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NATO'S CONTRIBUTION TO A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH OF THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY

Introduction

I am very pleased to have been able to accept State Secretary Espen Barth Gide's invitation to address today's seminar, and thank Norway for its initiative in organising it.

I want to talk today about comprehensive approaches to comprehensive threats.

During the Cold War, NATO defined security principally in military terms: both the situation in Europe at large and specific crises posed military dangers requiring military preparations and potentially military responses. But since the fall of the Berlin Wall, our understanding of security has broadened considerably; and, as highlighted in NATO's 1999 Strategic Concept, we have recognised the importance of political, economic, social and environmental dimensions in addition to the military.

Today, more than 50,000 troops are deployed under NATO command in operations and missions on three different continents: in the Balkans, in the Mediterranean, in Iraq, in Afghanistan, and in Africa.

I will try to identify two key themes which need to underpin the way in which NATO – and indeed other international organisations – undertake their roles today in crisis management and conflict resolution. The need for a comprehensive approach, and the comprehensive nature of the challenges we face.

Our experience of operations tells us clearly that few, if any, crises today can be resolved solely with military force. Peace, security and development are more interconnected than ever. The key to progress is to work together across a broad spectrum of fields (diplomatic, security, judicial, economic, humanitarian, etc.). Accordingly, NATO must be

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able to cooperate and coordinate with a range of other actors in the management of crises, including the planning and conduct of operations.

Comprehensive Approach - Basic Concept

At the NATO Summit in Riga last November, Allies agreed that today's challenges require a "comprehensive approach" to operations by the international community, and tasked the North Atlantic Council to develop pragmatic proposals for NATO's contribution to such a collective effort.

Let me make it clear that I am not talking about "NATO's Comprehensive Approach", as if NATO laid claim to some central role in orchestrating the efforts of other international institutions and non-governmental organisations. It is a matter, rather, of NATO's contribution to a Comprehensive Approach adopted by the whole of the International Community.

This is not new. In planning and conducting its operations, NATO has always sought to embed them in a wider framework, linking the provision of security to the pursuit of reconstruction and development. However, in the past, this has been done on a largely ad-hoc basis.

But the ad-hoc approach has limitations. It forces commanders on the ground to devote time and attention to resolving issues that could have been addressed in advance. It requires a degree of flexibility and mutual understanding on the part of various actors which cannot always be assumed or assured. And it can be upset by the constant rotation of personnel at the tactical level, leading to a loss of continuity and of relevant knowledge.

We need structured and effective coordination at all levels so that each organisation's efforts are complemented and mutually reinforced with a view to achieving common or at least similar goals – and all this without compromising any organisation's independence, and without infringing on the humanitarian space to which non-governmental organisations understandably attach great importance.

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Levels of Engagement

In pursuing this approach, NATO is looking at three levels of engagement with the International Community: at the political-strategic level, where we need to build mutual understanding and achieve better cooperation through regular engagement with all actors, especially the key international organizations; at the operational level, where detailed planning is done with other international actors and the essential practical link with the host nation is established; and at the tactical level, where there is a need for all players to be motivated and empowered to cooperate effectively with one another.

Some Key Principles

Let me next try to identify five key principles which should define NATO's contribution to a Comprehensive Approach.

The first is ownership. The Comprehensive Approach is a common obligation of the International Community, ideally under the leadership of the United Nations. Where the international community is operating in support of a democratically elected government, as in Afghanistan today, the ownership of the task of reform and reconstruction must rest with the Government – with the nation – itself.

The second, as a related matter, is coordination with other players. NATO does not aspire to coordinate the activities of other international actors, but rather to coordinate with them.

The third is civilian capabilities. NATO has no requirement to develop capabilities strictly for civilian purposes, but it needs to ensure an appropriate civil-military interface and be able, where necessary, to exploit dual use capabilities, particularly in the early stages of an operation where non-military actors may not yet be present, or may be prevented from acting by the prevailing security situation. That said, NATO's role in crisis management will continue to be a predominantly – but not exclusively – a military one.

The fourth is political direction. The North Atlantic Council needs to ensure political oversight of any NATO contribution and any adjustments to its operational objectives.

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The fifth is the need for pragmatism and flexibility. This is a field in which we are learning lessons fast, and a field, moreover, in which our arrangements for cooperation must be supple and flexible, in keeping with the potential variety of circumstances in which they may be brought to bear.

Areas to Improve NATO's Contribution to a Comprehensive Approach

With these principles in mind, Allies are examining four areas in which we can improve the Alliance's contribution to a Comprehensive Approach.

First, we need fuller and timely political-military assessments, and an ability to take into account military and non-military aspects of an engagement, throughout the entire duration of an operation, including its initial planning.

