

افغانستان آزاد – آزاد افغانستان

AA-AA

چو کشور نیاشد تن من مباد بدین بوم ویر زنده یک تن مباد
همه سر به سر تن به کشتن دهیم از آن به که کشور به دشمن دهیم

www.afgazad.com

afgazad@gmail.com

European Languages

زبان های اروپایی

[Asia times Online](#)

NATO dilemma: Turkey and Article 5

By Riccardo Dugulin
10/20/2012

A wind of crisis is blowing along the Turkish border with Syria. Tensions between the two neighbors have been on the rise since the Turkish village of Akcakale was shelled by Syrian artillery on October 5. Following a parliamentary vote, the Turkish government now has the political legitimacy to intervene in cross-border operations to protect its citizens, while Syrian artillery units have maintained sporadic fire on Turkish territory and combat helicopters have waged demonstrative raids over Turkey's border villages.

It remains highly unlikely that any of the two governments will unilaterally push for an escalation in violence since neither Turkey nor Syria has any long-term interest in entering a full-scale military conflict. Ankara may find it difficult to prevail over the Syrian Arab Army and would be inevitably dragged into a civil war, on the other hand Damascus is currently using the best and most experienced units of its armed forces in the attempt to squash the 18 months old rebellion. If a full blown military confrontation involving Turkey and Syria may, for the moment, be off the table, the place of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the current equation is more problematic.

As a member of the alliance, Turkey has provided NATO with a clear strategic added value during the Cold War and an unparalleled foothold in the Middle East ever since. Faced with the current border crisis, NATO is struggling as never before with a major identity crisis. The core objective of the alliance has been since its inception to deter its adversaries in order to effectively prevent any aggression on member states.

As for the longest time in its history the block was virtually challenged only by a single threat,

implementation of Article 5 - which states that any armed attack against one member of the alliance is an attack against them all - of its charter was relatively feasible. The multiplication of threats and the addition of transnational and non-national actors have created a complex environment in which strategic conventional deterrence may be hard to apply. On an article in the National Interest, Doug Bandow recently argued that the current Syrian crisis and the lack of NATO political will to intervene against an armed breach to one of its member's sovereignty marks a major blow to the alliance's protection capabilities.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, for the first time in history, NATO member states proposed to use Article 5 to protect the United States and effectively go after its enemies. Why then isn't it the case now, after a sovereign member state has seen its territory shelled by foreign military forces? If mortar shells fired by Warsaw Pact troops would have killed five civilians in Western Germany, would the reaction have been the same?

In a changing security environment the question of proportionality is becoming essential, and NATO surely understands it. Engaging the alliance into an already chaotic regional conflict would make little strategic sense and would certainly not help in the path to the resolution of Syrian civil war. A second point is that the threat posed to Western Europe during the Cold War was in a sense existential. A single attack by Soviet troops may have resulted in a full blown nuclear conflict and the mutual destruction of all belligerent. This is not the case today as neither Turkey nor Syria represents a vital threat to its rival. It is certain that Turkish implication into its neighbor civil war may bring to the fall of Bashar Al Assad, but not to the end of Syria as a state.

Furthermore, the evolution of the Syrian civil conflict makes it difficult for the NATO leadership to effectively recognize a single adversary. There are no doubts that the direct military target in the event of increased aggression on the Turkish territory would be the command and control structure of the Syrian regular army, yet any strike on this structure would create a set of new issues. The Syrian response be may regional, if not international, and would likely take an irregular and asymmetric nature. Hezbollah may use its foreign assets to destabilize NATO members' security.

In addition to these operational risks, the question of who would a NATO strike over Syria favor remains extremely relevant. On October 12, rebel units stormed a Syrian air defense base and subsequently took control of it. During this operation, sources identified the implication of elements of Jabhat al-Nusra - an al-Qaeda offshoot - as a key factor in the battle against government forces. Any NATO strike against Syrian military forces would without any doubt to some extent favor jihadists which are in no way to be considered strategic assets for NATO member states.

In addition to these issues directly linked to the nature of the conflict, a more sensible question regards NATO current capabilities. Member states are in fact focused on the withdrawal of forces from Afghanistan while the United States are struggling to maintain combat readiness in the Gulf and are at the same time shifting their focus toward the Asian theater of operations. If the Libyan operation has been tactically and logistically quick to coordinate and carry out, a Syrian one would require a major implication of all willing member states. To successfully counter an aggression on Turkey, NATO would need to wage a full spectrum operation. The lack

of political appetite and its overstretched strategic posture coupled with the European ongoing budget crises make the use of article 5 about tensions over the Turkish and Syrian border an extremely sensible matter.

It may also be highlighted that the low intensity of fighting may not justify a full blown military intervention, which in turn will be necessary if Syria commits a widespread and durable violation of the Turkish sovereignty.

The current Syrian conflict is presenting NATO with a dilemma. Either it attempts to conduct a conventional deterrence, against its members states' political will, and remains blocked in a Cold War structure which is no longer efficient or it takes the present situation as a unique opportunity to reform the meaning of the Article 5 and 6 of its charter and add dynamism and flexibility to its configuration. The response which the alliance will give to the current Syrian aggressions against Turkey will be instrumental in defining the NATO long-term attitude. An evolution of NATO's defensive strengths can only be done via a highly unlikely strategic debate over the posture and role member states want to give to the alliance. As the recent Chicago Summit proved, operational changes are on their way but an overall rethinking of the NATO deterrence doctrine may still be a path to follow in the future.