



SDA Report

Squaring the circle: Fitting force transformation into NATO's Lisbon reform programme

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Rapporteur: Jonathan Dowdall

Photos: Philippe Molitor

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Introduction

Speaking to assembled participants from across the European security and defence community, **General Stéphane Abrial**, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, welcomed the opportunity to "discuss the issues that are at the heart of my command's mandate". During this wide ranging debate, questions of national sovereignty in equipment sharing, the role of industrial and civilian partners in supporting force transformation and the need for a balance between capabilities were key themes. Overall, the General concluded that "the main challenges we face in transforming our forces can be overcome. They are not insurmountable, it just looks that way" he added jokingly.

Force transformation a matter of will, cost and engagement

General Abrial began the evening by outlining NATO's renewed focus on force transformation. Whilst the current debate is being framed by the fall-out of the fiscal crisis (a condition likened to a "budgetary winter" by a national chief of defence), the General made it clear that this was not the only driving factor. "Transforming our forces is at the heart of reforming NATO", he stated, and "would have been desirable whether or not our nations' public debts are reaching breaking point". Indeed, in the wider context of a changing military balance since the end of the Cold War, and the rise of various new and un-

anticipated security threats, "it would have been simply unsustainable for NATO to do business as usual".

Bearing this in mind, General Abrial went on to explain the three factors which he believes must underpin a successful force transformation agenda; political will, cost effectiveness and engagement with new security partners.

In terms of political will, the General invoked the image of a "battle of the will to stay involved" with NATO's commitment to maintaining sufficient defence budgets. Highlighting global defence trends which have seen an increase in total military spending, he noted that "the Lisbon Summit called for sustained defence spending not once, but twice", in order to re-affirm member state commitment to this "battle" of the will.

The next focus was cost effectiveness. The General outlined his firm belief that there are "very significant potential sources of efficiency" to be found in procurement and the training of new forces through pooling and sharing defence equipment. However, "establishing these solutions is not easy, especially in the field of procurement" because "these are areas that are close to the core of national sovereignty". Despite these difficulties, member state cooperation, as typified by the recent Anglo-French treaty, pointed to a potential model for other states.

"It would have been simply unsustainable for NATO to do business as usual."

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NATO would also have to accept that “it is not alone in seeking such solutions” in efficiency. With the EU also making important efforts in these areas, “neither organisation will be able to ignore the initiatives at work in its counterpart”, especially in terms of equipment. The important role of industrial actors was also outlined. “We should be able to interact very freely with industrial partners” in steps that are far removed from acquisition, General Abrial concluded, on a theme that would be elaborated by several participants later.

The final focus was rooted in Secretary General Rasmussen’s call for an Alliance that is “engaged” with security partners worldwide. In a globalised world where “distance is no protection, many vulnerabilities materialise in areas beyond the reach of any single nation”. As a result “NATO cannot live as if it was a self sufficient organisation”, and an important aspect of force transformation is the need to synergise with exterior partners, organisations and militaries.

“NATO cannot live as a self sufficient organisation.”

This effort must see NATO begin cooperation “well upstream of operations themselves”. The value of cooperation, such as joint training operations with non-NATO members, also offers new economies of scale, the General elaborated. “Opening up our NATO training facilities, centres of excellence and even our exercises to partner troops is of benefit to all, as the marginal costs for us leads to greatly increased interoperability in theatre”.

The SACT concluded by addressing the “human” aspect of transformation. Referencing US Marine Corp Charles C. Krulak and the concept of the “strategic corporal”, Abrial insisted that transformation would only be successful when it was rooted in the training, ethos and culture of a military’s fighting men and women. As such, “new tasks, new formats, and new responsibilities” for individual soldiers make up “the core of force transformation as I conceive it”.

