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**Report**  
**“Improving Today, Shaping Tomorrow, Bridging the Two”**  
**Special Meeting SACT**

**Organised by Netherlands Atlantic Youth and Jong Defensie**  
**Monday July 9, 2018**  
**The Residency of the French Ambassador, The Hague**

Speakers: SACT General Mercier and Colonel Nogrette

Moderator: Karlijn Jans

**On Monday July 9 Netherlands Atlantic Youth and Jong Defensie hosted a special meeting with NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Transformation General Denis Mercier. As strategic commander and commanding officer of Allied Command Transformation, he promotes and oversees the continuing transformation of the forces and capabilities of the Alliance and thereby identifies priorities regarding interoperability requirements. He also conducts experiments to explore new concepts and doctrines. The event was introduced by Sylvain Nogrette (French Defence Attaché to the Netherlands) and Karlijn Jans (strategic analyst at HCSS) and followed by a speech from General Mercier. The meeting was concluded with a Q&A. 45 guests attended the meeting.**

Colonel Nogrette started the special meeting with a few words on French-Dutch military cooperation and praised several of their partner operations, including the Dutch contribution to Mali. He emphasized the importance of the recently launched European Intervention Initiative and its potential members that are willing to contribute, including the Netherlands and France. According to Nogrette, this cooperation should ideally reflect in NATO defence cooperation as well. Therefore, he looks forward to this week’s summit. Then, Karlijn Jans briefly introduced SACT Gen. Mercier by giving a short overview of his military career and general responsibilities belonging to NATO’s (S)ACT.

#### **SACT**

General Denis Mercier started his speech by saying that to understand NATO now, you must understand its recent history (the past 5-6 years). He defined four of NATO’s key periods since 1949, each characterized by a specific core task. During the Cold War period, NATO was seen as a collective

defence organisation, defined by article 5. After the fall of the Berlin Wall, NATO obtained a new core task: cooperative security, and enlargement presented itself as an opportunity. After 9/11, NATO focussed on expeditionary operations and crisis management. Today, NATO combines all these core tasks. Furthermore, he talked about the strategic environment and new domains of warfare (cyber). Mercier stated that the line between peace time and crisis becomes more vague, especially regarding developments within the cyber area. Therefore we must integrate cyber into NATO. SACT emphasised the importance of the newly announced cyber operational centre.

He also talked about the Warsaw summit and the successful implementation of important decisions that were taken there. The results have shown NATO's capacity to adapt. However, NATO is weakened by political forces and decision-making on key issues like burden-sharing. NATO must work on its responsiveness and speed of reaction in order to tackle challenges. According to SACT, this is a major issue that needs to be discussed at the upcoming summit. In addition, the development of new partnerships and strengthening of old ones, for example with the EU, is essential to NATO's progress. Lastly, SACT mentioned that burden-sharing does not only involve financial contribution, but also commitment. He concluded with the statement that if NATO wants to innovate, it should demonstrate first, meaning experimenting with tools and technology that already exist in order to conform these to current needs.

## **Q&A**

Moderator Karlijn Jans opened the Q&A. She asked whether NATO is doing enough to adapt to the current strategic security environment. SACT answered that NATO is working on a lot of things like responsiveness, readiness, and interoperability. However, he especially mentioned that NATO should learn to fail in exercises in order to check its limits: "Try, fail, fix, try again". The next question came from the audience regarding a partnership with the EU on military mobility. General Mercier argues that NATO has to coordinate with the EU on this issue because the EU has more mechanisms to improve military mobility.

Someone mentioned the statement from Trump saying 'NATO is obsolete'. The participant argued that Trump might have been influenced by Russia. Could this be seen as a strategy used by Russia to break up NATO? SACT answered that NATO proved that it is not obsolete and that Trump took back his statement. Yes, Europeans should pay their part of the burden, but even if they don't it will not lead to a crisis within NATO. There were also some questions regarding the status of Turkey. What would it mean for NATO when Turkey leaves the Alliance? And how far can Turkey go in befriending Russia before it is becoming a great burden within the Alliance? According to General Mercier both Turkey and NATO are better off with Turkey being in the Alliance than out of it.

Lastly, a participant asked a question regarding cyber threats. How will NATO respond to these? SACT argues that it is necessary to integrate cyber in all areas of the Alliance. NATO has acknowledged that a cyber-attack can trigger article 5, however there is no threshold yet and exercises and discussions on the issue are still much needed. He mentioned datamining as an example of an early notification strategy that identifies where to act.

General Mercier concluded the event by arguing that the Washington Treaty provides many answers to questions and issues that dominate NATO's present state of affairs.