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# Transformation of NATO and Turkey's Position

Ahmet DAVUTOĞLU\*

“NATO is the most successful defence alliance in modern history.” While some may argue that this is a superficial cliché and that the Alliance is fast becoming irrelevant, others believe that this is a truthful statement reflecting the Alliance’s well-deserved prominent place, not only in the annals of history but also in today’s and, most probably, tomorrow’s security environment. I personally subscribe to the latter school of thought.

Why and how has NATO been successful? Is it due to its robust assets and capabilities? Or due to its firm commitment to its most fundamental mission- collective defence, i.e., its musketeer philosophy: “One for all, all for one?” Could it be its resolve not to compromise the unwavering principles of indivisibility of security, allied solidarity and cohesion which cement the Allies together? Is it its consensual decision-making that ensures unity for

a robust and credible Alliance Or is it NATO’s role as the embodiment of the transatlantic link that binds Europe and North America? Or does NATO owe its success to its readiness, willingness and ability to adapt itself to both the slowly evolving international environment and the rapid outbreak of conflicts? I believe that these questions are self-explanatory as to how and why NATO is a success story. The next relevant question, then,

is “How can NATO maintain its relevance and success?”

It is true that as an Alliance born in 1949, is a child of another era. It is also true that we have witnessed heated debates on the relevance of NATO in the past two decades. As we have entered the second decade of the 21st century, I consider such debates as a matter of the past. The question at hand now is not “whether NATO is still necessary”, but rather “how NATO could further adapt itself to today’s realities and yet be ready for tomorrow’s uncertainties.”

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\* Minister of Foreign Affairs, Prof. Dr.

During the 63 years of its existence, NATO has gone through three major stages. NATO was established at a time when the world was divided into two hostile camps along political, ideological and economic lines. The existence of the Alliance with its core mission of collective defence and its deterrent capabilities prevented the Cold War from turning into an armed conflict. Despite severe tensions and armed conflicts that appeared imminent and unavoidable at times, it would hold true to say that the Cold War was actually won without a single shot fired. One can only speculate that this was the natural outcome of a bi-polar world characterised by predictability and balancing of power. Paradoxically enough, the end of the Cold War paved the way for a popular debate on whether or not NATO's mission was complete and whether it could cease to exist. In other words, NATO had almost become the victim of its own success.

However, it soon became apparent that the Alliance's value during the Cold War era was no only the provision of security to its Allies against a perceived common threat. NATO was formed in the first place to preserve Western democratic values, and predicated on the principle of common defence. The preamble to the North Atlantic Treaty emphasises the Allies' determination "to safeguard the freedom, common heritage and civilisations of their peoples, founded on

the principles of democracy, individual liberty and rule of law". So long as our common values need protecting, NATO would continue to have a *raison d'être*.

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Along with its role of protecting these common values, the Alliance also formed an umbrella for the political reconciliation and integration of Western Europe. Furthermore, NATO helped to ensure and maintain a secure and stable environment for democracy and economic growth. Owing to the security provided by the Alliance, the European political landscape started to enjoy an unprecedented time of peace, stability and welfare. Indeed, such a favourable environment laid the ground for European economic cooperation and integration.

Nevertheless, the post-Cold War euphoria was soon overshadowed by emerging asymmetric threats, as well as by regional and intra-state conflicts, which erupted in the heart of Europe. The war in the former Yugoslavia was an eye-opener for the international community, forcing the realisation of the perils and characteristics of the new security landscape. The asymmetric, trans-

boundary and unpredictable nature of the newly emerging threats necessitated a holistic and comprehensive approach to security. Thus, security has become not only diverse, but multi-dimensional in nature, involving economic, social, humanitarian and environmental aspects. Under such circumstances NATO has proven to be the most capable organisation to fill the security vacuum created by the complexities of the new environment. In the midst of heated debates on NATO's "out of area" involvement, the bold actions taken by the Alliance in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo were instrumental in bringing an end to the conflicts raging in the heart of Europe. It was not only the military machinery of NATO that contributed to the security and stability in Europe, but also its soft power tools, including enlargement and partnership mechanisms, which played a decisive role in the creation of a "Europe whole, free and at peace with itself".

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NATO's partnerships, which were initiated by the formation of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991, have further expanded beyond the

Euro-Atlantic geography to include the Mediterranean and the Middle East regions. Distinctive and tailored partnerships have also been developed with the Russian Federation, Ukraine and Georgia. All these mechanisms are considered invaluable assets designed to broaden the zone of stability and security in and beyond the Euro-Atlantic region. They serve the purpose of promoting both political consultations and practical cooperation between NATO and its partners.

To summarize, in the post-Cold War era- the second era- in NATO's life, we witnessed an Alliance that effectively employed both military and political tools in a balanced and complementary fashion. In parallel, a continuous transformation process involving both military and political aspects of the Alliance was effectively put in place.

