states that the individual or collective self-defense will be considered against armed attack against one or more of the countries in Europe or North America. Why one might then ask, has it applied to Afghanistan, where there was no strategy for any mission, to Libya, and now in 2015 to the Russian Federation? And why does it not apply to the real enemy, Islamist terrorism?

NATO had one essential objective. It was created in the years of the Cold War as a defense against possible expansion westwards by the Stalinist Soviet Union. In the accepted joke, it was to keep Russia out, America in, and Germany down. The objective was clear – to deter a Soviet military attack in Western Europe. However, from the beginning, the territorial,

economic, and ideological boundaries and the minimum requirements for NATO membership were stretched to include Greece and non-democratic Turkey in 1952, and Eastern European countries from 1999 on until Albania and Croatia in 2009.

With the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, the end of the Soviet Union, and the reduction of its military presence by President Mikhail Gorbachev with his policies of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, the United States and the other NATO countries no longer appeared threatened by attack or invasion from the east. Logically, either NATO should have disbanded or some alternative reason found for its existence. Historical experience is that institutions rarely, if ever, seek their own termination. Now in a post-Cold War era, NATO, presently with 28 members, an international staff of 1,000 and a worldwide staff of 6,000 civilians in different agencies and commands, has had to redefine itself to remain relevant in some way.

One immediate response was the London Declaration of July 1990 with its objective to promote cooperation between the NATO countries and Russian and its associated countries. It was a recognition that NATO had to change to adapt to the evolving political landscape. To this end, the Partnership for Peace was launched in January 1994, a program aimed at creating trust between NATO and other countries in Europe and Russia.

NATO opted for military capacity to undertake crisis management operations, as in the case of Kosovo, either on the basis of Article 5 of the Treaty or under United Nations mandate, alone or in cooperation with other countries and international organizations.

It was understandable that NATO in the 1990s tried to stop the war in Bosnia and responded to the 1992 UN Security Council directive to use all measures necessary to end hunger and atrocities in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Indeed, NATO bombed Serbia for 78 days. But it is less understandable why the NATO

countries considered Afghanistan to be vital to their security, and assumed command of southern Afghanistan in 2006. It is even less apparent why a chill has developed in relations between NATO and Russia because of differences over the Ukrainian issue, instead of international discussion of the issue.

The foremost question is does an external military threat to the NATO countries exist from Russia? NATO announced it is planning a 40,000 rapid, reaction force in Eastern Europe to contain Russia, and had military exercises with 2,000 soldiers, tanks, jets, and helicopters in Poland. On June 22, 2015 in remarks in Munster, Germany, U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter said that the United States will contribute military assets, weapons, bombers and fighters, transport aircraft and special operations forces, although no ground troops, to this rapid reaction force. He argued that NATO must act against security threats, including Russia, which with its nuclear sabre rattling was a destabilizing influence seeking to undermine NATO from the east, though Carter also in passing did mention violent extremists from the south.

NATO looked down the wrong path. In the same week as Carter's remarks, Islamist terrorists struck targets in the beach resort in Tunisia killing 38 innocent sunbathers, beheaded a civilian in Lyon, France, and exploded a bomb in a mosque in the capital of Kuwait.

Both the U.S. and Russia have been reducing nuclear weaponry, though Russia still has an estimated 1,500 strategic warheads deployed on 515 missiles and bombers. Russia has also announced it will add 40 intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). Yet, even if these weapons must be taken seriously, they are not part of a more assertive Russia, nor does this constitute a nuclear threat. Yet, perhaps as a precautionary measure, Ash Carter announced that the U.S. was supplying 250 tanks, armored vehicles, and artillery to be located in a number of eastern European countries, in effect up to the

Russian border. This adds to the burden the U.S. is already bearing: it has been contributing to NATO more than \$1 billion a year, 70 per cent of total NATO expenditure and 4.4 per cent of GDP. The U.S. still maintains a force of 40,000 troops in Germany.

Obviously, NATO has been concerned with the Russian victory over Georgia in August 2008, and its actions in Chechnya, with Russian unilateral recognition of the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and with the annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in March 2014 and the support for pro-Russian insurgents in eastern Ukraine in a conflict that has caused 6,500 deaths. But this is not the most important item on its agenda.

NATO must recognize that the threat of Islamist terrorism, and now particularly of the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (IS) is much more serious than that of Russia. NATO is interested in deploying its new rapid-fire reaction force in case of crisis on the eastern front against Russia. However, it is imperative that its main focus be on confronting the Islamic State now that the Iraqi army has been defeated in Mosul and in Ramadi, even after 5000 Iraqi officers have been trained and the U.S. has spent millions on training, organizing, and arming them. NATO must take the right road, the fight against Islamist terrorism.

First published in the