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## THE ISTANBUL SUMMIT: STEPPING UP TO THE CHALLENGE

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*Since the demise of the Soviet Union, the danger to the North Atlantic area has increasingly originated in Central Asia and the Middle East. The run-up to the Iraq war involved acrimonious debates in NATO. Whatever history's judgment on the war, the fact is that all Alliance members now have a vested interest in the success of the post-war stabilization of Iraq. Failure in this mission is unthinkable.*

**T**he Istanbul NATO Summit on June 28-29, 2004, comes at a pivotal time for the Alliance. Since the Prague Summit in November 2002, two momentous developments for NATO have occurred: the enlargement of the Alliance to 26 members, and the assumption of command of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan, the first operation outside of Europe in NATO's 55-year history.

At the same time, NATO is confronted by an equally momentous challenge: whether to become active, as an alliance, in the increasingly grave situation in Iraq. I believe that it should.

It seems difficult to believe that little more than six years ago NATO was comprised of only 16 members, 14 from Europe and two from North America. The Alliance's membership had changed only slightly since the mid-1950s, with the addition of Spain in 1982 and the incorporation of the former East Germany after German unification in 1990. Except for Greece and Turkey, the European members came exclusively from the western part of the continent.

What a difference today! Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary have been NATO members since 1998. This year, at the end of March, they were joined by Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In Central and Eastern Europe, NATO territory now extends in an uninterrupted sweep from the Gulf of Finland in the north to the southern rim of the Black Sea in the south.

And what an infusion of new spirit and enthusiasm! The citizens of 10 countries that suffered for nearly five decades under the yoke of communism understand better than anyone else how precious freedom is. As a result, all the new members have participated in SFOR [the Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina], or KFOR [the Kosovo Force] in the Balkans, or in Operation Enduring Freedom or ISAF in Afghanistan, or in Iraq — in many cases in all three theaters.

Moreover, as part of the process of qualifying for membership in NATO, several of the countries have resolved long-standing disputes with their neighbors, thereby enhancing European stability.

The new members of NATO are closely connected to the United States by the human ties of more than 25 million Americans of Central- and Eastern-European descent. They are also sympathetic to the United States because of decades of principled American foreign policy. Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians know that the United States, almost alone in the world, never recognized the forcible annexation of their countries by the Soviet Union in 1940. They, and other Central and Eastern Europeans, remember the annual "Captive Nations Week" celebrations in the United States. Thanks to their courage, and to American persistence in opposing Soviet imperialism, Europe is now on the verge of realizing the aspiration of being "whole and free."

Does this attachment mean that the new members

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will uncritically fall in behind the United States in every intra-Alliance dispute? Of course not. It does mean, however, that at a time when policy-based criticism of the United States has been replaced by a reflexive anti-Americanism in many quarters in Western Europe, the new members of NATO, at the very least, are likely not to question America's motives, but rather to give Washington the benefit of the doubt in future crises.

The Alliance's formal assumption of the command of ISAF last August, after several individual members of NATO had taken turns at the helm, was another path-breaking event. Since the demise of the Soviet Union and its existential threat, the danger to the North Atlantic area has increasingly originated outside of Europe, in Central Asia and the Middle East. As early as the Alliance's Strategic Concept, agreed upon in November 1991 in Rome, NATO took note of the fundamentally changed environment. That document mentioned economic, social and political difficulties, ethnic rivalries, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction as new threats.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it specifically declared that "Alliance security must also take account of the global context."<sup>2</sup>

The Alliance's sixth and most recent Strategic Concept, approved at the Washington Summit in April 1999, went further by recognizing "failed efforts at reform, the abuse of human rights, and the dissolution of states"<sup>3</sup> as factors that could lead to local or regional instability. It also presciently declared that "Alliance security interests can be affected by other risks of a wider nature, including acts of terrorism...."<sup>4</sup>

Despite these fragmentary warnings, it took the terrible attacks of September 11, 2001, on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon to make clear the mortal threat to the West of failed states harboring technologically adept and ideologically fanatical terrorists.