Issues of sovereignty and resource-sharing

The debate was now thrown open to the floor, with the theme of asset-sharing and multinational procurement initiatives coming under immediate scrutiny. **Brooks Tigner**, EU/NATO Affairs Correspondent for Janes’s International Defence Review, pointed out the more painful aspects of resource sharing. “For pooling and sharing to work, some nations, or someone, has to lose”, he said. “Rationalising means someone loses a budget, someone loses a capability, a base; are nations willing to do this”?

The General Abrial agreed that sharing resources was a sensitive issue, and that “there are some capabilities which nations think forms an indispensable part of their national sovereignty”. Whilst efficiency may be the goal, inevitably, force reductions and cuts will indeed occur amongst individual members.

However, faced with declining financial resources, member states keep being forced to think realistically about the requirements of force transformation, and the need for capabilities which for many are simply out of reach. The reality, the General asserted, is that “you cannot

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keep everything single-handedly anymore". The SACT continued to express confidence that "despite the difficulties of implementation in the constrained framework", there was a willingness to collaborate that cut across sovereignty issues.

Drawing upon a known example, **Giancarlo Grasso**, Senior Advisor to the Chairman and CEO of Finmeccanica questioned the spirit of collaboration presented by the Anglo-French initiative. Was it not true, he asked, that this bilateral path represented "a lack of confidence in the role that NATO should play in harmonising and harnessing" transformation efforts?

Refuting this interpretation, the General was adamant that "They are a complement. Nations are sovereign, and NATO does not work in isolation, it works with the nations. In many senses, NATO is the nations". What would be important for ACT was "identifying the factors that make such cooperation work, for other members to analyse". Far from fearing bilateral agreements, the General welcomed them as valuable case studies, "to make sure we identify the trends...for both best practices and things we might advise not to do again".

Velizar Shalamanov from the NATO Consultation, Command and Control Agency wanted to delve into the specifics of sharing and pooling, asking "what are the most suitable capabilities that could be addressed in multinational projects"? The most important factors in a shared project's success, the General responded, were "the ones for which the nations really have something in common; common aims, common timetables, and a common vision". Although alluding to European programmes such

as the Eurofighter and A400M, the General declined to "name and shame" problematic examples, merely asserting that "if there is any ambiguity, in the end, you pay for it".

The SACT thus concluded that as long as you shared a common vision with your partner, resource pooling initiatives "can be applied to any capabilities", and given the efficiencies this can produce, are a vital component of force transformation.

Developing partnerships – civilian actors

Attention now turned to the need for new partners in supporting forces transformation. Cooperation with the EU was a key theme, with **Hartmut Bühl**, Publisher of the *European Security and Defence Union* raising the lack of references to the CSDP at Lisbon, and NATO's Deputy Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges **Jamie Shea** asking "what useful role can multinational organisations such as the EDA play" in ACT's efforts.

The General agreed that multilateral groupings provided an important resource for NATO in developing solutions for force transformation. Whilst sometimes lacking the resources of NATO departments, the EU's nascent defence structures offered an alternative "voice" which ACT would attempt to synthesise into their agenda, the General explained. "We will try to find agreements, small groupings, regional or otherwise, and we will need these forums to make sure people exchange ideas, and develop a common picture. This you cannot achieve if you speak to only one person", he concluded.

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Robin Davis, Head of the EU Cultural Relations Team in the British Council, cited the findings of the SDA's 2010 Online Security Jam, and asked the General about the peace-building capabilities of NGO's and civilian agencies. Given the wealth of experience held by the UN and national actors in these areas, "how can this expertise support NATO", he asked?

Abrial used the opportunity to clarify that "not everyone [member states] has the same objective or vision" when it comes to civil-military relations. Developing the so called "comprehensive approach" was an important part of NATO's reform agenda after Lisbon, he continued, but "it is not a mission, it is an approach". Therefore, it is not for ACT to give specific advice on the doctrinal choices of member states in this area.

This being said, a clear priority of force transformation would be better coordination with civilian actors in-theatre. Historically this had proven difficult, he elaborated, because "many people are not ready to talk to men in uniform", especially in the UN. In Afghanistan, ISAF has to work with the fact that "some NGO's just don't want to know us", which makes reforming civil-military structures harder.

