



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION**

SACT's First Address to the Staff

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As delivered

Général d'armée aérienne Denis MERCIER

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Generals, Admirals,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fellow members of Allied Command Transformation.

Good morning. Today, it is a great pleasure for me to meet you all in person.

First, I would like to once again congratulate M. Frank Schiller for his outstanding contribution to the communication of our Headquarters. ACT connect is a collaborative tool which not only provides latest news, information sharing, events management in the Headquarters, but also offers the opportunity to brainstorm and share innovative ideas. I really look forward to utilizing this emergent collaboration platform to its full extent.

I would also like to ask our US Navy service members to stand-up. I wholeheartedly wish you a happy 240th birthday. You are the sailors who make the US Navy ready then, ready now, always ready. Thank you for your service and great contribution to the Alliance.

Talking about the Alliance, it has been nearly two weeks since I took office, and I can tell you that I am very proud and motivated for my mission to lead Allied Command Transformation, and yet humbled by the faith and trust placed in me.



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As I said at the Change of Command, I'm very confident in our ability to keep the pace of Transformation moving forward. Indeed, I see it accelerating, and my many interactions with the staff to date have confirmed my initial impressions.

This Headquarters possesses a wealth of experienced and innovative people, who, **if well-connected together- this is key-, will help the Alliance meet its current and future challenges.**

The Framework for Future Alliance Operations is a perfect example of the high quality products that this HQ has been able to create.

To be very honest, this document is the most visionary future work I have read, in recent years, much more powerful than many Nations' White papers or Strategic Defence related publications.

So, I can only encourage each of you to read it, as it contains most of what Transformation will aim to achieve in future years. Discuss it to better understand it and its visionary power. I need you to read it, to re-read it and to discuss it. I was also impressed by the extraordinary progress made in other areas, implementing the Connected Forces Initiative, enhancing the NATO Defence Planning Process, efforts to mitigate our capability shortfalls, and among many other achievements, how we can make the best use of NATO resources across their three pillars: manpower, investments and military budget.



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And I am not alone in acknowledging the great potential of this Headquarters. Two weeks ago, the presence of NATO's Secretary General, many Ministers of Defence, Chiefs of Defence, and Permanent and Military Representatives, was a significant demonstration of the credibility ACT has gained in the Alliance and in many Partner Nations.

They crossed the Atlantic and came to Virginia for more than a ceremony. They were eager to meet and interact with those who truly enable NATO's future. I met them last week in Brussels –two days prior to the Defence Ministerial-, and all of them were positive about what they have seen here, for all the presentations which delivered the right message at appropriate level, to the right audience. And especially the Secretary General who told me that he has been very happy to be with you during this day, and who has now a clear understanding of what ACT can do.

So, you can, *no*, you must, be extremely proud of that;

- proud of having a central role in the Alliance's Transformation;
- proud of your many successes and achievements under the leadership of General Paloméros, my predecessor ;
- proud of shaping current and future operational battlefields;
- proud of having given such a high profile to our Command.

Let me give you one concrete example of Nations' high esteem for ACT. In Brussels, three Allies asked me about the possibility for ACT to assist



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them in different domains: one nation required assistance in the implementation of a new concept which is under development, one nation required assistance and advice in better spending their increased defence investments and one nation asked me during the lunch how we could continue assisting and advising them regarding the development of its new White Paper.

We will work on their requests. And this is a clear example of our Headquarters' credibility. To be frank with you, I didn't expect that. But they are waiting for our projects. So we have to find the right team, we have to go and meet them in order to provide the assistance they have asked us for. This is a clear and concrete example of the value of our headquarters. We will have to continue to promote that, and tell the Nations that we are here for them.

I have a deep respect for what you have done and **it is my clear intent to build on this legacy.**

But the focal question remains what is Transformation?

Transformation is not an end in itself. It is true that it is a continuous process but we must look further as we do not transform for the sake of transforming.

