

Speech by NATO Secretary General Lord George Robertson

Ladies and Gentlemen,

A week ago, the Wall Street Journal argued that if security were a marketable product, it would be hard to find a better brand name than NATO.

Dr. Teltschik, the same applies to this conference. Munich is a leading trade name in its field, a venue where the most serious security issues are debated openly and honestly, among experts and key decision makers.

Today, the most serious security issue facing us all is the campaign against terrorism. At ground zero and elsewhere in New York earlier this week I was told repeatedly that NATO's response to September 11 had reaffirmed the importance of the transatlantic partnership.

But we have all seen in the past month that a succession of commentators have started to argue that NATO has been marginalised and that its future is in doubt.

This is not the first time that predictions of this kind have been made. When the Berlin Wall fell, some critics suggested that NATO had completed its mission, and could pack it in. Then, after the success of the Gulf War coalition, they suggested that all future operations would be exactly like Desert Storm - and that, as a result, NATO wasn't needed to meet modern challenges.

The critics were wrong. During the 1990s, NATO's members transformed the Alliance to deal with instability in Southeast Europe, to provide security across the European continent and to spearhead the modernisation of their armed forces.

NATO prospered, expanded and even won its first military campaign, in Kosovo. Kosovo was, by any standards, a huge success. We won in 78 days, with minimum casualties and none on the Allies side, without a legacy of bitterness or terror, and with all our objectives met.

Every time I visit Kosovo, I meet people who would not be alive today but for NATO's planes and soldiers. You don't hear them bleating about "war by committee."

Today, NATO is keeping the peace in trouble spots in Southeast Europe; and cooperating more and more deeply with Russia, Ukraine, and 25 other countries in Europe and Central Asia. And as a sign of NATO's popularity, nine countries are queuing to join this year. Make no mistake, in 2002, there is simply no credible alternative forum to NATO for transatlantic security coordination. Nor is there any credible alternative for ensuring the military and political interoperability on which all coalition operations depend.

There is no other means than NATO to ensure that European Defence strengthens our collective capacity. And there is no other organisation which can provide stability and security in the Euro-Atlantic area and prevent the danger of re-nationalising defence in Europe.

But September 11th changed the world. As a result, some critics now argue that NATO has no role in dealing with the new threats that confront us all. Or that it could have a role but lacks the political will to seize it.

I totally disagree. The critics were wrong after the Cold War and the Gulf War. They are wrong now. NATO is not only a part of the campaign against terrorism - it is an essential part.

Start with the declaration of Article 5. We must not let revisionists cast doubt on the fundamental importance of that decision. By declaring that this attack was an attack against them all, NATO's 19 members triggered the same collective defence arrangements for the United States which Europeans had counted on during the Cold War.

This decision demonstrated that the mutual trust and commitments on which the Alliance has been based for 52 years remain tangible, real and reciprocal.

But Article 5 is not just a statement of solidarity. It is also a commitment by Allies to offer practical support and it was a unique signal to the world of terrorism that they had crossed a serious threshold with their attack.

At the outset of the crisis, the United States was quickly granted a range of specific measures, such as enhanced intelligence support; blanket overflight rights, access to ports and airfields, and so on.

Most significant, of course, was the move of seven NATO AW ACS aircraft across the Atlantic to patrol US airspace.

As President Bush said in his joint press conference with me in the White House Rose Garden on 10 October: "This has never happened before, that NATO has come to help defend our country, but it happened in this time of need and for that we are grateful". A high point indeed in the transatlantic relationship.

It is true that NATO did not lead the campaign against the Taliban and Al-Qaida because, as in the case of Desert Storm in the Gulf, a larger, more diverse coalition was needed for that phase of the attack on terrorism. But NATO's political, military and logistic support has nonetheless been crucial.

Furthermore, European members are leading the international stability force now deploying to Kabul. As in Desert Storm, their ability to work effectively with each other and with the United States is the result of decades of cooperation in NATO.

It is a striking fact that because of NATO's emphasis on multinational interoperability, British tanker aircraft over Afghanistan can refuel US Navy fighters, but US Air Force tankers cannot. Without a core of practical interoperability, we would rapidly be forced to rely on conditions of the willing but incapable.

And NATO's role stretches even further - because it has made a vital contribution to building the coalition that the United States needs to win this campaign. For years, NATO has been building partnerships and trust with Central Asian partners.

Now these same countries are providing airspace and bases without which effective operations in Afghanistan would have been impossible. That would not have been feasible without those years of cooperation with NATO.

Afghanistan reinforces the fact that no modern military operation can be undertaken by a single country. Even superpowers need allies and coalitions to provide bases, fuel, airspace and forces. And they need mechanisms and experience to integrate these forces into a single coherent military capability.

