The North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s ongoing engagement in missions ranging from Bosnia to Darfur suggests that the alliance has overcome the doubts about its future that arose after the Cold War. The war on terror that followed al-Qaida’s attacks on the United States on September 11, 2001, would appear further to reinforce NATO’s significance. While unilateral actions by the United States and U.S. cooperation with loose coalitions in Afghanistan and Iraq have garnered the bulk of international attention, experts agree that multilateral cooperation is essential in fighting terrorism. Moreover, several of NATO’s current activities, such as its missions in Afghanistan and the Mediterranean, are closely linked to the war on terror, with other NATO missions also contributing to this fight. These activities have led NATO’s secretary-general, Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, to declare that “more than ever, NATO is in demand, and NATO is delivering.”

This apparent vibrancy, however, may not accurately reflect NATO’s true condition. Although its missions have expanded dramatically since the end of the Cold War and alliance members agree on the threat posed by terrorism, NATO’s actual role in the multifaceted struggle against terrorists is minor. This could have long-term implications for alliance unity.

This article investigates how the United States has worked with NATO in prosecuting the war on terror. The U.S. government conceives of this struggle broadly, with counterinsurgency and efforts to constrain the spread of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) as essential elements. NATO is the United States’ premier alliance, and most of Washington’s closest allies are members. But how does NATO contribute to this war on terror? To be sure, NATO is not simply a “tool” of U.S. policy. The war on terror is a U.S. creation, however, and NATO has been forced to adjust to this fact. The United States perceives...
terrorism as the key national security threat it will face in the coming years. Just as the United States is working to transform its strategies in response to this threat, we would expect it to evaluate key alliances and security relationships with this measure.

I argue that NATO is playing a largely supportive role in U.S. efforts to combat terrorism. The focus of both the European “fight against terrorism” and the U.S. “war on terror” lies elsewhere, leaving NATO’s contribution to efforts to quell terrorism somewhat tangential. NATO is conducting a defensive mission in the Mediterranean in response to the terrorist threat, and it has adopted strategies ranging from new technology development to consequence management to prevent or mitigate terrorist attacks. In Afghanistan the alliance has assumed a frontline role in seeking to deny terrorist groups a foothold there, making this NATO’s first de facto combat operation ever. But many of the essential elements of the fight against terrorism, such as intelligence sharing, occur outside NATO. Afghanistan aside, NATO members participate in offensive efforts to respond to terrorism outside NATO through bilateral activities or loose coalitions of the willing. There are three main reasons for NATO’s limited role: shifts in alignments and threat perceptions caused by systemic changes, NATO’s limited military capabilities, and the nature of the fight against terror.

The United States needs allies in its fight against terrorism, but does it need the alliance? To be sure, the United States values NATO, and indeed has been the driving force behind efforts to expand the alliance by incorporating new members. In addition, NATO has become more than simply a military alliance. Glenn Snyder defines “alliances” as “formal associations of states for the use (or nonuse) of military force, in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership.” NATO is far more than this. It is commonly de-


scribed as a political-military alliance that combines the key political function of guiding members’ foreign and security policy and providing a forum for alliance consultation with the operational function of ensuring that members can train and develop the capabilities to cooperate militarily.\(^4\) This dual role helps to explain why NATO has endured.\(^5\) The key issues are whether its members continue to agree on its value and what its core tasks should be, as well as the threat that it confronts. Moreover, if NATO’s members do not seek to address their core security threats within the alliance, the alliance’s military value to its members is likely to be questioned.

In the next section, I compare U.S. and NATO strategies for confronting terrorism. I then assess NATO’s contribution to the U.S. fight against terrorism. The following section examines factors that help to explain why NATO’s contribution to the U.S. war on terror has been relatively limited. I look at three elements: systemic changes and their consequences for NATO, alliance capabilities, and the nature of the fight against terrorism. Finally, I discuss the implications of NATO’s elusive role in combating terrorism for U.S. policy and for the alliance.

**Comparing Strategies for Confronting Terrorism**

The U.S. government widely regards NATO as the most important institution that the United States works with, its premier alliance. Not only do government officials point out how much the alliance has done to support U.S. activi-
ties against terrorists, but they also note that virtually all of NATO’s activities today are shaped by the struggle against terrorism.6

Terrorism had emerged as a shared alliance concern by the late 1990s. Terrorist attacks in Saudi Arabia in 1996 and in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998 led the United States to urge NATO to address this threat more seriously. As a result, terrorism was incorporated as a factor contributing to NATO’s security challenges in the alliance’s 1999 Strategic Concept.7 It was not, however, a core focus of NATO policy at that time.8 Terrorism crystallized as a central threat to alliance members only after the September 11 attacks on the United States. NATO’s initial response to these attacks was twofold: within twenty-four hours, it invoked article 5 of its charter, declaring that the attacks on the United States represented an attack on all alliance members. It followed this in subsequent weeks with agreement on steps to assist the U.S.-led coalition that attacked al-Qaida and the Taliban in Afghanistan in October 2001. These steps included increasing intelligence cooperation, helping to defend states that were participating in the Afghanistan campaign, allowing overflight rights, and deploying naval forces in the eastern Mediterranean and NATO airborne warning and control system (AWACS) planes to the United States.9 These actions set the precedent that the alliance’s article 5 commitment could stretch beyond the territorial defense of member states to include defense against terrorist attacks.10

NATO also moved quickly to develop military guidelines for responding to terrorism. At the November 2002 Prague summit, members endorsed the new Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism as official NATO policy. The political guidance for alliance actions emphasizes that NATO’s goal should be to “help deter, defend, disrupt, and protect against terrorist attacks,” including by acting against state sponsors of terrorists. In addition, the document iden-

tifies four military roles for alliance operations against terrorism: antiterrorism, or defensive measures; consequence management in the event of an attack against a member state; offensive counterterrorism; and military cooperation with nonmilitary forces.¹¹

In some ways, U.S. strategies to combat terrorism differ from NATO strategies in the goals they emphasize. The U.S. National Strategy for Combating Terrorism, published in September 2006, specifies four short-term policies to address terrorism: preventing terrorist attacks before they occur; denying WMD to rogue states and terrorist groups; denying terrorist groups sanctuary or support from rogue states; and preventing terrorist groups from controlling any nation that they could use as a base of operations.¹² The strategy seeks to ensure that the United States confronts terrorism abroad, not at home. As the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) of March 2006 notes, “The fight must be taken to the enemy.”¹³ Moreover, in this rubric, prevention refers to offensive counterterrorism activities. The goal of preventing attacks before they occur is not only to stop a planned attack, but to hunt down and capture or kill terrorists determined to attack the United States. The denial elements of the strategy are largely focused on states that might support terrorists.

NATO’s military guidelines are more defensive and reactive than those of the United States. NATO places greater emphasis on reducing vulnerabilities and enhancing capabilities to respond quickly to potential attacks. In contrast, the United States seeks to keep terrorists from striking the homeland or U.S. interests abroad. And, whereas NATO’s military guidelines suggest that its forces could play either lead or supportive roles in offensive operations against terrorists, more planning is recommended before NATO-led offensive operations are undertaken, while the recommendations for support missions are more practical. This indicates the alliance’s greater comfort and experience with its support role.

