

NATO in the New Millennium

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Except John Le Carré, nobody really misses the Cold War. That pretty much goes without saying. But the Cold War did have one thing going for it: simplicity. It was an abnormal state of affairs, but it certainly was a reliable compass. We didn't have to define our security agenda -- the Cold War defined it for us. It was, in a sense, a negative agenda: preventing an attack against us. In other words, security in the Cold War was essentially about things we didn't want to happen.

Even when the Cold War was coming to an end, this narrow understanding of security could not be shed easily. Of course, we were mesmerised by the "velvet revolutions" of 1989, but we were also worried. We had always wanted it to happen, but now, as it was happening, there was also an unease as to where all this would lead. In a sense, we were like the Lady at the bar of the Titanic. When the iceberg struck she turned to the waiter and said: "Yes, I ordered ice, but this is ridiculous!"

Today, a decade later, we can confidently say that we have left this reactive approach well behind. We have come to realise that security in this new environment means more than thinking about what should not happen. Europe is no longer under siege, so we no longer need a siege mentality. We can afford to be much bolder now. Rather than thinking about what scenarios we wish to avoid, we can look ahead and design a preferred scenario of the future we actually want. The new strategic environment offers us a unique luxury -- the opportunity to set the security agenda ourselves. And setting the agenda is what the NATO of the 21st century is all about.

Take, for example, NATO's policy of enlargement. On the face of it, it is about bringing our Eastern neighbours into the political and military mechanisms of the Alliance. At closer inspection, however, it is a major contribution to the re-shaping of Europe, namely by eliminating the notion of Central Europe as a "grey area" of competing great power interests. For those who join, it provides the European identity the EU is not yet ready to extend. For those who want to join, it creates incentives to continue on their path of reform. And, at the same time, it makes sure that the widening of Europe remains compatible with a healthy transatlantic link -- a new Atlanticism extended beyond Western Europe.

Or take, NATO's relationship with Russia, NATO's major adversary during the Cold War. On the face of it, it could appear like a bureaucratic contest about influence. At closer inspection, however, it is much, much more: it is a major attempt to bring Europe's greatest security variable into the emerging European security architecture. It is a major attempt to anchor Russia firmly in the West: to win Russia over as a genuine Partner in managing new common challenges, such as regional conflicts or proliferation.

Or take, the Partnership for Peace. At the face of it, a military cooperation programme between the 19 NATO members and over two dozen non-NATO-nations. At closer inspection, however, it is much, much more: a means to enhance the pool of crisis management resources throughout Europe; a mechanism to draw even neutral states closer to the emerging architecture, and a "transmission belt" for conveying NATO's ideas on effective defence planning and civil-military relations to those many states that still struggle with their post-communist transition.

And, finally, take NATO's role in the Balkans. At the face of it, a military-technical and humanitarian job of creating the conditions for a self-sustaining peace in Bosnia and Kosovo. At closer inspection, however, it is much more. It is the successful containment of two regional conflicts that threatened to engulf a wider area; the breaking of the fateful logic of great powers always supporting their traditional client states in the Balkans -- for we managed to rally even Russia behind our common operations. And moreover, by making a long-term commitment to the re-building of these regions, NATO -- together with the European Union -- creates the basis for bringing all of volatile Southeastern Europe, including a newly democratic Serbia, back into the European mainstream.

I think these examples alone illustrate well the role of NATO as dynamo of political change. Today, NATO is setting the security agenda in ways the founders of this Alliance never dared to dream. The Alliance has become the dynamo at the hub of political change.

But does all this mean that NATO's future is assured? Can we now switch the Alliance on "autopilot" and leave its future evolution to Parkinson's Law of expanding bureaucracies?

The answer is a resounding "no". Security in Europe remains a work in progress. Our continent, and its surrounding area, are still in the midst of a major transition. There is still lots of unfinished business. So we cannot be complacent. NATO's job is far from over.

