First and foremost a sincere appreciation for the opportunity to provide my personal contribution to what I am sure will be a very stimulating discussion today at this conference. The title of the panel “Adjusting to the New Conflicts” captures the very essence of NATO’s utmost challenge: its ongoing adaptation to an ever changing and extremely fluid international security environment.

I would like to start with a short overview of the tenets forming the basis on which NATO has been evolving in order to tackle new challenges. After that, it is my intention to focus on the Alliance’s current operational prerogatives, with a special emphasis on Afghanistan, in order to highlight how its operational horizon has widened in functional as well as in geographical terms. The Alliance is in fact performing a variety of mandates in different contexts, ranging from traditional peace-keeping in Kosovo to a multifaceted assistance undertaking in support to the Afghan stabilization and reconstruction process. Then, I would like to offer some conclusive remarks on the way ahead.

The Atlantic Alliance remains, primarily and ultimately, a political-military organization whose tasks, as outlined in the 1999 New Strategic Concept, include the following: consultation amongst allies on issues of mutual interest and concern; collective defence (as per the letter and spirit of the Art. 5 of the Washington Treaty); crisis-management operations; and consolidation of partnership-frameworks forged with those Countries, which, irrespective of the extent to which they want to formalize their process of Euro-Atlantic integration, share values and interests with NATO and benefit from a security-dividend, as a result of their privileged cooperation with this organization.

The 1999 New Strategic Concept remains the core document of the Alliance, the one highlighting its outlook, as developed throughout the post-Cold War era. The real issue, from a conceptual, political, and operational viewpoint, is how to ensure, nowadays, that its implementation remains valid within an international security environment based on a set of radically different assumptions from the ones dominating the security thinking prevailing

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1 Disclaimer: the opinions expressed by the author are his own and do not by themselves reflect the official policy of the organization represented. Official queries should be directed to the office of the NATO’s Spokesman (Tel. +32-2-707-5041).
until the late 90s. A first attempt to this effect is represented by the conclusions of various NATO Summits held in the recent past, from Prague in late 2002, to Istanbul in June 2004, Brussels in February 2005, Riga in November 2006, and Bucharest in April 2008. All these gatherings at the level of Heads of State and Government of NATO Countries have not only reaffirmed the very letter and spirit of the 1999 New Strategic Concept, but have also defined two new political parameters. Firstly, the readiness to go where the threat is, regardless of its geographical connotation and, secondly, the commitment to develop a new type of military forces, deployable, multi-task oriented, and logistically self-sustainable. These two conclusions reflect a clear understanding, within the Atlantic Alliance, that the very nature of security threats and their conceptualization require a different approach and mindset. The 21st century security challenges are characterized by three distinctive connotations: they have a multidimensional nature and not anymore an exclusive military one, which in the past could be best summarized through the analytical equation security=military defence; moreover they have the ability to spill over instability well beyond the geographical boundaries of their initial manifestation; finally they are prone to rapid escalation, as a result of a multitude of factors which contribute to reach the so called “point of no return” much faster than what used to be the case in a not too remote historical context.

Some important implications can thus be highlighted. Firstly, simply put, the Euro-Atlantic Community cannot anymore afford to maintain an inward looking security posture. Indeed, recent indicators point towards a great deal of unfinished business in Europe: from the sensitivities already raised by the unilateral declaration of Kosovo’s independence, to the not-yet-completed process of integration of the Balkan region into the Euro-Atlantic mainstream, to Russia’s ongoing skeptical attitude towards new requests for NATO membership. That said, Europe itself does not anymore constitute NATO’s exclusive centre of gravity. Secondly, international military troops will increasingly be confronted with non-state actors on the ground, rather than territorial state armies. Additionally, they will not anymore be tasked to just perform traditional peace-keeping tasks, such as ensuring the implementation of peace-accords or cease-fires between belligerants. Thirdly, as threats come from remote areas, the Alliance needs to develop a truly global reach in order to confront them systematically and effectively.

On the other hand, developing a global reach and going beyond an inward conceptualization of security do not reflect a policy aimed at turning the Alliance into a sort of global policeman. Acting like “globe-cop” has never been in the DNA of this political-military organization, nor it will ever be. This conclusion can be extrapolated from two main considerations. Firstly, decisions by the North Atlantic Council will continue to be taken by consensus and as such they will be the synthesis of individual positions and nuances expressed by each member-state during the decision making process. Secondly, all NATO official documents recognize upon the United Nations the primary and ultimate responsibility to ensure that international peace and security are upheld.

