



“This Ain’t Your Daddy’s NATO”

**NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson’s Speech at a Conference on
The Marshall Legacy: The Role of the Transatlantic Community in Building
Peace and Security**

**Hosted by The George C. Marshall Foundation, The Center for
Transatlantic Relations at Johns Hopkins SAIS and The Royal Norwegian
Embassy**

On the occasion of Lord Robertson’s farewell visit to the United States

12 November 2003

I am delighted to give my final speech in Washington as Secretary General at a venue named after the man who gave enlightened self-interest a good name.

George Marshall, and the plan for which he is famous, rebuilt Europe and created the foundations on which the transatlantic partnership has prospered. But he did not do so out of pure philanthropy. American taxpayers bankrolled Europe’s reconstruction because Marshall and his colleagues recognised that it was in the interests of the United States for Europe to be strong and a close friend.

I applaud the sentiments which underpinned this decision. As a practical politician, I have no doubt that America’s commitment to a free and prosperous Europe was and is much stronger for being based firmly on self-interest as well as idealism.

The power of self-interest was famously recognised by Lord Palmerston, the mid-19th century British Prime Minister, who said that countries have no permanent friends, only permanent interests. Today, the fundamental difference for both North America and Europe is that time, events and the efforts of people like George Marshall have given our respective interests such a degree of congruence and permanence that Palmerston would have found inconceivable.

The 21st century embodiment of this unique transatlantic partnership of ideals and interests is NATO. Not the Cold War NATO. Not even the NATO which brought peace to the Balkans. An Alliance radically transformed and pursuing its common vision on the ground where it really matters. As a t-shirt I was given last month at the NATO Defense Ministers meeting in Colorado Springs put it: this ain't your daddy's NATO.

I know of course that some critics on both sides of the Atlantic are still arguing that Europe and North America have separate destinies, conflicting interests or incompatible world views. They are wrong. They are forgetting how strong and well founded our common interests have become.

Our unique partnership was born in common philosophies of freedom and democracy. It was forged during half a century's fight against tyranny. Now it stands as a beacon of democracy, toleration, plurality, openness and candour in a world menaced by extremism and instability.

Of course there are policy differences across the Atlantic, not least on Iraq and European security policy. There are differences within Europe and within North America. That should surprise nobody at all. There always have been differences. There always will be.

My illustrious predecessor, Lord Carrington used to say that the NATO Allies sing in harmony, not in unison. For my part, I welcome the diversity within the transatlantic community. It is the reason why I abhorred the Soviet system and why I became a democratic politician.

A more interesting critique of the 21st century transatlantic relationship was made recently by my good friend Tom Friedman. He argued that we were at risk of a divergence between the United States and Europe because the American world view was formed by 9/11 and the events of 2001, whereas Europeans' world view was formed by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989.

Tom suggested that the two world views were becoming incompatible. If he is right, then the era of common transatlantic self-interest would indeed be at risk.

My sense, however, is that Tom is being unduly pessimistic. It is, of course, true that the events since 1989, which broke down the artificial Cold War division of the Old World resonate more in Paris, France; Berlin, Germany and Athens, Greece than in Paris, Texas; Berlin, New Hampshire and Athens, Georgia.

It must equally be true that 9/11 had a greater impact in America's New York than England's old York. But in my experience, the post-communist rebuilding of Europe is still a powerful factor in American perceptions, just as 9/11 exerts a major influence on European thinking.

Most importantly, we have in the transformed NATO Alliance an organisation which deals effectively with both the post-1989 world and with the post-2001 world. That is because the two worlds exist alongside each other. The United States and Europe have to address the consequences of both, while at the same time planning for a future world which may be as different again.

I have no doubt that today's transformed NATO is the means by which the challenges posed by these three overlapping worlds can best be met.

Take first the post-1989 world created after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world with which we struggled throughout the 1990s. Its challenges did not disappear in the dust and rubble of the Twin Towers.

A Europe whole, free and at peace was the goal of successive generations on both sides of the Atlantic. It is within our grasp. We cannot, we must not, take it for granted.

