



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
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**SACT's REMARKS to
NDC Graduation Ceremony
Roma, 05 February 2016**

Général d'armée aérienne Denis MERCIER



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Mesdames et messieurs les ambassadeurs,

Mesdames et messieurs les membres du corps diplomatique et
différentes autorités italiennes,

Messieurs les officiers généraux, Janusz, Pascal,

Mesdames et Messieurs les invités de marque,

Mesdames, Mesdemoiselles, Messieurs,

Merci pour ces propos introductifs.

I'm truly honoured to address the graduates of Senior Course 127 on the auspicious day of your graduation, especially since I was unable to address you when you visited ACT this past November.

Today you become the *'individuals, both on the military and civilian side, for whom the NATO Defence College gave a thorough grasp of the many complicated factors which are involved in the problem of creating an adequate defence posture for the North Atlantic area'* that General Eisenhower, foresaw.

Now more than ever, this is what your Nations and the Alliance expect from you, because after two decades focused on expeditionary operations, NATO is at a turning point. The Alliance needs a new posture for a better balance of its three core tasks: collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security.



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You will not be surprised to hear that my main concern today, as Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, is to continue transforming the Alliance without compromising its cohesion.

This will require an understanding of the evolving security environment and an informed look at the next 15 years, to allow us to identify the decisions we need to take today to be fit for tomorrow; something that we may have disregarded a little in recent decades.

Only so, with your help, will we provide operational commanders and political leaders with the tools they need to implement the appropriate deterrence and defence posture.

This morning, I would like to add my personal perspectives to the discussions you have had these past 6 months about the changing Alliance landscape. In particular, I will highlight the need to bolster short-term requirements and adaptation for the next Summit, and more importantly to build an enhanced model for Alliance forces well beyond Warsaw.

Let me begin with the geostrategic context. In Wales, our Heads of States and Government acknowledged that the Alliance was now confronted with an unprecedented mix of risks and threats.



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So the real question is: what is new?

Current threats were already identified in the 2010 Strategic Concept.

Their potential for instability was recognized in ACT's Strategic Foresight Analysis and the Framework for Future Alliance Operations.

The simultaneity, complexity and interconnection of these crises were also considered, but did not necessarily lead to the definition of a solidarity-based strategy that would take into account national sensitivities and deal with threats from all directions.

Let's do our own *tour d'horizon*.

To the East and South-East, what happened in Ukraine has shown that conflicts between states could re-emerge close to the Alliance periphery.

In Crimea, the international principles guaranteeing the sanctity of borders and the territorial integrity of Nations were callously ignored ; and since then we have witnessed increasingly bellicose statements from some state actors – such as the recent designation of NATO as a threat in Russia's latest national security strategy.

In response, NATO has expressed its strong resolve while avoiding provocation and escalation.



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This is the right approach: transparency and risk reduction must remain a priority to avoid incidents and accidents escalating out of control, but based on a strong military posture.

The hybrid strategies used in Ukraine highlighted the need for a modern, credible and collective Alliance defence posture, a posture necessary to bolster any kind of comprehensive approach.

This requires our Alliance to adapt to face these new challenges through heightened responsiveness and broader strategic awareness.

This strategic awareness will be achieved through continuous and comprehensive information collection, fusion and sharing.

It will allow us to identify and attribute apparently unconnected events across the entire Diplomatic, Information, Military, Economy, Financial, Intelligence and Law enforcement (DIMEFIL) spectrum.

But Strategic awareness also encompasses all the intelligence necessary to support deployments at very short notice.

For NATO, the ability to conduct such analyses will require building flexible security networks with Allies but also with Partner Nations and other organizations, in particular the EU.



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This strategic awareness will be key to allow our political and military leaders to seize opportunities and respond timely to any emerging crisis.

In my view, this strategic awareness effort will also depend on a new mindset, based on creative and critical thinking, that we have to foster in our education and training programmes.

To NATO's South, we are also witnessing the destabilization of entire regions, which weak or unstable states are powerless to halt.

Emerging lawless zones on Europe's periphery, especially in Syria and Libya, provide bases for terrorist and extremist groups that have struck deep inside Alliance territory.

These major security issues and the massive influx of refugees have a common root in failing or failed states. This is why an important part of our response will involve strengthening the States to our South, using a pragmatic and mutually beneficial Partnership approach.

At the military level, individually tailored roadmaps will be developed to meet each Partner's objectives and requirements. The roadmaps will deliver a higher level of interoperability and improved complementarity for all military cooperation activities, including Defence Capacity Building (DCB) efforts.