Second, we need a more thorough and systematic lessons-learned process, and greater use of training, education and exercise opportunities, wherever possible bringing together civilian and military actors.

Third, NATO needs to enhance cooperation with external actors. Engagement with the United Nations, the European Union and other international organisations, non-governmental organisations and relevant local bodies should become a matter of routine, and not an exception, at all three levels, political-strategic, operational and tactical.

Finally, we need a comprehensive approach to public information. The involved organisations should, wherever possible, discuss their respective media strategies to ensure their consistency. Organisations will naturally insist on preserving the independence of their voices, but it should be possible to reconcile this insistence with at least that degree of coordination necessary to prevent gratuitous damage to the standing of other organisations and the effectiveness of their efforts.

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The Challenges

Delivering such progress is not going to be easy: if it was, we would have done it already.

We have to be clear-headed about the challenges that lie in the path of progress – political, institutional and cultural. Clearly NATO needs to improve its own performance, its own working practices. But the main challenges will lie in managing co-operation with other actors – international organisations, non-governmental organisations, and national and local authorities.

Let me be bold enough to mention three examples. Firstly – and notwithstanding the firm leadership of the two Secretaries General – it sometimes feels as if there is a yawning cultural gap between NATO and the United Nations. Despite the fact that, in Afghanistan and Kosovo, NATO is doing the UN's work, under UN mandates, NATO is too often seen as an alien, military organisation – a war-like machine to be contained, rather than an ally to be fostered. This perception must be corrected.

Secondly – and notwithstanding the 21 members that the two organisations have in common – we face challenges in enabling NATO and the European Union to work together. Success for the international community in Afghanistan and in Kosovo depends on effective co-operation between these two organisations. I do not expect the institutional difficulties which constrain this relationship to disappear overnight. But we must find pragmatic and flexible ways of working together. The political will must be found.

Thirdly, cooperation with NGOs. For sometimes very practical reasons, NGOs have traditionally been very sceptical of too close an association with military peacekeeping forces. But more and more, leading NGOs are recognising the importance of ensuring that the military understand their objectives, and that they act in a way which promotes the delivery of these objectives. This best practice needs to be spread.

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Comprehensive Threats

I have used almost all of my time talking about the comprehensive approach, and I make no excuse for this – it is important. But I want to end by touching briefly on my second theme. In so doing, I should stress what follows is largely personal – reflecting my experience of the last 4 years in NATO – as well, I hope, as largely true.

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer often rightly refers to the importance of the “indivisibility of security”. I want to examine now the other side of this coin – what I might call the “indivisibility of insecurity”.

I have talked so far about a comprehensive approach to peace operations. But we need to bear in mind that the nature of the threat which we – whether the UN, the EU or NATO – face today in such operations is “comprehensive” as well, i.e. complex and multi-dimensional. We see in Afghanistan the complicated interactions of insurgency, terrorism, criminality and corruption that form the context for our military presence. Peace operations are no longer simply about the separation of clearly identifiable armed groups. We see the ease with which individuals or groups of individuals can switch from being friends to enemies and vice versa. Armed groups operating with the tacit consent of a civilian population pose a whole new set of challenges to an international military presence. And in today’s operations, we also see the relative skill of opposing forces in dominating the digital stage – using the internet to influence and inspire, and beating the international community at its own game in its use of the media.

I believe that we can see four emerging conclusions from these developments:

- Firstly, that the threats we face have become a universal currency amongst those hostile to the interests of the international community. The weapon of the criminal may tomorrow be the weapon of the terrorist, the next day the weapon of the insurgent, and ultimately the weapon of the state actor.
- Secondly, that security challenges do not respect international or institutional boundaries. Bombs on the streets of our cities and bombs in southern Afghanistan share a

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common inspiration, if not a common organisation. The presence of trafficked women or heroin in our societies links directly to criminality in the Balkans and in Afghanistan.

- Thirdly, that these security challenges are real and tough. They require a robust military response – not just in terms of hardware but also in terms of doctrine and training.
- Lastly, and most fundamentally, today's security challenges increasingly blur the distinction between "peace operations" and preparations to maintain our own security. Stability and security in Afghanistan mean security for our own nations. And our obligation to defend our own nations means that we must look closely at the kind of threats which are emerging in distant lands.

The threats are demanding, global, indivisible.

For NATO, at least, we must do better in defining and demonstrating the indivisibility of security within and beyond our borders, in response to these indivisible threats. We must show our publics and our parliamentarians, how the role of our soldiers in Afghanistan is directly related to safety on our streets. We must demonstrate that NATO is preparing itself to face the security challenges of the 21st century – from terrorism, proliferation, cyber attacks, and so on – and to do so in a manner which is consistent with the spirit of the Atlantic Alliance – sharing benefits and burdens equally, adopting comprehensive approaches to comprehensive threats.