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Countering Terrorist Activities in the NATO Territory and Periphery

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COUNTERING TERRORIST ACTIVITIES IN THE NATO TERRITORY AND PERIPHERY

PROF. DR. GIRAY SADIK[1]

The kind of NATO that we need… is an Alliance that defends its members against global threats: terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction and failed states… What we need is an increasingly global approach to security, with organizations, including NATO, playing their respective roles.

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer
NATO Secretary General 2004 – 2009

Executive Summary

According to the 2022 Strategic Concept, terrorism poses a direct, asymmetrical, and transnational threat for NATO. Therefore, there is an ongoing need for research and learning about the global terrorism landscape and its implications for NATO Allies and Partners. To this end, this paper aims to analyze terrorist threat perceptions and NATO's counterterrorism (hereinafter CT) efforts and their implications on the security environment via assessing the contribution of the Alliance to countering worldwide terrorism by considering cooperation efforts among Allies, Partners, and other international actors. Recent wars from Ukraine to the Middle East have further complicated NATO's CT efforts by creating opportunities for terrorists to become hybrid actors by exploiting public grievances, emerging technologies, and strategic vulnerabilities. As a result, the following **key trends in CT** have become of expanding importance for NATO:

- Threat perceptions of NATO Allies and Partners continue to vary significantly based on their exposure to terrorist threats.
- Hybrid wars are luring foreign terrorist fighters from all around the world, including from NATO Allies and Partners. Their battle-hardened tactics and traumas lead to rising concerns about their return with potential risk of spillover to NATO territory.
- Growing terrorist exploitations of *Emerging and Disruptive Technologies (EDTs) and Artificial Intelligence (AI)* in the blurring lines of the crime-terror-tech nexus.

Following a comprehensive examination of these CT efforts and their effects on the Alliance, this paper puts forward the following **recommendations for NATO** to counter terrorism effectively by raising

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awareness within and beyond NATO, while paving the way for multistakeholder CT collaboration:

- NATO Allies and Partners need to work more seamlessly to seize the advantages of cooperation.

- Current NATO partnerships should address cyber defense, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, non-proliferation, defense science and technology, and Women Peace and Security.

- The nature of cooperation must rest on participation in NATO's military operations but also defense capacity building, training, and education. There is a widely recognized notion that it needs to move beyond operational engagement only, and that engaging partners in *political consultation and intelligence-sharing* at the strategic level has become crucial to meeting security challenges such as *terrorism*, proliferation, piracy, or cyberattacks.

- The individual *members of NATO should be concerned about terrorism*, but NATO as an institution should not lead on this issue. NATO should be considered one of many tools.

- Since NATO lacks many of the key policy competencies to fight terrorism, *it must ensure that it conducts counterterrorism operations in a responsible and realistic manner.*

- Through collaboration with partner countries and the international counterterrorism community, *NATO needs to complement, rather than duplicate, global counterterrorism efforts.*

INTRODUCTION

Terrorism has been among the top threats for global security, with multifaceted implications for world politics including, but not limited to, the ones on international organizations such as NATO. According to the 2022 Strategic Concept, terrorism poses the most direct asymmetric threat for NATO. Even though NATO's focus is directed to the other main threat, Russia, based on its war against Ukraine, terrorism remains as a major transnational threat across the NATO territory and periphery. Besides, the adaptations of terrorist organizations in light of ongoing wars, such as the ones in Ukraine, the MENA (the Middle East and North Africa), and around the Sahel are likely to exacerbate terrorist threats for NATO Allies and Partners.2 Therefore, there is an ongoing need for research and learning about the global terrorism landscape and its implications for NATO.

To this end, this research aims to identify the core reasons of worldwide terrorism and effects on security environment via assessing NATO's contribution to countering worldwide terrorism and looking for cooperation efforts among Allies, Partners, and other international actors. The expected outcome is to put forward useful recommendations for NATO in countering terrorism by raising awareness within NATO and support counterterrorism (CT) studies of the Alliance and to pave the way for multistakeholder CT collaboration. Leading to recommendations, this paper scrutinizes the effectiveness of the Allied capacity-building and counterterrorism measures considering the related NATO transformation doctrines and practices. This paper ends with the highlighting of key results and conclusions for NATO and global counterterrorism efforts.