In light of these initial contextual considerations, I would now like to expand on the main facets throughout which NATO is adapting its posture. They include the process of
capabilities-upgrading, the critical issue of partnerships, and the comprehensive approach. As far as the first aspect is concerned, some important steps have already been undertaken, including the acquisition of strategic airlift and sea-lift assets, the creation of a NATO Response Force, and important pledges made by individual NATO nations within the framework of the Norfolk Agenda, including commitments to make 40% of their forces deployable, with 8% of their land component sustainable in the medium to long-term. While this remains a work in progress it is important to point out that several NATO member states have already achieved these targets.

The consolidation of partnerships is also an increasingly important factor for most of the ongoing NATO-led operations. A few examples can be highlighted in this respect. Amongst more than 30 contributing nations to the Kosovo Force (KFOR) 9 are signatories of the Partnership for Peace (including Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Switzerland, Sweden, and Ukraine) and one is a signatory of the Mediterranean Dialogue (Morocco). The International Security Assistance Force to Afghanistan (ISAF), which currently has a strength of more than 52,000 troops provided by 40 troop contributing nations, includes a significant number of Partnership for Peace contributors (Austria, Azerbaijan, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, just to name a few), as well as signatories of the Mediterranean Dialogue (Jordan) and other partners across the globe (Australia, New Zealand, and Singapore). Also, the counter-terrorism and maritime monitoring naval operation, called Operation Active Endeavour (conducted across the Mediterranean Sea) has seen contributions from Russia and Ukraine. Recently, Morocco has formalized its interest to support this important endeavour. Having partners involved in important operations provide several benefits: it increases the number of security-providers; it widens the degree of political legitimacy; and it allows to rely on a more extended pool of resources and expertise. Obviously, if we want to ensure a proper level of inter-operability amongst forces provided by various contributors, partnerships and capabilities upgrading must be seen as two sides of the same coin.

Overall, however, expeditionary and flexible military forces are not by themselves the panacea to all the existing challenges. Indeed the military instrument is more and more an indispensable enabler to deal effectively with complex emergencies, but success, ultimately, lies on a full harmonization between civilian and military efforts. Although I will come back to this point in my concluding remarks, I think it is important, already at this stage, to recognize that even from the point of view of a political-military organization success must be measured across the multifaceted nexus linking together security, reconstruction, economic development, rule of law, and good governance, which is to say in those very realms, which, albeit not falling into NATO’s mandate and expertise, do nevertheless have an impact on long-term stability and thus represent pivotal cornerstones for any effective exit strategy.

At the present stage, the Atlantic Alliance has roughly 70,000 troops deployed in three different continents. These troops are involved in a wide and diversified array of activities. A NATO HQ in Sarajevo assists Bosnia and Herzegovina to consolidate its process
of defence reform and conducts certain operational tasks, including counter-terrorism, support to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and intelligence-sharing with the EU-led Operation Althea. Such a presence is in itself a visible proof of NATO’s ongoing commitment to Bosnia and Herzegovina’s long-term stability, while traditional peace-keeping tasks are being carried out by EU troops. In Kosovo NATO, through KFOR, maintains some 15,000 troops, tasked, in accordance with the UN Security Council Resolution 1244, to provide security in the interests of all the parties, while offering its support to the implementation of future security arrangement and maintaining a close cooperation with other key international players, including the United Nations and the European Union. Indeed, the recent unilateral declaration of independence by the Kosovar authorities cannot be overlooked, given a variety of implications stemming from it. At the Bucharest Summit, in fact, a clear reference was made to the fact that the Alliance expects the authorities in Kosovo to continue their “full implementation of their commitments to standards, especially those related to the rule of law and regarding the protection of ethnic minorities, as well as the protection of historical and religious sites, and to combating crime and corruption.” On the other hand, we must emphasize, clearly, that NATO remains - primarily and ultimately - a security provider in Kosovo, not the the forum, which, on behalf of the International Community at large, has the responsibility to decide over Kosovo’s end state.