However, the realities on the ground in Afghanistan were helping to forge new civil-military links. "We have started very constructive dialogues with some parts of the UN", the General reported, who were now "bringing something to table" for ACT to develop into cooperative structures. In the future, the General concluded, a reformed civil-military approach would make sure that all actors

were "ready to act together the day we are going to deploy together".

"If you stop investing in defence, you can lose capacity very fast."

Developing partnerships - industrial actors

The role of the defence industry in supplying the equipment required for force transformation was now examined. **Jean Fournet**, Former NATO Assistant Secretary General, enquired about the role of industry in developing new capabilities for the Alliance. Later, **Joseph Stein**, Deputy Defence Advisor to the United States Mission to NATO focused on research and development. "Many good things have been developed, but there is a wall between experimentation and implementation, because when you get to that stage, you have to re-compete", Stein explained. "How can we bridge that gap and make a more responsive use of new technologies"?

The General heartily agreed that the development of new equipment by the defence sector, at a cost bearable to member state budgets, was a pre-requisite to successful force transformation. ACT's goal, General Abrial continued, was to "make sure that we identify the best capabilities out there, the possibilities, and to make nations aware of what we discover". Throughout the evening's discussion new technologies such as missile defence and cyber capabilities were raised, highlighting the new capabilities member states will need to develop in the coming years.

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To improve the transition from research to procurement, the General outlined his vision of future ACT-industrial relations. “We need to associate the industry in the very early stages of capability development, pre-procurement, because as long as there is no money involved, we can talk”, he explained. Such pre-production dialogue, carried out under conditions of “total transparency when we come to discussing specific projects, and a guarantee of protection of information”, would be beneficial to both NATO members and industry stakeholders. “Sharing with industry our vision of the future, and what the industry sees as possible for that future”, can improve cost effectiveness and procurement speed, the SACT opined.

However this approach was questioned by **Peter Rasmussen**, Industrial Advisor in NATO's C3 Agency, who expressed concern that such an approach risked marginalising the concept of “industrial diversity”. Noting that the players most likely to be able to afford pre-production engagement with NATO were larger companies, Rasmussen asked “how do you engage small and medium sized (SMES) businesses from smaller NATO member states”?

The General agreed that there was a frustratingly delicate balance to be struck between the nurturing of SMES and maintaining the large scale producers that would underpin force transformation. He also described a disappointing industry uptake from his offer to attend ACT conferences in the US. “I asked them, please come to Norfolk, talk to delegates from all nations, who are going to prepare the capabilities of tomorrow for all members...They said no”. Whilst progress was being made, he

thus conceded “I have not found the solution yet” in this balancing act.

“Surviving the surprise” – a matter of balance

This theme of balance underpinned the entire evening's debate, and highlighted the complex decision-making that has to occur prior to force transformation. Budgets were an obvious focus. **David Rudd**, Strategic Analyst at the Canadian Department of National Defence, agreed with the SACT's idea that defence cuts provided an opportunity to rationalise forces. However, he also feared that NATO risked going “back to 1999”, and experiencing a “Kosovo” moment. The dual forces of withdrawing from Afghanistan and the financial situation risked creating a “chasm in capabilities” between Europe and the US, as was identified during the infamously resource-starved Kosovo War.

The General appreciated this danger, with the balance between cuts and reform leaning more towards cuts across Europe. “We are running the risk of facing a momentum to continue budget cuts, and to decrease defence institutions”, he warned. However General Abrial was confident that the realities of force transformation had created a sense of urgency. Indeed, the “huge amount of work” slated after the Lisbon Summit in a “very tight timeframe”, emphasised this urgency. “If you stop investing in defence, you can lose capacity very fast”, he cautioned, in terms of both training and equipment. The reality was that “budgets are *a* driver, but they should not be *the* driver”, the General asserted.