The sub-topics of the paper are organized as follows:

A. Historical Context and Anatomy of Terrorism
B. Perceptions of Terrorism Threats within NATO and its Implications
C. NATO's Capacity and Performance to Cope with Terrorist Activities in the AOR and Periphery
D. NATO's Counterterrorism (CT) Efforts and Cooperation Means with other International Actors
E. How Successful is NATO at Countering Terrorism?

*[2]This paper refers to **NATO Partners** based on the definition at NATO's official website: "NATO has 32 members, but it also maintains relations with 35 non-member countries and a range of international organizations, called **NATO Partners**". For details, see NATO partnerships available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_84336.html*

ANALYSIS

A. Historical Context and Anatomy of Terrorism

The origins of terrorism are multi-layered and complex, where historical, political, ideological, sectarian, and socio-economic factors contribute to its emergence. Terrorism has existed for centuries, but "the modern form often traces its roots to various historical events such as anti-colonial struggles, nationalist movements, religious extremism, political ideologies, and responses to perceived injustices or grievances. The word 'terrorism' has emerged from the Latin verbs 'terrere' and 'deterre' which means an act to tremble and frighten respectively" (Barman and Dakua, 2024). To this end, terrorism involves premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non-combatant targets, often to influence a wider audience beyond the immediate victims. As a result, terrorist acts can vary widely, ranging from bombings, hijackings, and assassinations to cyberattacks; therefore, definitions of it are frequently nuanced and contentious. According to Schmidt, Jongmann et al, in their book *Political Terrorism,* proposed the following definition:

"Terrorism is an anxiety-inspiring method of repeated violent action, employed by (semi-) clandestine individual, group, or state actors, for idiosyncratic, criminal, or political reasons, whereby - in contrast to assassination - the direct targets of violence are not the main targets. The immediate human victims of violence are generally chosen randomly (targets of opportunity) or selectively (representative or symbolic targets) from a target population and serve as message generators. Threat- and violence-based communication processes between terrorist (organization), (imperiled) victims, and main targets are used to manipulate the main target (audience(s)), turning it into a target of terror, a target of demands, or a target of attention, depending on whether intimidation, coercion, or propaganda is primarily sought." (Ness, 2009)

Terrorism Studies as a specific area of research came to prominence in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 (9/11) terrorist attacks in the USA but had existed across a range of disciplines long before, albeit as a less consolidated and certainly less visible subject area. However, despite the existence of a body of work on terrorism, the impact of 9/11 on western perceptions of terrorism ensured that the direction of study was firmly focused on religious extremism for many years after the attacks. It is only very recently that significant attention has been focused on other ideologically motivated extremisms, namely the Far Right. (Ahmed and Lynch, 2024)

Following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, David Rapoport published an article in which he developed a research framework in the field of terrorism. This article includes a "discussion of modern terrorism in a historical context and the historical evolution of violence. With his wave approach, Rapoport puts forward four waves of terrorism, which he categorizes as anarchist wave, anti-colonial wave, new left wave, and religious wave" (Rapoport, 2008). Besides, the new terrorism debate has brought with it another debate about whether there is a possibility of a fifth wave and/or relations among the different waves of terrorism in pursuit of terrorist adaptation attempts to changes in global security. For instance, experts observe that "despite being included in the third wave, the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) terrorist

organization sought to alter its organizational form, goals, motives and motivation sources, and action methods and tactics to respond to the changing environment and the impact of new terrorism. The PKK terrorist organization has been trying to transform itself from a hierarchical structure to a cell and network type structure, especially with the methods it learned from al-Qaeda and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL/Da'esh)" (Gök and Mavruk, 2023).

