



**NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION**

**SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER  
TRANSFORMATION**

**SACT REMARKS to  
NATIONAL DEFENCE UNIVERSITY**

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**As delivered**

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Ambassador Nesbitt, Ambassador Stewart, General Lovric, General Padilla, Ladies and Gentlemen, Distinguished guest,

Thank you very much for the introduction. It is genuinely an honour to be here before such an audience.

I fully appreciate this opportunity to address future US, Allies and Partners' military and civilian leaders, in this auditorium dedicated to President Lincoln. As we mark 150 years since his death, I would like, as an introduction, to recall some of his very inspiring words for future leaders. He used to say that *"You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."*

[01 Greetings NDU] Those words have a special meaning for military leaders who bear the responsibility of engaging our men and women in uniform in tough combats today, as well as ensuring the future of our armed forces. And I can say that your generation has already outstandingly taken its responsibility. Many of you have courageously already engaged in many operations around the globe, fighting your Nations' wars. And most of you had to face the consequences of economic crisis for our military services. And I'm pretty certain that each of you has already understood the crucial role of leaders in an uncertain, unstable, unpredictable world and the new challenges of leadership in this modern age.

President Lincoln's words remind us as well of the importance for our Nations to prepare their future strategic leaders, to invest in the education of these men and women in order to get through what the future holds for us.

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In that perspective, the National Defense University remains a premier, outstanding, and highly valuable institution, one that helps to build interagency, whole-of-government, multinational relationships. It prepares you to fulfil the needs for US Joint Warfighters, political and industry leaders, as well as to operate and think creatively in a volatile security environment.

Your services will especially look for your ability to help them enable the future, to anticipate, identify changes and lead the transition of your organizations. It has been a constant lesson of our military History. Successful leaders are those who are able to integrate factors of change and turn them to their advantage. As we are a 26 August, I cannot think of a better example than the battle of Crécy in 1346, not a good memory for French Knights who were overtaken by British new weapons and combined arms approach.

But the modern age has brought a significant higher pace of technological, societal, and geostrategic changes that leaders, in the whole chain of command, have to understand and embrace if they want their forces to remain relevant and be victorious.

*[02 NATO's adaptation through History]* The ability to adapt and face new geostrategic contexts has been and is still one of the great hallmark of NATO since its inception. The Atlantic Alliance succeeded for the past 66 years in adapting to changing times. It is an organization which has remained fit for purpose and able to effectively respond to the many crises we have subsequently experienced.

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This did not happen by chance, but as the result of a vision enshrined in the Washington Treaty by a generation of great leaders (Eisenhower, Marshall) who had brought World War II to a close. They established an organization able to safeguard our common values and to ensure the Collective Defense of 28 Nations and their 900 million people, citizens.

*[03 Necessity to carry-on Transformation]* Today, NATO has reached a new turning point in its history, asking its leaders to foresee its new future in a time of important changes in the geostrategic landscape.

We face a security environment in which warfare is morphing into a succession of violent events, difficult to define, delineate, codify, and control. In the East, we have seen Russia employ hybrid strategies to illegally annex Crimea. In the South, extremist groups such as ISIL fuel instability and create safe havens for terrorist activities.

The world in which we operate is growing in complexity, interconnectivity, and interdependence, making it quite impossible for any one single Nation or International Organization to respond on its own. We need, we must work together.

So, faced with this reality, our Heads of State and Government reaffirmed at the Wales Summit the necessity to pursue NATO's global Transformation to keep up with the pace of change and anticipate its military consequences.

Let me stress at once that leading NATO's transformation is not about looking through a crystal ball to foresee the future; unfortunately we didn't find such a breakthrough technology in ACT so far.



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Therefore, I see my role and ACT mission as enabling the future, imagining the possible strategic options, developing the most suitable, relevant, flexible capabilities, preparing our forces to cope with uncertainty and complexity.

1. Obviously, it is not an easy task for it requires to build consensus between 28 Nations with different sensitivities, from the North to the South, from the East to the West to achieve the highest level of consensus it needs to accept the debate, to listen, to convince and I can tell you, it's a very exciting job.

Einstein once remarked that *"If he had an hour to solve a problem, he would spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and 5 minutes thinking about solutions"*. So, let me lead you into our main findings in thinking about NATO's future problem.

