The NATO Summit in Prague: A Turkish Point of View

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There is no doubt that the North Atlantic Alliance has always been a strong and successful defensive Alliance. With almost twelve years of diplomatic life at the service of the United Nations and having represented Turkey in 26 UN General Assemblies, I believe that the NATO Alliance has been brought about by the unfortunate failure of the UN. This democratic and universal organization was created in 1945 on the ashes of the destructive Second World War to save mankind from the horrors of new wars and to prepare a framework by which future generations could not only be protected from the ravages of these calamities, but could also be given a solid and — if I may say so — a moral shelter under which to work in peaceful conditions, to realize at least some of their legitimate and peaceful aspirations. Alas, these noble aims could not help the founders to fulfill NATO's goals as prescribed in its Charter. If you ask me honestly to answer why they could not achieve this important priority, my answer would be direct and unwavering: because the UN Security Council, after a successful intervention against the armed attacks by the North Koreans in 1950-52, could not prevent the ensuing grave violations against peace and security as a result of the vetoes of some permanent members of the Council. In other words, the UN was born as a glorious hope for humanity, but was unfortunately incapacitated by vetoes and thus became impotent to use its sanctions provided for in Chapter VII of the Charter. That is why a strong and effective NATO Alliance had to be created.

Now, after almost 60 years of service in Turkish diplomacy, I am happy to say that thanks to the Alliance established by the North Atlantic Treaty, signed on April 4 1949 in Washington, the UN and the majority of its members have benefited from NATO directly or indirectly, because, basing itself on the UN Charter, NATO has afforded effective protection to those that had to face aggressive actions by in many cases militarily more powerful neighboring states.

The historic evolution of the North Atlantic Alliance has seen NATO (at least until the UN becomes effective again through the use of sanctions) having to assume new dimensions and additional protective schemes against the changed threats of aggression, intimidation and other means of pressures to peaceful states, especially during the last decade. Even NATO has had to slacken some restrictions imposed by its provisions, such as acting outside the "NATO area." The tasks undertaken by NATO in the Gulf Crisis as a result of Iraqi aggression against Kuwait and the tragic conflicts in Bosnia and Herzegovina and equally in Kosovo are examples that no one can overlook or forget. We have now reached a stage in the very efficient and dynamic role of the NATO Alliance when additional new threats and risks have emerged on the political horizon, especially since the end of the Cold War.

As long as the UN is not able to free itself from its impotent position, I believe that the NATO Alliance will continue to improve its structure through new measures such as enlargement of the Alliance; new changes in its strategic concepts; the creation of new and interoperable special forces to meet sudden challenges; better cooperation among the Allies and Partnership-for-Peace countries and through the Council of NATO and the Russian Federation and also of NATO and Ukraine. New organizational devices will continue to be addressed so that NATO can respond to the changes imposed on the world's political horizon with the most appropriate remedies.

Strategically speaking the epicenter of eighteen trouble-creating "most strategic adjacent areas," Turkey supported the creation of NATO from the very beginning, with the notion that effective and protective means, whenever necessary, should be provided for the good functioning of the Alliance. Turkey joined the Alliance with determination and readiness to
pay the heavy burdens regarding its military and other contributions to NATO. It remained faithful to NATO’s evaluations of the politico-military changes and the nature of new threats, risks and many similar menaces that Turkey has had to face in its special strategic position.

Turkey has always appreciated the protective value of the NATO Alliance, and our basic evaluation remains unchanged as Turkey recognizes its fiftieth anniversary of NATO membership. I believe candidly that I have given an honest view of NATO’s vital role in the preservation of peace, stability and security since its creation. The changes that have occurred in the 53 years of NATO’s life have been dealt with by the Council of NATO continuously and at important intervals by the summit meetings of NATO’s heads of state and government. Turkey has paid great attention to these meetings and contributed many times with extraordinary budgetary and similar important sacrifices. Now a few words on the extraordinary importance of the Prague Summit meeting and on what was achieved there.

Some time before the Prague Summit, the President of the Turkish Republic, His Excellency Ahmet Necdet Sezer, underlined *inter alia* the important points of the forthcoming meeting. Regarding the decisions to be taken by the Prague Summit, he said that one of the most important was the decision on enlargement of the Alliance. Prague would decide which of the ten candidate countries would be invited to join NATO. Everybody knows that Turkey has been approaching the question of NATO enlargement very positively, and President Sezer added: “We cooperate with Greece in order to let the countries in the southeastern part of Europe play an important role. We believe that the number of invitees will be highly effective. And Turkey also feels that after the decision of Prague, the door for enlargement should be left open for other European democracies that are willing and able to assume the responsibilities and obligations of the NATO membership, in harmony with Article 10 of the Washington Treaty.” The President continued in his assessment that in the fight against international terrorism, new measures would enable NATO to have new and positive means in the form of a package to make defense against this scourge for mankind very effective indeed. For this, many capabilities, military and other, have been considered. Among them was the NATO Response Force (NRF), to renew NATO’s military concept, and also to review minimum military requirements as well as to improve the command structures in line with the new requirements. In this perspective, the Turkish President mentioned a document (which would be approved at Prague) entitled “Prague New Capabilities Commitments,” which of course entailed very important contributions. The President also emphasized the developments in NATO’s relations with Russia and Ukraine, and that the Prague meeting would discuss reinforcement of the Mediterranean Dialogue and that no doubt effective decisions would be taken.

A look at the Prague papers – which to my knowledge are the Prague Summit Declaration on November 21 2002, the Chairman’s Summary of the Meeting of EAPC at Summit Level on November 21 2002, the Speech of the Secretary-General at the NATO-Russia Council Meeting at the level of Foreign Ministers; and the Statement on Iraq issued by the heads of states and governments – will show that all these subjects were foreseen and signed by the Republic of Turkey.

On a personal note, my career has spanned a longer period than the NATO Treaty, so I can repeat the following observation: whenever NATO has been challenged by opponents, they have always prescribed a death penalty for the Alliance. Yet in spite of these unbecoming attitudes and expectations, NATO has always come out of its troubles with successes, new vigor, dynamism and longevity. I believe that this is the most illuminating element for any organization or structure that is created to help mankind have more freedom, adequate security and stability: that it always defeats the prognostics that are presented against it.

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