Debates and research on terrorism increased markedly after the 9/11 attacks. A comprehensive overview of modern terrorism studies demonstrates that "the volume of terrorism research surged to record highs after 9/11 and has not decreased since" (Gaibulloev and Sandler, 2019). Notably after the 9/11 terrorist attacks NATO invoked Article 5, and the global war on terrorism has become at the top on the Alliance's agenda since then. Still, the need for strategic learning to keep up with terrorist adaptation remains, and therefore NATO Allies and Partners should keep pace in the learning curve when developing their counterterrorism strategies. This paper aims to contribute to these strategies by focusing on existing NATO capacity building and cooperation efforts in its territory and periphery. The following sections will focus on related NATO perspectives and efforts, and the analysis of their effectiveness for global counterterrorism cooperation.

B. Perceptions of Terrorism Threats within NATO and its Implications

The Allies' threat perceptions about terrorism have been varying, and this trend is likely to continue. For this reason, this section concentrates on analyzing the development of Alliance perceptions and their implications based on relevant NATO documents, such as communiques issued by the North Atlantic Council meetings and Strategic Concepts.

Although the September 11, 2001 (hereinafter 9/11) terrorist attacks on the United States have had a ground-breaking impact on the counterterrorism strategies of NATO, it is important to note that "terrorism became a NATO concern long before the tragic events of 11 September 2001. Terrorism was addressed for the first time in the 1982 Bonn Summit declaration, which condemns all acts of international terrorism and stresses the need for the most effective cooperation to prevent and suppress the scourge of terrorism, in accordance with national legislation. Since then, even though *terrorism* was only superficially mentioned in Brussels 1989, the next two Declarations from Brussels in December 1989 and from London in 1990 do not address *terrorism.* Only after 1991 did the Rome Declaration on terrorism become an integral part of all NATO declarations. Previous warnings about the related threats from terrorism can be attributed to the fact that some Allies, such as the United Kingdom, Türkiye, and Spain, had suffered from terrorism before 9/11, and hence the threat perceptions from terrorism have been present with varying implications for different Allies. In his comprehensive overview of the Allies' terrorism perceptions, Robert Kupiecki contrasts the differences of threat perceptions and their implications, before and after 9/11, for NATO:

In the Alliance's classified political and military documents terrorism is also listed as one of the new risks and challenges with which NATO might be confronted following the end of the cold war. The basic characteristic of its approach to this problem (pre-11 September) was its inclusion in the broader context of the threats of a non-military nature originating outside the North Atlantic area. Providing for adequate responses to threats of this kind was thought to lie outside the arrangements established for the purposes of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty (collective defense). Regardless of the policies of a number of member states that had been direct targets of terrorism, the basic instruments of common action were consultations provided for in Article 4 of the Washington Treaty and other measures aimed at strengthening peace and promoting development of democratic institutions (Article 2 of the Treaty). Thus terrorism, though part of allied threat assessment, was largely excluded from the sphere of practical planning, military planning included, to meet a threat to the security of one or more member states (a classic Article 5 contingency). In practice this meant that terrorism was perceived as a second-order risk of concern only to some of the allies rather than affecting the security of the whole North Atlantic area. (Kupiecki, 2001)

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, threat perceptions from terrorism shifted dramatically for the US and NATO. As the former head of NATO's Emerging Security Challenges Division Michael Rühle observes, the lasting impact of 9/11 on NATO's transformation and its implications for Allied threat perceptions, "neither had the United States been as dismissive as it had seemed initially, nor was NATO doomed to be marginalized in the fight against international terrorism. … Not shying away from drawing parallels even to the Cold War, Robertson [NATO Secretary General 1999-2003] suggested that this was only the beginning of a long struggle to which NATO now had to adjust. Eventually, however, the lessons of that fateful day would come to be reflected in NATO's political and military agenda" (Rühle, 2013).

