



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Many citizens of NATO member nations have failed to grasp that a failure of the international effort in Afghanistan would foster instability across much of Central and South Asia, abet the spread of extremist groups and ideologies throughout the region, increase the threat of terrorism to Europe and North America, and could gravely damage the transatlantic relationship.

One reason for this is that NATO has not adopted or explained the need for a comprehensive regional approach, opting instead for a strategy focused almost exclusively on Afghanistan, even though the Taliban, al-Qaeda, and affiliated terrorist groups are based in Pakistan. Despite this obvious interconnection, NATO has failed to fully embrace a broader Afghanistan-Pakistan mission. Many in Europe and North America have opposed the war in Afghanistan on the grounds that the real enemy, the al-Qaeda leadership, is in Pakistan. If NATO adopted a fully integrated regional approach, this line of opposition would be quelled and the Alliance would have a broader strategy that addresses the multi-faceted threats that emanate from the region.

The following is an assessment of the threat that regional instability, Islamist militants, and terrorist networks pose to countries in the region, as well as to Europe and North America. The assessment also focuses on the possible impact of a NATO failure in Afghanistan.

At present, NATO has not given itself the authority to conduct this kind of overall assessment. Despite clear links between international terrorism and NATO efforts in Afghanistan, Europe continues to separate NATO-led expeditionary operations in Afghanistan from domestic counter-terrorism. Those domestic operations are almost exclusively handled by national law-enforcement agencies, loosely coordinated through the European Union. Because of this inefficiency, there is no comprehensive assessment or general understanding of the overall threat caused by instability and extremist activity in Central and South Asia. This virtually ensures declining European public support for the Afghanistan mission.

While NATO should not necessarily take over the coordination of domestic law enforcement, NATO should play a significant role in shaping a comprehensive strategic approach to counter-terrorism as it is the only institution that can effectively integrate domestic counter-terrorism operations with operations in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Because of this unique position, NATO must undertake a comprehensive threat assessment that demonstrates the risk Europe faces from militancy in south and central Asia.

If the NATO effort in Afghanistan falters, it will have a wide-ranging impact not just on Afghanistan, but throughout Central and South Asia, the transatlantic community, and across the Middle East, Southeast Asia, Africa, and much of the world.

Failure would allow Afghanistan to once again serve as a safe haven for emboldened radical forces and terrorist networks, while serving as a rallying-cry and recruiting call for militant Islamists throughout the world. From a Taliban-controlled Afghanistan, or from an Afghanistan with no effective state, these forces could plan and launch attacks, destabilize Pakistan, and jeopardize the security of the Pakistani nuclear arsenal.



Many senior elements within the Taliban, Al-Qaeda's enablers, are not content to remain a local movement. Much of both the Afghan and Pakistan Taliban leadership sympathize with al-Qaeda and its goal of global jihad. Furthermore, in an effort to expand their extremist ideology and political control, the Pakistani Taliban and allies in al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups have launched a war against the government of Pakistan and are continuing to destabilize that nuclear-armed nation. A NATO failure in Afghanistan would embolden the Afghan Taliban to continue to work with their Pakistani Taliban allies to cause upheaval in Pakistan.

The actions of these militants are also threatening to create instability in India, Central Asia, and China, thereby threatening America's and Europe's greater strategic interests. A Taliban resurgence in Afghanistan could induce the Pakistani military and intelligence services to renew and enhance their cooperation with militants. Such a development would likely embolden ideologically aligned militants that strive to attack India, thus raising the prospect for increased terrorist attacks in India which could provoke an Indo-Pakistani military conflict that could destabilize the whole region. Already, perceptions that the United States and Europe are wavering in their commitment to the region have sparked concerns that regional countries may be preparing their own proxies for Afghanistan. Such movement could potentially create an atmosphere like the one that existed during the Afghan civil war in the 1990s.

A failure for NATO in Afghanistan and Pakistan will shatter transatlantic unity and lead more people to question the purpose of NATO in the 21st century.

Moreover, a NATO defeat in Afghanistan would have a direct impact on the homeland security of NATO countries, particularly Europe. Since 9/11, terrorists have executed three major attacks in Europe against NATO member states Spain, Turkey, and Great Britain, killing nearly 300 people, and have attempted several other attacks across the continent. In the last eight years, European authorities have made hundreds of arrests and have broken up several terrorist cells that were in the process of planning or carrying out large-scale attacks. Extremist groups continue to operate in Europe, recruiting new members and planning strikes designed to inflict indiscriminate mass casualties.

In many cases, perpetrators of terrorist attacks and members of militant Islamist groups in Europe are citizens or legal residents of European countries. This has led many to view Europe's exposure to terrorism as a primarily domestic security concern. In this view, the most important counter-measures focus on expelling visiting radical imams and other foreigners who advocate violence, banning militant groups that support terrorism, and addressing the social alienation that leaves some young European Muslims frustrated and prone to anti-social violence.

These steps are vital components of a comprehensive approach to protect Europe, but they address just one aspect—the problem of domestic radicalization—of a broader international issue. Most attacks, and the well-designed and potentially most lethal terrorist plots against Europe, have been conducted by groups that received training, support, or guidance from organizations abroad, especially al-Qaeda and affiliated groups. Recent assessments from European and U.S. intelligence agencies confirm that terrorist groups use the Afghanistan-



Pakistan border region to train and indoctrinate new recruits, plan terrorist attacks, and communicate with operational cells overseas. Moreover, taking advantage of the innumerable familial and social networks connecting Europe's Muslim communities with Central and South Asia, extremist groups based in the region maintain a presence across Western Europe, recruiting new members and placing operatives on European territory. To be successful, Europe's counter-terrorism strategy must incorporate measures to neutralize terrorist threats that germinate in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and radiate outward to Europe and around the world.