

Executive Summary

The history of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) will say that the first, and so far only, time NATO has called upon its Article 5 collective defense clause was on September 12, 2001, following a terrorist attack on one of its members. Yet, until the agreement by NATO Heads of State and Government on the new policy guidelines on counterterrorism on May 20, 2012, NATO did not have an agreed policy to define its role and mandate in countering terrorism.

In the 11 years that have followed the 9/11 attacks on the United States, NATO has opted for a pragmatic approach to the fight against terrorism and succeeded in identifying its added value. The result has been a series of substantial counterterrorism activities. Their impact, however, has been mitigated by the lack of an agreed policy defining NATO's rightful place among international counterterrorism actors. The evolving nature of the terrorist environment and of the global responses required has made it necessary to reassess the threat posed by terrorism and its implications for the Alliance. The new NATO policy guidelines on counterterrorism are the result of a comprehensive intellectual and political process that started with the 2010 Strategic Concept and led to the conclusion that in an era in which emerging challenges blend collective defense with the broader concept of collective security, the lens of collective interest must replace the prism of national perspectives. With this in mind, the overall judgment on the new policy guidelines can and should be positive.

Conceptually, the guidelines translate the notions of prevention and resilience into NATO policy and anchor its counterterrorism activities to the Alliance's *core tasks* of collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security.

In substance, the new policy guidelines focus on NATO's strengths, such as intelligence-sharing, capacity-building, special operations forces, training, and technology and capabilities. In doing so, the guidelines inaugurate a new phase of NATO's engagement in countering terrorism, predicated around the three principles of compliance with international law, NATO support to Allies, and nonduplication and complementarity in addition to focusing on the three key areas of awareness, capabilities, and engagement.

There are, however, three persisting shadow areas that may hinder the policy's potential. One is the vague and qualified notion of NATO cooperation with the European Union. The second is the need to reconcile the *horizontal* and cross-cutting nature of the terrorist threat with the *vertical* reality of Alliance policies and structures. The third area is the need to establish a clearer and more direct link between NATO's broader efforts and Allies' homeland security, intended here as the fundamental bond between sovereignty and the body public.

In this respect, the guidelines represent only a necessary first step. The challenge ahead for NATO policymakers is to define an Action Plan that ensures the implementation of the policy guidelines while, and by, addressing these issues. To this end, this paper suggests six cross-cutting proposals that should find their way into the proposed Action Plan:

- apply “Net Assessment” to counterterrorism
- develop effective counterterrorism strategic communications
- establish a homeland security constituency in NATO and foster the executive role of the Terrorism Task Force
- promote a NATO Border Security Initiative
- develop a “functional” Counterterrorism Partnership Framework
- contribute to the Global Counterterrorism Forum.

While certainly not sufficient, these six initiatives may well be necessary conditions to help place counterterrorism at the center of NATO’s post-International Security Assistance Force agenda and offer a new template for NATO’s role in facing the emerging security environment in an unpredictable world.