The goals of NATO and the United States as outlined in these strategies do overlap in important ways. For example, each recognizes the usefulness of multilateral actions and seeks to prevent attacks before they occur. In addition, NATO’s counterterrorism strategy shares with U.S. policy the recognition that

preventing attacks may require offensive action against terrorists or states that support them. As NATO’s Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism states, “Allied nations agree that terrorists should not be allowed to base, train, plan, stage, and execute terrorist actions, and the threat may be severe enough to justify acting against these terrorists and those who harbor them.”\(^\text{14}\)

The overlap notwithstanding, U.S. strategy documents suggest that NATO’s deeply institutionalized, consensus-based model is not the United States’ preferred approach for multilateral cooperation in the war on terror. Moreover, NATO appears to be less central to U.S. policy and planning. Both the 2002 and 2006 NSS documents promote the formation of coalitions, both within and outside NATO, to address a range of threats.\(^\text{15}\) More critically, the 2006 NSS makes explicit the U.S. preference for a looser form of cooperation, citing as a model the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), an activity designed by the George W. Bush administration to constrain the spread of WMD-related technology. The 2006 NSS states as a goal “[t]he establishment of results-oriented partnerships on the model of the PSI to meet new challenges and opportunities. These partnerships emphasize international cooperation, not international bureaucracy. They rely on voluntary adherence rather than binding treaties. They are oriented towards action and results rather than legislation or rule-making.”\(^\text{16}\) The 2006 NSS also states that “existing international institutions have a role to play, but in many cases coalitions of the willing may be able to respond more quickly and creatively, at least in the short term.”\(^\text{17}\) Similarly, the 2006 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) highlights the distinction between “static alliances versus dynamic partnerships” and the Pentagon’s preference for the latter.\(^\text{18}\) Some Pentagon officials insist that the apparent disdain for existing alliances is aimed not at NATO, but at bodies such as the Organization for American States, which, for example, has resisted U.S. efforts to revise its charter in an attempt to isolate Venezuela’s president, Hugo Chavez, to punish his anti-U.S. stance. Although NATO’s European members are less concerned now that the United States would use NATO as a “toolbox” than they were immediately after the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003,\(^\text{19}\) they may not be reassured that the United States strongly supports the alliance.

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\(^{14}\) NATO, “NATO’s Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism.”


\(^{17}\) Ibid., p. 48.


\(^{19}\) I thank an anonymous reviewer for reinforcing this point.
A central question for the United States and NATO is whether their aims correspond to the nature of the terrorist threat. Both U.S. strategy and NATO’s military concept initially focused on a particular type of terrorism: the threat posed by al-Qaida at the time of the September 11 attacks. The threat has evolved since then, partly in response to U.S. and allied efforts to disrupt terrorist groups and their activities. The 2006 NSS notes the changed nature of the threat, although the framework of U.S. policy has not changed. For example, whether terrorists need states to support their activities is no longer clear. Not only have individuals proven willing to fund terrorist actions, but increasingly, terrorists operate “virtually” without formal ties, communicating and even training via websites and other electronic media. One result has been the “localization” of threats, as seen in the terrorist attacks in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005. These attacks were carried out by homegrown terrorists with no clear ties to al-Qaida.

NATO and U.S. strategies thus exhibit both similarities and differences in priorities. The crucial issue is how these strategies affect cooperation between the United States and NATO regarding terrorism.

**NATO’s Role in the U.S. War on Terror**

In this section I assess NATO’s contribution to the U.S. war on terror in the following categories: (1) prevention and defense, (2) denial, (3) counterterrorism, and (4) consequence management—all of which are essential to confronting terrorism. These categories incorporate both elements of the U.S. strategy and NATO’s political and military efforts to fight terrorism. For each category, I evaluate how NATO’s efforts correspond to U.S. goals, as well as to the nature of the terrorist threat.

**Prevention and Defense Against Terrorist Attacks**

Efforts to prevent and defend against terrorist actions fall into two main areas: intelligence sharing and surveillance to detect preparations for an attack. NATO has engaged in both activities, primarily through Operation Active Endeavor (OAE). It is also exploring new technologies to detect and defend against terrorist attacks, a third preventive activity.

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OPERATION ACTIVE ENDEAVOR. OAE is NATO’s only article 5 operation, and it was the first substantive military action the alliance took after the September 11 attacks to address the terrorist threat.22 This activity corresponds both to Washington’s goal of preventing terrorist attacks and to NATO’s antiterrorism strategy. After deploying in the eastern Mediterranean in October 2001 as a deterrent and surveillance measure in support of the U.S. intervention in Afghanistan, OAE evolved into a broader counterterrorism initiative. It expanded to cover the entire Mediterranean in 2003; and during the U.S. invasion of Iraq, it escorted ships through the Strait of Gibraltar (at the United States’ request) to alleviate concerns that terrorists might target such ships. OAE has focused on monitoring shipping and the safety of ports and narrow sea-lanes. A second goal, particularly since 2003, has been to expand participation by non-NATO states, both by countries that are formal NATO partners and by countries participating in NATO’s Mediterranean Dialogue, a consultative forum intended to improve cooperation with countries in the Mediterranean area.23

OAE has devoted much attention to expanding its intelligence-sharing activities, including efforts to develop a network for tracking merchant shipping throughout the Mediterranean, and improving means to share this intelligence with relevant governments. This should help to address not only terrorist concerns but also alliance efforts to prevent drug smuggling and the spread of weapons of mass destruction.24

OAE has clear military objectives, and NATO has developed valuable experience in maritime surveillance and interdiction through this mission. At the same time, the mission has had both strategic and political aims. NATO has sought to include Russia in OAE, for example, to gain Moscow’s agreement to extend the operation’s activities into the Black Sea. Expansion into the Black Sea has not happened, due to objections from both Russia and Turkey to allowing NATO operations there, but Russia participated in OAE patrols in the Mediterranean in 2006.25 Efforts to include more Mediterranean countries are

25. Russia was unwilling to agree to this move unless it gained a greater decisionmaking role over the activity, which NATO was not willing to accept. Vladimir Socor, “Russians Not Joining NATO Operation Active Endeavor,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 1, No. 136 (November 30, 2004); Jones,
designed to improve cooperation and, if possible, to share the burden for sustaining the operation with a greater number of countries. This is in keeping with NATO’s ongoing efforts to explore expanded partnerships with countries around the globe.\textsuperscript{26}

The United States values OAE because it facilitates intelligence sharing and because it is an alliance-wide activity. Still, NATO’s efforts do not always go as far as the United States would like. OAE’s guidelines allow it to board only ships whose masters and flag states are willing to comply with the boarding, in keeping with international law. In contrast, the United States is willing to act alone if there is confusion about whether ships will comply.\textsuperscript{27} This has led to instances in which the United States has boarded ships unilaterally, although based on suspicions raised by OAE’s monitoring activities.

OAE is NATO’s most prominent defense activity, but the alliance has also undertaken numerous surveillance and patrolling missions to defend against possible terrorist attacks. NATO AWACS aircraft conducted surveillance at more than thirty events ranging from NATO’s Istanbul summit in 2004 to the 2006 World Cup in Germany. NATO also deployed its new Multinational Chemical, Biological, Radiological, Nuclear (CBRN) task force to the 2004 Athens Olympics.