NATO and its partners in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council are the world's largest permanent coalition. And NATO is preeminently the world's most effective military organisation. It will not be in the lead in every crisis. But it has a vital role - in my view the vital role - to play in multinational crisis prevention and crisis management.

Nonetheless, to maintain that role, NATO must continue to evolve. The context for our security is changing, and everybody in the security business has to adapt. What people do not seem to know is that we are already on the job.

We have a clear mission, set down at our autumn ministerial meetings, to make November's Prague summit a focus for adaptation and change.

Thus the Alliance is becoming the primary means for developing the role of armed forces to defeat the terrorist threat. NATO forces have already destroyed dangerous Al-Qaida cells in the Balkans.

Now our nations are examining ways to improve our forces' abilities to protect themselves against the use of weapons of mass destruction. And we are looking at using the military's unique skills and capabilities more effectively to protect our populations, and to assist in civil emergencies.

We are engaging non-NATO countries, including Russia, in the process. Tomorrow, I will host, along with Russian Defence Minister Sergey Ivanov, a major meeting to jointly look at how our militaries can do more, and do more together.

'This is an important symbol of NATO's deepening relationship with Russia, built on more issues than terrorism. We intend to work together as equal partners, in new ways which benefit both sides but still safeguard NATO's cohesion and the autonomy of action of both sides. If we succeed, and I am confident that we will, the strategic picture will be transformed as fundamentally for the good as it was for evil on September 11th.

We are also redoubling our efforts to complete the modernisation of European and Canadian forces. They must be able to take on a greater share of the burden of maintaining our common security - including dealing quickly with terrorism and weapons of mass destruction.

The United States must have partners who can contribute their fair share to operations which benefit the entire Euro-Atlantic community. This is the best possible way to build on the

emotional and practical strengthening of transatlantic bonds caused by the terrible attacks last year.

But the picture on burden sharing, is frankly a very mixed one. In practical terms, America's Allies are pulling their weight. In the Balkans, for example, more than 85% of the peacekeeping troops are European. The European Union is paying the lion's share in reconstruction and development. Javier Solana and I have a polished political EU-NATO double-act to keep the peace in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia . And in the coming months, we will see increasing efforts by the Europeans to reduce the burden on American shoulders in some of these Balkan operations.

Unfortunately, the longer term picture is less optimistic. For all the political energy expended in NATO and in the EU, the truth is that Europe remains militarily undersized.

Orders of battle and headquarters wiring diagrams read impressively. Overall numbers of soldiers, tanks and aircraft give a similar impression of military power. But the reality is that we are hard pressed to maintain those 50,000 European troops in the Balkans. And hardly any European country can deploy useable and effective forces in significant numbers outside their borders, and sustain them for months or even years as we all need to do today.

For all Europe's rhetoric, and an annual investment of over \$ 140 billion by NATO's European members, we still need US help to move, command and provision a major operation.

American critics of Europe's military incapability are right. So, if we are to ensure that the United States moves neither towards unilateralism nor isolationism, all European countries must show a new willingness to develop effective crisis management capabilities.

I am therefore redoubling my clarion call of "capabilities, capabilities, capabilities". This will not make me popular in some capitals. I hope it will, nonetheless, be listened to, especially by Finance Ministers.

Yet the United States must do much more too. Not in terms of soldiers on the ground or aircraft in the air. But in facilitating the process of European defence modernisation. By easing unnecessary restrictions on technology transfer and industrial cooperation, Washington can improve the quality of the capabilities available, and diminish any problems our forces have in working together.

If the US does not act in this way, the huge additional investment it is making in defence will make practical interoperability with Allies, in NATO or in coalitions, impossible. The gap between American forces on the one hand and European and Canadian forces on the other will be unbridgeable . For Washington, the choice could become: act alone or not at all, and that is no choice at all.

Finally, we are beginning the modernisation of NATO's decision-making processes. NATO has a unique ability to take and implement quick decisions. We showed it last summer, when within five days of the political decision we deployed 4,000 troops to the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to supervise a crucial disarmament process, and help prevent a civil war.

That kind of quick action will be necessary in future - including, potentially, to respond to terrorism. We must therefore ensure that it can still be done after any NATO enlargement in November.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome a renewed debate on NATO's future. The Alliance has a proud record and the proven ability to adapt as risks change.

In an uncertain world, NATO is not an optional extra. It is the embodiment of the transatlantic bond, the fundamental guarantor of Euro-Atlantic stability and security, and the essential platform for defence cooperation and coalition operations.

As a result the Alliance remains as busy and as relevant to the 21st century as it was to generations in the last one.

Thank you.