
THE U.S. AND NATO: A PARTNERSHIP IN ACTION

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Despite recurring predictions that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has outlived its usefulness and is in decline, NATO is larger and more active than ever. The discussion at Istanbul will not be about whether NATO still has a purpose or whether NATO should be transformed. It will be about the military operations and outreach activities that NATO is undertaking around the globe to safeguard and promote the common values that are the Alliance's foundation: freedom and democracy.

There is a cottage industry of critics who make their living off the premise that NATO's demise is imminent. They've been predicting this since the fall of the Berlin Wall. The criticism died down after NATO's successful intervention in the Balkans, but was out in force again last year with divisions over Iraq. These critics argue that NATO is an alliance in decline, hopelessly riven by transatlantic differences that can no longer be bridged.

There is just one problem with these analyses: they aren't supported by the facts. As we approach the June 28-29 NATO Summit in Istanbul, Turkey, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization has just expanded by seven new members, with more countries knocking on its door, and it is more active than it has ever been:

- Former NATO Secretary-General Lord Robertson said last year that NATO must go "out of area or it would go out of business." In Afghanistan, NATO has accepted this challenge, agreeing to lead and expand the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). NATO's number one priority is stabilizing Afghanistan and providing the security needed for democracy to take root. A successful mission may take years, but it will establish NATO's ability to play a key security role wherever necessary — not just in Europe but throughout the world.
- In Iraq, NATO is already playing an important role in support of the Polish-led multinational division in south-central Iraq. There have been many calls

for it to do more, and President Bush agrees that NATO should explore options to do so. At Istanbul, we look forward to an in-depth discussion of what role the Alliance could most usefully play.

- In Bosnia, NATO has laid down the blueprint for successful nation-building exercises. NATO brought peace and provided the security umbrella for reconstruction and democratization. At Istanbul, NATO will announce that SFOR (the Stabilization Force in Bosnia and Herzegovina), its mission complete, will terminate at the end of 2004. But NATO's role will not end. It will provide critical support to a combined military/police mission the EU will send to Bosnia in 2005 to help maintain stability and to foster faster integration with European institutions.
- In Kosovo, NATO intervened to stop genocide and then stayed to once more provide the security needed for reconstruction and development to proceed. Recent events have demonstrated the fragility of the situation in Kosovo and the need for NATO to remain engaged to ensure a multi-ethnic and democratic Kosovo, no matter what its final status.
- In the Mediterranean, NATO has established Operation Active Endeavour (OAE) to interdict maritime traffic and prevent the movement of terrorists. Through OAE, NATO warships and maritime patrol aircraft have conducted an unprecedented degree of surveillance of shipping of all kinds in the Mediterranean.

- NATO is undertaking an unprecedented expansion and deepening of its relations with its immediate neighbors to the south and to the east. With the Middle East, the Alliance plans to announce the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative as well as a deeper relationship with the seven countries in the Mediterranean Dialogue (Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia). Both of these initiatives will bring the Alliance closer to the countries of the Greater Middle East and contribute NATO's expertise to helping realize President Bush's vision of a reformed, democratic region.
- NATO will make the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus the focal point of the Partnership for Peace (PfP), the Alliance's most successful outreach initiative, reflecting their importance in the war on terror. As part of this shift, PfP will refocus on its original goal of increasing military cooperation between NATO and its partners, rather than its recent focus of preparing partners for membership. As part of this initiative, NATO plans to announce at Istanbul its intent to open regional offices in both the Caucasus and Central Asia.
- NATO is pursuing closer cooperation with Russia, through the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) and laying the foundation for future joint operations. In April, NATO and Russia agreed to establish a permanent Russian mission at SHAPE (Supreme

Headquarters Allied Powers Europe), and to expand the access of NATO's mission in Moscow. We hope to have a successful NATO-Russia meeting at Istanbul that will further cement this important relationship.

- The Alliance is also making progress in developing the new capabilities needed to win the war on terror, including developing expeditionary militaries that can meet threats wherever they arise. NATO took a major step in this direction last October when it "stood-up" the NATO Response Force (NRF). The NRF will eventually constitute a force of some 30,000 soldiers, able to react to a crisis in a matter of days and deploy virtually anywhere in the world.

This is quite an agenda for an alliance supposedly in decline. The discussion at Istanbul will not be about whether NATO still has a purpose or whether NATO should be transformed. It will be about the military operations and outreach activities that NATO is undertaking around the globe to safeguard and promote the common values that are the Alliance's foundation: freedom and democracy.

"Partnership," in the words of Secretary of State Colin Powell, "is the watchword of U.S. strategy in this administration," and NATO remains our vital partner.

