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The Role of the Military in Fighting Terrorism - A European View

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A. Introduction

Invited by Ambassador Primor I accepted to address the conference although I will never claim to be an expert on counter-terrorism. I can claim, however, a certain expertise in coping successfully with risks and dangers, so successfully indeed that the threat withered away. It did so when the Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact fell into pieces and the intermezzo which followed, characterised by the four wars fought over the former Yugoslavia, came to an end, i.e. to an absence of hostilities. From this moment on many Europeans came to believe that there is no longer any danger for Europe and the old European dream of peace at our time saw its renaissance.

The tragic events which ushered in the 21st century's threat scenarios such as 9/11, Madrid, most recently London and others were of course noted by the general public but they were not perceived as a threat which affects all Europeans. They remained alarm signals for the experts but not for the publics in most European countries.

In addition the erstwhile consensus between the U.S. and its European allies on dealing jointly with a commonly perceived threat which had been key to the success in winning the Cold War faltered.

This is the background against which I will discuss the role of the military in fighting terrorism.

I will proceed as follows:

I will first discuss the threat Europe is confronted with, then talk about the strategy to cope with it and I will then discuss which role the military could play in implementing a counter-terrorism strategy.

I will offer personal views since I do no longer speak for any government or any international organisation.

B. Discussion

1. The Threat

The end of the Cold War led first to a dramatically changed map of Europe and ushered then in a transitional decade of new challenges to European security which produced a fragile situation of unfinished political transformation. While being busy to cope with this situation the European governments and the international organisations such as NATO, the EU and the OSCE did not fail to see the new risks and dangers. The EU strategy paper, the European Security Strategy (ESS), adopted by the heads of states and governments of the EU countries in December 2003, lists terrorism, organised crime and proliferation as the most dangerous risks. The document shows a risk assessment which is strikingly similar to the one the U.S. National Security Strategy (NSS) contains. But as the dichotomy between the governments' risks awareness and the perceptions of the publics exists the implementation of measures to counter terrorism is slow and patchy. It differs widely from member state to member state in the EU which thus underpins that national sovereignty is the biggest impediment to a consolidated European response. Thus the European single market is turned into a single market of crime in which criminals and terrorists seem to make better use of the boundless opportunities the EU space provides than the European states do.

European responses are therefore event driven and remain to a large degree reactive whereas a successful counter terrorism strategy requires in addition to reactive protection both preventive and pro-active steps.

Moreover, there is no common international understanding what terrorism really is as the refusal of the UN member states to agree on a common albeit rather broad definition of terrorism amply demonstrates.

A common understanding on the nature of the threat is on the other hand necessary to arrive at common strategy and to identify the proper means including the use of the military in implementing it.

I leave aside for a moment the inner-state terrorism such as the IRA in Ireland, the ETA in Spain, the PKK in Turkey or earlier on the Brigate Rosse in Italy or the Red Army Faction in Germany. Such terrorism has to be dealt with primarily by individual nation states and it will in most cases suffice to combat it by employing police forces.

The other form of terrorism which I would like to leave aside for the moment is the insurgency terrorism which is often used by separatist movements or in reaction to occupation forces. It will require much more a military than a police force reaction although attempts to defeat such terrorism by military means alone are most probably doomed to fail. To defeat an insurgency by applying a search and destroy tactics of military operations is not likely to produce success. A strategy aiming exclusively at killing insurgents will produce new insurgents. It appears much more promising to aim at protecting the civilians in the area of the insurgency. This requires to focus on the establishment of a step by step growing number of safe havens accompanied by a set of other than military steps designed to address and eliminate some of the reasons for the insurgency.

This form of terrorism, however, is not the form of terrorism Europe is likely to be confronted with on European territory in the foreseeable future. There Europe will probably see terrorism which I would like to call Islamist terrorism. I deliberately use the word Islamist and not Islamic to make clear that I do not believe that it is Islam as such which produces terrorism. On the other hand, although most Moslems condemn terrorism as much as Jews or Christians do nobody can deny that the majority of recent terrorist attacks in Europe were the work of Islamist fundamentalists. But differentiation is necessary. Are really all these terrorists part of the al-Qaeda network or are some of them motivated by corrupt pro-Western regimes or the perception that some Western governments appear to be anti-Muslim?