For example, we need to continue the process of NATO enlargement, because continuing that process is our best insurance against new dividing lines. As Secretary General, my job is not to make the decision as to who should join next. That is for NATO's member states, and as many of you know, NATO's Heads of State and Government will be gathering in Prague next year to consider issuing further invitations for NATO membership. Between now and then, my job is to ensure that the enlargement process proceeds as it should. This means ensuring that all the issues are debated fully, by all the interested parties. It means giving the nine applicant countries as much feedback as possible, through our Membership Action Plan. It means reminding those aspirants that they will have to make difficult decisions, and tough decisions, if they are to meet NATO's standards, in particular on defence reform.

Needless to say, the final decision on enlargement remains fundamentally political. But one thing should be clear: in today's Europe, every democratic country must have the free right to choose its own security arrangements. Europe can never be fully stable and secure if countries are not in control over their own destiny, but have that destiny decided for them by others. For NATO, adhering to this principle means that when a European democracy is able and willing to make a real contribution to Euro-Atlantic security, then the Alliance has an obligation to consider their application for membership. In the new Europe of the 21st century, geography can no longer be destiny.

When you talk about NATO enlargement you always end up talking about Russia. Because much of the debate about NATO's enlargement is really a debate about the future of Russia. And the NATO-Russia relationship, very obviously, is another work in progress that needs continued attention.

All of us here are familiar with the ups and downs of this relationship over the past decade, and Kosovo was the most obvious low point. Relations are, however, once again back on track. Russian forces are working very well with NATO forces in the Balkans. The NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council is meeting regularly, and discussing cooperation on a wide range of the most serious security issues. And there is a general feeling on both sides that we can and should deepen our relations further.

One of the most important ways in which we can deepen our relations is through better communication. NATO needs to be more effective at conveying to Russians what the Alliance is, what it does and why -- because Russians need to understand more clearly that NATO is not, nor does it want to be, any threat to their security. That is why I will be traveling to Moscow next week and opening the NATO information Office there. This Office will provide accurate and timely information to anyone interested in NATO and NATO issues, and therefore help to eliminate some of the myths and illusions that sometimes get in the way of practical cooperation -- including the myth that enlargement is about encircling Russia. NATO and Russia cannot ignore each other, and this fact has been proven many times over. We should therefore have a relationship which reflects this reality.

The Balkans remain yet another work in progress. True, the changes that have occurred over the last few months have been spectacular. I found myself just a few weeks ago welcoming the Foreign Minister of Yugoslavia to NATO Headquarters, and today I received the Serbian Deputy Prime Minister. Democracy is becoming stronger in Serbia, and Serbia and Montenegro will soon find a new basis for their relationship. Together with the striking changes in Croatia last year, these developments mean that the ice that has kept hostility frozen in place in the Balkans has finally begun to thaw.

But let us be clear: for this progress to continue, we must keep our eye on the ball. Neither in Bosnia-Herzegovina nor in Kosovo do we have a truly self-sustaining peace yet. That day will eventually come, but it won't be tomorrow. So we must sustain the positive momentum -- by staying the course, by keeping up the pressure on the parties to get back to normal, but also by reminding them that international support is neither infinite nor unconditional. With patience and persistence, we can help the Balkans in turning the corner, we can help to defuse the proverbial "Balkan powder keg" for good.

The final work in progress I wish to address today is the development of the European Security and Defence Identity. Now, anyone following the news over the past few months would have had difficulty avoiding the many stories on this issue. But if I may say so, much of the recent coverage on ESDI has missed the point -- and particularly here in the UK! It has missed the point on why it is happening; and it has missed the point on what is happening.

Why is Europe developing a stronger capability? The answer is simple: because Europe has to make a greater contribution to security. Within NATO, the United States still has to do the lion's share of the more high-tech operations because Europe can't pull its weight at that end. And even for the lower-level ground operations, Europe has great difficulties deploying the troops it has. For Kosovo, Europe barely managed to provide 40,000 troops

-- which represents 2% of the 2 million troops Europe has on paper. And if we can't use them, the rest might as well exist only on paper.

