NATO’s Role in the Fight Against International Terrorism

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**Theme:** NATO’s strategy in the fight against international terrorism and its consequences for Spain.

**Summary:** International terrorism requires a strategy of cooperation between all countries. NATO, aware of this need, has been quick to react to the realisation that global terrorism, rather than a future risk, is a current threat. Its strategy is to be more dynamic, in an attempt to emphasise prevention rather than consequence management. Accordingly, it is adapting its command structure, its military capabilities and its procedures in order to be more efficient in the face of this threat. All of this is impacting and influencing Spain in the transformation of its armed forces and its role in the fight against terrorism.

**Analysis:** At the Washington Summit of 1999, NATO approved a new Strategic Concept which, in paragraph 24, identifies international terrorism as a risk in addition to others such as organised crime, disruption in the flow of vital resources and the uncontrolled movement of large numbers of people, and yet a year-and-a-half later there was still no specific strategy in place to fight terrorism.

*The Consequence of 9/11 for NATO*

On 12 September 2001, ambassadors from the 19 NATO countries met and for the first time in history the Alliance invoked Article V of the Washington Treaty, considering that the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon were an attack against them all and, consequently, offering the United States the possibility of help in its response to the aggression. With this unprecedented gesture, the Alliance evidenced its firm will to fight terror. Spain, when it signed the invocation alongside the rest of NATO countries, made clear its intention of cooperating against terrorism in the international stage, which in fact implied the participation of its armed forces in this kind of conflict.

The attacks of 9/11 revealed the US’s weaknesses and, of course, those of the Alliance, in terms of fighting international terrorism. But they also marked a major turning point which led member countries to approve, at the 2002 Prague Summit, comprehensive restructuring of NATO, which had just been enlarged to 26 members, in order to devise an efficient response to the new threats. This implied a reorganisation of its command structure, the creation of the NATO Response Force (NRF) and the sealing of a commitment to procure the necessary capabilities to cover its most blatant weaknesses, the so-called Prague Capabilities Commitment (PCC). All of this without setting aside the idea of Allied

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Command Transformation (ACT), at the site of the former Supreme Allied Commander-Atlantic (SACLANT), to promote the creation of new doctrines, operating procedures and learning and training systems with the aim of preparing the force to respond efficiently to new threats. NATO launched a number of anti-terrorist operations, in which Spain’s armed forces have taken part.

The global nature of the terrorist threat led delegates at the Prague Summit to reconsider their sphere of action. Hitherto, NATO had aimed to provide security and defence in the so-called Euro-Atlantic Zone and, despite the ambiguous nature of the area’s delimitation, it was evident that regions such as Afghanistan did not enter into it. Accordingly, NATO redefined its sphere of action under the premise that ‘it would deploy necessary forces as and how they are required’, thus removing any geographical restriction. For Spain, and for most other allies, this implied the possibility of deploying units at a considerable distance from home territory, increasing the complexity of command and control systems, and logistics, especially strategic transport, which laid bare our weaknesses.

NATO’s Strategy on Terrorism
NATO has devised a strategy integrating political, economic, legal, social and military initiatives to enable it to take centre-stage in the global fight against terror.

NATO’s strategy against terrorism is the result of consensus between the various positions of its member countries. At one end of the scale is the United States, whose feeling of vulnerability on its very own doorstep in the wake of 9/11 led it to devise a brand new National Security Strategy, approved by President George W. Bush on 17 September 2002, marking a radical change with respect to the previous strategy. Its preamble reads as follows: ‘Terrorists are organized to penetrate open societies and to turn the power of modern technologies against us. To defeat this threat we must make use of every tool in our arsenal, military power, better homeland defenses, law enforcement, intelligence, and vigorous efforts to cut off terrorist financing.’

The United States adopts a clear proactive strategy to pre-empt the terrorists’ actions. The National Security Strategy document goes on to say: ‘It has taken almost a decade for us to comprehend the true nature of this new threat. Given the goals of rogue states and terrorists, the United States can no longer solely rely on a reactive posture as we have in the past. The inability to deter a potential attacker, the immediacy of today’s threats, and the magnitude of potential harm that could be caused by our adversaries’ choice of weapons, do not permit that option. We cannot let our enemies strike first.’ Based on this strategy, the United States designed a specific strategy to fight against terrorism, which was approved in February 2003. In it, the United States affords its armed forces a central role, taking into consideration that the terrorist organisations threatening it are located abroad.

At the other end of the scale are a number of European countries, such as France, which has viewed terrorism as a police and judicial problem, applying antiterrorist legislation, although it does have plans, such as the Vigipirate Plan, envisaging the use of armed forces to various degrees in antiterrorist interventions, to strengthen police forces, particularly the Gendarmerie, where this strategy fits in more easily in view of its military nature, along the lines of Spain’s Guardia Civil. The use of the armed forces in the fight against terrorism abroad is limited and requires the approval of the UN Security Council.
France is contributing naval units to the antiterrorist fight in the non-NATO operation called Enduring Freedom, spearheaded by the United States. The French government – under the guiding hand of Interior Minister Nicolas Sarkozy – proposes to toughen antiterrorist legislation. It is evident that such disparate strategies on either side of the Atlantic, particularly in regard to the invasion of Iraq by the United States in application of its counter-terrorism strategy, have undermined transatlantic relations.