We transform because there is a tangible output to be delivered. And here is the key. ACT must be the architect of what I would currently call the



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Alliance's capacity. - In fact, initially I called that “combat system” but combat system is probably not the best word. So now I come with the word of capacity. Nevertheless, after I have described to you what I mean by capacity, I would appreciate any suggestion for a better wording. For the time being, we will continue to call it capacity, - keeping in mind we are at the strategic level. A capacity that ACT must continuously transform taking into account its short and long-term requirements.

In the short term, ACT has all the necessary competences to implement vital adaptations in order to preserve the lives of our fellow servicemen and women deployed on current operations. In the short term, ACT has also a major role to play in the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan.

In the long-term, ACT can place our Alliance in a position of superiority to face the future threats. We have the means to innovate, experiment with new solutions. Be audacious, there is no risk to think out of the box. The only risk is to have our ideas rejected or customized. I will fully assume that risk as a Commander. There is no risk to think out of the box in the long-term.

But what is this “*capacity*” I have just talked about? Well, I mean the integration of NATO Allies’ national and collective capabilities into an operationally effective whole capacity that enables the Alliance to fulfil



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its three core tasks (Collective Defence, Crisis management, Cooperative Security).

A fully integrated capacity on which we would base our efficiency, and be open to Partnerships and cooperation with a wide range of actors.

It is a first broad vision that I want to share with you today. I want us to focus on the output of Transformation, on this idea of the “capacity”, not the label itself, but the idea, working together and uniting our effort to develop the forces the Alliance needs for the future.

This will be the head-mark for our Transformation and the backbone of all our projects.

Before going further and explaining how I foresee our work as an integrated and cohesive team to support this vision, let me briefly provide you with a little bit of my background, which I hope will help you understand what I want us as a team to achieve together.

I joined the French Air Force in 1979 and qualified as a fighter pilot in 1983, in a period when the Cold War was still going on.

As we constantly assessed our missions through NATO, I was quickly impressed by the high level of interoperability, trust and confidence between Alliance’s forces, the high tempo of training and exercises we



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were able to sustain, and the deep knowledge of NATO's doctrine by every single operator.

For instance, I remember taking part in very short notice exercises to fly towards Germany where Germans engineers were able to perform cross servicing for any aircraft. We formed ad-hoc patrols in the air, knowing our role and place during the mission with just our call-signs, thanks to the procedures developed by the Alliance.

We were extremely ready, responsive, and interoperable, relying on the backbone of the NATO Command Structure, especially its Command and Control capability. This structure was and remains today the backbone of our Alliance, enabling for instance NATO to respond within minutes for Air Policing missions. The strength of NATO has always been its strong command and control capability.

During my following assignments in different squadrons, I saw the dividends of this high level of integration, in particular during crisis management operations in the Balkans.

After an assignment at the Joint Staff College and one position at the NATO Department of the Joint Operational Planning Staff in France, I was assigned to Brunssum in 1999 as Deputy Head of the Combined Joint Task Force Branch. There, I was able to meet some of you present today in this room.

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I had the chance to take part in major NATO exercises such as Strong Resolve 2002, which in size and scope was close to what we are currently able to deliver for Trident Juncture 15.

I learned the added value of major exercises, as a true reality check, a training ground laboratory and a test of interoperability for our joint, multinational forces.

We can learn from this past as this is exactly what we currently strive to enhance our readiness and responsiveness.

From 2004 to 2008, I was assigned to the planning division and later as deputy head of the budget and performance division in the French Air Force Command. These positions persuaded me of the necessity to continuously and proactively transform our forces, because the world is not waiting on us.

But leading Transformation means finding the right tuning, the right measure, while continuously fostering innovation, and whenever possible exploit this innovation to explore new directions.

As a senior military adviser to the French Minister of Defence for two years, I participated in two NATO Summits in Lisbon and Chicago and many ministerial meetings.



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It gave me the clear conviction that military issues must be brought at the strategic level to be sufficiently addressed. But their credibility, even if we are at a strategic level, often rely on clear examples and military explanation. This is the challenge and I could feel it again last week at the Defence Ministerial Meeting. We must stay at the strategic level. But sometimes, to explain the things and what we intend to do, we have to provide some technical and tactical details.