That is why a strong NATO, pursuing the goals of the post-1989 world, is as much in the interests of the United States today as at any time in the past. The great and welcome difference is that today NATO can achieve this goal largely by political means.

Two of the main themes of last year's Alliance Transformation Summit in Prague are related directly to the realisation of a re-united Europe. The first is new members: NATO's largest enlargement ever which, in 2004, will consolidate security and stability in seven new democracies from the Baltic to the Black Sea.

The seven ambassadors already sit around the North Atlantic Council table. I am proud to have played a part in this truly historic enlargement process, the culmination of a dream for so many people, some of them here today.

The second of these transformation themes is new partners. Ending the Cold War division of Europe has not re-ignited national conflicts across the continent as some feared. Instead, it has created a web of new partnerships,

binding together democracies old and new to face the challenges of both the post-1989 and the post-2001 worlds.

Partnership for Peace has expanded into the world's largest permanent coalition, 46 countries from Vancouver to Vladivostock, working politically and on the ground to deal with today's problems, together.

In parallel, we have built truly mould-smashing partnerships with Ukraine and especially with Russia. The NATO-Russia Council, created in Rome in May 2002, finally destroyed the last Cold War stereotypes and started a process of unique, practical cooperation on topics from terrorism to theatre missile defence.

Although we will not always agree with Russian policy, not even the most imaginative Hollywood scriptwriter can today dream up a scenario which would plausibly pit NATO and Russia at each others' throats in the old-fashioned Cold War style. But we need to carry on working every day on all of these partnerships to ensure that the 20th century edge-of-the-seat nightmare can never return.

The same applies in the Balkans.

During the 1990s, the United States led NATO's interventions to help end bloody civil war in Bosnia and Milosevic's brutal ethnic cleansing in Kosovo. Both were fully justified on humanitarian grounds. Yet they were also excellent examples of enlightened self-interest. Left unchecked either crisis would have spilled over to spread instability and chaos further into Europe, thereby undermining the extraordinary political gains of 1989.

Today NATO has stopped the Balkan killing. In FYROM¹, we even managed to prevent a civil war from starting. We can therefore cut the number of our soldiers on the ground in the Balkans, and perhaps look again at how we organise ourselves there.

But it would be a disaster for the Balkans, for Europe and for the United States if we abandoned a job well done yet still incomplete.

Before leaving the world created in 1989, let me also remind you that the partnerships created by NATO since the end of the Cold War are now playing a key part in helping the United States meet the post-2001 challenges.

Poland, one of the first round of enlargement countries, is today leading a sector of the multinational stabilisation mission in Iraq. Had Poland not joined NATO, would it have been willing or able to do so? I doubt it.

Russia is a key US partner in the fight against terrorism. Would this have been as effective without the habit of cooperation provided by the NATO-Russia Council? I don't think so.

And 20 Partnership for Peace countries, from Albania and Uzbekistan to Ireland and Finland, are today contributing forces to multinational stabilisation operations in the Balkans, Afghanistan and Iraq. Could they have done so effectively without the framework for building practical military interoperability provided by NATO? Absolutely not.

So the Alliance would have been playing an important but indirect part in dealing with post-2001 challenges in any circumstances. In fact, however, 9/11 galvanised NATO to transform faster and more fully than had previously appeared possible.

¹ Turkey recognises the Republic of Macedonia with its constitutional name.

That transformation began within 24 hours of the terrorist attacks when NATO for the first time declared Article 5 of the Washington Treaty – an attack against one is an attack against all – and quickly thereafter sent AWACS early warning aircraft across the Atlantic to help guard America’s cities. What an extraordinary reversal of the expectations of the Alliance’s founding fathers and of decades of Cold War military planning.

The transformation gathered pace as NATO forces smashed Al Qaida cells in the Balkans and protected shipping against terrorists in the Mediterranean.

