NATO after Enlargement: The Way Ahead

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In August 1961, American and Soviet tanks held each other at gunpoint in the streets of Berlin at Checkpoint Charlie. The communist regime of the so-called German Democratic Republic built a wall to stop its citizens from fleeing to the West. Three decades later these citizens tore this wall down with hammers and with their bare hands. In October 1962, the United States stood eyeball to eyeball with the Soviet Union in the Cuban missile crisis. The crisis was resolved when the Kremlin backed down. As Dean Rusk, then American Secretary of State, put it: “The other guy blinked first.” In both instances, the West prevailed.

In January 1963, French President Charles de Gaulle threw the transatlantic alliance in disarray. He blocked British membership of the European Economic Community. He also torpedoed a proposal for a sea-based multilateral nuclear force, which was to give the NATO Allies input into decisions concerning the nuclear deterrent. In 1966, France withdrew from NATO’s military organisation altogether. The West seemed to be fraying at the edges.

Calling these Cold War years to mind serves a purpose. It tells us that the transatlantic alliance has always balanced between unity and division. A family of democracies is bound to experience disagreements. But one should never write off their alliance when it is put to the test. For this alliance is based on common values that are deeply rooted in our societies: freedom, democracy and respect for human life.

Many years later, the Cold War ended on NATO’s terms. With the accession to NATO of member states from the former Warsaw Pact, the development of a constructive relationship with Russia and Ukraine and the pacification of the Balkans, Europe has become a unified continent. A difficult and painful chapter in history has truly been brought to a good end. This could not have been achieved without NATO and the constructive role of the United States. The message is clear: the benefits of transatlantic alliance far outweigh any downsides there may be. This is not any different now.

Multiple Challenges

Rather than dwelling on the past, today’s conference will deal with the future of NATO. And so it should. For NATO faces multiple challenges. The to-do list is daunting indeed.

- We need to protect our citizens from terrorism and from the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. The nexus between these two poses a serious and unprecedented threat to our societies.
- We cannot afford to fail in our mission to bring stability to Afghanistan. ISAF will have to expand its footprint step by step in support of the democratically chosen central government.
- We need to bring our stabilising work in the Balkans to a good end. The recent disturbances in Kosovo have reminded us of the continued volatility of the region.
- We need to overcome divisions within the Alliance over Iraq. The new UN resolution is a major step in this direction. Many allies, including the Netherlands, have deployed troops to assist the Iraqi people in fulfilling their desire for democracy. But the requirement for transatlantic unity continues to demand a conscious and consistent effort from all sides to seek common ground.
- We need to fully take in seven new member states after their accession earlier this spring.
• We need to maintain our constructive relationship with Ukraine and Russia and develop it further.
• We need to reach out to new partners in the Middle East, North Africa and the Caucasus.
• We need to adapt and further improve our armed forces to deal with a radically changed security environment.
• We need to establish the NATO Response Force as an effective multinational fighting force.
• We need to further develop a fully transparent and mutually reinforcing relationship between NATO and the European Union. As president of the European Union for the remainder of 2004, the Netherlands will focus on full transparency and cooperation with NATO.

The future vitality and relevance of NATO depends on whether and how NATO meets these multiple challenges. Our governments will thus have a full and urgent agenda before them at the NATO Summit in Istanbul. On the eve of this summit, I call attention to the transformation of NATO.

Request for Transformation

The need for transformation results from the fact that new threats have emerged where old threats have disappeared. We no longer need to fear a large-scale conventional attack on Allied territory. However, in large parts of the world people continue to suffer from the consequences of poverty and political repression. This affects us too, directly and indirectly. It manifests itself in mass migration movements and the extensive trafficking in people, drugs and weapons. It provides a breeding ground for political and religious extremism. It contributes to the rise of terrorist organisations that plot against the very foundations of our free societies. The new reality is that we have to tackle problems where they emerge before they come to haunt us; it is that we are motivated to intervene, too, by humanitarian concerns.

This has far-reaching implications for NATO. During the Cold War, the Alliance operated in reactive mode. Its planning focused on the development of capabilities for deterring a known threat on the borders of Allied territory. Today, NATO has shifted into an active mode. It actively seeks to create stability and it intervenes to restore peace and respect for human life. This places vastly different demands on the way the Alliance operates and on our armed forces. We need a transformation in NATO’s working methods that support both the transformation into an active alliance and the required transformation of the armed forces of the member states.

