

“New Challenges - Better Capabilities”

Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the Bratislava Security Conference

Ambassador Kacer,
Foreign Minister,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear Friends,

Thank you, Ambassador, for those kind words of introduction. It is a great pleasure for me to be here today. This is my first visit to Slovakia since I took office as NATO Secretary General in August. Actually, I think Slovakia plays a special role for me. When I was appointed Prime Minister of Denmark eight years ago, I paid my first official visit as Prime Minister to Slovakia and today and tomorrow I will chair my first Ministerial in my new capacity as Secretary General of NATO in Slovakia. So you can imagine that this country plays a special role for me and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to participate in this conference, and in this splendid setting.

I am aware that my remarks are being transmitted to several universities here in Slovakia, as well as in Budapest, Brno and Warsaw. I just hope that the VTC technology is working correctly and that you are all able to hear and see me clearly.

I have looked through your programme, and I have noticed that it covers virtually all the key issues that are on NATO's agenda today: our new Strategic Concept, the meaning of Article 5, NATO-Russia relations, military transformation, nuclear matters, and even the difficult economic climate. I would like to speak about an issue that does not feature specifically on your programme, although I am sure it will have come up in your discussions – and that is Afghanistan. My second topic of course will be the Strategic Concept.

Afghanistan is the most complex challenge which NATO has ever undertaken. And I am well aware that there are an increasing number of people, also here in Slovakia, who are asking if the cost of our engagement in Afghanistan is too high. To these people, I want to say very clearly and unambiguously that the cost of inaction would be far higher. Leaving Afghanistan behind would once again turn the country into a training ground for Al Qaeda. The pressure on nuclear-armed Pakistan would be tremendous. Instability would spread throughout Central Asia. And it would only be a matter of time until we, here in Europe, would feel the consequences of all of this.

At our meeting here in Bratislava, NATO Defence Ministers will discuss how we can make a greater effort towards transition – to encourage and to help the Afghans themselves to look after their own country. That means, from a security point of view, Afghans taking lead responsibility, province by province, with international forces in a supporting role.

To achieve this, we all have to invest more in training and equipping the Afghan security forces. And we need other international actors to redouble their efforts to help with reconstruction and development. It is in fact a very simple calculation: we have to do more today, if we want to be able to do less tomorrow.

Clearly, Afghanistan remains NATO's number one priority. But at the same time, it provides a very clear example of the way that security challenges for the Alliance have changed. Terrorism is no longer specific to a single state or issue – it has now mutated into a global franchise.

But there are other illustrations of new, complex security challenges. The consequences of the information age for example. Yes, technological progress has lifted millions out of poverty, out of ignorance. But it has also given many more countries and many more individuals the potential to access weapons of mass destruction. And of course, associated with the information age is the challenge of cyber-attacks -- which, as we saw in Estonia two years ago, can seriously destabilise a country.

Energy security is another emerging challenge. Indeed, many countries –including your own – have already felt the effects of disruption in energy supply, and in the next few years, the competition for energy will only get more intense. This means that we need to think about how to protect our supply lines, our transit routes, and our critical infrastructure.

And let us not forget what is perhaps the most global of challenges -- climate change. We are only just beginning to wake up to the potential security implications of global warming – implications that are likely to be felt most severely in those regions of the world that are least able to deal with them.

These are just some examples of the increasingly complex risks and threats to our security that we now face. They also serve to show why reaching consensus in NATO on whether and how to respond to these challenges has become increasingly difficult.

Indeed, this is one of the main reasons why the Alliance decided earlier this year to develop a new Strategic Concept. Because this should help us to make the right political choices; to better prioritise our tasks; to clarify the political and military tools that we need to have available; and to better identify the resources needed to fulfil them. To put it simply, the new Strategic Concept will give us a vision of NATO in the changing security environment – and it will give us a firm, and agreed, foundation for all our future activity.