I then took the lead of the French Air Force in September 2012.

I asked my airmen and women to face, together, as a team, numerous challenges.

It was a very demanding task, as they were engaged on many fronts, in North Africa, in the Middle East or on Air Policing over the Baltic States. And alongside these operational commitments, we conducted a deep transformation of the French Air Force, necessary to adapt to the future.

I came to another conclusion during this last assignment.

We must avoid the trap of having the impression that military operations always run smoothly, that preparing and employing forces is easy and simple. Trust me, nothing is simple, nothing can be taken as granted in our business.

Therefore, we must maintain a high level of awareness and always be prepared to be challenged and surprised in the future.



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Most recently, bolstered by these key lessons from my career – team working, strategic mind-set, the crucial need to transform and innovate - I was honoured to take this command on the 30th September.

I am confident that, with committed people like yourselves, we can be together at the cornerstone of NATO's future.

So, looking forward to the coming months, I want this Command to be resolutely oriented towards the development of NATO's future capacity, while concurrently and coherently addressing short-term adaptation requirements, such as the Readiness Action Plan and other important preparatory works for Warsaw.

I want ACT to consider this capacity as the central strategic output of this headquarters that unifies national capabilities together into a cohesive force enabling NATO to achieve its 3 core tasks.

And I want you to adopt a strategic mind-set for your contribution to this capacity.

To help you reaching these goals, let me go a little bit further with my vision on what is this capacity. This capacity is composed of five main areas.



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1. Central: C4ISTAR (Command, Control, Computers, Communications, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target, Acquisition and Reconnaissance).

C4ISTAR will increasingly become the heart of modern warfare, as the ability not only to plan and conduct operations but also to connect our forces.

Today, we have forces able to connect themselves together. It is our role to foresee the future C4I. We must reflect:

- on how NATO forces should connect together through C4I in the future,
- how ISR and command and control could be better integrated as one single capability. We should not disconnect, and consider independently, C4I, C4, C2 and ISTAR. We must think this is a capability in itself.
- how we provide a global and shared situation awareness
- how we provide the appropriate connectivity at the different levels of the chain of command
- and how this chain of command – I would say [cloud] – could be rapidly distributed to create decentralized networks when the situation requires.



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I know that we have already many initiatives in this field and the Federated Mission Networking is one of them, but only a first step. We have to look further. This will be the first area and probably the most important one for the preparation of the future.

This ambition is not new: again read the FFAO! Everything is in there.

In a nutshell, we have to think “system”. And the backbone of our system will be C4ISTAR.

2. 2nd area: Projection, mobility and sustainability

This is another key area for NATO’s fighting capacity. Because this area will continue to enable our forces to deploy and to sustain their operations.

We must provide the Alliance with the appropriate points of embarkation and debarkation as well as all necessary enablers to facilitate the integration of these forces in the theatres of operations as required.

We must look at how the civilian world address these logistics issues with an extensive use of digital systems and promote “smart ideas”.

Our development must also take into account the revolutions underway in terms of the extended range of our platforms and the consequences of future reduced footprints in areas of operations, a trend which could be accentuated by a modification of our way to supply forces.

This is the future we must anticipate here.



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3. 3rd area: training

ACT is well placed to develop innovative ideas to ensure the best operational training and readiness for our men and women.

If we want to build an efficient capacity, we will have to provide the resources, the means to train and exercise its components.

Here, I foresee a wide aperture to leverage new modelling and simulation technologies, to continuously better connect national activities as well as to quickly implement and experiment new concepts and doctrine.

We have already initiated this shift in our exercises. Indeed, they offer many opportunities to be used as a demonstration of our continuous innovation. At the end, exercises will send an underlying message of the credibility of our Alliance capacity and posture, and finally will bolster the deterrence. The question of deterrence was part of all the meetings I had last week in Brussels. How are we sure that we provide a posture that is deterrent enough not only for the Eastern threats, but also for the Southern threats? This is a question that we have to work on.