INTELLIGENCE. Intelligence is widely viewed as the most important tool in preventing terrorist attacks, and the United States shares intelligence regarding terrorist activities with a broad range of countries.\textsuperscript{28} NATO’s intelligence contribution to U.S. efforts against terrorism is limited, however, for four reasons. First, most of the military intelligence NATO relies on, which is shared through the NATO Special Committee, is provided by the United States to the alliance. The Multinational Battlefield Information and Exploitation System, for example, is a “near-real-time all-source system” through which the United States feeds information to NATO commands.\textsuperscript{29}

Second, the United States and its European allies have diverging views about the role of military intelligence. From the U.S. perspective, military intel-


\textsuperscript{27} NATO, “Briefing: Response to Terrorism,” p. 5.


ligence is an increasingly important component on the battlefield. The Department of Defense emphasizes that military intelligence is no longer just a staff function, but rather a war-fighting function that soldiers on the battlefield will be actively engaged in at all times. In addition, as part of its broader interest in network-centric warfare, the Defense Department is pushing to establish a fully “networked battlespace,” with the goal of “information dominance” in any conflict.  

Third, the capabilities gap that has presented a chronic problem for NATO is increasing in the intelligence area, which suggests growing problems for interoperability. Already in the 1990s, the U.S. military had to maintain “legacy” communications systems to enable it to operate with other NATO members, and allied forces depended heavily on U.S. communications and intelligence during the 1999 Kosovo bombing campaign. One reason the United States rejected some European offers of military assistance in its intervention in Afghanistan in 2001 was the difficulties presented by different levels of technological sophistication. The United States spends far more on research and development than its allies; the Defense Department’s budget request for research and development for FY 2007 is $57.9 billion. In contrast, the entire defense budget for the United Kingdom, NATO’s next largest spender, was $50.2 billion in FY 2006. The United States also has a more robust domestic high-technology industry than does any of its European allies.

To be sure, alliance members agree on the need for improvements in intelligence capabilities and interoperability. NATO adopted an initiative on developing new capabilities, particularly in areas such as intelligence and surveillance, in November 2002. In addition, some alliance members are working to improve their information warfare capabilities. That better intelligence


capabilities continue to be problematic is evident in repeated references to the need for improved intelligence sharing both among national agencies and internationally. 34

The problem, however, is deeper than merely the need for better intelligence capabilities; NATO’s members have developed diverging operational concepts because their military capabilities differ. Differences in their views on the role of information in war fighting are one example of this divergence. The United States approaches the use of force differently than do most European militaries, which means that cooperation on the battlefield could be increasingly difficult. 35 Although joint exercises may highlight these differences, they do not necessarily resolve them.

Fourth, the most vital terrorist-related intelligence information generated in Europe is outside NATO’s scope, because it comes from police and domestic intelligence agencies. The bulk of intelligence sharing within Europe, and between the United States and European states, occurs bilaterally or among select groups of states, not in NATO. U.S. intelligence cooperation is closest with the United Kingdom, and its cooperation with members of the UK-USA network is far more intensive than is its intelligence sharing with other NATO countries. 36 The major European mechanism for sharing domestic intelligence is the Berne Group, a club of European intelligence organizations to which the United States does not belong. Three factors hinder greater cooperation in non-military intelligence sharing: the problem of ensuring protection of sources when information is dispersed, differences between the United States and many European allies over appropriate domestic privacy standards, and disagreements over legal constraints on intelligence collection. 37 The turmoil caused by reports of secret CIA detention centers in Europe, and Italy’s indictment of several CIA officers for operating illegally on Italian soil when they kidnapped a terrorist suspect, illustrate the differences in views regarding the acquisition and use of intelligence. 38

35. I thank Terry Terriff for pointing this out.
TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT. NATO’s effort to develop counterterrorism technologies represents the alliance’s third defensive activity. The Defense against Terrorism (DAT) program was established by the alliance’s Conference of National Armaments Directors after the 2004 Istanbul summit. Its goal is to develop technologies to help prevent terrorist attacks ranging from the use of improvised explosive devices to rocket attacks against aircraft. Different NATO countries have taken the lead on each of the ten project initiatives.39

This effort has strong U.S. support. As part of the alliance’s defense investment program, the DAT program reflects Washington’s interest in persuading U.S. allies to devote more resources to their military capabilities, and it corresponds to the increasingly high-technology approach to warfare adopted by the U.S. military. Some new defensive technologies, such as mechanisms to detect improvised explosive devices, are currently being developed, but it is too soon to determine whether the program will improve the alliance’s ability to prevent terrorist attacks. Notably, the United States is using the defense investment program to promote allied transformation goals. NATO’s new transformation command, Allied Command Transformation, established after the alliance revised its military command structure in 2002, is based in Norfolk, Virginia, near the U.S. Atlantic Fleet’s headquarters; and the defense investment program is led by an American, Marshall Billingslea, who worked in the Pentagon on counterterrorism and special operations before moving to NATO. U.S. efforts to use this co-location to promote NATO’s transformation have led to some resentment within the alliance that the United States is “feeding” its views through the new headquarters and the defense investment program.40

NATO’s contribution to ongoing efforts to prevent terrorist attacks is thus important, but it may not be central to U.S. policy. While OAE’s surveillance activities contribute to tracking potential terrorist movements, the intelligence developed through OAE may be more directly relevant to law enforcement than to military missions. To be sure, U.S. officials agree that many NATO members have strong intelligence capabilities, and they can provide valuable intelligence that the United States does not possess. But the most important elements of intelligence gathering in Europe take place outside NATO and are conducted by domestic intelligence organizations. This intelligence is more likely to be shared bilaterally, rather than through NATO. Bilateral intelligence

40. NATO official, interviewed by author, Brussels, Belgium, June 2006.
sharing among key allies continued despite severe strains in political relations in the months prior to the U.S. invasion of Iraq, as revelations about German intelligence cooperation with the United States to designate military targets and civilian locations just prior to the invasion made clear. Four European states with substantial terrorism concerns developed their own forum for intelligence cooperation in March 2005. In 2006 the alliance established a new intelligence “fusion center” to ensure that needed intelligence can be distributed to troops in the field. It also created the Terrorist Threat Intelligence Unit to provide a forum for joint analysis of nonclassified information. But these are better means to share and interpret information. NATO as such does not generate raw intelligence useful to preventing terrorism. Finally, NATO’s effort to develop new defense technologies to protect against terrorist attacks reinforces the U.S. goal of promoting allied defense transformation. Whether the program will contribute to NATO or U.S. defense remains to be seen.

DENIAL: WMD, SANCTUARY, AND STATE CONTROL

Denying terrorists certain weapons and the benefits of state support, ranging from use of a state’s territory to outright control over its government, is a central feature of the U.S. strategy against terrorism. Denial is less evident in NATO’s strategy; the goal of disrupting terrorist activities comes closest to the U.S. concept. NATO’s contribution to this effort varies considerably; it is marginally involved in efforts to deny terrorists WMD, but it plays a significant role in efforts to deny terrorists state support.

