

**Ulrich Brandenburg, Ambassador
Permanent Representative of Germany on the North Atlantic Council**

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After a 60 Years Success Story – NATO’s Tasks for the Coming Decade

It has become a tradition that, a few weeks after a NATO Summit, we gather here at Adenauer-Stiftung in Brussels to discuss where we are at NATO, and what the outcome of the Summit means for us. We did so a year ago after the Bucharest Summit, we are doing so again today, and let me first of all thank you as the organizers for the initiative, for keeping security policy on the agenda in this part of Brussels (where NATO seems far away), and for inviting me again.

When I thought what I am going to tell you tonight, I admit I regretted again I am not an analyst: because analysts have the advantage of distance. They can look at things in a historical perspective much more easily than those of us who are involved in the nitty-gritty of the organization. NATO – in terms of Ministerials and Summits – is beginning to rival the European Union. For us at Headquarters this frequency of high-level events translates into more and more reports, tight deadlines, countless meetings at committee and Council level, and the general sense that this organization is rotating faster and faster: something you would normally not suggest to a person that has just completed his or her 60th birthday.

And if you are in the middle of it, you tend to see the problems, rather than the achievements. Fortunately since Strasbourg and Kehl a number of analyses have been published and they confirm that indeed most expectations have been met.

You cannot always control the messaging. Last year’s Summit in Bucharest was supposed to be about Afghanistan, about the “comprehensive approach” to one of our most serious challenges. But the media were full of Georgia and Ukraine. And this time the immediate attention was caught by the issue of a new Secretary General. The bottom line is: this Summit did send a strong signal of unity; it did devote considerable attention to Afghanistan (which continues to be our major operational challenge); it did adequately reflect France’s return to the integrated military structure; it was more than atmospherically marked by the presence of the new President of the United States; it was able to welcome two new members, and it even

found time for some reflection and symbolism – with the ceremony on the bridge, the Declaration of Alliance Security and the mandate for a new Strategic Concept. This, I think, is about what you can do in less than 24 hours.

So much for the Summit. Today we are back in the real world and exposed to real questions, which will keep us busy for much of the coming decade.

First: operations.

Around 15.000 NATO soldiers are still stationed in Kosovo. KFOR until now has been the least controversial element of the international presence in the region, and is still needed. More than 70.000 NATO soldiers today are deployed in operations worldwide. The biggest challenge undoubtedly is Afghanistan.

What we see is that NATO has become more and more insistent in urging the Afghans themselves and the other institutions of the international community to take their share of responsibility for the resolution of a conflict, which is – like it or not - widely associated with NATO today. Summits are opportunities to raise awareness beyond the security and defence establishments we usually address. You have the Heads of State and Government there, a higher profile and a broader spectrum of responsibility. This did not turn Strasbourg and Kehl into a pledging conference, but significant new commitments were made. There was also support for the US approach to deal with Afghanistan and Pakistan in connection - although there is no appetite to engage NATO troops further east.

Second: Dealing with Russia.

At its 50th anniversary in 1999 NATO had 19 members, up from 16 just a few weeks before. The first enlargement round after the end of the Cold War had just been completed. The new members – Poland, the Czech Republic and Hungary – were happy to be inside and Kosovo (remember Operation Allied Force) was the main subject overshadowing everything else. Today we are 28. I consider the enlargement that we have achieved at NATO over the last ten years (and hopefully the FYROM issue will soon be solved) as a remarkable and very positive development: Each of the new members is making its own distinct contribution and is adding its own flavour to the Alliance.

At the same time it is natural that an organization that has grown from 16 or 19 to 28 becomes less coherent, internal debates become a lot more time consuming, and efforts to build and strengthen consensus are all the more necessary. Over the last few years we have made significant progress at NATO in restoring lost confidence.