[11 SFA-FFAO] Taking the time to conduct analysis and consultations, capitalizing on all Nations and Partners' best brains, with large scope of stakeholders, we completed the Strategic Foresight Analysis, which defines the key political, human, technological, economic and environmental trends of our current security environment and derives their potential to create instability. We studied for instance the changing demographics and the consequences in terms of flows of refugees, the increased access to technology and its potential to foster cyber intrusion, espionage and attacks. Integrated into other future works, it informs *NATO Defence Planning process (NDPP)* on the long-term.

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And we have reached the conclusion that our forces will likely face an even tougher security environment in the foreseeable future. There are some main scenarios that I can highlight.

First, more and more state and non-state-actors may no longer feel constrained by International laws, and may increasingly look to strike our Nations, even upon our own territory. In a Russian model, some of these actors will synchronize their efforts and act with greater ambiguity. This hybrid modus operandi will likely be very innovative, even very disruptive.

Our adversaries may also trigger simultaneous and dispersed crises preventing any Nation from responding only on its own, thus challenging our consensus-based planning, preparation and decision making processes.

Last but not least, our opponents may try to reduce our military superiority in power projection. They may, for instance, deploy more Anti-access and area denial weapon systems, which will threaten our forces in their strategic, operational, and tactical depths and challenge our Nations' ability to re-posture.

*[12 Strategic Military Perspectives]* So, faced with such adaptive and innovative adversaries, what could be the long-term vision to adapt our forces, what should be the principles guiding our ability to engage, to sustain, and to succeed in our future operations? Let me stress what for me should be the five guiding principles of Allies' strategic leaders.



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First of all, we must permanently improve our Strategic awareness, in every single operation, through information sharing, joint intelligence building, real time Surveillance and Reconnaissance capabilities, and, not to forget, indispensable human expertise – which is the only way to transform information into knowledgeable intelligence. In looking towards your future security environment, a reliable strategic awareness will no longer be an option, but a pre-requisite.

Second, given that we must expect strategic surprises, we need to emphasize resiliency. Our Nations will continue to rely on their military forces to act as a strategic shock absorber, able to operate when everything else fails. We must remind that to our political leaders. As a consequence, in the context of shrinking military forces, leaders have to better coordinate and consolidate this shared resilience. We should incorporate selected redundancy and measures of protection for critical infrastructure, decision making centers, networks, population and other centres of gravity. We have as well to be trained and get ready to operate in very degraded environments.

Third, as you have already perceived in light of recent operations, our forces must be highly agile and modular, trained in the full spectrum of warfare in order to engage any possible adversaries. They need higher responsiveness, with enough lifting capabilities to project power and strike adversaries in depth, especially during crisis management operations. This is true as well for collective defence.

Fourth, in any context, including hybrid, we need to gain control of the battle of narratives, through the use of effective strategic communication.



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Military leaders must learn to use and take advantage of media, even if it does not seem natural for them. Nevertheless, we should not let others speak about our job. We can do that better.

In particular, this will help to explain why and how we conduct our operations to our domestic audience, and keep their support.

Last but not least, given the geographically dispersed conflicts, the changing security environment, the decline of most Allies' defence budgets, there is an increased need to work with Allies, and also Partners, close and willing to settle the crises. Partners have indeed been committed to take part in our operations over the past decades and they continue to provide an increasing contribution to the stabilization of their regional areas.

I use to say that Partners are now part of our Alliance's DNA, and we need to ensure the highest level of interoperability between our forces so that they can take share in our Future Coalitions, and cope with their own regional security. NATO remains the standard and should remain the standard. This is a step forward that we undertake, both with Nations and International Organizations, such as the European Union.

*[Transition on necessary resources to adapt]* Yet, these 5 principles, this joint vision of NATO's strategic leaders for our future forces, can only be translated into effective transformation if it is backed by an appropriate level of reinvestment, in our capability and in our capacity, and above all, in our people.



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2. In fact, people are at the core of all our capability, and at the core of any successful adaptation of our organization. Leadership is first and foremost a human endeavour to lead and manage this change, to educate, guide and inspire the men and women who are selflessly serving our countries.

This is not fundamentally new as it has been identified throughout history.

Nevertheless, in a more unstable, dynamic and technological world, it is worth reminding ourselves of the centrality of the human dimension of warfare.

This is something that I'm sure you do not need to be convinced of, as you have fought the harsh counter-insurgency fights of the last decade; and with them the challenges of trying to win the hearts and minds of domestic population while keeping the morale and motivation of your fellow servicemen and women who had to face determined and very resolute adversaries.