All things considered, "counterterrorism was top priority before the resurgence of the Russian threat with the annexation of Crimea and the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. It has played a crucial role in the post-Cold War transformation of the Alliance, as stated in NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept, mentioning explicitly that terrorism poses a direct threat to the security of the citizens of NATO countries, and to international stability and prosperity more broadly. Extremist groups continue to spread to, and in, areas of strategic importance to the Alliance" (NATO Strategic Concept, 2010). These post-9/11 shifting threat perceptions from terrorism have significant implications at the time they were conceived and the years to come for NATO.

Allies' growing recognition of terrorism as a significant threat in the post-9/11 era had lasting implications on the US-led war on terror. As Nevers observes, "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" (Nevers, 2007). All of these factors remain relevant today, with rising risks of being exacerbated by emerging threats after 2022 with the Ukraine war. When gauging the potential implications of terrorism perceptions for NATO, Kupiecki warns about the far-reaching effects for the Alliance:

Short-term diagnosis from today's vantage-point it can be clearly seen that the military operation in Afghanistan will not be the end of the war on terrorism or eliminate threats of this kind from the strategy arsenal of states and organizations. It will be a prolonged effort encompassing coordinated action in the political, economic, diplomatic, law-enforcement and military fields. For NATO it could mean the necessity of embracing new tasks within the broad spectrum of Alliance arrangements, including of a military nature. Relatively the weakest link in current NATO business is exchange of information and cooperation between intelligence services. Only to a limited extent is the Alliance the main arena of cooperation, but it does play a crucial part in facilitating it for member states. The events of 11 September, which both put the international intelligence community in the dock and jolted it into action, triggered an unprecedented expansion of such cooperation within the Organization. Information-sharing mechanisms are also accompanied by organizational steps leading to the development of data gathering and processing structures. There will have to be a relatively speedy reappraisal of the threat analyses (in principle classified) carried out by NATO and its regional agencies (in both a substantive and geographical perspective), and in those the problem of terrorism is bound to feature more prominently. (Kupiecki, 2001)

Further complicating the above warnings is the fact that still "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" (Nevers, 2007).

C. NATO's Capacity and Performance to Cope with Terrorist Activities in the AOR and Periphery

NATO's "area of responsibility" (AOR), within which attacks on member states are eligible for an Article 5 response, is defined under Article 6 of the North Atlantic Treaty to include "NATO territory".

Therefore, according to the North Atlantic Treaty's above AOR-definition, the core focus of NATO counterterrorism efforts is set to be responsible for these listed areas of the Allies. Considering its domestic security dimensions, NATO assumed a supportive role for counterterrorism, leaving terrorist threats to be primarily addressed by the Allies concerned till the terrorist attacks on 11 September 2001 (the 9/11). Since then, it has been more than two decades when NATO invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty for the first, and so far only, time. While this collective self-defense reaction represented a response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States, *fighting in a war on terror is not something the Alliance was built to do from the outset* (Venema and Ertan, 2021).

Coinciding with Secretary General Stoltenberg's presentation of the NATO 2030 initiative in 2024, this section explores how NATO has adapted to the reality of sustained engagement in counterterrorism operations, a task that in many countries falls within the remit of law enforcement or intelligence agencies, rather than within the military domain. NATO's focus on territorial defense instead of counterterrorism does not mean that the members inside NATO should not be working together on counterterrorism operations—but NATO as an institution should not be the leader or main actor in these operations. Instead, "if a military operation is required to fight terrorism, it should be led by a coalition of the willing, formed and led by NATO members, but not by NATO itself" (Coffey and Kochis, 2020). In addition, "NATO's Science and Technology Organization is uniquely capable in establishing public-private partnerships aimed at developing technological counterterrorism solutions, exemplified by NATO's efforts in developing microwave sensing tools capable of detecting improvised explosive devices in moving crowds". Since 2017 the NATO Headquarters includes a *Terrorism Intelligence Cell,* which focuses on strategic intelligence analysis. Additionally, NATO Headquarters has an Intelligence Liaison Unit which facilitates intelligence sharing between NATO and *Partner Nations*' intelligence agencies.