By improving Europe's capabilities, we can balance burdens more fairly within NATO, and overcome any complaints on the other side of the Atlantic about burden-sharing -- complaints which I believe remain justified today. At the same time, a stronger Europe will be able to handle the security crises in or around Europe that do not engage the strategic interests of the United States and NATO -- which means that we will have more options than just "NATO or nothing".

We are already turning the corner in one important area: defence spending. The general ten-year fall in defence budgets across the Alliance has stopped. And in 11 European NATO countries, defence budgets are starting to go back up. This is an important development, because the right defence spending is necessary if Europe is to take on a fairer share of the defence burden.

Does all of this mean that Europe is creating its own army? No -- despite what the press is saying. European countries are simply developing the capacity to use their forces more effectively. The troops will still be part of national forces, but should have better equipment and training, and be deployable on national operations, or NATO missions, or UN missions -- and soon, EU missions as well.

The EU is preparing itself to take on a range of missions, called the Petersberg tasks, which comprise: humanitarian and rescue tasks; peacekeeping; and crisis management operations, including peacemaking. The EU is not planning to assume responsibility for the collective defence of Europe -- that remains exclusively NATO's job. And of course, the Alliance will continue to retain the mandate and the capability to take on the full range of missions, from conflict prevention to crisis management.

For all these reasons, stronger European capabilities are no threat to relations with North America. We are not losing any options - we are simply gaining one more tool in the toolbox of crisis management.

Both the EU and North America have therefore agreed that, where NATO as a whole is not engaged, but the EU does wish to be, NATO will support the EU with Alliance capabilities. This arrangement will ensure that the EU has the support it needs, without implication, but that NATO and the US don't always have to be in the lead. It is a more flexible and efficient way of responding to future crisis management in the Euro-Atlantic arena.

We have already broken ground on this project. Indeed, we have made more progress in the past 2 years than in the previous twenty. NATO and the EU are now working out how to share information, how to share equipment, and how to cooperate in peacetime and times of crisis. Which means that we are on the way to putting in place the kind of NATO-EU relations we will need to manage crises in the 21st Century. But the road is long, and we have to ensure that NATO-EU relations are based on transparency and cooperation, and that all Allies are included in the process. When we succeed -- and I am confident it will happen -- it will benefit all concerned: NATO, the EU, and wider Euro-Atlantic security.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

NATO has moved from a single-purpose collective defence institution to a multiple-purpose instrument, able to set the security agenda in unique ways. The possibilities for the Alliance to exercise decisive influence on security developments throughout Europe have grown tremendously. There is currently no other organisation which can create such a powerful, positive momentum.

To keep this momentum requires us to maintain the "inner balance" of this Alliance -- the balance between transatlantic burdens and responsibilities, the balance between sound politics and sound military capabilities. This inner balance of our Alliance is not self-regulating. It requires an active effort to maintain it. It requires a constant transatlantic dialogue.

But it also requires another dialogue: the dialogue with our own publics. We may sometimes complain about public indifference on matters of security and defence. In particular when it comes to resources, defence risks losing out against other causes that are seen in the short term to be more noble -- schools, or hospitals. But let us not miss the forest for the trees. It may sound paradoxical, but the current indifference is in fact a sign of how well we are doing. People don't worry about security because they feel secure.

But the leaders of the Alliance must make it clear to their electorates that this feeling of safety and security is not a natural state of affairs. It is a result of a constant and persistent effort, not least by NATO. We have to explain that this Alliance is much more than insurance against the unexpected downturns in international relations. It is a tool we can use to shape the strategic environment in line with our interests and values.

Investing in this Alliance thus means more than paying an insurance premium. Investing in NATO means investing in Europe's positive evolution. It means investing in the safety of future generations.

Thank You.