At Reykjavik in May 2002, Secretary Powell and his fellow Foreign Ministers brought an end to a dozen years of theological wrangling over whether the Alliance could operate beyond the NATO area. Go out of area or out of business we were told. NATO unanimously agreed that threats had to be met wherever they arose.

Finally, at last November’s Prague Summit we established new missions as one of the main platforms of NATO’s transformation. You simply cannot overstate the importance of these decisions. An Alliance created to defend Western Europe at the Fulda Gap casting off its geographic shackles to respond to the threats of the post-2001 world.

Most importantly, we quickly put this new principle into practice. Less than a year later, NATO leads the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul, Afghanistan. As we speak, planning is in hand to expand ISAF into other parts of the country.

This is a mission no other organisation could even contemplate. And it is a mission which must succeed. If Afghanistan is allowed to fall back into

fanaticism, the world's war against terror will have received a potentially fatal body blow.

Who would be prepared to stand with us against the terrorism and its backers if we are not fully and demonstrably committed to the long haul needed to achieve victory?

Those who are not prepared to go to Afghanistan will find Afghanistan coming to them.

I am confident that we will succeed in Afghanistan. Because NATO's record is one of hard won achievement in the most difficult of circumstances.

Remember the darker days of the Cold War. Remember how the international community was split over Bosnia before Dayton and NATO's intervention. Remember the wobbling during Kosovo. And the divisions which made many think that we would be unable to reinforce Turkey in the run-up to the Iraq war. In each and every case, the Alliance's cohesion held firm and we delivered.

We did so again within months of the overthrow of Saddam. NATO's darkest hour according to some. But decisions to go to Afghanistan, and the even more difficult decision to help Poland put together its multinational division in Iraq, were taken then, quickly and unanimously.

Of course, we have taken some knocks. Nothing new and radical that is worth doing is easy or painless. Yet the transformed NATO is the product of a genuine and robust consensus among the 19 – soon to be 26 – NATO countries about the threats and challenges which we all face, and how we should respond to them.

Re-read the statements from Prague. They do not support the idea that the Europeans disagree with the United States about the post-2001 world. Nor does the recent European Union security strategy.

Indeed, it is this strong consensus about what we need to do and why we need to do it which underpins the last major Prague theme: new capabilities.

I like to think that my repeated message on the vital importance of closing the transatlantic capabilities gap galvanised the Europeans and Canadians into action. In truth, however, they did not need me to demonstrate the irrelevance of their Cold War heavy metal militaries. What they needed was a framework for transforming them. That is what they got at Prague.

A cutting edge NATO Response Force for expeditionary operations. A streamlined command structure. A reformed headquarters. Hard commitments to acquire strategic transport aircraft, air tankers, precision-guided weapons, air ground surveillance systems. Defences against chemical and biological weapons. This is most emphatically not your daddy's NATO.

An Alliance unconvinced about the post-2001 strategic environment would not be going down that road. It would not have adopted defence against terrorism and weapons of mass destruction as new NATO roles. Neither would it have set up a NATO Transformation Command, collocated with the center of US national transformation efforts in Norfolk, Virginia. Nor would each and every one of the NATO Allies and Invitees be fighting tooth and nail to secure key command jobs in that headquarters.

Do not mistake me. Not every operation will require or be suitable for NATO. Sometimes larger coalitions will be needed, although NATO already has experience working with non-Partner nations such as Chile, Morocco and New Zealand. Maybe the job can be done without US involvement.

But NATO is now capable of being the permanent coalition of choice for demanding 21st century missions, even at the toughest end of the crisis spectrum. An alliance of first resort. And that in my view means that it meets both the post-1989 and the post-2001 security challenges.

More than that, we now have the machinery to respond flexibly and effectively to the unpredictable nature of today's security environment. To deal with what Donald Rumsfeld eloquently described as "what we don't know we don't know."

Ours is a new and immensely complex world, and the international community is only now recognising its implications. Isolationism and passivity are options only for failure, whether you live in North America or Europe.