Meeting these challenges has required great leadership skills to promote and implement changes in terms of doctrine, training and organisation.

Your decisions and achievements as commanders enabled our servicemen and women, coming from very diverse backgrounds to succeed on our Nations' operations. Ultimately, you have provided a shining example to our citizens of the talented youth they have in their respective Armed Forces and reminded politicians and the public of their responsibilities to support them.



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So, I'm certain that you possess the right stuff to become the strategic leaders of tomorrow, provided that you cultivate a level of proficiency, cohesiveness, trust and swift ability to adapt our organizations.

Never forget as well that operational training is a major way to continue to incorporate the lessons learned from operations and challenge leaders and their subordinates. It is a major path to achieve successful short-term adaptation and long-term Transformation to cope with the very volatile strategic security environment that I have just described.

*[21 Reinvestment in people: CFI]* Within NATO, much needed reinvestments have already started in the preparation of our forces in few years. It was necessary because during the previous 15 years, budget constraints and a high operational tempo in Afghanistan had reduced the scale of exercises, and we were largely concentrated our training on the preparation of our Headquarters and forces for counter-insurgency operations.

So, we have taken a very important initiative called, the NATO Connected Forces Initiative, we currently are reorienting our training and exercises towards more demanding, high intensity operations and joint manoeuvre warfare, while capitalizing on the experience gained through recent commitments. We must not forget that we may face other insurgencies. Our men and women need to be prepared for the full spectrum of warfare, because crises are increasingly complex, diverse, hybrid, and they can rapidly evolve from a low intensity, crisis management type environment to a high intensity, collective defence situation.



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With this new approach, the dynamics of exercise programming within NATO has changed dramatically during the past two years, increasing the diversity of venues, along with substantial improvements in complexity and quality. Together, Allies have built an ambitious and efficient training and exercise policy that has enough flexibility to adapt to any requirement.

The quality of training reflects the operational environment of current crises: our scenarios are more demanding. We have introduced new dimensions such as BMD, Cyber, JISR, and Hybrid and many others. The Connected Forces Initiative is now the engine to feed our doctrine, to help identify capability gaps and solutions, to stress-test interoperability and, more and more, our readiness and responsiveness.

*[22 Reinvestment in capabilities]* Regarding our capabilities, during these same two decades, we have also stretched to the limit the employment of our current capabilities, all while we were imposing very demanding reforms to our forces. So, at the Wales Summit, our Heads of State and Government clearly perceived this limit. They all decided reinvestment in their defence during the next decade must reach the level of 2% of GDP, including 20% for new equipment.

This is promising, yet as mentioned by Joseph Nye, "*the armed forces are like oxygen, it is when they become rare that you understand their need and feel their crucial absence.*" Let's hope that this pledge will be there.

We cannot wait in order to address the long-term effects of the post-Cold War budget cuts, cuts which have severely impacted the preparedness, the



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serviceability of our equipment, the logistic support and the modernization of our capabilities.

Between Nations, we can at least mitigate capability gaps, capitalizing on our multinational cooperation projects wherever they stem from – Smart Defense, European Pooling and sharing, Framework Nations, Regional groupings. We move in the right direction.

It is the role of leaders to trigger new projects which will best support our forces in operations. It is also their responsibility to propose new frameworks of cooperation which would be the best adapted to Nations' interests.

*[Transition on Innovation]* But keeping our military edge will require going further in terms of human and capability investments. Future leaders will have to foster more and more on innovation, taking full advantage of new technologies, new concepts enabled by the connection of will and brains.

As stated by your current Chairman, General Dempsey, *“at the more senior levels, we need to innovate, which he suggests is the ability to see things changing before they begin to change, so we get ahead of it”*.

3. Taking the full potential of innovation depends on highly skilled leaders, equipped to face complexity, uncertainty, and even ambiguity; skilled leaders able and ready to set ambitious paths for the future while grounded in the reality of the present; leaders who must assume their responsibilities and continuously adapt their organizations and processes towards operational efficiency.



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So, in a nutshell, we expect you to be creative and inspiring leaders, skilled managers, and courageous commanders.

But it is not enough, because you must be able to achieve that together within coalitions, within the Alliance.

*[31 : Innovative-creative leaders]* NATO has the ability, and I would say the requirement, to bolster Innovation as a key enabler, to unleash the full potential of the men and women serving our Nations, to encourage their creativity and ability to think differently. With Innovation spread throughout the culture of our organization, we will find new objectives to reach, and bring our forces to a level of performance we are not yet expecting, while budgetary constraints.

