NATO after the Istanbul Summit

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer

Following is the speech that NATO Secretary General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer gave to the Netherlands Atlantic Association on 5 July 2004 in The Hague.

“This is my first official speech after last week’s Alliance Summit in Istanbul. I am very pleased that I am giving it here in The Hague. And I am particularly happy to be the guest of the Netherlands Atlantic Association, which has always been among the most active, most professional and most successful of the Atlantic Associations within our Alliance. And it is not the former Vice-chairman of the “Atlantische Commissie” who is now speaking.

Before I go into what happened at Istanbul, let us take a brief look at the specific context of this Summit, to help put things in perspective and to get a better appreciation of the significance of our Istanbul meeting.

Two Dimensions

All Summits have two dimensions. They are about symbolism, and they are about substance. Both dimensions are crucially important. I am happy to report that Istanbul delivered on both counts. The symbolic meaning of this event was clear: to demonstrate new transatlantic unity. Istanbul was the place where the NATO Allies had to show that they were prepared to look to the future rather than to the past. In fact, everyone signalled that it was time to think imaginatively about how to move forward. And I had the firm impression that this was a deeply shared desire.

What helped to underline this unity – and here we move from symbolism to substance – were the achievements of the Istanbul Summit. At Istanbul, Allied Heads of State and Government agreed on a series of initiatives, including:

- The expansion of NATO's mission in Afghanistan;
- A decision to offer training for Iraqi security forces, and to consider other options for possible NATO support to the new Iraqi Government;
- A package of capabilities improvements and counter-terrorism measures;
- A tasking, to myself and the North Atlantic Council, to take the steps necessary to fully implement the transformation of our procedures and military capabilities;
- Enhanced partnerships – with Russia, Ukraine, the Caucasus and Central Asia;
- A deepening of our Mediterranean Dialogue and a new outreach to the countries of the broader Middle East through the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative; and
- The termination of the successful SFOR mission in Bosnia, which ended the war and kept the peace in that country. We expect that the EU will now launch a new mission there.

Afghanistan

The first major Summit decision was the expansion of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. With so much of the spotlight on Iraq, one might have feared that Afghanistan would get little attention at the Summit. But this did not happen. President Karzai’s powerful presence helped to ensure a strong focus on what I have called NATO’s number one priority from my first day in office, which is to get Afghanistan right.
At the Summit, the Allies reconfirmed their strong resolve not to let Afghanistan slip back into chaos or become a safe haven for terrorists once again. We decided to increase the number of Provincial Reconstruction teams, in order to extend the authority of the central government and to facilitate development and reconstruction. And we agreed to provide enhanced support for upcoming elections, which will be equally crucial to ensuring long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Let me note, in this context, how much I appreciate the strong contribution by The Netherlands in Afghanistan. By agreeing to lead a PRT in Baghlan (if Parliament approved), in addition to having provided the Apache attack helicopters, this country will remain among the most active members of the NATO-led ISAF operation in Afghanistan.

As you know, meeting our commitment vis-à-vis Afghanistan has been quite a difficult exercise for NATO. It has taken nations some time to provide all the forces and equipment that we need for such a challenging mission. So I am pleased that the Istanbul Summit decided that we should re-examine our approach to force planning and force generation procedures. Because if NATO wants to continue to meet its commitments – in Afghanistan, Iraq or elsewhere – our military means must match our political ambitions.

Iraq

Another major element was, of course, Iraq. The handover of power to the new Interim Iraqi Government was announced at our Summit, two days before the scheduled date of 30 June. The decision to bring forward this handover was undoubtedly motivated by security concerns. Those in Iraq who had hoped to turn last Wednesday into a day of terror were suddenly deprived of the heavy symbolism of that date. But it also helped our NATO Summit. Because it made our gathering even more topical. And it highlighted one of the Summit’s decisions: NATO’s offer to provide training for Iraqi security forces.

In addition to continuing to support Poland in its leadership of the multinational division in Iraq, NATO will now play a distinct role in helping Iraq to find its feet. This role is in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1546, and at the specific request of the new Iraqi Government.