The past two decades have seen NATO move from an Alliance that acknowledged terrorism vaguely as a point on the horizon to an organization that suddenly found itself knee-deep in counterterrorism operations. While NATO has institutionalized many counterterrorism frameworks over the past decade, the next decade will need to see NATO's programming take counterterrorism into account at all levels: tactical, operational, strategic, and diplomatic. Counterterrorism will, unfortunately, remain a necessary area of focus for the entire Alliance, and further solidifying it as a cross-cutting theme throughout all levels of the Alliance is not only the smart thing to, but also the necessary thing to do.

D. NATO's Counterterrorism (CT) Efforts and Cooperation Means with other International Actors

Considering the growing global footprint of terrorism, the counterterrorism efforts of the Alliance go hand in hand with NATO's cooperation with other international actors. To this end, NATO has developed a three-pronged approach to guide the Alliance efforts on counterterrorism: *raising awareness, developing capabilities, and enhancing engagement with partner countries.* Starting with the first prong:

Increasing awareness of the terrorist threat is one of the core pillars of NATO's counterterrorism approach. NATO does this by supporting Alliance members through consultations, finding ways of enhancing intelligence sharing within the Alliance, and providing strategic analysis on terrorist threats. NATO receives intelligence from Allies' intelligence services to help build that strategic analysis. Since 2017 NATO Headquarters (HQ) includes a Terrorism Intelligence Cell specifically founded for this purpose. More broadly, the Joint Security Division facilitates intelligence sharing between members and the Alliance and distributes strategic reporting on terrorist threats. (Venema and Ertan, 2021)

To complement these efforts in the regions with a rising risk of terrorist attacks with increased situational awareness on NATO's southern border, NATO's Joint Force Command in Naples, Italy hosts the 'Hub for the South', which is responsible for strengthening the Alliance's ability to anticipate developments in the region. This 'Hub for the South' initiative can also be considered a step toward Alliance capacity building, which brings us to the second prong:

NATO's second prong, capability development, focuses on building the skills and know-how to prevent, protect against, and respond to terrorism. NATO offers advice and assistance to members where requested, in terms of doctrinal and policy development but also in terms of practical training, all of which are captured in NATO's Defense Against Terrorism Program of Work. By way of example, NATO released its Battlefield Evidence Policy in late 2020. This first-of-its-kind document aims to facilitate the sharing of valuable evidence collected by deployed militaries in support of legal prosecution of terrorist fighters. Because of NATO's theater of operations, deployed Allied troops may find themselves in a unique position to secure evidence where domestic criminal justice mechanisms tasked with prosecuting terrorism of fences do not have access. By providing NATO militaries with awareness and a framework for evidence collection and safeguarding, NATO Allies are building the necessary capabilities for executing this niche task within the global counterterrorism effort. (Venema and Ertan, 2021)

In order to expand the effects of the first two prongs, NATO's third prong - *engagement* – is aimed at *strengthening cooperation with international actors and partner countries* in acknowledgement of the fact that countering terrorism requires an international approach. To this end, building a collective knowledge base becomes critical not only for the NATO Allies but also its partners and other actors such as international organizations. For example:

The 2020 Counter-Terrorism Reference Curriculum represents a standardized output designed to ensure Allies all have a common understanding of terrorist ideologies, motivations and methods, as well as contemporary counterterrorism practices. The curriculum was the product of multinational cooperation, produced through the Partnership for Peace Consortium with input from a range of actors, including the European Union, the United Nations, and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. (Venema and Ertan, 2021)

To put all these international cooperation means in the framework by explicitly outlining this three-pronged approach in the Counter-Terrorism Policy Guidelines (2012), "NATO has continued to carve a specialized role for itself and remained wary of mission creep that risks the organization overextending itself in domains that are neither military nor counterterrorism focused. Through collaboration with partner countries and the international counter-terrorism community NATO attempts to complement, rather than duplicate, counter-terrorism efforts" (NATO 2012).

