

**Conference on Crisis Management and Information Technology
“Towards Interoperability in Crisis Management”**

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“A view from NATO”

Remarks
by
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President Ahtisaari, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am grateful to President Ahtisaari for the opportunity to address this distinguished audience.

This is actually my first public address since becoming the first Assistant Secretary General for Operations on NATO's International Staff on 2nd September, less than two weeks ago.

In this position, I am Lord Robertson's principal civilian adviser for crisis management and the planning and conduct of NATO's military operations, be they in support of collective defence or for crisis response purposes. At least, that is what I'm supposed to be.

In the 1990s, I was closely associated as a Polish diplomat with the OSCE in Vienna, including through the Polish chairmanship in 1998, so I bring to our discussions today a number of perspectives.

I won't waste your time revisiting some of the key findings or lessons learned from recent peace support operations in the Balkans, in the Middle East or Africa, the virtue of early warning, early response, co-ordination and co-operation among the various players, the obstacles represented by institutional competition, bureaucratic inertia, obsolete concepts, methods and technologies, and the like. They are well-known and well-documented by practitioners better qualified than I am.

Nor will I attempt to summarise and build into some compelling intellectual construct some well-known themes, which enjoy widespread support, regarding peace keeping, peace enforcement, nation building and reconstruction, etc.

Instead, I will focus on some of the key crisis management challenges ahead and the role NATO has been playing and intends to play in helping the international community address them.

We have all heard a lot about asymmetric threats and perhaps the greatest asymmetry in crisis management is the contrast between the chaos on which belligerents thrive and our own highly structured, disciplined societies.

This chaos scares us sometimes into action, but sometimes also into inaction. Countries in chaos can prompt us into action but also have a powerful deterrent impact on even the most resolute of our Western societies. The balance between these contradictory impulses is an unstable one.

That kind of chaos we face also within so called weak and failed states, incapable of controlling their territories and thus being a source of terrorists' threats to (international) security.

At the same time, organisations such as NATO, representing an alliance of like-minded nations with both political resolve and unparalleled military capability, with well-established modes of operations, can be a powerful antidote to chaos.

Beyond this immediate role of stabilising a deteriorating or escalating situation, the next challenge is to convey to the belligerents a post-conflict vision, which encompasses a political solution in which they all have a stake.

NATO's success in the Balkans has been built on the twin strengths of a readily available military capability, backed up by a political vision of a return to normalcy. A return to normalcy which is not a mere re-establishment of statu quo ante, but which holds a promise of addressing the root causes of conflicts and tensions. The military and political dimensions, the shorter and the longer term, interact continuously.

At the same time, NATO was the axis around which other international organisations could progressively deploy their activities. Not that NATO claims any pre-eminence, but through its military capability on the ground and by gradually creating a peaceful and secure environment, the Alliance has been the International Community's "enabler" in Bosnia and Kosovo and also in the Former Yugoslav Republic of

Macedonia¹. To put it in simple terms, the issue here is not who is more important, but rather how to make the best possible use of all organisations' comparative advantages.

NATO's role in the Balkans has been made possible thanks to a number of unique NATO strengths:

the Alliance's evolving dual political and military nature, which allows political resolve to be manifested in almost instantaneous military action;

this duality is reflected in well-established intelligence-sharing, political consultation and decision-making, and force generation, deployment and employment arrangements in support of crisis management;

these arrangements are underpinned by a unified command structure, standardised communications protocols and long-haul communications capabilities.

For instance, in the Balkans, NATO was able to extend its communications infrastructure from Italy and Germany into Bosnia and Kosovo, ensuring communications flows back to Brussels and North America, as well as laterally with the various UN agencies, the OSCE and the European Union. It's not perfect, but it works.

This does not mean that this was a simple task, or that we did not experience shortfalls. Everyone is aware of the insufficient degree of communications interoperability within the Alliance, with incompatibilities of equipment between analogue and digital equipments, between tactical and strategic networks, between army, navy and air force communications systems, etc. But we have protocols in place and both the financial and technical means to help overcome obstacles when the success of the mission is at stake.

The Supreme Allied Commander Europe - SACEUR for short - has both the authority to request fast-track procurement of urgent communications and an inventory of readily deployable communications and information systems (CIS), known as the Allied Contingency Communications and Information Systems Pool.

And beyond that, NATO is set to establish so-called Deployable CIS Modules - known as DCMs - to be located at two or three locations in Europe.

These DCMs will provide a CIS backbone for the NATO Response Force and other rapid reaction NATO capabilities intended to control a crisis before it escalates or to help bring a conflict under control once it is already underway.

So we have in NATO what I would call a robust "foundation capability" to underpin the efforts and initiatives of the International Community to prevent crises from emerging and escalating into conflicts.

If you could visualise it, it extends from the political resolve resident in the North Atlantic Council, the Alliance's supreme decision-making body, to the SACEUR, and downwards to the forces, backed-up by well-developed crisis management procedures and arrangements and modern communications and information systems.

As a result of our operations in the Balkans, our interaction with the UN, EU and OSCE and our co-operation with NGO's, NATO's expertise now extends beyond the strictly military sphere to civil-military co-operation - what we call CIMIC - and civil emergency planning in support of humanitarian relief emergencies and other kinds of natural or man-made catastrophic events, including consequence management of CBRN attacks against civilian populations.

Against this backdrop, NATO's ability to deliver on its promises is now being tested in Afghanistan, with NATO's assumption of the leadership of the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul.

¹ Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name

This is a very long distance operation, requiring communications vertically back to Europe and horizontally to the UN mission for Afghanistan, other UN agencies, and the Operation *Enduring Freedom*'s coalition headquarters at Bagram airbase.

Because of this expanding NATO role in crisis management and peace keeping, NATO has taken an active interest in President Ahtisaari's Crisis Management Initiative and the central concept of using new communications technologies to help federate the efforts of the International Community through readily deployable, modular CIS means.

Getting better co-operation on the ground between the various institutional and non-governmental players, and indeed getting them to be more effective on the ground more rapidly, are important objectives.

While I cannot pledge NATO's commitment to this initiative - this is something for Alliance member nations to decide - I and my colleagues at NATO HQ can be facilitators, by helping facilitate contacts between ourselves and other interested International Organisations, between our respective requirements specialists, and between our procurement agencies and private vendors. In NATO, we have specialised bodies, such as the NATO Consultation, Command and Control Board and Agency, and the NATO Industrial Advisory Group, to facilitate this dialogue.

In the end we are in the hands of member nations, who alone have the power of the purse. This is true of NATO as it is of the other International Organisations represented here today.

But through conferences such as this one, as well as field exercises and demonstrations, such as the PfP exercise taking place in Finland this month, we can make progress by widening the awareness of the potential of new communications technologies to virtually revolutionise information transmission and sharing, facilitate co-operation and promote a greater degree of reactivity by the International Community. Achieving greater convergence of efforts among International Organisations and between governments and industry is key to this endeavour.

Obviously, interoperability in crisis management does not require just technical means of communications, important as they are. A prerequisite in that regard is a truly common agenda, based on common objectives. Assuming, however, a genuine political and "institutional" will to develop interoperability in crisis management, means and channels of communication become crucial, since they are the starting point for any kind of meaningful interaction and co-operation.

As NATO assumes an ever-greater role in crisis management, becoming more competent, more reactive, more effective are key priorities. New communications technologies can be an important enabler. In some cases, they can mean the difference between mission failure and mission success.

Our role here, is to help show the way and help shape future decisions.

To that extent, you can be assured of NATO's interest in this Initiative and my own.

President Ahtisaari, Ladies and Gentlemen, thank you for your attention.