Together with the Operation Endeavour, mentioned above, the current operational outlook of the Alliance includes other forms of tailored engagement. As of today over 10,000 members of the Iraqi forces have been trained within the framework of the NATO Training Mission-Iraq (NTM-I). And at Bucharest, NATO leaders have pledged to look favourably into a recent request from the Iraqi Prime Minister Al Maliki to enhance the NTM-I in areas such as navy and air force leadership training, police training, border security, and defence reform. Moreover, following a request from the African Union, the Atlantic Alliance has agreed to provide support to the African Union-led Mission in Somalia, after the recently concluded logistical support provided to the African Union Mission in Sudan.

Overall, however, Afghanistan constitutes the most adamant exemplification of NATO’s adjustment to new operational requirements. As reiterated at the recent Bucharest Summit, Afghanistan remains the Alliance’s “top priority.” I would thus like to turn to this undertaking in some depth, before offering some final considerations. To begin with, the very concept of enemy in Afghanistan is extremely multifaceted, hence not allowing the utilization of too rigid categories. Together with extremist elements, including representatives of Al Qaeda, hard-line Taliban, and the Haqqani network, ideologically driven against any form of stabilization, a wide array of spoilers is active, comprising disgruntled commanders, drug-barons, and ordinary criminals determined to forestall any attempt of real progress in the country, as this would, in turn, seriously undermine the territorial and economic leverage they have been exerting on the ground.

Moreover, as 40 troop-contributing nations operate within the NATO/ISAF framework, the creation and consolidation of a uniform narrative of the mission is per se a
daunting task, as each of these states has a natural inclination to inform its own public opinion through the prism of its individual contribution and its individual area of geographical responsibility. Recognizing these national driven public information prerogatives is crucial. This, however, implies, at the same time, a systematic effort to pursue a coherence of 40 messages, so as to highlight, ultimately, to international and Afghan audiences alike, what NATO/ISAF’s end-state actually is. Namely, the creation of those conditions conducive to the establishment of an Afghan security governance capable, alone, to address the various security priorities of the Afghan population, without an open-ended commitment of external assistance. Furthermore, it implies a sustained endeavour by the Afghan authorities to develop their own communications capabilities, as Afghan ownership is a crucial element, amongst others, to foster the effectiveness and credibility of communicating how internationals and Afghans cooperate for the benefit of long-term security. Finally, as Afghanistan borders with Pakistan, China, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran, we simply cannot pretend to pursue long-term security in Afghanistan, within a regional stability vacuum.

NATO’s mandate in Afghanistan, drawn from a specific request for assistance by the Afghan authorities and a series of UN Security Council Resolutions under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, is not to hunt terrorists, but rather to assist the Afghan authorities to create the conditions for long-lasting security and development. As Afghans are in the driving seat, Afghan ownership is, ultimately, the informing principle of NATO’s engagement in Afghanistan. Overall, NATO/ISAF forces perform a variety of tasks. They include the following: high intensity operations necessary to maintain the initiative and deprive insurgents from the possibility to pose a strategic threat to the country; provision of the security framework necessary for Provincial Reconstruction Teams (currently 26 are operating in Afghanistan) to carry out their activities, with the view to extending security, reconstruction, and development on a country-wide scale; delivery of military assistance in specific sectors of the Security Sector Reform (in particular training of the Afghan National Security Forces, support to the process of disbandement of illegal armed groups, and assistance to Afghan-led counter-narcotics efforts); promotion of Afghan defence institutions building (within the framework of the 2006 NATO-Government of Afghanistan Declaration); and activities of pratical cooperation at the regional level in the domains of counter-narcotics police training and border security, as carried out through the mechanisms of the Counter-Narcotics Training Project (under the auspices of the NATO Russia Council) and the Afghan-Pakistan-NATO Tripartite Commission, respectively.

Some elements of analysis have already emerged, pointing towards the need to recognize, on one hand, the accomplishments achieved until the present stage, and, on the other, the vast gamut of work necessary to maintain momentum and reach the end state previously outlined. Notwithstanding the negative security story dominating media headlines, some encouraging indicators exist and should not be discounted. Roughly 70% of the insurgency-driven violence registered last year has occurred in only 10% of the 398 Afghan districts, hence affecting approximately 6% of the entire Afghan population. Moreover, the Afghan National Army (ANA), with a current strength of more than 50,000 troops, is
increasingly capable to take on board new responsibilities, as exemplified by six out of nine ANA-led main operations currently ongoing on a country-wide scale, as well as by a high degree of popularity of this institution amongst ordinary Afghans, and by its prompt reaction to the recent prison break in Kandahar. Also, NATO/ISAF and ANA forces retain the operational initiative on the ground, as demonstrated by the need for insurgents to counter-balance ongoing conventional defeats with an exponential reliance upon methods of asymmetrical warfare, including suicide attacks, use of improvised explosive devices, and targeted assassinations against government officials, school teachers, and ordinary citizens. Besides, some important steps in order to boost good governance at the local level have been undertaken, including through the establishment of an Independent Directorate for Local Governance. And recent observations suggest an increasing level of synchronization between PRTs personnel and their Afghan counterparts, as demonstrated by a rising allignment of PRT-driven activities with the Afghan reconstruction and development prerogatives outlined in the Afghan National Development Strategy.