Spain, which has faced the terrorism of ETA for decades, wisely kept its armed forces out of the fight against terrorism, except on specific occasions such as the Alazán operation, to seal the French border. Like France, Spain bases its strategy on police and judicial measures, establishing special legislation which, in addition to political consensus among the main parties in regard to terrorism, has yielded good results. But 9/11 and 3/11 highlighted the fact that Jihadist terrorism is an entirely different kettle of fish, against which the fight is both at home and abroad, and that it requires a specific strategy based on cooperation in the international community, whereby the State is obliged to use all its resources, including the armed forces.

**NATO’s Military Concept to Fight Terrorism**

At the Prague Summit, the Alliance agreed to establish a Military Concept encompassing the organisation’s principles of intervention in regard to international terrorism and the various actions envisaged. This directive, known as MC-472, was approved in December 2002 and outlines the different roles which NATO may play, which are basically two: to lead an operation or to support a nation or coalition of nations in the fight against international terror.

The Military Concept for the fight against terror, approved unanimously, sets forth certain political criteria: the Alliance’s actions in the fight against terrorism must be in line with international law, must be approved by the UN and must uphold Human Rights. They will be aimed at helping to dissuade and prevent any terrorist attack against populations, territory, infrastructure or forces pertaining to NATO countries. Support operations to third parties will be studied and approved on a case-by-case basis, at the request of the said third parties. Spain’s National Defence Directive 1/2004 is coherent with these criteria and, furthermore, requires Parliamentary approval if an operation implies deployment of Spanish troops abroad.

The Military Concept envisages four types of action by NATO: (1) antiterrorism actions (AT); (2) counter-terrorism actions (CT); (3) consequence management (CM); and (4) military cooperation (MC). There follows a brief overview of each:

1. **Antiterrorist actions** are mainly defensive and aimed at lowering the degree of vulnerability and, if possible, thwarting any terrorist attack. These actions include those aimed at creating an intelligence community that shares information, using early warning systems to prevent attacks, deploying naval defence systems and the NATO Integrated Air Defence System (NATINADS), which even envisages the possibility of shooting down passenger aircraft in the event of being certain that it has been hijacked and will be used as an aircraft-missile, as on 9/11. These are known as renegade aircraft. Furthermore, NATO proposes to establish standard requirements in regard to protection of its forces acting outside NATO territory, including rapid response capabilities. Other antiterrorist operations include non-combatant evacuation operations (NEO) in third-party countries. The possibility that terrorist organisations might acquire long-range missiles in the illegal weapons market – and even that they
might be loaded with WMD– has led the Alliance to consider the provision of anti-missile defence systems. The Patriot missiles recently acquired by Spain have this capacity, although they were not specifically designed for this purpose. In this kind of operation, NATO will normally act in support of a nation or coalition. It is worth recalling that the responsibility for the protection of countries’ infrastructures and population is first and foremost for the national governments and that what NATO does is support these governments when asked to.

(2) Counter-terrorism is more proactively military and even offensive in nature, ranging from threats to actions to prevent imminent terrorist attacks. In these actions, psychological operations (PSYOPS) and information operations (INFOOPS) are vital. The possibility of performing pre-emptive action is not envisaged, so that to perform such actions there would need to be an imminent terrorist attack and the unanimous approval of all 26 member countries would be required —no easy prospect in so short a space of time as would be available to make this kind of decision—. Counter-terrorist actions may be led by NATO or performed in partnership with a country or coalition.

(3) With Consequence Management, NATO tries to apply measures to mitigate the destructive effects of terrorist attacks. Basically, the idea is to support the civil authorities, for which purpose the armed forces must have the necessary capabilities. This is especially important in the event of a terrorist attack with weapons of mass destruction, considering that the Alliance forces have units of WMD protection and decontamination. Considering that consequence management in any attack is the responsibility of the country’s authorities, NATO will offer its help and support to cooperate with said authorities, but will never act as leader in this kind of operations.

(4) Finally, military operations seek to coordinate efforts in the fight against terrorism between countries via international organisations such as the UN, the OSCE, the EU, etc, generating public confidence via good relations with influential civil bodies. In this regard, NATO has vast experience via its cooperation programs, most notably: Partnership for Peace (PfP) with Russia’s former Warsaw Pact partners, associations with Russia and the Ukraine (NATO/Russia Founding Act and NATO/Ukraine Commission) and the Mediterranean Dialogue. Considering the origin of Islamic terrorism, the latter is especially significant, as was highlighted at the Istanbul Summit in June 2004.

Conclusions: NATO has demonstrated its firm decision to contribute to the fight against global terrorism and it is the most deeply involved of all international organisations in terms of troop numbers. The Alliance has been unwavering in undertaking the most sweeping reform in its history in order to face the new threats.