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But I would argue that we should look beyond this geographical approach to threats that may manifest elsewhere and in a different manner in the future. This will require learning to anticipate this known unknown.

To do so, we have to define the risks and opportunities from the other political, human, technological, economic or environmental trends shaping the future strategic context.

This is an ongoing effort within ACT through our Strategic Foresight Analysis. This work examines the effects that might lead to the gradual circumvention of our military power.

However, all these changes in our security equation do not call into question the underlying principles and the validity of the current Strategic Concept.

The Alliance has to find a deterrence and defence posture that fulfils its three core tasks – collective defence, crisis management and cooperative security – and the translations of these tasks into efficient military strategic effects.

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This brings me to my second point. On the way to the next Summit in Warsaw, we will accelerate the pace of our Transformation.

Our Transformation must meet the short and long-term requirements of a robust deterrence and defence posture, which ensures the Alliance's political and military credibility.

By posture, I mean the right mix of conventional, nuclear and missile defence forces at the appropriate level of readiness, with the responsiveness required to rapidly deploy, sustain operations and redeploy.

And to be militarily credible today and in the future, this posture must rely on a solid and modern foundation, a military capacity that enables the Alliance to permanently, or on short notice, plan and conduct any kind of operation.

This military capacity is not new and has been a mainstay of the Alliance since its inception. Adaptations are already ongoing in several fields, in particular through the Readiness Action Plan, which is well on track.

But we must look beyond the RAP and I want to offer some additional concerns about NATO's posture, which could be relevant for Warsaw.



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- First, we have to look more closely to the balance set in Wales between the persistent, although rotational, forward presence of forces and flexible rapid reinforcements.

This balance is hard to define because we still have to assess the actual readiness and responsiveness of our NATO Command and Force Structures, and more importantly what is needed to improve it.

At the military level, NATO initiatives are underway to enhance the quick reinforcement of the Standing Naval Forces by aggregating identified ships of NATO Nations at sea, which does not imply that they automatically fall under SACEUR's command. Extended to other domains – air, land and even cyber -, these ad-hoc and innovative solutions would give the Alliance more flexibility to aggregate forces at short notice and extend its responsiveness.

With such a pragmatic approach, we could identify national forces at high readiness and be cognizant that pending on the situation, these forces could be engaged sometimes prior to the deployment of the NRF forces.

In my view, this would make our Alliance even stronger and deliver a much greater deterrent effect.



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- Second: we must identify what threatens our current edge or advantage; one based on the results of the second American offset strategy and which has been taken for granted during the last thirty years.

This is to be done in the short term since we face sophisticated Anti-Access Area Denial (A2AD) systems and over the longer term by looking at the opportunities and risks inherent to future technological breakthroughs.

[A2AD] A2AD weapon systems complicate our ability to deploy in some areas, but they too are not new. They combine integrated anti-aircraft defence and other ballistic, anti-ship and anti-submarine equipment built for defence purposes.

Today, the main political concern is the possible threat to the access and freedom of manoeuvre of NATO forces even within the Alliance's periphery.

At a military level, we realize that we may not have invested enough in the integration of our own systems during the last decade.

However, A2AD does not prevent the Alliance's forces from deploying where they are tasked to do so.



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In the short term, A2AD can be defeated by the planning and conduct of large-scale operations, as long as we accept the associated risks.

In the longer term, this leads us to anticipate the development of integrated systems that could network a mix of Allied sensors and forces to neutralize complex defence architectures.

[New technologies] Competing with the sophistication and innovation of current weapon systems deployed by our potential adversaries will no longer be enough to maintain our military superiority.

We have to assess the potential of emergent technological breakthroughs, especially those that might affect our current perception of the battlespace, in terms of time and space.

For instance,

- Platforms and weapons will have extended ranges and perform their missions with increased autonomy.
- Artificial intelligence and the capabilities used to collect, analyse and identify trends and associations in huge amounts of unstructured data will continue to improve.



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- New technologies will also continue to compress the time we have to make decisions, in particular when confronted with hypervelocity weapons.

These are only few examples of the exceptional pace of technological innovation. Without getting into details, they highlight a necessity to change our mind-sets so that we get prepared to these major changes that will significantly influence the plan and conduct of modern operations as well as the structure of our forces.

I have touched mainly the military considerations to support a credible posture. Let me open the scope.

At the political level, we also need to strengthen the credibility of our posture.

There are five areas I think we might focus on for Warsaw.

1. First, resources. It is my feeling that political leaders are now more aware of the need to sustain the Alliance's posture over time and at 360 degrees.

There are encouraging signs of reinvestment in defence, but they must be maintained. The Defence Investment pledge should be reaffirmed and turned into reality, especially for major equipment and research, to enable us to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change.