Denying access to WMD. Preventing the spread of WMD is a core NATO goal, though preventing terrorist acquisition of these weapons is not. Moreover, NATO’s contribution to international efforts to confront the problem of WMD proliferation is complicated by two central questions. First, should denial efforts be primarily multilateral or bilateral? If multilateral, what is NATO’s “value added” in seeking to address proliferation problems? Some NATO members have been involved in cooperative threat reduction efforts in Russia and other former Soviet republics. These nonproliferation efforts have been conducted bilaterally or by small groups of states, however, rather than as multilateral NATO initiatives. The United Kingdom, for example, is work-

ing with Russia on projects ranging from dismantling nuclear submarines to developing sustainable employment for scientists and engineers formerly employed in Soviet WMD programs. Canada, France, and Germany have engaged in efforts to develop plutonium disposition methods. And several core NATO countries—France, Germany, and the United Kingdom—have sought to induce Iran to end its nuclear enrichment program since 2004. The group seeking to deal with Iran is generally referred to as the EU-3, and the broader proposals by these countries and the United States, China, and Russia were presented to Iran in June 2006 by Javier Solana, the European Union’s foreign policy chief—not a NATO representative. The only alliance-wide efforts to address WMD proliferation have sought to encourage political dialogue through forums such as the NATO-Russia Council, established in 2002, and consultations with other NATO partner states such as Ukraine.

Second, what means are appropriate for preventing terrorists from acquiring WMD? Although alliance members generally agreed that Iraq did possess WMD capabilities, this question was at the heart of the bitter 2002–03 debate over invading Iraq. The differences were over the response, and core NATO allies disagreed with the United States about whether preemption was an appropriate counter to Iraqi efforts to develop WMD. This is not a new debate, but it was sharpened by the fight over Iraq policy.

U.S. policy favors preemption against the potential spread of WMD, as stated in the 2006 NSS. This reflects Washington’s concern that rogue states and terrorists will acquire WMD for use in terrorist attacks. Given alliance differences over means, it is not surprising that NATO does not figure centrally in U.S. counterproliferation activities. Moreover, to the degree that it relies on


45. The French government supplied the CIA with contrary information from one of Saddam Hussein’s cabinet ministers, who was a French spy. According to a former CIA official, however, “He said there were no weapons of mass destruction...so we didn’t believe him.” Drogin, “German Spies Aided U.S. Attempt to Kill Hussein in Aerial Attack.”

multilateral efforts to prevent WMD proliferation, the Bush administration has stated its preference for more flexible partnerships, such as the Proliferation Security Initiative. From the U.S. perspective, the PSI has two main advantages: it is a coalition of the willing, involving only those states that share the PSI’s goals, and it is results oriented, emphasizing action rather than legislation or rule making. Although many NATO members participate in the PSI, this is not an alliance activity.

The United States demonstrated its preference for informal coalitions to deny WMD to terrorists by agreeing with Russia on July 15, 2006, to establish the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism. Like the PSI, this informal agreement is open to states that share the United States’ concern about nuclear terrorism. There is no plan to establish a treaty or institution to formalize this program; its legal authority is based on the International Convention on the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism, signed in 2005, as well as on United Nations Security Council resolutions 1373 and 1540, which proscribes terrorist financing and the spread of WMD-related materials. The initiative seeks to set new standards for securing nuclear materials, engaging in law enforcement, and prosecuting terrorist suspects and their supporters. In this, it resembles the requirements of earlier UN resolutions regarding terrorist financing and law enforcement. Several NATO members are likely to participate in this initiative, which had its first meeting in October 2006, but it is not a NATO activity.

Although many of NATO’s European members share the United States’ concern about the proliferation of WMD and their acquisition by terrorists, this has not translated into cooperation through NATO to actively confront this security problem. Instead, individual states have worked bilaterally or through alliance consultations to address WMD proliferation. The alliance has done better, however, with regard to denying terrorists sanctuary.

Denying State Support or Sanctuary. NATO has contributed substantially to the U.S. goals of denying support or sanctuary from rogue states to
terrorist groups and ensuring that such groups do not gain control over states. NATO’s mission in Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), has assumed control over international military forces throughout the country. NATO forces are also involved in ongoing efforts to train Iraqi security forces.

The U.S. intervention in Afghanistan that began in October 2001 caused some tension within the alliance. While several NATO states offered to contribute troops to this mission, and NATO declared that the September 11 attacks constituted an article 5 attack against all alliance members, the United States did not seek NATO’s participation in the invasion. This reflected President Bush’s desire to avoid having allies dictate how the war would be fought, as well as the preference among some in the Pentagon to avoid the headaches of having to gain allied consensus on strategy similar to those that had developed during NATO’s bombing campaign against Serbia in 1999.50 Equally important was the question of whether NATO allies could contribute the specialized capabilities needed for the campaign the United States was planning.51 Nonetheless, a few NATO countries took part in the initial attack against Afghanistan—including Denmark, France, Germany, Turkey, and the United Kingdom—and NATO AWACS aircraft patrolled U.S. airspace in the fall of 2001, “backfilling” to ensure that U.S. territory was defended while freeing U.S. forces for the invasion.52

ISAF was initially established with UN Security Council authorization under British command in October 2001, after the United States overthrew Afghanistan’s Taliban government. NATO assumed control of ISAF in August 2003.53 Initially ISAF’s mission was limited to patrolling Kabul, but since 2004, ISAF has undertaken a four-stage expansion of its mission into the northern and western provinces of Afghanistan, and later to the south and east. It has also deployed several provincial reconstruction teams, which are based on a

51. Indeed, initial operations in Afghanistan were conducted by the CIA, which was able to act more rapidly than the Pentagon. See Suskind, The One Percent Doctrine, pp. 18–21; Ivo H. Daalder and James M. Lindsay, America Unbound: The Bush Revolution in Foreign Policy (Washington, D.C.: Brookings, 2003), pp. 101–102; and Peter van Ham, “Growing Pains,” NATO Review, No. 3 (Autumn 2005), http://www.nato.int/docu/review/2005/issue3/english/analysis_pr.html.
52. “Backfilling” is one of NATO’s support goals in its strategy for confronting terrorism.
model developed by the U.S. military that combines security and reconstruction functions in an effort to help stabilize the countryside. ISAF assumed responsibility for security throughout Afghanistan in October 2006. At that point, it was NATO’s largest operation, involving about 31,000 troops, including roughly 12,000 U.S. troops under ISAF command.

ISAF represents a valuable contribution to the U.S. goal of denying terrorists sanctuary or allies, given al-Qaida’s close ties with the previous Taliban regime and ongoing efforts to pursue al-Qaida members in the border region between Afghanistan and Pakistan. All twenty-six NATO members participate in ISAF, as do ten non-NATO partner countries.

At the same time, ISAF has suffered from three significant problems. First, since 2003 the alliance has been unable to secure sufficient troop commitments to meet the target force size. When NATO took control of the southern and eastern regions of Afghanistan in August 2006, its 31,000-strong force represented about 85 percent of the troops and equipment that NATO commanders had requested for the mission. Since July 2006, NATO troops have confronted far more intense fighting than expected. The alliance appealed for more troops in September 2006, but only one member country, Poland, offered to send additional troops. At the November 2006 summit meeting in Riga, Latvia, new pledges from member states raised the troop and equipment totals to 90 percent of requirements. ISAF’s commander at that time, Lt. Gen. David Richards, said that it can manage with the current troop strength, but additional troops would allow it to conduct major operations more rapidly and with less risk to NATO soldiers.