One rather balanced and finely tuned differentiation is offered by Philippe Errera, a Deputy Director in the French Foreign Office. He argues that Europe and the U.S. face three overlapping circles of Islamist terrorism. The first circle are the core members of the al-Qaeda network, that is those who were behind the 9/11

attacks. To negotiate with these fanatics does not make any sense at all. One should concentrate on capturing and eliminating them knowing that this will not eliminate this form of Islamist terrorist threat. We seem to enter a post-al-Qaeda phase of terrorism which could well mean that those are right who say as Jason Burke, a British journalist does that al-Qaeda might be more lethal as an ideology than as an organisation.

The second circle is formed by ethno-nationalist groups in places such as Kashmir, Chechnya and elsewhere. They share some of al-Qaeda's ideology but they do not pursue global objectives, their focus is local. Some of these groups have already established contacts with al-Qaeda others might do so in the future. Western governments should monitor such links, should encourage local solutions to the conflict and should strongly discourage any government to support these groups. Some European governments successfully developed a strategy of disrupting the terrorists, of encouraging the political wings of these groups to enter politics and of addressing the underlying issues which contributed to producing terrorism.

The third circle is according to Errera the least understood and potentially the most dangerous. It consists of freelance "jihadists": Islamic terrorist groups or individuals based any where in the world, who may or may have not direct connection to the al-Qaeda network and who may or may be not inspired by Osama Bin Laden.

These groups may have autonomous leadership, they may select their own targets and they may plan their own attacks. Thus the third circle could become as lethal as cancer which grows metastases. No one knows how many terrorists belong to such groups, it could be a few hundred, it could be many thousands. Our common aim should be to ensure that these groups do not grow.

Therefore we have to find means to detect them, we have to develop methods to distract them from their plans and we have to offer incentives to the Muslim societies not to join them.

To this end we need to find better solutions how to integrate Muslims into European societies and we need to support our American allies in encouraging democratic reform throughout the Middle East. Both approaches, however, will not take place quickly and they will not succeed easily. Moreover, we need to stress that these efforts are worthwhile goals on their own merits and that they are

not pursued solely as part of a counter-terrorism strategy, we need to emphasise that we do not wish to impose solutions and that our strategic objective is cooperation and partnership and not domination.

This might include the admission that welfare and development is not only a privilege of the most developed countries, and it might lead to a new understanding of international sharing and participation.

Looking now at these three overlapping circles and the two forms at the lower and the upper end of the spectrum it is not easy to find an answer to the question which role the military could play in countering terrorism. Obviously, there is a role but it appears to be a supporting role not a role of its own, a role which makes the military to be part of a wider strategy.

Moreover, the terrorists will rather sooner than later dispose of the full range of the most modern and most sophisticated weaponry. The question whether they will one day use Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) and weapons of mass disruption such as cyber attack is in my view no longer a question of an "if" but a "when and where" question. So nations or international organisations might be forced to make use of military force. As police does not dispose of any capabilities to cope with these weapons – and it is lacking the international structures which are indispensable for those operations the military must inevitably be part of fighting terrorism. But the military will not be in the driving seat and its proper role will be defined by a nation's or an international organisation's counter-terrorism strategy.

To this end I will turn to strategy next.

2. The Strategy

The aim of any counter-terrorism strategy should be twofold:

It should prevent terrorist attacks and, since a guarantee of successful prevention will never be possible, it must protect as good as possible the citizens and it must ensure the functioning of the state. But the emphasis should be on prevention which means that such a strategy should be pro-active and not event driven.

As the terrorists will act while showing little to no respect for human life and without being restrained by any law whereas the defenders must avoid damage to human lives to the extent possible, must adhere to the law and must observe the

rules set up in democracies to protect the individual citizen's rights and liberties the strategy must compensate for the disadvantages which stem from such a point of departure. In addition it has to take into account that the initiative will in most cases rest with the attacker.