That said, challenges remain. Corruption continues to affect various layers of the Afghan administration, hence diluting the effect of military successes on the ground and providing a propaganda window of opportunity to insurgents. The production and trade of narcotics pose concerns in different realms, as they create the conditions to fuel corruption and sustain insurgency-driven activities. Moreover, a legislative and administrative gap features prominently in the interface between the Afghan central authorities and the sub-national administrations. Too many fence-sitters, dissatisfied with the pace through which essential services are delivered at the district and village levels, provide manpower for destabilizing initiatives. And the volatile security situation in the Pakistani tribal areas provides ample evidence of the correlation existing between an insurgency-driven emergency within Pakistan – acknowledged by NATO’s Pakistani interlocutors – and a significant level of violence across the Afghan-Pakistani border.

As Afghanistan prepares to undergo another crucial historical juncture with new presidential and parliamentary elections scheduled for 2009 and 2010 respectively, the ISAF’s Strategic Vision document approved at the Bucharest Summit offers a clear indication of the priorities and informing principles of the Alliance’s ongoing engagement in Afghanistan. They include a firm and shared commitment for the long-haul; a renewed support to the concept of Afghan ownership (and the acknowledgment that this entails also a full fledged political commitment by the Afghan authorities to tackle head-on good governance and rule of law-gaps fuelling insurgency); a full-fledged backing of the UNSC Resolution 1806 of March 2008 tasking the United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan to provide added impetus and coherence to the International Community’s efforts; and a determination to pursue increased cooperation and engagement with Afghanistan’s neighbours, especially Pakistan.

In light of the above, I would like to offer a few conclusive remarks. While collective defence ex art. 5 of the Washington Treaty will remain NATO’s acquis, the credibility of this institution will more and more be based on its ability to perform effectively as a crisis
management political-military actor. In the so called post 9/11 era NATO continues to offer a unique two-fold comparative advantage. The first is represented by a degree of euro-atlantic solidarity shaped and implemented through consensus-driven political decisions, which ensure proper institutional accountability and create an indivisible security-return in favour of all the Allies. The second is represented by a consolidated integrated command and control structure enabling a proper level of inter-operability amongst different nations. Such a comparative advantage is likely to generate more demands for NATO services, as the current trends already demonstrate. In order to bring this to its full fruition, several priorities must be addressed. Firstly, those minimum military requirements on the basis of which political decisions to undertake a certain operation are made must be filled. Existing shortfalls do not prevent to meet missions and operations objectives, but they certainly pose an hindrance to the possibility to achieve them faster. Secondly, theatre-commanders must benefit from the maximum possible degree of operational flexibility, as current operational dynamics require the same forces to perform different tasks within the same operational context (including use of combat assets, provision of immediate relief to civilian population when logistical and security constraints do not allow civilian players to intervene, and training of indigenous forces). Thirdly, the military tool must be integrated into a comprehensive approach bringing together military and civilian efforts (under a renewed UN leadership), so as to avoid duplications and ensure the provision of specific added values by each of the players involved. This requires, ultimately, a more systematic and institutionalized interface and exchange of information amongst various actors, including NGOs, throughout the various stages of a given operational undertaking. Fourthly, strategic communications aspects must be regarded as an integral component of crisis management, given the crucial importance to convey to different target audiences – at different levels - the rationale of a given operation, its linkage to regional and international stability, and the specific contributions provided by various civil and military players in accordance with their respective mandates and expertise. Finally, it is of paramount importance for NATO, despite an ever increasing operational tempo, to begin a process aimed, ultimately, at defining the tenets of its medium to long-term strategic outlook. To this effect, the decision made at the Bucharest Summit to start working on a Declaration on Alliance Security is a step in the right direction.

Thank you very much.