Then came the 9/11 attacks, colossal and tectonic in nature, which heralded the beginning of a new- the third- era in NATO's history. The significance of 9/11 was that, for the first time in the history of the Alliance, it paved the way for the invocation of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. It also led to an Alliance operation, which was not only "out of area" but also at a strategic distance away from the Euro- Atlantic geography. Another important outcome of this phenomenon was the unequivocal consensus reached among the Allies on the necessity to include terrorism in

NATO's agenda, as a standing item and as a threat that must be decisively fought by the Allies.

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Over the last decade, the agenda of the Alliance has been characterized by NATO's engagement in Afghanistan in security and stabilization efforts, in the Mediterranean to fight against terrorism through an Article 5 operation (Operation Active Endeavour) off the shore of Somalia against piracy, in Iraq for the training of Iraqi security personnel, and in Libya for protecting civilians. All these efforts have been essential and instrumental in contributing to security and stability in and beyond the Euro-Atlantic geography. The successful conclusion of Operation Unified Protector in Libya is a solid case in point.

However, unintentionally and perhaps partially due to these recent intense military engagements, NATO's image has shifted towards being a more military and less political organisation. It is not my intention to question or challenge the military aspect of the fabric that makes up the Alliance. Yet this should not overshadow the political aspect. My concern would rather be about a NATO that is perceived solely as a military tool- a hammer- imposing and implementing

political decisions taken elsewhere, or as a military arm of the United Nations. Without any prejudice to the overall precedence of the UN in maintaining international peace and security, I would argue that NATO's distinctive nature as a politico-military organisation, certainly including its military capabilities, must be preserved. Another important point that I wish to emphasise strongly is the necessity for a legal basis, i.e., UNSC Resolutions, for NATO's actions. Participation of regional countries and actors in NATO actions, if and whenever the nature of the operation warrants, is also important for the legitimacy of the Alliance's involvement. These have been the very arguments that guided the Turkish approach to NATO's involvement in Libya. Thus, a demonstrable need, a clear legal basis and support from the region became the prerequisites for NATO's military action in Libya. The successful conclusion of Operation Unified Protector is also a result of this principled approach.

Concerning the developments in the Middle East and the response of NATO towards these events, I see parallels between Eastern Europe in the early 1990s and the current developments in the Middle East. It is generally accepted that NATO played an important role in the transformation of Eastern Europe, and this role has been praised by many commentators. NATO paved the way for peaceful changes in Eastern Europe, and

we must keep in mind NATO's success in this respect. What we are witnessing today is the dissolution of Cold War political and economic structures in the Middle East, and NATO must play a constructive role in the ongoing transformations in our neighbourhood.

Until now, old regimes in the Middle East have survived the tides of change due to three frictional forces within the region. The *first* of these frictions is the tension between the administrations and the ordinary people within the region. The unfolding events in the region are simply a 'normalization of history' due to Soviet style regimes being replaced by new regimes. When we witnessed colossal changes in different parts of the world at the end of the Cold War, the Middle Eastern region remained immune to the changes taking place elsewhere. The democratic transformations in Europe and elsewhere were supported by international institutions, however, the tides of change and democratization did not reach to the shores of the Middle Eastern region. NATO must side with the people of this region and support genuine demands for change.

The *second* reason for the tensions in the region is the Arab-Israeli conflict, which is affecting regional dynamics in direct and indirect ways. This problem is inherited from the Cold War era and is still affecting the regional dynamics, since efforts such as the Oslo Process failed to bring desired peace and stability

to the region. Israel aims to continue its policy of occupation and delay regional peace. NATO must pursue a common policy in encouraging Israel to adopt a constructive attitude towards the Arab Spring. Without making advancement in the solution of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it will not be possible to have stability in the Middle East.

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The *third* reason is the Arab-Iran rivalry within the region. Dating back to the Iranian Revolution, there is a fear of Persian domination among the Arab states, strengthened by negative memories of the Iran-Iraq war. In considering these factors, I believe that NATO must develop a policy based on strong foundations, and refrain from double standards in approaching the problems in the Middle East. For example, NATO's agenda should not be dominated by *a priori* negative perceptions of Iran and positive perceptions of Israel, regardless of whatever these countries do.

Keeping in mind the background of the Arab Spring outlined above, the response of the international community to these events must evolve around three principles. *First* of all, democratic

transformation should be supported, results of the elections must be accepted - in other words, 'the right side must be supported'. Instead of supporting long lasting rulers or the toppling of regimes by force, we must encourage a system in which former presidents are able to lead a normal life of retirement in the Middle East. The outcomes of elections should not change our principled position and the agenda of the international community should not be dictated by the security needs of Israel. The maturation of democratic systems requires time and experience; the international community's support for democratic processes must continue for a smooth transition from authoritarian regimes to democratically elected accountable rulers. If democratic processes are delayed because of the security concerns of some countries, this will be a resistance to the natural flow of history. We should not forget that democracy is a self-regulating mechanism, and our support for democratic processes should not depend on whether election results are in line with our wishes.