Over the same period, however, (and more visibly since the Georgia Crisis last August) we have again come to realize how different the experiences are that our Nations have made with Russia. We should not underestimate the importance of this historical baggage, because it helps understand – even for those who do not share it – the apprehension by some Allies vis-à-vis our “strategic partner” to the East. It is no secret that finding consensus on how to deal with Russia has become more difficult in an Alliance at 26 or 28 than it was before. On that as well we have made progress recently, there have been several consensus building efforts, and NATO Foreign Ministers have proposed a resumption of NATO-RUS activities. But we need to do more, including through a more honest strategic debate.

Third: Collective defence.

Even though not directly linked to the security of any of our Allies, the Georgia crisis once again triggered a discussion about the Alliance’s core business, and raised questions about its ability and readiness to honour our commitment to collective defense against a conventional attack in Europe. This should not be controversial. For us Germans there can be no doubt about the seriousness of Article 5. To give an example: for many years we have participated in air policing, to protect the airspace of our Baltic Allies. Unlike like others we also never questioned the need to continue this operation, which we see as an expression of solidarity. We will look what may need to be done in addition to provide reassurance, through deterrence as much as through confidence building. It is clear however, that we and many others do not want to be drawn into a political and military confrontation for which we do not see any grounds. All of us are well advised to avoid loose talk about a “New Cold War”. I am glad that this has disappeared from the headlines.

Fourth, and for the sake of completeness, let me refer to some of the so called “new security challenges” which are adding to our agenda and often making consensus more difficult. Of course everyone can raise every issue at NATO: the Alliance is an essential forum of transatlantic political consultations. And one can with good reason discuss questions related to the security of our nations. At the same time we should have a common interest to keep

NATO workable and effective, and this requires a certain rigour in questioning where NATO can actually contribute to the solution of the issues we discuss.

No doubt NATO is the right venue to deal with military challenges: to protect our nations against an armed attack or to safeguard our security through expeditionary operations, under a UN mandate – like in Afghanistan or Kosovo. This is where NATO has a comparative advantage.

Climate change, migration, shortage of energy supplies, water and other resources, the risks of globalization, trade imbalances, the increasing vulnerability of our information systems – all that can obviously affect our security. But sometimes you get the sense that the multiplication of subjects on NATO's agenda is diluting our sense of purpose and opening up unnecessary controversies. Traditionally you will find Germany among those who use to call for a concentration on core functions of the Alliance – which can include for example, the protection of critical infrastructure and information systems of particular importance of our security, as well combating piracy off the African coast.

I realize that energy supplies – the flow of vital resources, as the Strategic Concept says – can be security-relevant. Remember the problems Bulgaria and other Allies were exposed to in January. But this experience also illustrates where the problem is: it is not in the political-military field, which NATO can cover in operational terms.

A word about US leadership. This was the first visit to Europe by the new American President, a president who is finding himself confronted with huge expectations. Interests and abilities of our nations of course will remain unchanged, and President Obama will not be able to produce miracles. But NATO more than other organizations depends on credible American leadership, a leadership that integrates, that is willing to listen, willing to convince and to work for consensus in a multilateral setting. For many important issues NATO will continue to be the venue of transatlantic consensus building. I am optimistic and confident enough to believe that a new American President will also mean a new chance for NATO.

In which areas? Let me again start with Afghanistan. For several years now our publics, our Members of Parliament, our media have discussed whether the glass is half full or half empty.

In Germany we are usually having this debate through the summer break in preparation for the annual extension of the mandate for our ISAF contingent. My own experience is that in spite of all doubts people are willing to listen – and to vote in favour of continued engagement – if they feel the concept is right.

We have given a lot of thought to this at NATO, probably more than at any other organization. Since Bucharest 2008 we are working on the basis of a “comprehensive strategic political-military plan”. But if you add the commitment, the authority and the credibility of a new administration, you get something like a “force multiplier” that can also mobilize additional efforts by other Allies.