Spain, with the approval of invocation of Article V of the Treaty in consonance with its commitment to fight against terrorism alongside the international community, deployed its armed forces in the fight against global terror. NATO reforms impact and influence the transformation of the Spanish armed forces, but the latter must perform their own reflection in order to adapt their transformation to national circumstances and objectives.

Spain wishes to have the international weighting that corresponds to it in global institutions and organisations. Accordingly, in NATO it must contribute 3.5% of global
troop requirements, a similar percentage to its economic contribution, while in the EU this percentage is 10%. In line with this international status which Spain seeks, approval of MC-472 has important consequences for the country’s present and future. Antiterrorist actions allow NATO resources to help at specific times to prevent attacks; examples of this are the Head of State and Government Summits in Spain or the Antiterrorist Summit held in Madrid. These same measures were implemented during the Athens Olympics. This implies economy of resources for all members of the Alliance. But the main antiterrorist measure is to share information, an eternal matter pending, which is easier to perform in a bilateral context than multilaterally. In any event, Spain must make an effort in its human and material resources to obtain information, and to take advantage of and exploit all the information which the allies and its own sensors can supply. Information is largely useless if there are not enough analysts able to turn it into intelligence.

The fight against global terrorism must be conducted within the sphere of international cooperation. NATO, due to its infrastructure, experience and the characteristics of its members, seems to be the best equipped international organisation to do this. This fight may require various counter-terrorism actions, which are more difficult to explain to public opinion in countries such as Germany, Spain and even France. However, maintaining international cohesion in the fight against terror and the specific need for these actions appear to suggest that if this kind of operation is approved they should be accompanied by major efforts to explain to the public why they are needed.

In a meeting in Berlin on 13 and 14 September 2005, NATO Defence Ministers agreed to group together ISAF and Enduring Freedom operations in Afghanistan, under a single NATO allied command, to tap synergies. This could imply that part of the Allied forces have to perform antiterrorist interventions to root out the dregs of al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Countries such as France and Spain have declared that they do not intend to participate in combat missions.

NATO is a magnificent forum to facilitate the formation of ad hoc coalitions and to foment international cooperation. One example of this is that both Russia and the Ukraine have offered NATO their help in the antiterrorist initiative Active Endeavour to control sea traffic in the Mediterranean, in a bid to prevent weapons from being smuggled to terrorist groups.

Actions which NATO can perform to benefit a country that has fallen victim to a large-scale terrorist attack which overwhelms the country’s capacities are evidence of international collaboration and a better use of the available resources, as well as an exercise of solidarity, which benefits everyone. Consequently, infrastructure of Spanish crisis management systems –and, specifically, the National System for the Management of Crisis Situations (Sistema Nacional de Gestión de Situaciones de Crisis)– must be seamlessly integrated with those of the Alliance and there must be sufficient training for their efficient use.

Military cooperation is one of the major contributions NATO can make to the ‘Alliance of Civilisations’. It can contribute vast experience in this connection and Spain –which spearheads the Mediterranean Dialogue– must be among the NATO countries to lead the quest for collaboration with the Muslim world and, more specifically, North Africa. In 1995, when the Mediterranean Dialogue was created, NATO still saw this sea as its southern flank, due to the inertia of 45 years of Cold War, and most northern European
countries afforded this forum only secondary importance. Today, all countries are aware of the importance of cooperating in the development and political and social strengthening of the countries of the southern Mediterranean shore, as a way to combat terrorism and avoid terrorist breeding grounds. Spain must not lose the central role which rightfully corresponds to it in view of its geopolitical position in the Mediterranean.

NATO’s decision to deploy its forces wherever and however necessary to face global terrorism makes it necessary to increase the ability to protect our armed forces, boosting, among other aspects, logistic capabilities, most notably those of strategic transport.

Spain, which on 9/11 was in the midst of drafting its Strategic Defence Review (RED), was obliged to reconsider the document then in the pipeline. The RED, approved with the consensus of the main political parties, establishes that Spain wishes to strengthen the role of the Alliance in defence against international terrorism.

‘In particular, our country should foment:

- An improvement in counter-terrorism capabilities, in line with the efforts made in the EU and NATO.
- Cooperation in intelligence with other agencies and bodies.
- Defence against weapons of mass destruction (WMD).
- The configuration of an adequate command and control chain for military units deployed in operations against terrorism abroad.
- The projection of the force and its survival in allied operations.’

Spain’s military strategy as approved by its Defence Chief (JEMAD) on 25 July 2003 asserts that: ‘in this decade, terrorism will continue to be the main threat for our society. Trans-national terrorist groups associated to the use of weapons of mass destruction will become more dangerous, and States will have to focus their military efforts against them.’

Both the RED and the Military Strategy elaborate very little on the role which the Spanish armed forces might perform in the fight against terrorism. Following the 11 March attacks, the experience of recent years and Directive 1/2004, future reviews of these documents should elaborate further on the possible actions to be performed in regard to international terrorism.

To Western countries, accustomed to seeing the enemy armies as the threat, it is hard to imagine an invisible and slippery enemy, like terrorism, but, as Sun Tzu said: ‘the ability to gain victory by changing and adapting according to the opponent is called genius.’