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NATO redefined? > Nato's anti-human smuggling mission in the Mediterranean highlights the organization's broader priorities

NATO's inclusion in the migrant crisis in the Mediterranean should make Europe safer by combatting human smuggling. But as NATO engages in new types of security missions, what does the organization's future hold?

Over 140,000 migrants have arrived in Greece this year and as many as 30,000 smugglers are suspected of aiding them. As long as chaos continues in the Middle East and West Asia, the migrant flow won't be letting up any time soon. In order for Germany to show initiative, and in an effort by Greece and Turkey to increase cooperation, the countries have asked NATO to intervene in the migrant crisis.

Until now, the situation has been handled by the Greek and Turkish Coast Guards as well as the EU's border security agency, Frontex, with member state support. However, conflicts between Greece and Turkey make cooperation difficult, and Frontex's relatively new status as an actor with limited capabilities has hindered the EU's ability to handle the situation effectively. Given the limited abilities of Frontex and member states in the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), NATO was seen as the logical choice to carry out this mission, especially given tensions between Greece and Turkey.

The NATO mission will provide Europe with the monitoring, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities needed to manage the situation and will serve as an intermediary between Greece and Turkey to

enhance cooperation. NATO will have no direct action in confronting the smugglers and the information gathered through its surveillance will be passed to the Turkish Coast Guard. NATO will only directly interfere if human life is at risk, such as in the instance of a sinking boat.

However, in this circumstance, migrants will be returned to Turkey, regardless of whether they are rescued in Greek or Turkish waters. This is a departure from earlier activities in the Mediterranean, in which Frontex returned all migrants to Greece, regardless of where they were rescued.

In addition to its monitoring in the Mediterranean, NATO will also increase its intelligence, reconnaissance, and surveillance efforts on the Turkish-Syrian border. How this mission will work in practice and whether the effort will thwart migrant smugglers is questionable, but the clear request for NATO assistance underlines the fact that Europe is facing struggles in its own backyard that it cannot handle alone.

Europe is standing at a crossroads at the moment, as it faces not only the migrant crisis but financial hardships and the possibility of the United Kingdom's exit from the EU. These internal crises call into question whether further cooperation

within the EU, including CSDP to counter external threats, is really feasible.

This new NATO mission sits firmly within the realm of what the EU's CSDP should be capable of: solving civilian crises using military means. To its credit, CSDP did try to solve this crisis using its own abilities by launching EUNAVFOR Med; however, given member states' limited capabilities and the need for Turkish cooperation, this mission has not been successful.

While EUNAVFOR Med could have used the Berlin Plus agreement to borrow NATO capabilities, doing so would not solicit greater cooperation with Turkey. Therefore, EU members and Turkey requested that NATO act in this crisis. Yet, given the limited abilities of EUNAVFOR Med and NATO's involvement in the operation, the question still remains: if the EU's own organizations cannot secure its borders from human smugglers, how relevant is CSDP as an enabler and how will NATO and the EU's CSDP interact in the future?

NATO's future as a military actor may also be redefined by its involvement in this mission. NATO's mission has always been to ensure the collective defense of its members against an outside attack; however, this is the first time that NATO is

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protecting its members' borders from non-military, external threats. Unlike NATO's Operation Active Endeavour, which also patrols the Mediterranean but protects against terrorism using military means, this new mission has not been enacted by Article V and is meant to protect the EU's borders from civilian security threats. This new mission takes even more of a departure from traditional NATO activities as it is purely meant to provide capabilities and oversight, but will not act on the information gathered.

NATO is now moving into an arena in which it both performs its traditional duties in military missions as well as softer security measures, including border security. This could, in ways, be more promising for EU members, especially those not in NATO that favor increased border security.

It can also be argued that the expansion of NATO's abilities and mission types, combined with Europe's crises, may prove to be an impetus for further challenges by Russia. Russia has utilized weak points in recent history to reassert its power in its region. As Ukraine leaned toward Europe, Russia annexed Crimea and supported destabilization in Eastern Ukraine. Russia regularly violates the airspace of both EU and NATO

countries, recently culminating in the shootdown of one of its fighter jets over Turkey. Another worrying possibility is that Russia is co-opting migrant flows for its own geopolitical goals. In this case, NATO's development of alternative capabilities to handle broader crises can be seen as a positive development to best secure Europe.

Perhaps this NATO mission is most notable in that it helps to understand the hybrid threats facing Europe, and the ability of NATO as a security organization to respond to these threats. Hybrid combat combines both traditional military methods of warfare with irregular and cyber tactics, which require not only a military, but a civilian, response. As NATO delves more into the realm of civilian security, perhaps NATO's new identity is a blessing to the EU as it is an organization that can protect its region from many types of threats, be they geopolitical challenges or human smuggling.