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2. Second, in line with these investments, the Alliance must ensure it works closely with a strong and innovative Defence Industry on both sides of the Atlantic.

At the same time, we should also strive to ensure that the requirement for innovation, expressed through the US 'Defense Innovation Initiative' and 3rd Offset Strategy, remains connected to our efforts when designing future capabilities.

3. Third, we must improve how Partners are associated with the building of the Alliance's posture.

Partnerships, with Nations as well as International Organizations must be a major priority for this Summit as the Alliance is very unlikely to engage any operations without Partners.

4. Resilience will be paramount.

Emerging challenges will require ever greater shared resilience, so that Nations can resist, absorb, accommodate, and recover from the effects of strategic setbacks in a timely and efficient manner.

This also should be a main question for Warsaw.

5. Last, the credibility of our posture will also depend on demonstrating the scope of our abilities. Trident Juncture 15 is a good example of the ambitious scope and execution of our strategic exercises.



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But in terms of strategic communication we could have done better.

Our exercises should contain specific objectives tied to the messages we want to address to potential opponents or adversaries.

Because, in the end, the strengthening of the political and military credibility of our posture will require the affirmation of a solid political will through an efficient strategic communications plan.

The effectiveness of Strategic Communications must be considerably improved, in the form of clearly defined objectives shared by all Allies.

These are, in my view, the main efforts required on the path to Warsaw.

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Let me now look well beyond Warsaw. And doing so, let me restate a warning given by the NDC's founder: *'our real problem is not our strength today; it is rather the vital necessity of action today to ensure our strength tomorrow'*.

We have then to work on the military foundation of the posture, to ensure our forces continue to maintain their military advantage over our potential adversaries, well beyond the implementation of the RAP.



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We have set priorities on six focus areas: command and control; logistics/Sustainability; collective training and exercises; partnerships; human capital; and capabilities. Together, they provide what we call NATO's capacity.

We have to rethink this foundation and design a new model of forces that can provide the strategic awareness, operational agility and security networking necessary to succeed in future operations.

With the help of your imagination, we will have to answer numerous questions about:

- the implementation of new and more flexible command and control architectures;
- the interaction of future capabilities on the battlefield;
- the organization of logistics and sustainability;
- the way to integrate a wider range of Partners;
- the skills required from every war fighter and military leader;
- and the collective training of this combat system.

I will not go into details for all these areas. But let me highlight a few things for Command and Control and for Sustainability.

As the backbone of NATO's capacity, C2 will be the main driver for offsetting the advances of any potential adversary.



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Its future architecture should then be able to handle large amounts of data, supported by a cloud system providing NATO authorities with the necessary global situational awareness and the means to enable faster and more effective decision-making from the political down to the tactical level.

And taking into account the increasing cyber-threat and the need for more flexibility in the conduct of warfare, our aim should be for further decentralization of operational control within a fully networked and effective system.

A first step is ongoing through the Federated Mission Networking initiative, which paves the way with open architecture and interoperability standards for national and NATO C2 networks.

This new approach for NATO's fighting capacity will also depend on the coherent preparation, stockpiling, deployment and projection of forces or power, whenever and wherever needed.

Future sustainability will include more modular approaches to produce smaller and mission-tailored logistic tails. We will be thinking in terms of hubs and of 3D printing to create spare parts on demand, to name but two.

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I will stop here so we have some time for questions, but more importantly, because I am acutely aware that I alone stand between you and your certificates and diplomas.

I really hope, and that will be my main message during my roundtable with the Command Group this afternoon, that we can leverage the NATO Defense College at its full potential to build this future and foster innovative thinking.

So my very last words will be to congratulate you warmly for your efforts and successful completion of this course, which is unique I understood.

You are now well-prepared to fully contribute to building and inspiring the innovative and versatile forces that will be essential for the future security of all our Nations, Allies and Partners.

Your military commanders will expect from you to be creative and inspiring leaders as well as audacious commanders.

To be creative, to think out of the box, to know the possible know-how, I personally look for officers with an open mind-set. This is what I am asking to all my officers in ACT. They need to be opened to the pace of

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change and innovative concepts outside of the military arena and willing to a constant exchange of ideas. They must create and work with expanded networks, including the civilian and private world.

Leveraging innovation, I look forward to working with officers having the boldness to implement their ideas and push forward NATO's Transformation.

To return once more to General Eisenhower, I believe you are the core of the Alliance's Human capital, this audacious and broad-minded elite we require to innovate and prepare the Alliance's future.

Merci pour votre attention et je suis prêt à répondre à vos questions.