A Comprehensive Approach to Modern Conflict: Afghanistan and Beyond

Ambassador Martin Erdmann *

Distinguished guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much, Dr Rose, for the invitation to speak here this morning. It is what I call a double pleasure. Not only do I get the opportunity to return briefly to my native country, but I also have the opportunity to discuss with you and the conference participants, NATO's current thinking on a topic that occupies a lot of my time back in Brussels.

At the end of last year, at their summit meeting in Riga, NATO's Heads of State and Government agreed that the Alliance should, and I quote, 'develop pragmatic proposals to improve coherent application of its own crisis management instruments as well as practical cooperation at all levels with partners, the United Nations and other relevant international organizations, non-governmental organizations and local actors in the planning and conduct of ongoing and future operations wherever appropriate,' end of quote. This phraseology, although long and cumbersome, does give a very accurate feel for the breadth of cooperation that NATO believes is a pre-requisite for success in today's volatile security environment. Thankfully, we have found a more concise way to describe it – it is succinctly expressed as 'developing a comprehensive approach.'

Before describing what this comprehensive approach entails for NATO, allow me first to explain why we have not seen the need for such an approach before. And permit me also to highlight the key features of today's security environment which have driven the need for developing such a comprehensive approach now.

The first forty years of NATO's existence were dominated by the Cold War. For much of this period, NATO's strategy was based on deterrence – a strategy that relied heavily on the Alliance's nuclear capability and that had only a very narrow political dimension. Even after 1967, when NATO adopted the strategy of flexible response and put a stronger emphasis on conventional forces, nuclear weapons remained at the core of the Alliance's strategy and the political dimension was limited.

The collapse of the Soviet Union heralded the start of a new period for NATO – the post Cold War period. Initially, everyone was intoxicated with euphoria and looked to reap the peace dividend. Indeed, the 1991 Rome Strategic Concept moved NATO away from a strategy of frontal defense and committed the Alliance to a reduction in the size of its conventional and nuclear forces. Very soon, however, it was clear there would be no peace dividend, and Alliance military forces found themselves facing a

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new challenge – crisis management in the Balkans. New military doctrines were developed to guide such operations, but again, the political dimension to these operations was relatively limited.

Today, this post-Cold War period is also behind us. We are now living in the post-'9/11' world. We are faced with a very volatile, multi-polar international environment – an environment where established thinking, policies and relationships are constantly tested; where new players, such as China and India, are finding their role; where non-state actors are able to exert more and more influence; and where power is more diffuse than ever before.

This post-'9/11' world is frequently described as a 'globalized' world. I do not doubt globalization's value as a means of opening up economies, lifting people out of poverty, and promoting democratic values. But globalization is not completely benign – it also has its dark side.

The same channels that allow money and information to be transferred instantly across borders can also be used by criminal networks to traffic virtually any commodity – people, missile components, laundered finance, weapons and fissile materials. Nuclear proliferation, which for the past thirty years appeared to be a secondary problem, is now taking center stage. Failing states, once considered a concern only for their immediate neighbors, can have truly global implications. And of course there is a new breed of terrorism – a terrorism that uses globalization to import radicalism, religious fanaticism and new terrorist techniques into the very heart of our own societies.

Faced with such an environment, NATO had to adapt. Let me give you an example. I think it is fair to say that in the immediate aftermath of '9/11,' and the declaration of Article 5, there was a view in some quarters that NATO, with its impressive military capabilities, would be the ideal organization to deal with this new vicious and global form of terrorism. But it quickly became clear that military action alone would not be enough. Could the threat of military action by NATO have prevented the terrorist attacks in London, in Madrid, and elsewhere? I don't think so. Indeed, neither does NATO.

The Alliance's conceptual paper on defense against terrorism emphasizes that the best chance of success will come from 'an overarching international strategy that integrates political, military, economic, legal and social initiatives' and 'fully conforms to the relevant provisions of the UN Charter and all relevant international norms, including those concerned with human rights and humanitarian requirements.'

We understood that the threat of military force, and even its use, is not enough on its own to guarantee our security. We needed a new NATO. And we have already made considerable progress in shaping that new NATO.