E. How Successful is NATO at Countering Terrorism?

Considering the post-9/11 NATO counterterrorism efforts, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg in 2021 stated that "NATO prevented Afghanistan from being a safe haven for international terrorists and prevented any attack against any NATO ally for over 20 years" (Stoltenberg, 2021). Although his statement presents state of the art of NATO counterterrorism (CT) efforts from its top leadership, a comprehensive assessment needs to address the failure to develop effective governance, an army, or a police force in Afghanistan, which ultimately led to the withdrawal of NATO-led foreign forces, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), in 2021 from the country. As a result:

ISAF and US intelligence led operations were highly successful in their aim of eliminating terrorist al-Qaeda and insurgent Taliban leaders, a perfect example of the optimal use of hard power in CT. But, by not having coordinated actions to follow-up military success with soft power to address the actual needs and desires of the people, this approach sadly *ensured tactical battlefield success never translated into operational security and strategic stability.* (Harley, 2024)

NATO's experience from Afghanistan and other related theatres highlight the importance of a 360-degree view that includes the utility of population-centric approaches when considering the long-term effectiveness of counterterrorism. These considerations have only been increased with growing hybrid threats from Ukraine to the broader Middle East and North Africa (MENA), where the battle for hearts and minds can be used for offensive purposes by various state and non-state actors including terrorists in addition to CT efforts. These interrelated trends further complicate the accurate assessment of the success of NATO counterterrorism efforts by adding dimensions such as cyber and cognitive security that have the potential to be manipulated in the grey-zone

conflicts by terrorists and their patrons. In this regard, there is a risk that:

NATO is a victim of its own success in some ways, as malign competitors leverage western interconnectedness and development to their advantage. The map looks like this: successful interdependence and deterrence increased economic welfare of member and adjacent states and in turn, increased the welfare for successive generations. Newer "higher" needs emerge in individuals as they satiate lower needs. Every generation expects more from their state and in turn, the alliance. With higher expectations comes the potential for more significant disappointment and discontent, which can tear at *Alliance cohesion*. (Karp and Maass, 2024)

These hybrid threats and their growing implications need to be taken into consideration when assessing the success of NATO counterterrorism efforts, along with the legitimate security concerns of the Allies suffering from terrorism, such as the United Kingdom, Türkiye, Norway, Spain, France, and Belgium to count a few that experienced serious terrorist attacks in the post-9/11- era. It is to be noted that this era brought an exponential growth of terror attacks based on violent interpretation of religious ideologies, as well as continuation of activities of sectarian terrorist organizations (such as ETA[3] and PKK) and their extensions and affiliates, both in Europe, Africa and the Middle East. These ongoing concerns about human security and their implications for the Allies and their populations need to guide our recommendations for effective counterterrorism strategies for NATO.

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[3]ETA, or Euskadi ta Askatasuna, is a separatist group in the Basque region of Spain and France that has been classified by various international agencies as a terrorist organization. On 16 April 2018, ETA completely dissolved all its structures and ended its political initiative. For details see: https://www.ebsco.com/research-starters/ethnic-and-cultural-studies/eta-terrorist-group

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR NATO

Based on the analysis of NATO counterterrorism efforts in this paper, the following recommendations aim to shed light on the prospects and limitations for NATO on how to improve its strategies for countering terrorism more effectively. As NATO prepares for 2030 with the recent 2024 Washington Summit:

The many advantages of working more seamlessly with both Allies and Partners have become evident and even a priority. Current partnerships address cyber defense, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, non-proliferation, defense science and technology, and Women Peace and Security. The nature of cooperation rests on participation in NATO's military operations but also defense capacity building, training, and education. There is a widely recognized notion that it is time to move beyond operational engagement only, and that engaging partners in *political consultation and intelligence-sharing* at the strategic level has become crucial to meeting security challenges such as *terrorism*, proliferation, piracy, or cyber-attacks. (Bola, 2013)

NATO's experience, from a range of counterterrorism efforts, confirms the above observation around the recent NATO summit, and thus to Enhance Allied Coordination and Cooperation emerges as the good start for the recommendations for NATO. Accordingly, given the transnational nature of terrorism, NATO should strengthen cooperation among the Allies, especially in terms of joint exercises and intelligence-sharing.