Exercises, especially through LIVEX, such as the one of Trident Juncture 15, are demonstrating that we have the capability to operate, that we have the required interoperability.

4. 4th area: manpower



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NATO's fighting capacity will rely on the quality, and on the competencies of the people who will be part of it.

It is likely that their education and individual training will remain a national responsibility. This is true. It stresses ACT's core role to support Nations in connecting educational activities, in recognising good practice and building on the wealth of national expertise, so well embodied in NATO's centres of excellence.

ACT can design new ways to deliver education, leveraging new information technologies, and can as well work as a pathfinder to imagine how we can foster the necessary agility and flexibility NATO's leaders and operators will need in future operational environment.

We must help the people part of this capacity to be very adaptive, as many of our opponents already are.

5. 5th area: capabilities themselves

Building NATO's fighting capacity means providing the Alliance with the required capabilities to meet its level of ambition with each capability being developed along the DOTMLPFI framework; with each capability developed as part of the whole capacity .

Here, I really urge all of you to think of capabilities as a coherent and integrated part of this core capacity, not standalone pieces.



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As a good example of NATO's capacity, look carefully at the Readiness Action Plan. In fact, we are implementing a plan that aims at providing the right tools in the five main areas I have just mentioned. But we must look at their long-term aspects as well.

Ladies and Gentlemen, whatever your position in Norfolk, Washington DC, Brussels, Mons, Monsanto, Stavanger or Bydgoszcz, I want you to be convinced that we have the ability, rather the responsibility, to build this capacity enabling the Alliance to fulfil the whole spectrum of its core tasks today and tomorrow . No one else other than ACT can better achieve this.

So, we have all an individual responsibility to increase dynamic, cross-functional working to make sure we address the short and long-term requirements of this capacity on which NATO will base its deterrence posture in the most coherent manner possible.

We must be curious, achieve better exchanges across the Directorates and above all, break out of our silos.

We have to think together strategically and advertise our findings and achievements at the most appropriate level to deliver the outcomes we require.



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It is the only way to gain traction outside ACT. I am not saying that we may not back our words with technical deeds or facts, but that they should only be examples and not be a refuge against too technically focused narratives.

Thinking strategically also requires us to maintain a continuity and a coherency between all our strands of work. The Framework for Future Alliance Operations provides us with the criteria to select our best courses of action when building the core capacity.

I believe that all the solutions and proposals that this Headquarters will provide to NATO and the Nations to enhance or adapt part of the capacity must be cross-checked against their ability to increase:

NATO's operational agility, strategic awareness, security networking, shared resilience and/or strategic communication (the 5 strategic military perspectives addressed in the Framework for Future Alliance Operations).

I urge you to propose any refinement according to these principles if needed.

And I would like to really emphasize two of these principles which will take an increasing place in our projects.

First, the crucial need for the Alliance to develop a robust strategic communication, and this issue of STRATCOM came up in all the meetings I had last week, even with SECGEN, especially in the context



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of recent events in the Middle East. And I have been asked last week to play an active role in this domain.

Second, the need for ACT to strengthen its security networking, with Partner Nations or Organizations with mutually beneficial relationships, but also with the whole community of experts in academia, think tanks or centres of excellence.

In my view, this wide network will help us to be a proactive and reactive source of proposals. Together with them, we can better innovate in an organization that fully embraces innovation as part of its culture.

Therefore, I envision an organizational climate within ACT which will foster innovation, creativity, personal development, and individual empowerment.

I have already told the Flag Officers and General Officers how I want to interact more often with you, with the specialists and stakeholders to generate fruitful debates, brainstorming, and discussions.

I want a professional, friendly, confident and trusting atmosphere within the staff to be able to speak with one but very strong and effective voice in the outside world.

To enable such a climate, I believe in three main values which I want you to take on-board.



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- Respect

Respect must exist between people, whether they work in this Headquarters, in our sister command in Mons, in other places of the NATO Command or Force Structure, or in national positions. I want everyone to listen to others, to understand national or other Headquarters' positions and perceptions.

