

Madeleine K. Albright, US Secretary of State
'The Right Balance Will Secure NATO's Future'

Financial Times, 7 December 1998

Tomorrow my colleagues and I in the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation will meet in Brussels to set the agenda for the April 1999 Nato summit in Washington. There alliance leaders will commemorate Nato's 50th anniversary and welcome, for the first time as Nato allies, the heads of state of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland.

We should be proud of what the alliance accomplished in its first half century. But we cannot be complacent. Today we face issues different from but no less challenging than those faced by our predecessors 50 years ago. With apologies to the calendar, the Washington Summit will be the first Summit of the 21st century. It will chart Nato's future, not just celebrate the past.

In Brussels we will continue our efforts to build a Nato that is a larger, more flexible alliance, committed to collective defence, capable of meeting a wide range of threats to common alliance interests, and working in partnership with other nations and organisations to advance security, prosperity and democracy in and for the entire transatlantic area.

At the Washington summit, our leaders will issue a new strategic concept, a blueprint for the alliance's future. A 21st century Nato must take account of the new strategic environment. While most of Europe is more secure than at any time in living memory, alliance territory and alliance interests can be affected by a range of risks from a variety of sources. As President Clinton said in Berlin last May: "Tomorrow's alliance must continue to defend enlarged borders and defend against threats to our security from beyond them - the spread of weapons of mass destruction, ethnic violence, regional conflict."

Bosnia and Kosovo are recent examples that demonstrate Nato must act when conflicts beyond its immediate borders affect alliance interests. Nato's new strategic concept must find the right balance between affirming the centrality of Nato's collective defence missions and responding to such crises. Together, we must improve both our flexibility and our capability to prevent, deter and if necessary respond to the full spectrum of possible threats to alliance interests.

Nato's primary mission will always remain defence against aggression. That is the heart of the original 1949 Washington Treaty establishing Nato. But the founders of the alliance also distinguished between what the treaty commits us to do and what it permits us to do. If joint military action is ever needed to protect vital alliance interests, it makes sense to use the unified military structure and the habits of co-operation we have built up over the past fifty years.

In addition to reaching agreement on a new vision for the 21st century, the task for the Washington summit will be to ensure that Nato has the means to realise that vision. We need military forces that are designed, equipped and prepared for 21st-century missions. William Cohen, US defence secretary, has been working closely with allied defence ministers on proposals to modernise Nato's military forces. Our goal is to

reach agreement at the Washington summit on a long-term programme to develop the right capabilities to ensure both self-defence and the ability to respond quickly and effectively to crises.

That is why we welcome the call from Tony Blair, the UK prime minister, for Europeans to consider ways they can take more responsibility for their own security and defence. Our interest is clear: we want a Europe that can act. We want a Europe with modern, flexible military forces that are capable of putting out fires in Europe's backyard and working with us through the alliance to defend our common interests. European efforts to do more for Europe's own defence make it easier, not harder, for us to remain engaged.

We will examine all proposals on European defence and security with a simple question in mind: Does it improve our effectiveness in working together? Like Mr Blair, we believe the emphasis should be placed on enhancing the practical capabilities Europe brings to our alliance.

The Kosovo crisis shows how practical European defence capabilities can help fulfil Nato missions. Thanks to the initiative of the French and the contributions of the Germans, British, Italians and other allies, Nato is deploying an all-European "extraction force" for the monitors of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe who are being sent to the troubled province. This force is under Nato command, and is based on solid European capabilities. It shows how European forces can work within Nato to great effect in the real world. We appreciate the willingness of the government of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia to host this force.

Kosovo carries another lesson: political will is more important than additional institutional structures. The problem in Kosovo before we acted together was not the lack of appropriate institutions; it was the lack of agreement to use the institutions we have.

As Europeans look at the best way to organise their foreign and security policy cooperation, the key is to make sure that any institutional change is consistent with basic principles that have served the Atlantic partnership well for 50 years. This means avoiding what I would call the Three Ds: decoupling, duplication, and discrimination.

First, we want to avoid decoupling: Nato is the expression of the indispensable transatlantic link. It should remain an organisation of sovereign allies, where European decision-making is not unhooked from broader alliance decision-making.

Second, we want to avoid duplication: defence resources are too scarce for allies to conduct force planning, operate command structures, and make procurement decisions twice - once at Nato and once more at the EU. And third, we want to avoid any discrimination against Nato members who are not EU members.

The goal outlined by Mr Blair is consistent with these principles. We look forward to discussing with all of our European allies and partners how to strengthen Europe's capacity to act.

One challenge in particular the Washington summit must address is the very real threat to our people, our territory, and our military forces posed by weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery. We must improve overall alliance efforts both to stem proliferation and to deter, prevent and protect against such attacks. Nato's efforts should complement, not supplant, the existing regimes and efforts under way to control proliferation.

The 21st-century Nato we envisage will be a central pillar of a much wider North Atlantic community of shared risk and responsibility among increasingly secure and prosperous democracies. For nations aspiring to membership, Nato's door remains open, and the alliance should be even more active in its efforts to help them walk through it.

Nato enlargement is not a one-time event; the first new members will not be the last. But the Washington summit should improve our ability to work jointly with all partner nations, regardless of their alliance aspirations, to extend security and stability throughout this broader community. Nato's distinctive partnership with Ukraine is an important element of this broader effort.

We want Russia to be a close and active participant in this 21st century partnership. My colleagues and I will be meeting this week with Igor Ivanov, the Russian foreign minister, in the Nato-Russia Permanent Joint Council, where we continue our efforts to improve cooperation in the spirit of the Nato-Russia Founding Act, which will celebrate its second anniversary in June. Nato and Russian troops continue to work side by side in Bosnia. Together we are working on possible Russian participation in the Air Verification Regime in Kosovo. We plan to open a military liaison mission in Moscow. Together we are retraining retired Russian military officers, developing co-operative responses to civil emergencies, and developing common approaches to non-proliferation and to environmental protection - all signs that the Nato-Russia relationship continues to move forward.

The lesson of this century - the bloodiest ever - is that when Europe and the US act together, we advance our interests and our values more effectively than any of us can alone. When we fail to agree, stalemate and even crisis are the result. Fifty years from now, we want a succeeding generation to say that we learned our lesson and applied it well to the many challenges we would face in the new century. That new century is being shaped today by our joint response to instability in the western Balkans. And it will be shaped to a great extent by the decisions we take this coming week and over the coming months. I am confident that those decisions will be the right ones for the future of our great alliance.