

Introduction

In April 2012, the North Atlantic Council agreed on the new North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) policy guidelines on counterterrorism. On May 20, 2012, the Alliance's Heads of State and Government endorsed the policy guidelines at their summit in Chicago and tasked the North Atlantic Council to "prepare an Action Plan to further enhance NATO's ability to prevent, deter, and respond to terrorism by identifying initiatives to enhance threat awareness, capabilities, and engagement."¹

What may appear as routine NATO business—the agreement of a policy and the development of an implementation plan—is in fact groundbreaking news for the Alliance. Until now, NATO did not have an agreed policy to define its role and mandate in countering the terrorist threat, notwithstanding the fact that a terrorist attack was the origin of its first and only invocation of the Article 5 collective defense clause.

In the 11 years that followed the 9/11 attacks on the United States, NATO opted for a pragmatic approach to its contribution to the fight against terrorism, aware of the political, historical, and sometimes ideological differences among Allies. On the ground, NATO's contribution has been substantial; the Alliance has engaged in all areas of work related to terrorism—political, operational, conceptual, military, technological, and scientific. Yet the evolving nature of the terrorist environment, and of the global response, has made it necessary to reassess the threat posed by terrorism and its implications for the Alliance.

This trend was first captured by the new Strategic Concept, adopted by NATO Heads of State and Government at the Alliance's Lisbon Summit in November 2010. For the first time, terrorism was specifically included among the direct threats to NATO's security and a renewed emphasis placed on the Alliance's role in fighting it.² By focusing on threat analysis, partner consultations, capability development, and training, the Strategic Concept also indicated the way ahead. Against these premises, the Allied nations acknowledged the need to reinvigorate NATO's role in, and contribution to, the fight against terrorism.

The new NATO policy guidelines on counterterrorism are the result of a comprehensive intellectual and political process that started with the 2010 Strategic Concept, passed through the analysis of the evolving terrorist environment, and ended with an assessment of NATO's contribution to the fight against terrorism. In this respect, the guidelines should not be considered as the snapshot of an endstate but rather as a fresh start for a contribution to countering terrorism. The development of an Action Plan on counterterrorism will translate policy into action and provide answers to questions left open.