Second, many troops in Afghanistan operate under “national caveats,” whereby governments place limits on what military activities their troops are allowed to do or where they are allowed to go in carrying out their missions. These caveats are problematic for two reasons: they hurt operational effectiveness; and alliance members do not share risks equally, which can cause friction. Germany’s troops can be deployed only near Kabul, for example, and in 2006 Poland resisted sending additional troops to southern Afghanistan, where they are needed the most. Only six NATO members operate without caveats. The problem is not unique to ISAF; national caveats caused headaches during NATO’s peacekeeping mission in Bosnia as well, and they have long been a problem in UN peacekeeping missions. Recognition of the operational problems such caveats pose has led to a marked decline in their use, but they have made both multinational cooperation and operations in general more difficult in Afghanistan. Caveats tend to creep back in, moreover, as is evident in repeated efforts to eliminate them. NATO leaders agreed to reduce caveats at the 2006 Riga summit, for example, with the result that 26,000 troops of the increased force of 32,000 had broader freedom to act.

Third, the Afghan leadership fears that the United States will abandon it, and it is unsure what NATO’s authority over both the security and counterterrorism mission will mean in the long run. Concern has also been raised about whether NATO has the political will and capabilities to fight a sustained counterinsurgency campaign. Since NATO forces assumed responsibility for security in southern Afghanistan, the frequency and intensity of Taliban attacks have increased. This renewed fighting forced the United States to reverse plans to re-

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59. Some of the national caveats, for example, are imposed for technical reasons, such as aircraft that are not properly equipped to conduct nighttime operations. Philip H. Gordon, “Back Up NATO’s Afghanistan Force,” International Herald Tribune, January 8, 2006.
60. I thank Chantal de Jonge Oudraat for pointing this out.
62. NATO, “NATO Boosts Efforts in Afghanistan.”
64. This was apparently intended to test the will of NATO’s member states to sustain their commitment. U.S. Department of Defense, “DoD News Briefing with General Richards from Afghanistan.”
duce its military commitment in Afghanistan and led the British to expand their troop contribution to ISAF. The United States decided in January 2007 to extend the tours of 3,200 troops in Afghanistan, and further troop increases were under consideration. Notably, U.S. forces, ISAF’s largest contingent, will continue to conduct the bulk of counterterrorism activities aimed at al-Qaida. The U.S. military also retains 11,000 troops outside ISAF’s command to sustain a separate counterinsurgency function in addition to peacekeeping.

NATO has played a far smaller role in Iraq. Whereas the Bush administration sought to frame the March 2003 invasion as part of the war on terror, the alliance remained deeply split and did not formally participate in the invasion. The NATO Council never discussed Iraq, an indication of the depth of discord within the alliance. NATO did offer some support for the U.S.-led operation, however. It contributed to Turkey’s defense against possible Iraqi retaliation during the invasion, and it agreed to the Polish government’s request for allied support when Poland took over leadership of one sector of the stabilization force in Iraq in May 2003. Fifteen NATO states have contributed forces to the coalition since 2003. And although Germany did not participate in the coalition and strongly opposed the U.S. invasion, it deployed hundreds of chemical and biological weapons–detection troops in Kuwait and Turkey to aid coalition forces in the event of a WMD attack.

In 2004, at U.S. urging, NATO agreed to play a central role in training Iraqi security forces. NATO’s training effort has several elements: mentoring of Iraqi military officers by NATO personnel; creation of an officer training facility in Iraq; and training of Iraqi officers in NATO facilities. NATO’s target is to train 1,000 officers inside Iraq annually, and 500 outside the state; by September

69. Some of these troop contributions are quite small. Participating states include Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Spain, and the United Kingdom.
70. Daalder and Lindsay, America Unbound, p. 190.
2006, NATO had trained 650 Iraqi officers in European facilities and roughly 2,000 officers overall.\textsuperscript{71} NATO has also donated military equipment to Iraq’s security forces. This equipment comes primarily from former Warsaw Pact countries that have become NATO members, and it is compatible with Iraq’s Soviet-supplied military hardware.

NATO’s training mission has faced significant difficulties, however. First, the need to gain consensus on all decisions hamstrung efforts to get the mission up and running and greatly slowed the process; residual bitterness over the U.S. decision to invade Iraq contributed to this problem. Some members objected to the precedent set by taking on the training mission, which also slowed decisionmaking.\textsuperscript{72} Second, as in Afghanistan, some troop contributions have operated under national caveats, which has hindered commanders’ efforts to coordinate NATO’s activities. Third, funding for the mission has been a serious problem. Countries contributing troops are expected to cover their own costs. NATO set up a “trust fund” to pay for the establishment of a defense university in Iraq, but contributions to the fund have thus far been insufficient. As a result, although the Iraqi government has stressed its preference for in-country training to help gain popular trust and support for the new security forces, more officers have been trained outside Iraq.\textsuperscript{73}

OFFENSIVE MEASURES: COUNTERTERRORISM

NATO’s offensive role in fighting terrorism is limited. Although its Military Concept for Defense against Terrorism stresses that NATO must be prepared to take on offensive missions if required, the alliance has operated primarily in support of member state efforts to conduct offensive counterterrorist operations. NATO officials point out that this is appropriate given that the alliance’s task is to defend its members and support them in the event of attacks, rather than to take the lead in offensive operations.\textsuperscript{74}


\textsuperscript{72} NATO officials, interviewed by author, Brussels, Belgium, June 8, 2006.

\textsuperscript{73} Lynch and Janzen, “NATO Training Mission Iraq,” pp. 32–34. The funding problem is not unique to this mission; the NATO Response Force has been referred to as a “reverse lottery” because troop-contributing nations must bear all the costs. De Hoop Scheffer, “Speech at the 42nd Munich Conference on Security Policy”; and Jones, “NATO: From Common Defense to Common Security.”

\textsuperscript{74} Indeed, some members, notably France, continue to insist that NATO’s military role should be limited to article 5 operations. NATO officials, interviewed by author.
The only example of NATO assuming a combat role is found in Afghanistan, where ISAF took control over security operations throughout the country in October 2006. Although the security problems on the ground in Afghanistan range from crime and drug trafficking to counterterrorism, ISAF’s rules of engagement do not explicitly cover missions other than peacekeeping; ISAF does not have a formal counterterrorist mission. ISAF’s limited mandate is due in large measure to member states’ nervousness about the prospect of taking on counterterrorism or counterinsurgency responsibilities, as well as concern that acknowledging the potential combat elements of the mission would make it even harder to obtain sufficient troop commitments to ISAF.

NATO’s mission in Afghanistan shifted from a primary focus on reconstruction and stability to counterinsurgency when it took responsibility for security in the southern region of the country at the end of July 2006, and it adopted more robust rules of engagement. Since then, British, Canadian, and Dutch forces on the ground have been engaged in counterinsurgency operations. Commanders dropped their earlier vagueness about their activities in Afghanistan and now acknowledge the war-fighting nature of the mission. Lieutenant General Richards of ISAF stated in August 2006 that NATO’s goal was “to strike ruthlessly” at Taliban fighters seeking to undermine the Afghan government. Similarly, in parliamentary debates over extending Canada’s deployment to Afghanistan in May 2006, members openly acknowledged the combat nature of the mission.

