



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER
TRANSFORMATION**

**SACT's opening remarks at the Resilience Conference
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As delivered

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Minister Stropnický,
Ambassador O'Sullivan,
Mayor Alexander,
Dr Arafat,
Generals, Admirals, Air Marshal,
Distinguished guests,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Welcome to this conference, co-organized with our host city of Norfolk, on the topic of resilience.

Before we begin, I would like to come back to the reasons that led us to organize this event. From a NATO perspective, it started from the recognition that our strategic environment is evolving at an increasingly rapid pace, and is now defined primarily by complexity.

We used to live in a “complicated” world – we now live in a “complex” world. Complicated meant interacting with many factors, but that we could analyse them, and draw reasonable conclusions to drive our decisions. Complex means that there are so many factors interacting with each other that it is impossible to comprehend all the possible outcomes, thereby making surprise more likely, decision-making based on imperfect information more commonplace, failure an option, and resilience a necessity. By resilience, I mean the ability to resist, and recover from a potential surprise or shock.



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What is true for NATO is also true for the other multinational organizations, such as the UN or the EU. I am especially thankful to be joined by high-ranking EU executives for this event. They will bring the EU perspective to our discussions, in the frame of our ever-growing partnership.

We have come to realize that civilian authorities were also reflecting on the same challenges, as the complexity of the environment applies to all of us. The city of Norfolk is confronted by natural events, and is also a strategic hub for military and private organizations. This conference is organized here not because Norfolk is our host city – that would be the easy answer – but because along with its recognition among the Rockefeller Foundation’s 100 Resilient Cities Network, Norfolk is THE city of resilience. And unsurprisingly, resilience has also become a subject of expertise for another of our long-term local partners, Old Dominion University. This shared vision of resilience, which is a vital capacity to build, has led ACT, with both the City of Norfolk and ODU, to realize that we could join our efforts, in order to develop an unprecedented partnership on the matter, between a city, a university and an international military organization. This leads to the following question: who else should we partner with to address the question of resilience?

NATO, and the defence world in its broadest sense, must reach “outside of the traditional walls” and engage more with a large spectrum of actors, in order to develop resilience .



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We cannot imagine military operations today without considering critical factors, like the living conditions of populations, the infrastructure, the energy supply, or the continuity of civilian government, to name just a few. Identifying civilian and military interdependencies in a context of complexity will be discussed in the first panel.

How to develop resilience at the local, organizational and the strategic levels by identifying common requirements will be a recurring theme in panels 2 and 3. The city of Norfolk will bring its perspective in terms of preparation for dealing with catastrophic events (whether due to system failures or acts of nature), the private sector will discuss the risks and opportunities and how their models can support resilience, and the military authorities will focus on how to react and recover to potential setbacks and strategic surprise. Through our discussions, trying to blend or expand definitions and terminologies may help improve understanding, add consistency and enable interoperability.

We already have examples of fruitful cooperation on resilience: the city of Norfolk has shown interest in an urbanization model that ACT has developed for its studies on combat in an urban environment. We had to clear a few practical and legal hurdles to get there, but we have finally managed to share this model. In return, ACT will benefit from improvements and expertise brought by the city – in a win-win approach. I am also confident that the significant expertise of ODU in modeling and simulation could support this effort.



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In the last panel, tomorrow, we will try to harmonize our conclusions, and to identify possible areas of future developments addressing these interdependencies – like the example I have just used.

I insist on the fact that our objective is to reach tangible outcomes to implement a whole-of-government approach to resilience, and not just to ponder on the principles. And we will demonstrate that we are performing much better when we associate our competences and expertise.

To conclude, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the City of Norfolk, whose commitment was instrumental in making this conference happen, and to our speakers and panelists. I look forward to our upcoming discussions on this critical topic, and encourage you to share your insights, through candid and lively exchanges: this is how we will nurture our reflection and reach significant conclusions.

Thank you for your attention.