To complement the above recommendation for intra-alliance coordination, inter-agency cooperations among all stakeholders covered by the concept of homeland security and NATO need to be considered by ***"strengthening NATO preventive capabilities primarily in the domain of cooperation with the national intelligence communities and police organizations, and strengthening cooperation with the media, with specialized and expert organizations close to NATO"*** (Jacobs and Samaan, 2015).

In addition to the above organizational recommendations, NATO needs to better adopt technology in its counterterrorism efforts. As hybrid threats increasingly involve technological solutions and manipulations through cyberspace that carry the risk to be exploited by terrorists, NATO must prioritize investments in cyber resilience and technological innovation. This includes developing advanced capabilities to detect, deter, and respond to cyber threats, identifying and refuting disinformation, and ensuring that critical infrastructure is protected. To this end, NATO should ***incorporate resilience-building scenarios into its military education, training, and exercises, preparing forces to respond effectively to terrorist threats.*** This includes enhancing the adaptability of command structures, ensuring that military operations are integrated with civilian crisis management efforts and that the civilian populations of the Allies are ready to support NATO counterterrorism measures.

Another recommendation on harnessing technology for NATO counterterrorism efforts is the growing need for NATO to prioritize enhancing its counter-drone and counter-IED [IED: Improvised Explosive Devices] capabilities. As a result of ongoing wars, from Ukraine to the broader Middle East, the war-induced instability and global proliferation of weapons have presented opportunities for terrorist groups to acquire arms and exploit these fragile situations. While this primarily concerns the acquisition of weapons for use against Western targets, it is not limited to this scenario. Therefore, implementing effective and coordinated measures to ***counter the proliferation of materials for terrorist-use is crucial for NATO Allies and Partners.***

Evidently, these recommendations require a thorough reflection on the potential and limitations of the Alliance. During this reflection process, NATO should:

- ***Support CT capacity and cooperation:*** The individual members of NATO should be concerned about terrorism, so as an institution, NATO should not lead on this issue. NATO should be considered one of many tools. NATO's Concept for CT and Policy Guidelines confirm the supportive role of NATO when it comes to countering terrorism. Therefore, NATO's framework can serve to reassure CT cooperation among Allies and Partners.

- ***Recognize its institutional limitations:*** Many in North America and Europe are reasonably concerned about the terrorist threat. While NATO needs to be aware of this concern, as an Alliance it must be realistic about what it can do to conduct counterterrorism operations. Since NATO lacks many of the key policy competencies to fight terrorism, it must ensure that *it conducts counterterrorism operations in a responsible and realistic manner.* (Coffey and Kochis, 2020)

KEY RESULTS/ CONCLUSIONS

The main result of this paper is based on the fact that "it is only natural that the citizens of NATO members want more to be done to fight terrorism" (Barnes, 2017). Recent wars from Ukraine to Gaza, and ensuing instability from Africa to the greater Middle East and Asia-Pacific, have demonstrated how globalized and fragile our security has become. These ongoing conflict trends are likely to exacerbate risks from terrorism to the Allies by presenting opportunities for terrorists in the forms of growing availability of foreign fighters and advanced weapons technologies. As these threats have become increasingly hybrid and transnational, the need for enhanced NATO counterterrorism cooperation have also become more evident than ever for the Allies and Partners. In conclusion, for NATO, successful measures to counter hybrid aggression and counter terrorism cannot be separated. The better policy makers understand the complex links between hybrid warfare and terrorism, the more they can design effective strategies to secure the eastern Flank. One step in this direction would be achieving greater cooperation among the relevant Centres of Excellence. Building on expert capacities of *NATO Accredited Centers of Excellence* such as Center of Excellence Defense Against Terrorism, Stability Policing Center of Excellence, Maritime Security Center of Excellence, and Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence can be counted as a step in the right direction to countering growing terrorist exploitations of EDT and AI in the blurring lines of crime, terrorism and technology.

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