NATO’s mission in Afghanistan is of crucial importance to the alliance. NATO troops are engaged in their most militarily challenging mission since the alliance was formed in 1949. NATO leaders regarded the mission as a suc-

cess at the end of 2006; the alliance has shown the ability to fight and to main-
tain support for the mission. But continued success is not guaranteed. Both
NATO and U.S. commanders expressed growing concern in late 2006 that
without significant advances in reconstruction and development in Afghani-
stan, the military effort would ultimately fail. As Lieutenant General Richards
noted, “Fighting for its own sake in a counterinsurgency will get us nowhere
over time.”79 The military commanders argued that the international commu-
nity had failed to convince the Afghan people that international involvement
would make their lives better in terms of either security or living standards. If
it did not do so soon, the resurgent Taliban would win their support, or at least
acquiescence.80

There are also worrisome hints, however, that some NATO members may
be unwilling to sustain their commitments to ISAF. Not only has the alliance
had difficulty convincing members to send more troops to Afghanistan,
but some governments were starting to pull out troops at the end of 2006.
The French government decided to withdraw 200 special forces troops from
the southern region of Afghanistan in December 2006, for example, although
some 1,100 French troops would remain near Kabul.81 The Italian government
has faced pressure to set a deadline for withdrawal of its 1,800 troops in
ISAF.82 The ambivalence toward ISAF is partly explained by the fact that
even governments that acknowledged the dangers confronting their troops
were surprised by the strength of the insurgency in Afghanistan; in other par-
ticipating states, the failure to prepare their publics for the true nature of the
mission damaged support for ISAF. Finally, the Afghan mission suffers from
the European public’s residual resentment about Iraq, with which it is often
associated.83

80. Ibid.; and “Oral Statement of General James L. Jones.” On the fragility of the situation in Af-
ghanistan, see also Barnett R. Rubin, “Still Ours to Lose: Afghanistan on the Brink,” prepared testi-
mony for the House and Senate Committees on Foreign Relations (Washington, D.C.: Council on
Foreign Relations, September 21, 2006).
2006. In both the Netherlands and Canada, parliaments raised serious questions about sending
troops to Afghanistan; both Dutch and Canadian troops are actively engaged in fighting insurgent
forces there. “Canada Committed to Afghan Mission, Harper Tells Troops,” CBC News, March 13,
europe/4673026.stm.
82. Helene Cooper, “NATO Allies Wary of Sending More Troops to Afghanistan,” New York Times,
83. Moore and Anderson, “NATO Faces Growing Hurdles as Call for Troops Falls Short.”
CONSEQUENCE MANAGEMENT

The U.S. strategy for confronting terrorism gives priority to preventing attacks. In contrast, NATO’s Military Concept emphasizes consequence management and has two main goals: to respond to an attack once it occurs, and to minimize the effects of an attack that has taken place. At the 2002 Prague summit, the alliance adopted a Civil Emergency Planning Action Plan to improve its ability to respond to attacks involving WMD, and it has developed a range of capabilities to respond to such attacks, including the multinational CBRN Defense Battalion, a deployable analytical laboratory, an event response team, a chemical and biological defense stockpile, and a disease surveillance system. The alliance has also established a center of excellence to further explore defenses against WMD.

NATO has also expanded its disaster relief plans to enhance its terrorism response capabilities. The alliance has conducted several WMD-related exercises, and its Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Center has assisted in responding to floods, forest fires, and snowfalls in states both within and outside the alliance, as well as to Hurricane Katrina in the United States. NATO also contributed to disaster relief operations after a major earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005. This was considered a significant step because it represented the first time the alliance had offered disaster assistance outside its own geographic area, which could set a precedent for such operations.

Some analysts have argued that NATO should expand its consequence management abilities because this is a logical role for the alliance, and it would encourage NATO members to do more to enhance their militaries’ capabilities to respond and coordinate in the event of terrorist attacks or other disasters. There are two obstacles to expanding NATO’s role in this area. First, NATO can act only if its members request assistance. For example, NATO was not asked to aid Spain’s response to the terrorist bombings in Madrid in 2004, nor did it respond to the 2005 London bombings. Whether other states will turn to NATO in the future is likely to depend on the gravity of the attack and on


NATO’s ability to provide specialized capabilities such as CBRN. Second, European states disagree about whether this function should be carried out by NATO or by the European Union. Moreover, although the need for greater cooperation between NATO and the EU in areas such as emergency response is widely recognized, little progress has been made in this area.

SUMMARY
This examination of NATO’s participation in the U.S. war against terror yields three main insights. First, the chronic capabilities gap between the United States and its allies is growing, and increasingly may be limiting the alliance’s operational cooperation. Second, the gap between what the United States and European states are willing to do militarily is also growing. This reflects their disparate capabilities and the differences in operational planning that follow from them. Third, the United States’ commitment to working through the alliance is unclear. While NATO’s chief military officer stresses the value of NATO’s military mechanisms and political consultation, the U.S. government is often unwilling to rely on NATO in campaigns that relate directly to defending the United States. Not only do Pentagon leaders want to avoid the effort of working to build consensus within the alliance, but they see it as compromising the mission and the safety of U.S. forces. Moreover, some U.S. government officials note that the Bush administration sees NATO as unreliable, because of the difficulty in gaining troop commitments from member states in recent years. This has fostered the view expressed by one State Department official, who noted, “We ‘ad hoc’ our way through coalitions of the willing. That’s the future.”

NATO’s Limited Role in the U.S. War on Terror

Three factors help to explain why NATO’s contribution to the U.S. war on terror has been relatively limited: shifting alignments and threat perceptions due to systemic changes, NATO’s chronic and growing capabilities gap, and the war against terror itself.

ALIGNMENTS AND THREATS AFTER THE COLD WAR
Two critical changes in the nature of the international system have influenced NATO’s evolution since the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. First, the dis-

tribution of power in the international system is no longer bipolar. For all its
tensions, the international system was relatively stable during the Cold War,
with the two superpowers and their allies aligned in opposition. This made
core alliance cohesion relatively easy to maintain. NATO’s European members
were unlikely to defect from the U.S.-led alliance, and the United States was
unlikely to abandon Europe, though fears to the contrary emerged periodi-
cally. Although scholars continue to debate whether the current international
system is unipolar, multipolar, or something else, today U.S. military power
dwarfs that of other powers in the international system.

Second, a security community developed among the European powers,
Japan, and the United States concurrently with the erosion and eventual col-
lapse of Soviet power. As a result, the option of war between these powers has
become virtually unthinkable. This is an equally momentous change in the
international system, given that great power war has been a constant in
history.87

NATO has defied realist predictions that it would not survive in the absence
of the threat it was created to defend against: the Soviet Union. But the afore-
mentioned systemic changes have led alliance members to perceive security
threats differently. They have also renewed uncertainties about alliance stabil-
ity and the U.S. commitment to NATO.