Another area where NATO will strongly depend on American leadership and vision is our relationship with Russia. Allies are rightly concerned about some aspects of Russian policies. Russia as well has concerns that – in my view - have not been taken seriously enough. A reasonable modus vivendi with Russia requires that both sides are willing to listen to each other’s problems and to look at solutions. In the past, NATO was creative enough (in 1997 and 2002 with the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the Rome Documents) to provide the political and institutional framework – including clear-cut assurances to the Russian side and assurances by the Russians – to integrate the last two rounds of NATO enlargement in a broader concept aimed at strengthening security in all of Europe. Unfortunately we have not seen much of that creativity in recent years, and too much routine megaphone diplomacy instead.

To me, a particularly unfortunate example is the adapted CFE Treaty. Since 2007 we have reached a new level of deadlock due to Russia’s suspension of the existing treaty. In the years before, NATO’s own position had contributed to the problem. To say it bluntly: it has been unimaginative and self-defeating. Saving the CFE regime will be a huge challenge for us. Arms control talks between the US and Russia have just resumed last Friday. I do see a chance that arms control as well as nuclear and conventional disarmament – which have been part of NATO’s coherent approach to security since the 1960s – will again move up on our agenda.

A third area where already the past administration has played a positive role is NATO-EU: There is no contradiction between a strong NATO and a strong and operational ESDP, quite to the contrary. This is what we have also heard from our co-host President Sarkozy. France’s

reintegration, as we hear, is based on the assessment that European Security and Defence will not work if it attempts to rival NATO.

So far, so good – and imagine how productive we could be if we managed to coordinate the efforts by NATO and EU in crisis management and stabilization in a truly comprehensive approach, from early warning and assessment via joint planning, integration of civilian and military operations to a coordinated use of resources for reconstruction. NATO and the EU have a shared interest in anything that affects European Security. That is why joining their potentials would be an essential step towards greater efficiency. I realize this is dreaming aloud, but I was asked to reflect on the next decade.

[Anrede]

This historical context and the outlook are reflected in the “Declaration on Alliance Security”, agreed at the Strasbourg/Kehl Summit, which also charts the way to a new Strategic Concept for the next Summit possibly in late 2010, to replace the current (and still very good!) Strategic Concept dating from 1999. At NATO a Strategic Concept is at the top of a hierarchy of documents which – at the end – will translate into our defence planning and force postures.

You cannot force such an effort (and it is good we did not start it earlier), because if you do so the exercise can become extremely divisive. But there are examples that conceptual work can actually build and enlarge consensus. This work will probably start before the Summer break, involving outside expertise and at the same time making sure that all nations see their concerns and interests reflected. The new Secretary General will have a key rôle in steering this exercise. We must achieve both: preserving the essentials – the character of the Alliance – and adapting it to future challenges.

Since the end of the Cold War NATO as well as our national defences have undergone a huge transformation, starting with the 1990 London Summit, which already referred to a “transformed” Alliance in a changed world. We started off with the new Partnerships, the “hand of friendship” extended to our former adversaries, to be followed by three rounds of enlargement and several military operations in support of peace and stabilization. Transformation, in other words is ongoing, politically and militarily with the adaptation of our armed forces and the development of new capabilities, some of them NATO-owned or purchased and operated collectively.

All that needs to be properly explained to our publics and taxpayers, not least against the background of the financial and economic crisis – which is already affecting some of our Allies’ defence budgets. To that effect we would all benefit from a strengthened sense of purpose and a more coherent view – a “Grundkonsens” as we say in German – on the basic parameters of European security, and the conclusions to draw from them.

Such a coherent picture will have to reach beyond the geographical borders of the Alliance. It should be open for new proposals (such as Medvedyev’s idea of a security treaty) and an enhanced cooperation with Russia and other partners. None of this will make the Alliance superfluous. NATO will remain – to quote a slogan from the 1980s – “our insurance for peace”, although in a very different environment with new political and military challenges.

There is plenty of work left for analysts, therefore, and again we should listen to them, as we are approaching another conceptual stage in NATO’s history. At 60 this Alliance has survived its midlife crisis, it has somewhat enlarged as many of us have, but it is still agile enough to re-invent itself, as it has done several times in its history.