Of course, we did not do away with some of NATO's unique features. We have kept collective defense as a core purpose. We have preserved, and even strengthened, our exceptional political consultation mechanism, and our integrated, multinational military structure to implement our common decisions. But what has changed fundamentally inside NATO is the way we *think* about security, and the way we *go about safeguarding and promoting* that security.

Unfortunately, I do not believe that everyone outside NATO has changed the way they think about the Alliance. Too many people continue to view NATO through the old Cold War prism – a prism that prevents these people from seeing the true extent of the Alliance's transformation.

Today, NATO is safeguarding peace and promoting security though active engagement. Rather than waiting until problems turn up on our doorstep, we are prepared to take decisive action when and where those problems first emerge. And that action is not confined to the military domain: there is now a considerable political dimension to NATO's activity.

Today's NATO is a forum for enhanced political dialogue among Allies. It is the center of a network of relationships with other countries and international organizations. And it is an Alliance with substantially improved military capabilities. We now have a fully operational reaction force. We can deploy our forces over great distance. And our forces are able to conduct the full range of military activity including combat, peacekeeping, reconstruction, stabilization, training and humanitarian operations.

It is this array of operations that gives the most visible demonstration of the new NATO and its strategy of active engagement. As we meet here today, more than 50,000 troops are deployed under NATO command in operations and missions on three different continents. In Europe, NATO is keeping the peace in the Balkans, notably in Kosovo where we are facing a challenging transition phase. In the Mediterranean, we are conducting naval anti-terrorist patrols. In Iraq, NATO is training Iraqi security forces. In Pakistan, after the earthquake in 2005, NATO provided humanitarian relief. And in Africa, NATO is airlifting African Union peacekeeping troops to the crisis region of Darfur. But it is in Afghanistan that we are conducting what is probably the most important and difficult mission in the Alliance's history.

Today, the NATO-led, UN-mandated International Security Assistance Force is made up of some 35,000 personnel from every one of the 26 NATO Allies, as well as contributions from 11 partner countries. Together, these brave men and women perform a variety of roles. ISAF's principal task is to assist the Government of Afghanistan in creating a safe and secure environment, where it is able to assert and expand its authority, and where other organizations are able to do their work. ISAF also supports the development and equipment of the Afghan National Army and Police, including their capability to demobilize illegally armed groups and to fight the drug trade. Moreover, ISAF includes 25 Provincial Reconstruction Teams at strategic locations throughout the country, where we bring together civilian and military expertise to promote security and development.

We have all heard about the growing number of suicide attacks and roadside bombs over the past half year or so. But what these reports cannot disguise is the enormous progress that has actually been made in Afghanistan, and which is due in no small measure to NATO's engagement.

Today, less than four years after NATO took control of ISAF, Afghanistan is an emerging democracy and an increasingly pluralistic society. There have been free elections, President Karzai enjoys considerable respect, and there is a functioning parliament as well as several other new institutions. Well over 4 million refugees have returned home; 80 per cent of the population has access to health care; and 6 million children are

in school. Women make up about 25 per cent of the parliament; about a third of schoolchildren are girls; and about the same proportion of teachers are female. There has been significant reconstruction and development, especially in the north of the country, and Afghanistan's Gross National Product has tripled over the past few years.

All this is significant progress – achieved, as I said, thanks in no small part to NATO. But the recent upsurge in violence shows that it is also fragile progress – progress which must be sustained and reinforced or it could again unravel. To prevent that from happening will require not just the Alliance's continued engagement, but a broader, concerted international effort by the international community.

From NATO's point of view, this points first of all to closer engagement with non-member nations. During the Cold War, NATO did not need other countries to fulfill its essential security mission of self-defense. Allied solidarity was enough. But today, as we send our forces to Afghanistan and on other complex missions well away from our traditional area of operations, we realize full well just how much the success of these missions depends on the contribution by other nations, and notably our partners. Some partners help us with military bases, air fields and transit rights. Some provide forces to our missions, and some provide us with intelligence and expertise.

But our partners benefit, too. NATO is a framework that they can use to make their own contributions more effective. And our many NATO partnership programs provide these countries with material help and expertise in taking care of their own security problems, reforming their military forces, and increasing their interoperability with those of the Alliance. In sum, when NATO enters into a partnership with another country, it is a relationship that benefits both.