No one country, or organisation, can do everything needed to stabilise all of the crises which pose a current or potential threat to its security. Consider the recent roll call of international missions: Bosnia, Kosovo, FYROM, Afghanistan, Iraq, East Timor, Congo, Liberia. Not even the United States has been able to do them all.

To complete our existing commitments and deal equally effectively with those which we will inevitably take on in the coming years, we need two things.

First, we need more usable and deployable European soldiers, and the political will to commit them. That has been a main theme of my final six months as Secretary General, and I am pleased to say that the message is hitting home.

Second, we need better cooperation among the international organisations now involved in dealing with the 1989 and 2001 security agendas. NATO, the

United Nations, the European Union and the OSCE should all be part of the answer to today's challenges, not part of the problem.

I have demonstrated during the past four years that it is possible to be both a convinced and passionate Atlanticist, and a convinced and passionate European. Indeed, one of the most important achievements of my term was to complete the so-called Berlin Plus arrangements allowing the European Union to use NATO assets for its operations.

Berlin Plus is a great deal for Europe and for the United States because it avoids the unnecessary duplication by the EU of capabilities which already exist in NATO. That means more resources for capabilities that really matter.

It is a great deal for Europe and the United States because it allows Europe to take on missions where and when Washington decides that it does not want to be directly involved. Like FYROM or the Congo.

It is a great deal for Europe and the United States because, properly implemented, it will put an end to fears of damaging competition rather than cooperation between NATO and the EU.

In Europe, I argue strongly – and bluntly – with those whose initiatives risk undermining Berlin Plus. Here in Washington, there are those who see Berlin Plus and the EU's European Security and Defence Policy as a slippery slope to the kind of transatlantic divisions about which I spoke at the outset.

To them I would say: be vigilant against unnecessary duplication and any diminution of Berlin Plus. But do not see each and every strengthening of Europe's security and defence capacity as a threat to NATO. Examine them on their merits. And if they add value, welcome and support them.

While you cannot and should not create a stronger EU by weakening NATO, neither can you sustain a vibrant transatlantic relationship if Europe and the European Union remain militarily weak.

We need both organisations to be healthy and strong, and genuinely willing to work together in a strategic partnership, if we are to confront and overcome the threats of today and tomorrow as we did their predecessors from the Berlin Airlift to Al Qaida and Saddam Hussein.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have tried to combine a measured rebuttal of NATO's cynics and critics with a sales pitch for the new NATO which was created at Prague, and with something of a valedictory.

Let me finish with a couple of illustrations which cover all three of these strands.

When I was appointed Secretary General, US and other NATO warplanes had only recently ended their air campaign against Milosevic's Serbia. Only four years later, Serbia and Montenegro wants to join NATO's Partnership for Peace and we are considering whether a very sizable contingent of Serbian soldiers should serve a continent away in Afghanistan under a NATO flag.

What an achievement. And one which bridges the post-1989 and post-2001 world views to perfection.

Two months ago, I visited Afghanistan for the first time. French and German transport aircraft were flying troops and supplies across the Hindu Kush from airbases in the Partner countries of Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

I arrived at Kabul airport, which is run by Germans and guarded by Belgians. I was driven by Danish military police to meet the German force commander, his British boss and his Canadian deputy in a headquarters guarded by Italians.

14 NATO countries provide soldiers to the International Security Assistance Force in Kabul. 18 of the 26 NATO members and invitees have troops on the ground in Iraq.

Finally, NATO has this week been debating how to bring our Mediterranean Dialogue relationship with the Middle East front and center at our Istanbul Summit next June. Your conference today is helping to lay the intellectual groundwork for a dramatic shift in how we do business with our friends in the region.

This certainly ain't your daddy's NATO. It is the new, transformed NATO. The NATO of hard facts, not false or old fashioned myths.

I will always be proud of my part in this extraordinary transformation process. But the credit really belongs to men and women here and in every NATO capital, at all levels of government and in the wider security policy community, who have taken the inheritance of past generations of Atlanticists, from George Marshall onward, and remodelled it for a new age.

Believe it or not, the new NATO really does do you justice.