*Secondly*, in overcoming regional problems, the local dimension should not be ignored and regional initiatives should be supported by the international community. The efforts of regional organizations such as the Islamic Cooperation Organization and the Arab League and Turkey's contributions are good and important examples in this

respect, and such regional endeavours can play a constructive role in finding solutions for the conflicts. We must refrain from double standards and pursue a coherent policy regarding policies in the Middle East. For example, in the case of nuclear proliferation, we must construct our policy on concrete principles and apply these same principles equally to each country. Otherwise, the sincerity of NATO's or other international organizations' intentions may be questioned.

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*Thirdly*, the international community must develop inclusive policies and mechanisms. Here, in responding to the developments in any country, we must follow a three-layered policy. In the beginning, we must support domestic mechanisms in that country for finding solutions to the problems. International mechanism may follow if regional ones are not successful. In this respect, NATO must take new perspectives on the rising powers into consideration and develop bilateral relations with countries such as China, Russia and India. Otherwise,

we may end up with a situation where mutual concerns lead to misperceptions. NATO must avoid declarations and actions that would create an image of confrontation with rising actors around the globe.

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This brings me to my final point: “How could NATO maintain its relevance and success?” Of course this cannot be the ultimate purpose. Therefore, we could rephrase this question: “How could NATO, an invaluable asset so far in contributing to international peace and security, keep up the good work?” My first argument would be that NATO’s fundamental purpose, which is collective defence, must continue to be upheld. Secondly, NATO must continue its ongoing adaptation process for efficiently operating within the new security atmosphere. In this respect, NATO reform has so far been successful. We need to keep up this good work, albeit without changing such overarching time-tested principles as consensual decision-making. Reform also must not lead to any cumbersome bureaucratic

structures. Thirdly, notwithstanding its role as the essential transatlantic forum for security affairs, we must see NATO as a part of a larger team collectively catering to international peace and security. In the same vein, while absolutely supportive of a broader vision for the Alliance, I would not wish to see NATO turning into a global security organisation or a “mini UN”. As long as the allied determination to protect our security and values prevails, there should be no need to search for a new “raison d’être”. What we need is to remain focused on our fundamental purpose and be confident of our Alliance.

Focusing on our fundamental purpose by no means implies NATO’s isolation from international efforts to manage crises and contribute to peace and security elsewhere. It is clear that the Alliance cannot remain indifferent to emerging challenges emanating from outside the Euro-Atlantic geography. The underlying reason for the “out of area” or expeditionary missions and operations is to meet risks and threats where they emerge and before they directly affect the security of the Allies. This reminds me of the famous words of one of the former Secretaries General of NATO, Lord Robertson, who said that “If we do not go to Afghanistan, it will come to us in the form of terrorism and drugs”.

However, the “out of area” operations and missions that NATO have undertaken since the 1990s, as well

as those that may be assumed in the future, do not necessarily mean that the Alliance seeks a global role similar to that of the UN. The critical balance which NATO will find between addressing its traditional missions and tackling new global threats will shape its future success.

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In the face of a rapidly changing and complex security environment and the global financial downturn, no single actor alone is capable of providing security. In this regard, comprehensive approach is the name of the game. This requires not only closer and effective cooperation among relevant actors, but also efficient internal coordination and diversification of capabilities within international organisations, including NATO. The importance of the comprehensive approach, with both its internal and external dimensions, has been underpinned by NATO's new Strategic Concept. As a matter of fact, this notion is a part of NATO's daily agenda, in particular, in the context of "smart defence" and critical capabilities. In this regard, the ability to tap the existing

civilian capabilities in the inventories of the Allies, when need be, is of particular importance for the effectiveness of NATO's involvement, not only in crises but also in post-conflict endeavours. In fact, even today such involvements come in the form of contributions to stabilisation, consolidation of security, and reform of security and defence sectors in countries such as Afghanistan. As NATO is often the first or the only responder to a crisis situation, it will be important for the Alliance to be able to deploy civilian capabilities for use during emergencies. NATO's contribution to civil emergency assistance, including its strategic lift capabilities, is also of critical importance during natural disasters. We have seen how important this can be during the floods in Ukraine and the earthquake in Pakistan.