Over the past few years, we have already successfully broadened our partnership policy by reaching out to countries in Northern Africa, the Middle East and the Gulf region. And we are now opening a new chapter by deepening our ties with countries in the Asia-Pacific region. This is a most timely development. Australia and New Zealand are already involved with us in Afghanistan. Japan and the Republic of Korea have also shown a willingness to shoulder a greater share of the international security burden. Prime Minister Abe made that very clear when he met with the NATO Council in January. And just a few weeks ago, when I had the pleasure of leading a NATO Delegation to Tokyo, Japan agreed to work more closely together with NATO in providing aid to the civilian population of Afghanistan. More and more countries realize that we all face the same risks and threats, and that it is in our mutual interest that we face them together.

The second plank of NATO's efforts to ensure greater, more effective international involvement in Afghanistan is to promote a new level of cooperation among international organizations. And what we are aiming at here, in particular, is better concerted planning between the military aspects of peace building and the civilian aspects.

Security and development are two sides of the same coin – they must go together. Neither in Afghanistan, nor anywhere else, will peace survive for long without jobs, electricity, roads, schools and hospitals. The military can do some of this work on a short-term basis, and our PRTs in Afghanistan have proved their value. But the essential programs that improve the lives of Afghans and build effective government institutions need the ex-

perience and hands-on involvement of civilian reconstruction agencies and NGOs, backed up by adequate international aid money. We also need better coordination among the civilian actors, particularly in the field of counter-narcotics. NATO can assist, of course, but the main responsibility has to rest with the civilian organizations and agencies. We will not succeed here if we are all advocating different strategies and are not providing the resources for a credible alternative livelihood program.

In January we held a major ministerial meeting in Brussels in which the European Union Council and Commission, the United Nations and the World Bank all took part. This was an important step in getting these other international actors to buy into our concept of a comprehensive approach. We now need to implement it urgently through more coordinated and effective activity on the ground in Afghanistan, and closer cooperation at headquarters level. The UN is the natural leader of this effort. But NATO will play its full part in supporting the UN in this role.

While Afghanistan may have acted as a catalyst for NATO's ongoing efforts to promote better concerted planning among international military and civilian actors, it is clear that the importance of such better planning stretches well beyond Afghanistan. Wherever we are engaged, we must find ways not only to better connect with each other, but also with local and regional actors, in order to advance our common objectives. And I would also argue that, when we speak about a more comprehensive approach, we should not just look at it in terms of crisis management, but also—and indeed ideally—with a view to preventing crises from occurring in the first place.

It is absolutely vital for NATO, the UN, the EU and other international actors to redouble our efforts. Together, we must develop more structured relations between our organizations, and a culture of cooperation, that will permit us to be less reactive and more proactive in future contingencies.

Making that kind of adjustment, and developing such a culture of cooperation, is not an easy matter, neither for us in NATO, nor for the UN, the EU or other institutions. We are all attached to our own ways. There is also an element of institutional pride and, yes, even a degree of competition. NATO has the means to deploy at strength in an emerging crisis situation. And this can lead to frustration on the part of civilian actors about being constrained in their movements, but also unrealistic expectations about the level of support the military is capable of providing. We have to break through all that. We have to arrive at an honest appraisal of the particular strengths and limitations of each of our organizations, and how we can best complement each other's efforts. And that will take pragmatism, vision and—above all—political will.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

During the Cold War, and even to a large extent during the decade that followed it, NATO's basic approach to security was essentially a military one. Today, as globalization confronts us with an entirely new set of challenges, we have to adopt a broader approach that includes greater coordination and cooperation between political and civilian elements. We need to engage. We need to cooperate among likeminded countries all over the world. And we need to work together with other institutions and non-governmental organizations.

NATO will soon be celebrating its 60th anniversary. Over the past six decades, time and again, the Alliance has shown a remarkable ability not only to adapt to new and evolving security realities, but also to actually influence those realities in a positive direction. To successfully influence the security realities of this new century in a positive direction, the Alliance must engage other actors in a truly comprehensive approach. I believe that NATO is well placed to do so. And I am confident that this conference will help us to significantly advance our thinking on this critical challenge for the Alliance.

Thank you.