We have deliberately made the development of a new Strategic Concept a very open and very inclusive process. We are engaging the public through a series of conferences and other activities – and your own conference here can make a valuable contribution. We are using new media to ensure that the wider public can also stay informed and contribute. We have, for example, designed a special webpage for this purpose on the NATO website, and I would strongly encourage you to visit this.

Former US Secretary of State Madeline Albright is leading a group of 12 experts that I have selected to come up with analyses and recommendations by next spring. On the basis of those recommendations I will then prepare a draft paper for with our member nations. And I hope then to deliver a new Strategic Concept to NATO Heads of State and Government for their approval before the end of next year.

So much for the process. But what about the content? Without wanting to prejudice the debate in any way, let me mention five issues that, I personally believe, will require particular attention – and that will undoubtedly take considerable time to work out in a way that all 28 Allies will feel comfortable with.

First, NATO's core task was, is, and will remain, the defence of our territory and our populations. For our Alliance to endure, all members must feel that they are safe and secure. NATO has never failed in this respect. And I intend that it never will. However, we must also realize that territorial defence very often starts far from our own borders, like in Afghanistan. And territorial defence also requires a capability to deal with the new security threats like terrorism and cyber defence.

Second, the new Strategic Concept will need to urge continued military transformation – to allow us to cover the full spectrum of tasks, from collective defence to peace support operations. It should also encourage Allies to work more closely together in acquiring key capabilities and in funding operations. Needless to say, the current financial crisis and the budgetary problems faced by all our nations only make this a more pressing requirement. This is also about taxpayer's money. We have to make efficient use of our resources, through better cooperation, through better coordination and through collective solutions.

Third, our new strategy must incorporate the notion of a "Comprehensive Approach". Today's security challenges cannot be dealt with by NATO alone. Security in Afghanistan, and elsewhere, demands a comprehensive application of economic, political and other measures that go far beyond NATO's capabilities. There is a vital role for NATO to play within such a comprehensive approach – but it requires the Alliance to be much better connected with other international players, including the United Nations, the European Union and the NGO community.

Fourth, our new Strategic Concept must reaffirm a long-standing NATO objective: to help complete the consolidation of Europe as a continent that is whole, free and at peace. NATO's open door policy will continue. It will continue because it contributes to Euro-Atlantic security, and it provides a strong incentive, for aspirants, to get their house in order. And it will continue because it is an expression of a key principle on which any European security order must be based: namely the free choice of alignment. Each and every sovereign nation has the right to decide alliance affiliation itself.

And finally, relations with Russia. It is clear that we will continue to have differences with Russia but we must not let these differences hold the entire NATO-Russia relationship hostage. After all, NATO and Russia also have many common interests – in Afghanistan, in combating terrorism, and in preventing nuclear proliferation. And so what we need is a relationship that allows us to pursue these long-standing common interests, and which will not be de-railed every time we disagree.

Now don't get me wrong. A more mature NATO-Russia relationship will not mean that the Alliance will sacrifice its core principles. Clearly we won't. But we do need a new beginning in NATO-Russia relations and, as a first step, I have already proposed that NATO and Russia, together, should assess what the real threats to our security are. There I have suggested that NATO and Russia launch a joint review of the 21st century security challenges. And I will visit Moscow in the next few weeks, and I look forward to the opportunity to discuss not just concrete ideas for taking this idea forward, but also to discuss our relationship more broadly,

including in the context of NATO's new Strategic Concept and Russia's own national security strategy.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

For the past 60 years, North America and Western Europe have formed a trans-atlantic community of nations. It is a community that has evolved considerably. It is a community that has achieved enormous success. It is a community that has been significantly strengthened -- politically and militarily -- with the membership of new nations, including your own. And it is a community determined to adapt further, to meet the new challenges that it faces.

Getting our new Strategic Concept right is a prerequisite for further success. This has to be a broad-based effort, grounded in solid political and public debate. This morning I have shared with you some of my thoughts on the key issues that the Concept should cover. I now look to you to make the most of the opportunities that are available so that you can contribute your thoughts and ideas too.

Thank you.