Now I have seen press reports – also in this country – which implied that our offer to train Iraqi security forces did not amount to much – that it reflected the lowest common denominator. It won’t surprise you that I see things more than a little differently. Last week in Istanbul, the NATO Allies not only affirmed unambiguously that a stable Iraq is in their common interest; they also made it clear that NATO has a role to play in bringing about that stability. NATO is going to contribute in an area that is critical to Iraq’s stability, and where the Alliance has valuable experience and expertise to share. I consider that to be excellent news, and let’s not forget: it is first and foremost for the Iraqi Government to say what it needs and what it wants. It wants training to become less dependent on the Multinational Force as soon as possible. Training of the Iraqi Security Institutions, as requested by Prime Minister Allawi is key to this policy.

Military Transformation

At Istanbul, we also moved our military transformation another major step forward. I had the pleasure of being present at the Change of Command ceremony of the NATO Response Force, which will soon achieve its initial operational capability. Our new Multinational Defence Battalion to deal with Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear attacks has already become fully operational. And our member nations approved usability targets, committing themselves to be able at all times to deploy and sustain larger proportions of their
forces on Alliance operations. These targets will be a key driver in the transformation process.

I am glad that, in this area as well, The Netherlands is fully on board. That it is keenly aware of the need to enhance our operational output. That it is alert to the need to examine funding arrangements in this regard and that it believes it is already able to meet the usability targets we have agreed.

**Partnerships**

The Istanbul Summit was the first NATO Summit “at 26”, that is, with the seven countries who joined our Alliance earlier this Spring. It was therefore particularly important to give a strong signal that NATO’s door remains open and to encourage those who want to join the Alliance to continue to pursue the necessary reforms. And this is precisely what we did.

At Istanbul, we also launched a new phase in our Partnership policy – with more individualised cooperation, a greater emphasis on defence reform, and a stronger focus on cooperation with the Caucasus and Central Asia. We launched a Partnership Action Plan on Defence Institution building. We will soon send two liaison officers to the Caucasus and Central Asia, and a Special Representative to the latter region. And we made it very clear that we look forward to welcoming Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro into the Partnership for Peace, once they have met certain conditions, including full cooperation with the International Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia.

We were also able to make further progress in our relations with two special Partners – Russia and Ukraine. We have agreed that they will soon contribute to Operation *Active Endeavour*, our maritime surveillance and escort operation in the Mediterranean. This is another indication of the growing operational dimension of these NATO Partnerships with two countries of major strategic importance.

We also decided to terminate NATO’s SFOR operation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. We welcome the intention of the EU to establish a new mission. I appreciate the determination of The Netherlands, in its capacity as the new presidency of the Union, to facilitate this transition. I appreciate its stated preparedness to give a strong push to the Union’s defence and security role and capabilities. And its intention to promote greater transparency and closer cooperation between NATO and the EU in functional and geographical areas where our interests converge, and where we can complement each other.

**Broader Middle East**

One such geographical area is the broader Middle East. NATO, at Istanbul, took two important decisions with regard to that strategically important region.

First, we agreed to deepen our Mediterranean Dialogue with seven countries in North Africa and the Middle East, by strengthening in particular its military cooperation dimension. Second, allied Heads of State and Government launched a new initiative, the so-called “Istanbul Cooperation Initiative”. Through the ICI, we will offer practical cooperation to countries in the wider region in areas where NATO can make a real difference.

Advancing political and economic progress in this vast and pivotal region is an enormous task. It will require strong involvement by the countries involved. It will require a sound understanding on our part of their ambitions and concerns. And it will require a new degree of cooperation between international organisations – with NATO and the EU playing a major role. So I hope very much the Dutch Presidency will be able to contribute in that area as well.
To Conclude

Last year, when the war in Iraq took its toll on the transatlantic community, several pundits predicted the end of Atlanticism. The Istanbul Summit has demonstrated that such notions were fundamentally wrong. There is new momentum in transatlantic security cooperation. And NATO remains a key element for that cooperation, both within and beyond the Euro-Atlantic area, in Afghanistan, and now as well soon in Iraq.

And I’m proud to say that, closer to home, the Netherlands plays an important role in that renewed transatlantic consensus. Through the respect it has won, all over Europe and across the Atlantic, as a founding member of both the NATO Alliance and the European Union. Through its political and intellectual contribution to the ongoing transformation of NATO and the development of the European Union’s security role. And, last but not least, through its active, exemplary role in military operations in regions of key strategic importance. That strong commitment fills me with pride, and gives me confidence for the future.”