I wish to emphasise that NATO is already playing a greater role than ever before in sustaining and enhancing peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic area and beyond. However, the need to preserve the effectiveness, credibility and legitimacy of NATO makes it necessary to resist the temptation of a global role for NATO. Nor would a stronger military role at the expense of political aspects serve the purposes of the Alliance. We are, nevertheless, under the obligation to ensure that NATO is equipped with all the necessary means for tackling both military and political challenges in the 21st century, as the basis for the

Allies' collective defence, and an essential forum for security consultations between Europe and North America.

I would conclude by briefly emphasising NATO's importance to Turkey and Turkey's importance to NATO. Since the early years of the Republic, Turkey's defence and security policies have been characterised by dialogue, cooperation and multilateralism. Turkey's membership to NATO is a clear testimony to this fact. Moreover, it is a solid symbol of Turkey's Western vocation and her choice of joining with democratic societies governed by universal values.

Turkey is located at the heart of a vast geography in which NATO is engaged in constructive dialogues, comprehensive partnership mechanisms, as well as a number of other operations. Over the last 60 years as a member of the Alliance, Turkey has not only benefited from NATO's security umbrella but also contributed immensely to the security of her Allies and to NATO's efforts to project security in the Euro-Atlantic geography and beyond.

During the Cold War years, the Turkish contribution to NATO's security umbrella was primarily related to the containment of the Soviet threat on the eastern flank of the Alliance. In order to fulfil this mission, Turkey devoted huge amounts of financial and human resources and played an important role in

the success of NATO against the Soviet threat. Turkey helped to secure Western identity through its security policies during the Cold War years. With its contribution to Western security, Turkey found its rightful place within the Euro-Atlantic scheme.

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With the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkey supported the transformation of NATO to respond to new types of challenges that the Alliance and its members were facing. As the only reliable security apparatus of the post-Cold War era, NATO's role in this era developed out of practice rather than a pre-conceived plan. Conflicts in the former Yugoslavia and subsequent developments induced NATO to implement UN Security Council resolutions to provide peace and security. Turkey strongly supported this role of NATO and was one of the keenest members of the Alliance to play a role in ending the inter-ethnic and inter-communal conflicts in the former Yugoslavia. In the post-Cold war era, Turkey was in favour of the expansion of the Alliance through the inclusion

of new members to extend the zone of peace and security. Besides supporting the expansion of NATO to new members, Turkey actively took part in several peace-making and peace-building mechanisms in Europe and elsewhere.

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The tragic events of 9/11, the subsequent invasion of Afghanistan and the following developments heralded a new era in NATO's history and the role of Turkey within the Alliance structure. Afghanistan was NATO's first "out of area" mission beyond Europe, and the aim was to contribute to the stabilization and reconstruction of this country. In this era, along with the changing nature of the threats against the Alliance, NATO started to counter threats such as terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. Unlike in the Cold War years, possible threats that NATO had to deal with were much more diverse, diffuse in nature and difficult to counteract. Turkey's geographical position and cultural characteristics made it a crucial ally in combatting the threats of the contemporary world.

With Turkish troops and assets deployed in on-going NATO missions

and operations in three continents, and extensive contributions - in soft security terms - reaching out to Central Asia, Caucasus, Middle East and Northern Africa through NATO's partnership mechanisms, Turkey has proven to be a staunch member of the Alliance, and a net contributor to both regional and global peace and security. Due to her geographical proximity as well as cultural and historical ties with the Balkans, Caucasus, Central, Asia and the Middle East, Turkey plays a special role in the Alliance's outreach to its partners in these regions. Thus, Turkey is not a security consumer, but a security promoter.

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Turkey has a multidimensional foreign policy with goals of maximum integration in the neighborhood, involvement in nearby regions, and development of ties in areas such as Africa, Asia and Latin America. The new foreign policy line is also active in international platforms and organizations. NATO's evolution in the post-Cold War era matches Turkey's approach to the transforming nature of the security challenges in this period. NATO has civilian and

military capabilities and will remain as the only security institution to tackle new challenges. Consensus-based decision-making processes and reliance on international law and legitimacy will be the guiding principles of Turkey's position in NATO.

There are other perspectives within NATO that assumes a stronger role for some of its members. There are also inclinations toward justifying country-specific interests using NATO as a pretext. Turkey will resist any manipulations of NATO or maneuvers without international legitimacy. NATO's latest involvement in Libya exemplified the fact that Turkey's unique characteristic

of having access to all the actors in this geography not only enhances NATO's operation capabilities, but also helps to justify its involvement in the eyes of the regional actors. Turkey will continue to be an asset and an influential actor within NATO if future needs arise for further NATO involvement in the Middle East.

As we approach the 60th anniversary of Turkey joining NATO, I reiterate our commitment to the continued success and relevance of the Alliance. This is not only a matter of principle, but also an inherent aspect of Turkey's proactive policies toward promoting peace, stability and sustainable development across the globe.