The cross-cutting pressures created by changing and sometimes competing
interests have made it more difficult to reach consensus on how to deal with
security threats confronting NATO.88 The disappearance of the Soviet threat
made intra-alliance differences on issues including trade, the environment,
and human rights more salient. NATO’s European members also responded to
concern about U.S. willingness to act through NATO, and Europe’s inability to
act collectively without the United States, by expanding efforts to build a via-
bles European security identity that would make it possible for European states
to operate independent of the United States.89

NATO has always been a political-military alliance, rather than a purely mil-
itary union. It has had a long-standing goal of cementing its members’ shared
democratic ideology and values,90 as evidenced by NATO’s expansion in the

also Karl W. Deutsch, Sidney A. Burrell, and Robert A. Kann, Political Community and the North At-
lantic Area: International Organization in the Light of Historical Experience (New York: Greenwood,
1969), pp. 5–8; and Buzan and Waever, Regions and Powers, pp. 343–376.
90. Thomas Risse-Kappen, “Collective Identity in a Democratic Community: The Case of NATO,”
In expanding eastward, NATO accomplished two objectives: it extended the European security community, and it removed the potential threat of unstable countries along the borders of member states. This expansion, however, has led to further divergences in threat perception among alliance members. While some of NATO’s new members continue to have territorial security concerns due to their proximity to Russia, some long-standing members feel less threatened by “traditional” security concerns. Moreover, European perceptions of the gravity of the terrorist threat vary widely. Some states perceive the threat to be limited, whereas others view it as significant. Notably, only five states—France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom—had legislation dealing with terrorism before the September 11 attacks.

NATO’s members also differ on the means to respond to threats confronting the alliance. This was most apparent in the bitter dispute over the 2003 U.S. invasion of Iraq. The dispute illustrated three points of disagreement. First, it reflected different understandings of the nature of the terrorist threat and how to combat it. Second, it exposed deep differences about the appropriate use of force, and in particular about the U.S. policy of preventive war. Whereas the United States insisted that the urgency of the threat posed by Saddam Hussein’s supposed possession of WMD mandated immediate action, several European allies argued that Hussein was contained and could be deterred. Third, the dispute illustrated increasing European concern about U.S. unilateralism and the fear that NATO’s European members might be “entrapped” by their alliance commitments to support a reckless military operation.

As a result, both France and Germany balked at supporting the United States. Although the Bush administration sought to repair relations with key European allies and institutions after the 2004 presidential elections, the acrimony caused by this dispute has left a residue of ill will.


94. To be sure, frictions over U.S. unilateralism are not new to the alliance. Similar tensions were evident during President Bill Clinton’s administration, which rejected several attempts to establish
Moreover, the United States’ strategic focus has changed, with greater attention being given to the Middle East, Central Asia, and East Asia. This is evident both in the changing base deployments in Europe and the State Department’s decision to shift at least 100 diplomatic positions from Europe to other regions, including Africa, South Asia, East Asia, and the Middle East. This move is a logical step and if anything overdue, given the end of the Cold War, but it is telling of shifts in U.S. policy priorities.

Differences in member states’ views of the role of military force have probably contributed to U.S. frustration with alliance constraints. National caveats attached to military operations sometimes reflect limited capabilities, but they can also reveal different political goals. U.S. inability to count on allies for military cooperation in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere has produced great frustration within the Bush administration. This is evident in Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld’s comment, “It’s kind of like having a basketball team, and they practice and practice and practice for six months. When it comes to game time, one or two say, ‘We’re not going to play.’ Well, that’s fair enough. Everyone has a free choice. But you don’t have a free choice if you’ve practiced for all those months.”

ALLIANCE CAPABILITIES
From the United States’ perspective, the perennial frustration regarding NATO is the difficulty of convincing its European allies to increase defense spending and thus to improve capabilities. During the Cold War, NATO members agreed that defense spending should be roughly 3 percent of a state’s gross domestic product; in 2006 the minimum spending level set by the alliance was 2 percent. Yet only six states other than the United States met this threshold. Furthermore, how this money is spent causes concern in Washington. Many states continue to expend the bulk of their resources on manpower, rather than on transforming their forces in ways the United States hopes they will—and to which NATO has agreed. Some, such as Greece and Turkey, still have military forces focused at least in part on each other.

international institutions that it believed might undermine U.S. national security, such as the 1997 Ottawa Convention, which banned antipersonnel land mines, and the International Criminal Court.

96. Quoted in Banusiewicz, “‘National Caveats’ among Key Topics at NATO Meeting.”
As NATO has taken on new tasks, differences in capabilities have hindered the alliance’s operational cooperation. Moreover, willingness to address this gap appears limited; although many European states acknowledge the problem, defense spending and military transformation remain low domestic priorities in several states because they do not see major military threats to their security. Additionally, the large number of operations in which NATO is currently engaged means that many states do not have the manpower and resources to devote to transformation given current budgets. Notably, the United States has funded operations in both Iraq and Afghanistan through supplemental budget requests, rather than the annual defense budget. It has also financed some allied contributions, such as the Polish division in Iraq.

U.S. officials would like to see NATO undertake a transformation similar to what the United States is adopting: that is, to develop expeditionary forces and what Defense Department officials call twenty-first century military capabilities. The alliance’s adoption of transformation as one of its goals in 2003 represents a welcome step in this direction; indeed, NATO’s reorganized command structure designates one of its two new commands the Allied Command Transformation.

The United States and some other alliance members disagree over the kinds of capabilities NATO members should seek to acquire. The QDR affirms U.S. support for “efforts to create a NATO stabilization and reconstruction capability and a European constabulary force” that could build on the EU’s existing constabulary forces. It suggests that allied states should aim to “[tailor] national military contributions to best employ the unique capabilities and characteristics of each ally, [to achieve] a unified effort greater than the sum of its parts.” This implies the development of “niche” capabilities. If the alliance moves in this direction, it could reinforce the perception that the United States, along with only a few alliance members such as the United Kingdom and

France, has combat-ready troops able to conduct frontline operations, while NATO as a whole is relegated to postconflict operations and “cleanup.” The need for such postconflict capabilities is increasingly apparent, notably in both Afghanistan and Iraq. Less clear, however, is whether NATO states are willing to codify this division of labor, and how this would affect alliance unity and decisionmaking.

Yet there is an element of hypocrisy in Washington’s annoyance with its NATO allies, because the U.S.-backed expansion of the alliance contributed to the erosion of NATO’s military capabilities. The United States was the strongest voice encouraging two rounds of NATO expansion to incorporate Central European states after the Cold War, in 1999 and 2004, and it supported the decision at the Riga summit to consider further enlargement of the alliance as early as 2008. When the second expansion decision was made in 2004, however, it was already apparent that the states that joined NATO in 1999 had failed to meet the goals set for transforming their militaries to accord with NATO standards; and they were not likely to achieve them soon. Moreover, none of the second-round applicants met NATO’s military capability standards, and they were far behind the first-round states in their ability to transform their militaries. Lessened alliance capabilities may have been unproblematic to the United States because it did not intend to incorporate alliance forces in its major operations.