On the day after the terrorist attacks, NATO responded by invoking Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first time. I believe that the United States missed an opportunity by not immediately utilizing the proffered allied assistance in a more

comprehensive manner in Afghanistan and, once the Taliban and al-Qaeda had been militarily defeated, by not rapidly expanding ISAF's area of peace-enforcing activity throughout the country. Eventually, most NATO partners did make major contributions to the effort in Afghanistan, both in war-fighting (Operation Enduring Freedom) and to ISAF.

On May 14, 2002, under the influence of September 11th and of the Afghanistan war, the Alliance took counter-terrorism to its logical conclusion in the final communiqué of its Reykjavik Ministerial Meeting, when it declared: "To carry out the full range of its missions, NATO must be able to field forces that can move quickly *to wherever they are needed* (italics mine), sustain operations over distance and time, and achieve their objectives."<sup>5</sup>

Under the Reykjavik mandate, the Alliance assumed command of ISAF last summer, thereby "crossing the Rubicon" into out-of-Europe operations. As long as the terrorist threat emanates from outside of the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO must continue to be ready to commit forces to the origin of the problem.

The run-up to the Iraq war in 2002 and 2003 involved the most acrimonious debates ever heard at NATO. Whatever history's judgment of the wisdom, or foolhardiness, of the war, the stark fact is that all 26 Alliance members now have a vested interest in the success of the post-war stabilization of Iraq. Failure in this mission is unthinkable. It would almost certainly result in civil war in Iraq, which would likely draw in neighbors like Turkey and Iran. Iraq might well become like Taliban-era Afghanistan, with the nominal central government ceding de facto control to terrorists bent on attacking Europe and America. Democratic Iraqis would be thrown to the wolves, moderates and modernizers in the region would be put on the defensive, and radicals would be catapulted into the ascendancy.

In the medium-term and long-term, of course, it will fall to Iraqis to guide their country to democratic stability. In the short-term, however, it is the international community that must "step up to the plate." As the necessary first step, I hope and anticipate that the United States — in concert with

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the other four permanent members of the United Nations (U.N.) Security Council — will craft a new resolution that gives the United Nations significant powers in the reconstruction of Iraq after the transfer of sovereignty on June 30, 2004. Such a U.N. resolution could also specifically authorize a role for NATO in the stabilization process.

Once the resolution is approved, I would urge the North Atlantic Council to move immediately to plan for NATO operations in Iraq. Areas of activity that come to mind are controlling the borders with Iran and Syria, demining, training the Iraqi army and police, and assuming command of northern Iraq and of the south-central sector currently under Polish control.

I am aware of the argument that NATO should successfully complete its ISAF mission in Afghanistan before taking on another assignment, but I find it unconvincing. First of all, the stakes in Iraq are so high, and the current situation so precarious, that temporizing is not an option.

Second, as heartening as allied participation in Afghanistan has been, the disinclination of several allies to make even modest contributions of materiel there has been extremely disheartening. The Alliance collectively is capable of making available much greater capabilities of troops and materiel.

NATO has always risen to the challenge. The need to do so has never been greater than at the present time. Therefore, I urge the Alliance to agree at Istanbul to participate in the vital task of stabilizing Iraq. ●

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<sup>1</sup> "The Alliance's Strategic Concept (Brussels: NATO Office of Information and Press, 1991), Part I, articles 10 and 13.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid, Part I, art. 13.

<sup>3</sup> "The Alliance's Strategic Concept" (Washington: Press Communique NAC-S(99)65, April 24, 1999), Part II, art. 20.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, Part II, art. 24.

<sup>5</sup> "Final Communiqué. Ministerial Meeting of the North Atlantic Council Held In Reykjavik on 14 May 2002," article 5 (Reykjavik: Press Release M-NAC-1(2002)59).