These conditions are very similar to the situation NATO was confronted with in preparing to defend against a Warsaw Pact attack. It might therefore not be the worst idea to remember which strategy helped the West to prevail during the Cold War.

Then NATO countered the Soviet threat through containment and deterrence on the military side and through dialogue on the political side. Facing terrorism and the threat assessment as discussed earlier on today's containment could be called isolation. Departing from Mao's description of the guerrilla who should swim among the people as fish swim in the sea which applies for terrorists as well nations as well as organisations such as the EU or NATO should try to isolate terrorists from their supporters, suppliers and targets everywhere in the world. The strategy has therefore to take a multi-faceted long-term approach which mixes political, economic, judicial, police, diplomatic and military means and applies it at home and around the globe. Such a strategy of isolation should as David Keohane suggested have three tactical elements: integration, investigation and insulation.

- Integration

  Integration could consist of two different strands: First, a new and reinforced attempt to integrate the own citizens of foreign origin in the society and to assimilate the growing numbers of Muslim and other faith citizens and, secondly, new initiatives to induce legal, democratic and economic reforms in countries that want close cooperation with the EU and the U.S.

  Thus the U.S. and the EU could for example eliminate the flawed impression that they are anti-Muslim. They could thus reduce the support base for Islamist terrorists across the Muslim world.

- Investigation

  The EU, the U.S. and countries close to the two should do more to encourage governments to improve international law enforcement cooperation and

practices. Governments should not only think about how they gather intelligence, they have to do much better in sharing intelligence and they should reflect upon much closer cooperation in capturing, arresting and prosecuting terrorists. In addition they should further increase judicial cooperation.

How weak international cooperation in this field is illustrates best the fate of the twelve UN conventions for the fight against terrorism: Only 57 of the 191 UN members are party to all of them, while 47 countries ratified fewer than six. Only five of these twelve conventions were signed and ratified by all 25 EU governments.

- ■ Insulation

  Insulation is Keohane's term for what I would call defence: The protection of the citizens and critical infrastructure such as power stations and lines of communication and transportation from terrorist attacks.

  No doubt, much has been done by the various governments to protect critical targets in the individual countries but much remains to be done to improve reaction times, cross border cooperation and assistance to countries which are not members of bodies such as NATO and the EU. Moreover, areas such as defence against WMD, the prevention of proliferation and the protection against cyber attack represent largely unknown terrain in which a lot of work is waiting for truly international and trans-national cooperation.

These three elements are to a large extent reactive in their nature and they need to be supplemented by a pro-active element which would help to deter or should I better say dissuade terrorists to some degree. I therefore favour an addition which admittedly might be controversial: I feel strongly that we who are prepared to fight terrorists have to send a very clear and strong signal: Terrorists and states supporting them must know that there is no safe haven and no security for them and that we, the defenders, will go after them wherever they will hide. As a consequence governments which fail to counter international terrorism have to face international efforts on their territory and international search and interdiction activities might be carried out in international waters and airspace. It should as well be understood that neither the U.S. nor NATO nor the EU could tolerate failed states to become safe havens for terrorists. Those who support terrorists or tolerate their activities must

know that a military intervention could be the ultimate consequence of such behaviour. These are roles which clearly and almost exclusively fall into the military domain. To this end the military forces of nations which are serious about countering terrorism must be deployable at short notice and they have to be capable of participating in interventions wherever it will be necessary in the global fight against terrorism. The dimension of this role will exceed the capabilities of all but one nation, the U.S. All other nations have to team-up in coalitions or alliances as appropriate. The strategy I would favour in countering terrorism is therefore a strategy of isolation and deterrence and the open issue to be discussed is the role the military could play in the isolation part of such a strategy since to describe the role the military has to play in the deterrence part would really mean to carry coals to Newcastle.