Building on this assertion, SDA Director **Giles Merritt**

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wanted to drill down into the General's vision of capability priorities, and specifically to ask, "what would you like to see less of in NATO armed forces? Because it seems to me your transformation isn't just about transforming forces, it's about getting rid of legacy equipment. What should we be looking for?"

The General exclaimed that "it was almost impossible to directly identify the parts of the legacy we don't need". Continuing, he made it clear that "we need to think of the future balance" when restructuring our land, air and naval capabilities. "We cannot get rid of everything, and we should not. We do not know what tomorrow will be", the General explained. "Today we're concentrating on threats in very different domains", such as asymmetric warfare and missile defence, but this may not be true forever. "So don't ask me if we still need frigates, tanks, jets" he said. "We will still need them, but in various balanced numbers, and it is our task to find this balance".

At its core, balance is important because of the need to "survive the surprise", the General continued. "When you look back to military history, it is a single string of strategic surprises", he explained. These surprises inevitably deliver a "tactical blow", be it from an unexpected avenue of attack or a new threat, which can only be recovered from if you have a healthy balance of capabilities and capacities. "We [military actors] are always caught by surprise, and have to get back up again", he ex-

plained. Those nations or alliances that last are the ones who are capable of surviving such surprises.

It is for this reason that "we have to be very prudent when we say we can get rid of pieces of equipment from

"We have to be very prudent when we say we can get rid of pieces of equipment from the past, and very prudent when we assess the training and human aspect of transformation."

the past, and very prudent when we assess the training and human aspect of transformation", the General summarised. New threat priorities, new ap-

proaches and new capabilities must be weighed against the likelihood of existing technology or doctrines leading to a crisis on the world scene.

Conclusion

So transformation, for all its focus on new structures and equipment, must also involve a careful balance between new and old. The Alliance has a long way to go. It is being asked to chart a path between budgetary retrenchment and reform, collaboration and sovereignty, big and small industry, civilian and military capabilities. Yet with political will, cost efficiency and a more engaged approach, the General concluded that it may just be possible to square this circle.

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List of participants

Lt. Col. Eric Abonadi

Staff Officer

NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Luciano Accogli

Medical Project Officer

European Defence Agency (EDA)

Gerhard Ahlbrecht

Secretary General

European Organisation of Military Associations
(EUROMIL)

Sergey Bludnov

Third Secretary

Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to
NATO

Christian Bréant

Director, R&T

European Defence Agency (EDA)

Hartmut Bühl

Publisher

The European Security and Defence Union

Lt. Col. Leo Buzzerio

Assistant Army Attache

Embassy of the United States of America to Bel-
gium

Geert Cami

Co-Founder & Director

Security & Defence Agenda (SDA)

Patrice Cardot

Conseiller

Ministry of Defence, France

Direction Générale de l'Armement (DGA)

Gianluca Cazzaniga

Correspondent

Italian Defence Review RID - Rivista Italiana Difesa

Vaclav Cejka

Officer IS/DPP (DPCD)

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Rear Adm. Patrick Chevallereau

Executive Assistant to SACT

NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Jarka Chloupkova

Principal Administrator

European Parliament

Mark Clark

Vice President, Business and Development

Raytheon International, Europe

Adm. Alain Coldefy

Vice President, Political Affairs France

European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company
(EADS)

Mariette Colinet

Official

European Commission

Directorate General for Enlargement

Zlatimira Colova

Assistant, EU Satellite Navigation Programmes

European Commission

Directorate General for Enterprise and Industry

H.E. Mr. Stanislav Daskalov

Ambassador & Deputy Head of Brussels Liaison

Office

Regional Cooperation Council

Robin Davies

Head of EU Cultural Relations Team

British Council

Jorge De Andrade

Senior Adviser

Bridge Europe Consulting Bucharest Offices

Squaring the circle: Fitting force transformation into NATO's Lisbon reform programme

Joan Delaney

Independent Consultant

Pauline Delleur

*Public Affairs Officer, Office of the Chairman
NATO - International Military Staff (IMS)*