We must better spend each euro or dollar, we have to be smarter.

We can see how innovation percolates into our day to day civilian lives. We need to embrace this momentum in our military affairs. We have to maintain a high pace of innovation, in terms of concepts and capability development, so that we keep the initiative on the battlefield and surprise our adversaries.

And we have through the Alliance this unique ability to connect together all the experts from our Nations' Centers of excellence, the Science and Technology world, the Industry, the Think tanks and academia.

All our leaders can share best practices, they can identify potential disruptive technologies and reach new development and procurement models better able to solve the equation of time, cost, and effectiveness.



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Such a strategy for Innovation will require a long-term commitment of all stakeholders to create and maintain the coherency and consistency between all the initiatives, the different reforms which will be initiated for a better performance of our forces.

*[32 Courageous leaders]* This is where you may sometimes require moral courage in front of your political authorities. In fact, you will be confronted by two main challenges:

- a decreased awareness of the political masters in the defence domain
- and increasing pressure on them to deliver short-term results and implementations of new initiatives.

My advice to you, if I may, is that you should take time to explain and justify your positions against non-consolidated and hasty decisions. Be courageous even if you potentially put yourself, your future, your promotion, your ambitions in harm's way because you have to take a difficult stance as you assess it is the better thing to do.

Let me highlight just one example coming from my past experience as an officer in the French Air force. As early as the beginning of the 90's, as a young colonel, I was convinced of the key role that drones would play in the future operational environment, with their ability to enhance strategic awareness, the persistence of air coverage, and the precision they bring. Within the French Air Force and I would say more generally in Europe, it required great tenacity and determination to convince and start the acquisition of our first MALE drones in the late 90's. You need to build the



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winning team. And at the end, we achieved that with a very small team of skilled, dedicated, courageous men and women, able to take the risk of failure - which I was ready as well to assume.

The keys to success in enabling such a fundamental innovation are vision, trust, and conviction. Today, drones have proven to be indispensable, and we need more and more of them, both for military and civilian applications.

Nevertheless, we must have the courage to question what we now accept as an assumption.

Drones, at the end of the day, were never tested in a highly contested environment, which is a major risk as they have become so crucial for our strategy. So let's not be trapped in a single best or unique solution. We need the right use, the right balance in our capabilities.

I would not go further on that domain but just show you that you owe this courage in challenging ideas and assumptions to your political and military authorities, to help prepare the next fundamental changes, to make the best use of our resources as well as to our men and women when you will have to explain your decisions and convince them.

We need to build a mix of capable, smart people.

*[33 leaders connected to many networks]* So in a nutshell, above all, our future Alliance's success will rely:

- on commanders well connected but able to disconnect from traditional thinking when needed,



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- on commanders able to take the full benefit of new information technology, including social media, but able as well to take time to meet, to listen, to recognize their people in capacity to work together in a very collaborative way.

Ladies and gentlemen, what you will learn and take from here, the networks, the relationships that you form, is unique, invaluable, providing you with perspectives and accesses outside of your particular service or institutional boundaries.

It will help you to decide with less uncertainty, to build this consensus which is so crucial because the time for reflection will continue to shrink as long as you evolve in your career.

Your work and learning here will help you to swiftly identify the weak signals in the strategic landscape and win the sprint for ideas to get the adhesion of the political authorities, of your peers, and of your subordinates on the way ahead.

The fruits of your success will then be measured by your ability to generate dynamism better than the status-quo, because an organization which is not questioning itself and able to adapt will likely become irrelevant. In other words, you must be leaders willing to act instead of react, willing to remain ahead of our opponents; willing to keep the initiative.

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It brings me, in closing, to where I began. Your time in the NDU represents a significant contribution of your Nation to strengthen, improve, and enhance your leadership. It will provide you the knowledge and skills to address our future world, to maintain peace and security, and pass the legacy of our Alliance to future generations.

As leaders, we owe to our servicemen, to our people, to demonstrate the same tenacity, resilience, and creativity that our elders brought to the fight in the defence of our core values.

President Kennedy used to say that “*Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other*”. Make the most of your teachers and staff. You are the enablers of our future, the transformational brains of our armed forces. This is why I’m confident in our Alliance’s future.

Thank you for your attention. I’m ready to answer your questions.