C. The Role of the Military

To discuss such a role of the military from a European point of view requires keeping three different levels in mind: NATO, the EU and the nation state.
NATO
NATO began to reflect upon terrorism during my last year in office as CMC NATO and as a result it identified terrorism as one of the risks affecting its security in its 1999 Strategic Concept.
After 9/11 the NATO military authorities developed the Alliance's Military Concept for the Defence against Terrorism which was endorsed at the Prague Summit in November 2002.
Without delving into the details of this classified document one can summarise its content in four points:

1. NATO faces a real threat from terrorism and countering it will be time critical.
2. The primary responsibility for the defence of the nations' population and infrastructure rests with the nations but NATO has to be prepared to augment their efforts.
3. There are four roles for NATO's military operations for defence against terrorism: defensive/passive anti-terrorism measures, consequence management, offensive/active counter-terrorism and military cooperation.

4. NATO needs to be ready to conduct military operations to engage terrorist groups and their capabilities as and where required and as directed by the NAC.

I should note that the third element in point 3 and point 4 outline more or less what I had called the deterrence role of the military whereas the other points describe the role the military could play in the isolation element of the strategy I had proposed.

The EU

At the EU level there is not too much discussion of the employment of defence and military capabilities. The evolving European common defence and security policy makes no mention at all of the defence and security of the homeland. It emphasises the European Arrest Warrant, steps to attack terrorist financing and an agreement on mutual legal assistance with the U.S. The counter terrorism focus of the EU is on a broad approach. The EU stresses cultural aspects and consequence management in case of attack. It appears to to leave the employment of military forces in a domestic environment very much in the hands of the national states and seems to renounce more or less of a coordinating role. In my view this is an area to which the EU should devote much more attention since the defence of every EU member is inextricably bound up with that of its neighbours.

The nations

The European nations have in the area of homeland defence and consequence management much more experience than their American allies. European military forces have routinely be deployed to secure key installations or to help in disaster relief. Depending on the legal provisions military forces also participated in counterinsurgency and policing operations.

Looking at the isolation part of the strategy to counter terrorism discussed earlier on there seems to be no doubt in Europe that the military should play a supporting and augmenting role in the implementation of all three elements of such an isolation strategy : integration, investigation and insulation.

In integration it would be cooperation and partnership with Non-NATO and Non-EU countries, a role in which NATO is doing well since the mid-nineties.

In investigation it would be the sharing of intelligence with allies and with partners as directed by national authorities, an area in which improvement is still necessary.

In insulation the military role will vary from nation to nation according to the constraints national legislation will impose.

A military role in air defence as part of insulation efforts is probably the undisputed lowest common denominator and it may end up with counterinsurgency roles in nations which dispose of para-military forces. The mid-level of NBC defence, disaster relief and securing critical infrastructure appears to represent the consent of the EU nations as well.

In summing up one could say that the consensus in Europe seems to be that the military has to play an important albeit not the leading role in fighting terrorism. One has to add, however, that this is the agreement among the experts which did so far not lead to adequate political precautions.

In a nutshell, the role of the military could be described as follows:

The military should be ready to support police forces in countering terrorism as directed by the national command authorities or as requested by international organisations, it should help in all consequence management efforts and it must be ready to go pro-actively after the terrorists in interventions decided upon in NATO or in the EU.

There is broad agreement in Europe as well that the military is not in the lead when fighting terrorism and that there where the brunt of the action falls on the military, e.g. in interventions, counter insurgency operations or in post-intervention stabilisation operations, additional non-military efforts have to be taken to succeed in stabilising the situation.

D. Concluding Remark

It is a sad reality that we Europeans know what we should do but we have not done it. It is as John L. Clarke put it perhaps the ultimate irony that terrorists in Europe think more European than many of Europe's homeland-security related agencies. They enjoy the liberties granted them by the governments and turn those liberties against those same governments. They plan attacks in one country and execute them in the next. So far his sobering assessment of today's situation.

Europe has a long way to go and the biggest stumbling stone on its road is the tenacity of the European states in the defence of their national sovereignty.

What Europe really must avoid is that the individual nation state seeks its security at the expense of its neighbour. What Europe must avoid as well is to act without the U.S. or without close coordination with the U.S.

Security within Europe and across the Atlantic must never become divisible.

We need to understand that we, the democratic nations, are sitting in one camp closely watched by our enemies who are prepared to exploit in the global conflict in which we are any fissures in our resolve and cohesion in order to inflict utmost damage on us.

We must not give them any chance since we must prevail.