Discussion and debate is very positive for generating new ideas, as long as you are respectful in providing constructive criticism, advice and recommendations.

Be sure that with SACEUR and CMC, we are very good friends. Last week, we agreed to continue working together, and to reporting to higher authorities with one voice. I expect the same from you.

So, respect must be also demonstrated in following or responding on time to all the directives we receive at different levels. It will reinforce our willingness to see ACT speaking with one very credible and audible voice.

Respect comes along with **integrity**. We are all responsible for the whole chain of stakeholders which will develop NATO's capacity.

Each of you must understand that he or she has an essential role to play in the chain, which ACT can be the strongest link.



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Respect is also to have esteem for what each Nation can provide to our Alliance. I want the staff to take the most benefit of different cultural perceptions, because this diversity makes us stronger!

- Service

Service because all of us strive to ensure the success of our Alliance in guaranteeing security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area. Service is to keep in mind our responsibility towards those who are currently or will be engaged in the future in the defence of our values and territories. Serving is also to understand that strengthening NATO's capacity, is as beneficial to the Alliance as to each of its Nations.

Therefore, we must serve in overcoming all obstacles, keeping our ultimate objectives in mind. Our focus must remain on the objectives.

- and Excellence

I look also to Excellence, probably the most important value, in my view. Collective Excellence for sure to provide the Alliance with the best outputs, but individual excellence as well.

Over the past two weeks I have seen a wealth of high potential in this Headquarters. I want to foster the conditions to encourage these talents express themselves, to develop your own individual excellence.

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For instance, many enlisted personnel have skills that are unknown or unexploited by the staff. I have therefore discussed with our Command Senior Enlisted Leader, Jack, and charged him to ensure each enlisted member's duties are valued and integral to our overall mission success.

But what is true for the enlisted people, must also apply for everybody else in this Headquarters.

For instance, we have been tasked to continue to develop new concepts, to develop the Readiness Action Plan, with no additional resources. Therefore, the first thing to do, before asking for more resources, we have and we will continue to fight for more flexibility inside the headquarters. We also have to make sure that we understand, in all of our areas of responsibility, what the competences of each people are and how we can make the best use of those competences. That's very important and I would say that's absolutely crucial.

And my aim is that everyone in our HQ can find a way to enhance his own personal and professional development.

Listen to me. It is not forbidden to have fun at work! It's even better providing that the work is done of course!

Along with these values, the climate of our organization also depends upon our families' well-being. So, I will strive to provide more welfare

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opportunities, so that our families meet each other and strengthen the ties of our community. I will encourage all the initiatives in that way.

Our great Host Nation, the United States, and our host state, Virginia, offer an outstanding welcome and living conditions to our NATO community on which we will continue to capitalize.

My fellow ACT members

In closing, I want to pay tribute to what has been done over the last 13 years, and especially what you have achieved with my predecessor for whom I have a deep respect, General Paloméros.

We will build on his legacy of Transformation, which I agree is a continuous forward looking process, which enables proactive adaptation of NATO's posture, organizations and capabilities.

These are very strong foundations upon which to deliver the output of Transformation: NATO's capacity to fulfil its core task now and tomorrow.

I have great confidence in your will, commitment, imagination and innovation to support this vision.

I trust you, and I really need you to support my role as a Strategic Commander. You are not working for me, you are working WITH me. You are working WITH me to help NATO remain credible, relevant and



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deterrent vis-à-vis all potential threats our Alliance may have to meet in the future.

- I know that you will think strategically, as a strategic command;
- I know that you will focus on the output of our Transformation, on a full capacity-based approach;
- I know that you will help ACT speak with one strong and credible voice, as a strong team.

There may be some of you who think that their work, as good as it may be, has no impact on today's and tomorrow's changing world. Let me assure you it is not true. As economist Peter Drucker said: “*The best way to predict the future is to create it*”.

The Future starts here, with you, with all of us as one team.

I thank you for your attention and I'm eager to work with you and get your perspectives, insights, comments on this first presentation of my vision for ACT.