Guido Delvoy

*Global Account Manager NATO
Cisco Systems Belgium*

Lt. Tina Di Carmine

*Aide de Camp to SACT
NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)*

Gerard Donelan

*VP Public Sector Projects
SES Astra*

Jonathan Dowdall

*Project Assistant
Security & Defence Agenda (SDA)*

David Henry Doyle

*Security & Defence Advisor
YFPF Brussels*

Robert Draper

*President
AeroStrategies*

Eeva Eek-Pajuste

*Counsellor Political Affairs
Permanent Representation of Estonia to the EU*

Andrei Enghis

Former European Commission Official

Alexandre Escorcía

*Deputy Political Advisor to SACT
NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)*

Raffaele Esposito

*Senior Advisor, NATO Programmes
Finmeccanica*

Lt. Col (ret.) Zvi Eyal

*Official on sabbatical
Ministry of Defence, Israel*

Capt. Sandro Fabiani Latini

*Chief, NATO Permanent Liaison Team to the EU
Military Staff
North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)*

Henning Faltin

*Deputy Branch Head
European External Action Service (EEAS)
European Union Military Staff (EUMS)*

Col. Corinne Faut

*Director-General
Royal High Institute for Defence, Belgium*

Jean Fournet

Former Assistant Secretary General, NATO

Octávia Frota

*Senior Advisor
Conrad International*

Elena-Dana Frunzeti

*Defence Counsellor, Head of Defence Section
Delegation of Romania to NATO*

Benjamin Fuchs

*Project Officer, Infantry Modernisation
European Defence Agency (EDA)*

Michel Gari

*Manager
DMG Consult sprl*

Andrea Ghianda

*Project Manager
Security & Defence Agenda (SDA)*

Laurent Giquello

*French National Expert
NATO - Air Command and Control System Management Agency (NACMA)*

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Didier Gondallier De Tugny

EU / NATO Affairs Director
MBDA - Brussels Office

Thomas Gottschild

Director for EU & NATO Policies
Cassidian

Giancarlo Grasso

Senior Advisor to the Chairman and CEO
Finmeccanica

Frederic Gray

Commander
NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Barbara Gregori

Consultant
NATO - Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Co-Ordination Centre

Michael Hartinger

Project Officer, Capability Development Planning
European Defence Agency (EDA)

Beatrice Hasani

Project Assistant
Security & Defence Agenda (SDA)

Louis Haynes

Communications Assistant
Security & Defence Agenda

Ernest J. Herold

Account Manager, NATO
IBM Belgium

Arnauld Hibon

Eurocopter Vice President & Director for EU Relations
European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS)

Martin Hill

Vice President, Defence
Thales

Henna Hopia

Brussels Correspondent
Nyckpäivä

Ferenc Hornyacsek

First Secretary
Delegation of Hungary to NATO

Brig. Gen. Gabor Horvath

Director, Concepts and Capabilities
European External Action Service (EEAS)
European Union Military Staff (EUMS)

Bjoern Hultin

Managing Director
Intercity Consulting

Maj. Gen. Albert Husniaux

Director
NATO - Research & Technology Agency (RTA)

Karli Johnston

Strategic Intelligence Analyst, Intelligence Unit of the Office of Security
North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Lt. Col. Paris Kapravelos

Staff officer, Capability requirements
NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Mario Karnstedt

Project Officer
European Defence Agency (EDA)

Frans Kleyheeg

Director NATO Programmes
TNO Defence, Security and Safety

Denis Kolokoltsev

First Secretary
Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to NATO

Capt. Matthew Kopetski

Legal Adviser
Hume Brophy

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H.E. Mr. István Kovács

Ambassador

Delegation of Hungary to NATO

Oleksii Kuropiatnyk

Counsellor

Mission of Ukraine to the EU

Jean Labrique

Secretary General

Western Defense Studies Institute

Martin Lacourt

Senior Delegate to the Armed Forces

International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)