True, NATO has already changed immensely from the organisation that won the Cold War. It admitted new allies, developed new partnerships, and put a halt to the bloodshed in the Balkans. After the end of the Cold War, NATO has had to reinvent itself. That it has been able to come this far, is a tribute to its vitality. But further transformation is still required if we are to respond more effectively to the security challenges of this century. The previous Summit, in Prague in 2002, laid the foundation for the new NATO by establishing the NATO Response Force and setting important capability goals. NATO’s transformation, however, is far from accomplished. It has only just begun. The Summit in Istanbul should give this process further impetus.

Many of the issues associated with this transformation concern NATO’s Defence Ministers in particular. Defence planning is a core activity of the Alliance. It must ensure that we have the armed forces we need. Today, these forces must be capable of conducting operations quickly, over great distances, under varying conditions and with the minimum number of military and civilian casualties. This requires substantial changes in NATO’s planning
mechanisms, however. Above all, these mechanisms should help to ensure the suitability of our forces for crisis response operations and to monitor the output of our defence efforts in terms of expeditionary forces. To this end, it is crucial for NATO as a whole to develop clear targets and indicators.

I emphasise that there is an important political dimension to this issue. In this Alliance, there is no place for free rides or paper armies. If countries want to be protected by NATO, they need to contribute their fair share. In an active Alliance, we need to consider the actual ability and the willingness of nations to deploy forces as the true measures of allied solidarity. At the Summit in Istanbul we therefore need to make substantial progress in this domain.

The Summit in Istanbul should promote the cause of transformation in other ways too. I particularly strongly support Secretary General De Hoop Scheffer's call for a radical shake-up of the way the Alliance plans and finances its operations. NATO’s difficulty in generating sufficient forces for its vital mission in Afghanistan has shown that improvements are long overdue. There is a gap between, on the one hand, the general availability of forces within NATO and, on the other hand, the willingness of nations to come forward and commit those forces to execute a mission. NATO’s credibility as a forum for collective action is thus at stake.

NATO needs to develop a more effective approach to generating forces for operations, which today is done on an ad hoc basis and focuses on one mission at a time. This approach will necessarily need to be more structural. It should not only be concerned with short-term needs in a particular operation. The new approach should address the longer-term need for forces in the various NATO-led operations. And it should take account of the commitments of nations in the NATO Response Force and in operations led by other organisations than NATO.

At last year’s NATO ministerial meeting in Colorado Springs, I proposed that the Allies exchange information on all of their current and future deployments abroad at regular intervals. This would allow NATO to more effectively mobilise existing capabilities and to do so on a realistic basis. I am confident that in Istanbul we can indeed agree on holding regular planning conferences.

Funding, too, is an integral part of this issue. The existing funding arrangements for operations within NATO mean that the country providing the forces foots the entire bill. Our experience with generating forces for ISAF in Afghanistan has shown that these arrangements present an obstacle to force contributions. They tend to place too large a burden on the smaller nations. They also punish the more willing nations with the more capable forces.

In Istanbul we should therefore decide to adapt the present funding arrangements in order to improve NATO’s operational performance. We should in particular look into the potential for more flexible criteria for common funding of NATO operations and critical enabling capabilities (such as strategic transport, intelligence, and command and control). Again, in this Alliance there is no place for free rides. We need to spread the participation in missions and the cost of missions more evenly across the Alliance’s 26 members.

**Collective Action**

It is my personal conviction that, as in the Cold War, the combination of military power in the Alliance continues to be the best safeguard for our peace and security. As President Bush said: “When Europe and America are united, no problem and no enemy can stand against us.” We must therefore keep NATO firmly in place. And we need to preserve and to improve
our ability to act collectively as an Alliance. This is the standard against which the results of the Istanbul Summit will have to be measured.

One thing is for certain: there is no such thing as a free ride to peace and security. This involves more than just the percentage of GDP spent on defence – or even than the number of troops available for crisis response operations. It means that we are prepared to act when action is needed. It means that we do not run away from danger if confronting it is the only way to stave off greater danger. Ultimately, the future of the Alliance does not depend on what we are willing to say for a safer and more just world. It depends on what we are willing to do.

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