The nature of the war on terror
The final factor explaining NATO’s limited role in the war on terror is the very nature of that conflict. Although the Bush administration determined that this is a war, it is not one in which most “battles” are fought by military forces. Different means are required as well. Indeed, this is partly why Europeans tend to refer to the “fight,” rather than “war,” against terrorism. Combating international terrorism requires cooperation in a wide range of areas among different countries and international organizations. Key elements of the struggle include diplomatic efforts to maintain and strengthen international treaties and norms proscribing terrorism, as well as economic cooperation to find and eliminate sources of terrorist financing. In addition to military activities, security cooperation is needed to ensure that states can share intelligence regarding ter-

rorists and that law enforcement agencies can work together across borders. U.S. efforts to combat terrorism in these areas involve extensive cooperation with European states, but this does not occur through NATO. Rather, it occurs either bilaterally or with the EU.

Additionally, the threats facing the United States and its European allies are different. The United States has chosen to combat terrorism as far from its shores as possible, through military actions in Afghanistan and Iraq; it also emphasizes the role of covert special-operations forces to conduct counter-terrorist missions overseas. In contrast, several European states face a domestic threat. Their large Muslim minorities create the potential for “home-grown” terrorists, particularly to the degree that these minorities have not been integrated into the broader society. Indeed, the July 2005 bombings in London were carried out primarily by British citizens. This gives European states a different set of priorities in fighting terrorism, because the threat they confront is local, not distant.

Conclusion

NATO plays a largely supportive role in the war on terror. To the degree that NATO countries are engaged in key elements of U.S. efforts to combat terrorism, they do so on the basis of bilateral ties or loose coalitions—not through NATO. Operation Active Endeavor provides important support for U.S. military operations in the Middle East. It contributes to the prevention of and defense against terrorism; it is not, however, a combat operation. The contribution that NATO members make by providing intelligence in the struggle against terrorists occurs largely bilaterally, and it is generated primarily by law enforcement agencies, rather than by allied military intelligence capabilities. NATO’s defense investment programs may help to create better defenses against terrorism, but it is too soon to tell how successful these will be.

Similarly, NATO does not have a direct role in denying terrorists access to WMD. NATO maintains political dialogues with countries at risk for the theft or sale of weapons or WMD-related products, and individual members participate in threat reduction activities. These are not designed to address the problem of terrorist acquisition, however. The alliance is split on the use of

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preemption as a means to prevent the spread of WMD to states that might let terrorists obtain weapons of mass destruction, and the United States prefers the PSI and the new Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism to NATO as means to prevent the spread of WMD to terrorists.

NATO’s ISAF mission in Afghanistan directly contributes to the U.S. goal of denying terrorists sanctuary there. ISAF troops are in essence conducting counterterrorism as well as counterinsurgency operations, and this is NATO’s first combat mission since its creation. The lead role in counterterrorism in Afghanistan continues to be played by U.S. special forces, however, not NATO; and U.S. troops are the largest contingent in ISAF. NATO’s role in Iraq is even more limited. Many member states have individually contributed troops to the U.S.-led coalition in Iraq, but the alliance’s sole contribution to stabilizing the country has been the training of Iraqi military officers.

NATO has begun to develop consequence management capabilities to respond to terrorist attacks, particularly those with WMD. This could give the alliance a valuable support role. The nature of the terrorist threat confronting individual member-states will likely determine whether they take advantage of NATO’s support capability.

Three factors explain Washington’s circumvention of the alliance in prosecuting the war on terror. First, two critical changes in the international system, U.S. hegemony and the emergence of a security community, particularly among European states, have led NATO’s members both to differ among themselves on a broad range of global issues and to perceive security threats differently. They also differ on the appropriate means for responding to perceived threats, as was most evident in the dispute over the U.S. invasion of Iraq. These shifting alignments and attitudes have reduced U.S. willingness to accept alliance constraints.

Second, U.S. military capabilities are greater and more sophisticated than those of its allies, which makes it difficult for even close U.S. allies to coordinate with U.S. forces in frontline military activities. Some U.S. officers point out that one goal of NATO training exercises is to illuminate these differences, as a way to spur allies to improve their capabilities. But NATO’s expansion has eroded its military capabilities further. Combined with the increasing use of national caveats, which constrain what individual military forces can do in NATO operations, the alliance’s ability to work with the United States in confronting immediate military threats appears limited, at best.

104. U.S. official, interview by author.
Third, the nature of the war on terror itself constrains NATO’s contribution to U.S. strategy. Iraq and Afghanistan notwithstanding, terrorism is fought primarily by nonmilitary means, such as law enforcement and intelligence gathering. Moreover, NATO’s members face different threats.

The United States is unlikely to abandon NATO, however. In spite of its rejection of alliance constraints on its own actions, NATO provides a crucial forum in which the United States can discuss foreign and security policy with its key allies to reach common understandings of shared problems. This is particularly vital to the United States as the EU’s Common Foreign and Security Policy begins to coalesce and influence the policies of European states. Only in NATO does the United States have a voice in European security affairs. This helps explain U.S. support for expanding the alliance, and it has sought to make NATO the forum for discussion of a broad range of security problems affecting Europe and North America.

Moreover, Washington recognizes that combating international terrorism requires extensive cooperation, both bilateral and multilateral. This is best built on a shared understanding of the problem states confront, and NATO can play an important role in generating common views regarding terrorism. So long as the United States views NATO as a valuable forum in which it can convince its European allies that they share the same goals and that they confront the same threat in the war on terror, it will continue to value the alliance. If threat perceptions within the alliance diverge further, however, this could make it harder to reach agreement on common policies. Notably, European states appear to have differing views of the threats they face; this is not simply a transatlantic divide.

U.S. policy increasingly acknowledges the importance of nonmilitary measures such as public diplomacy and the “war of ideas” in combating terrorism. Increasing recognition that the terrorist threat is evolving means that U.S. approaches are likely to move toward greater concurrence with European policies on terrorism, which stress intelligence, law enforcement, and quiet engagement with the Muslim world. This would ease some of the frictions in Washington’s relations with its European allies. It would not, however, lead to a greater role for NATO in confronting terrorism. Rather, it could accelerate the tendency to utilize mechanisms outside the alliance framework to address this urgent threat.

NATO’s military value as a partner to the United States in the war against terrorism also remains in question. Should the United States confront terrorists militarily in the future, it will likely do so with special operations forces working either alone or with host-government troops. A few alliance members may participate in such operations, but the alliance itself will not. Further, the bulk of the struggle against terrorism requires substantial nonmilitary means. NATO may have a useful diplomatic role to play, both among its members and with regard to key states such as Russia. But many of the critical tasks in this fight are outside the military domain, leaving NATO with little role.

In 2003 NATO Supreme Cmdr. James Jones noted that if the attempt at defense transformation fails, the alliance may lose its military value. Others point to NATO’s ISAF mission as the essential test for its survival. Its success or failure in Afghanistan will be a critical indicator of the alliance’s ability to address the type of security threats that will emerge in contested regions around the globe. Success would confirm NATO’s unity and capability to act “out of area,” but a defeat would undermine NATO’s claim to a broader global mission. The alliance would continue to provide for the defense of Europe, and the alliance members’ shared values may be sufficient to sustain NATO as an organization, assuming its political consultation and dialogue functions continue to thrive. But such a defeat would raise serious questions about NATO’s contribution to its members’ core security concerns, if these are seen as out of area. If NATO’s major member-states do not seek to address their most urgent threats within the alliance framework, its military value could atrophy.