EU Liaison Office

Sadid Lailuma

Second Secretary

Embassy of Afghanistan to Belgium

Timothy Lannan

Staff Officer

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

IGA Jean-René Le Goff

Armament Counsellor

Permanent Representation of France to the EU

Bruno Lete

Program Associate

The German Marshall Fund of the United States

Jean-Marie Lhuissier

Marketing & Sales Director for EU-NATO, Naval Business

Thales

Marie T. Lubs

Member

EGMONT, Royal Institute for International Relations

Lt. Col. Herman Maes

Capabilities Division - Area Command, Strategy Department

Ministry of Defence, Belgium

Pascal Mallet

NATO and EU Defence Correspondent

Agence France Presse (AFP)

Natalia Marczevska

Editorial Assistant

EMC Consulting Group

Mohammad Yahya Masoud

Counsellor

Mission of Afghanistan to the EU

Pauline Massart

Senior Manager

Security & Defence Agenda (SDA)

Olivier Masseret

EU Affairs Manager / Key account Manager EU-NATO

European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS)

Cdr. Malcolm McKenzie

Staff Officer Policy & Plans

NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Sq. Leader Ross McKenzie

Military Assistant to SACTREPEUR

NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Col. Michael McLaughlin

Air Attaché

Embassy of the United States of America to Belgium

Com. Neil McMullan

Special Assistant to SACT

NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Giles Merritt

Director

Security & Defence Agenda (SDA)

Susanne Michaelis

Officer

NATO - Emerging Security Challenges Division

Squaring the circle: Fitting force transformation into NATO's Lisbon reform programme

Col. Jean-Claude Mignonat

Policy Branch Chief, Intelligence Division
NATO - International Military Staff (IMS)

Annalisa Monaco

Director EU and NATO Relations
The Boeing Company

Valentina Morselli

PhD Candidate, Teaching assistant
Université Libre de Bruxelles (ULB)
Institut d'Etudes Européennes (IEE)

Patrick Moulin

Chef de Projet
Eurocopter

Jacques Mouysset

Senior Vice President, European Affairs
DCNS Brussels Office

Dr. Col Otto Naderer

Counsellor, Military Affairs
Mission of Austria to NATO

George Vlad Niculescu

Former NATO Staff Officer

Martin Nitsche

Professional Solution Leader for Network Centric Operations
IBM Deutschland GmbH

Andreas Öffner

Key Account Manager, NATO/EU
Cassidian

Jean-Luc Onckelinx

Desk Officer for EU and Benelux
United Nations Regional Information Center for Western Europe (UNRIC)

Ali Kaan Orbay

Counsellor
Delegation of Turkey to NATO

Marek Orzechowski

Correspondent
Polish Television

Egon Paulin

Head of NATO Programmes, Commercial Directorate
Finmeccanica

Marcin Podgorski

Director
Lodz Region Brussels Office

Maj. Gen. Simon Porter

SACT Representative in Europe, SACTREPEUR Office
North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)
Office of the Secretary General

Fritz Rademacher

Deputy Political Advisor
NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Peter Rasmussen

National Technical Expert/Industrial Advisor, NATO C3 Agency
Delegation of Denmark to NATO

Kyriakos Revelas

Senior Security Policy Analyst
European External Action Service (EEAS)
Directorate Conflict Prevention and Security Policy

Lt. Col. Fernand Rouvroi

R&T Domain Manager
Royal High Institute for Defence, Belgium

David L. Rudd

Strategic Analyst
Department of National Defence, Canada

Diego Ruiz Palmer

Head of the Strategic Analysis Capability
NATO - Emerging Security Challenges Division

Squaring the circle: Fitting force transformation into NATO's Lisbon reform programme

Gert Runde

Director, Defence & Security
AeroSpace and Defence Industries Association of Europe (ASD)

Donatella Scatamacchia

Journalist
Greennews

Col. (res) Thomas H. A. Schneider

Head of International Affairs
European Association for Coal and Lignite (EURACOAL)

Gustavo Scotti di Uccio

Senior Advisor
Finmeccanica

Sabine Seeger

Brussels Correspondent
Rheinischer Merkur

Velizar Shalamanov

Director Sponsor Account NATO & Nations
NATO - Consultation, Command and Control Agency (NC3A) NC3A Brussels - Bâtiment Z

Jamie Shea

Deputy Assistant Secretary General
NATO - Emerging Security Challenges Division

Apar Sidhu

Political-Military Affairs Officer
Mission of the United States of America to the EU

Col. Wouter Sleurink

Staff Officer
North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO)

Lt. Col. Jean-Charles Spiteri

Staff Officer
NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Brig. Gen. Armin Staigis

Chief Political Military Advisory Staff
Permanent Representation of Germany to the EU

Joseph P. Stein

Deputy Defence Advisor
United States Mission to NATO

Olivia ten Horn

Assistant, Unit for the Subcommittee on Security and Defence
European Parliament

Pierre Thibaudat

Liaison Officer
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Belgium

Laurent Thomet

Defence Correspondent
Agence France Presse (AFP)

Vice-Amiral d'escadre Jean-Pierre Tiffou

Defence Advisor to the CEO
MBDA France

Brooks Tigner

EU/NATO Affairs Correspondent
Jane's International Defence Review

Oana Topala

Programme Associate
International Security Information Service Europe (ISIS Europe)

Klara Tothova

Consultant
NATO - Allied Command Transformation (ACT)

Denis Trioulaire

Cap Manager
European Defence Agency (EDA)

Michel Troubetzkoy

Senior Vice President, Director for EU & NATO Affairs
European Aeronautic Defence and Space Company (EADS)

Manuela Tudosia

Advisor
Polit Bureau International

Squaring the circle: Fitting force transformation into NATO's Lisbon reform programme

Takako Ueta

Ambassador, Deputy Head of Mission
Mission of Japan to the EU

Hans Verheggen

Director
PwC

Kostyantyn Voytovsky

Counsellor
Mission of Ukraine to NATO

Peiran Wang

Visiting Scholar
Brussels Institute of Contemporary China Studies
(BICCS)

Stefani Weiss

Director, Europe's Future
International Governance
Bertelsmann Stiftung

Anna Zakharchenko

Second Secretary
Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to
NATO

Dmitry Zorin

Counsellor
Mission of Belarus to NATO

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EADS Brussels Office
28, avenue Marnix
1000 Brussels
Belgium
T: 0032 2 502 60 05

EADS N.V
P.O.Box 32008
2303 DA Leiden
The Netherlands

www.eads.com

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SDA Co-Presidents



Jaap de Hoop Scheffer
former Secretary General
of NATO

Javier Solana
former EU High High
Representative for Common
Foreign and Security Policy



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Last year the SDA held 16 events, debates and meetings, at which over 280 senior defence and security leaders took the floor. A ground-breaking innovation was the SDA's Security Jam, which gathered 4,000 security & defence specialists from 124 countries for a five-day online discussion. In 2011 the SDA will cover topics ranging from the reform of NATO and relations with Russia to cybersecurity and energy security—speakers this spring will include General Abrial, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, Ivan Bizjak, EU Council Director-General for Justice and Home Affairs, Peter Zangl, European Commission Director General for Humanitarian Aid & Civil Protection, Gabor Iklody, NATO Assistant Secretary General for Emergent Threats, and Craig Mundie, CTO of Microsoft.

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For further information, contact us at:
 Tel: +32 (0)2 739 1582 | E-mail: info@securitydefenceagenda.org

SECURITY & DEFENCE AGENDA (SDA)

Bibliothèque Solvay, Parc Léopold, 137 rue Belliard, B-1040, Brussels, Belgium
Tel: +32 (0)2 737 91 48 Fax: +32 (0)2 736 32 16 E-mail: info@securitydefenceagenda.org
www.securitydefenceagenda.org