



RESEARCH PAPER

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An interview with General James L. Jones, USMC, Retired, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), 2003-2006¹

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Research Paper

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What were the Alliance's greatest achievements during the four years (47 months) you served as SACEUR?

The greatest achievements include the Alliance's enlargement from 19 to 26 allies and the progress made in fulfilling the vision of the [November 2002] Prague Summit for the transformation of NATO's military posture. The vision includes the creation of the NATO Response Force and the establishment of Allied Command Transformation. Thanks to Prague, since 2003 the Alliance has had two strategic commands; one for operations — Allied Command Operations located in Mons, Belgium — and one for transformation, Allied Command Transformation, in Norfolk, Virginia. The Alliance has also established three operational level commands. This new command structure involved a major headquarters realignment and significant manpower downsizing, plus the disestablishment of numerous headquarters.

The Prague Summit was certainly one of the most visionary summits in the Alliance's history. It provided a new strategic direction for the Alliance in the 21st century, thus enabling crossing the line of departure for NATO's twenty-first century transformation. It went a long way toward redefining the operational command structure of the Alliance.

The Prague Summit Declaration was a seminal document. It offered clear and unambiguous guidance, plus implied tasks, such as the recognized need for common

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N.B. *The views expressed in this paper are the responsibility of the authors and should not be attributed to the NATO Defense College or the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation or any U.S. government organisation.*

intelligence capabilities, common logistics, and standardized command and control capabilities. It confirmed the expeditionary trend in Alliance force development, and it called for the integration of air, land, sea, and special forces in a new NATO Response Force (NRF). It also furnished the basis for defining the wide range of NRF missions, which currently extend from disaster relief to forcible entry.

The NRF has since demonstrated just how thoroughly obsolete the phrase “out of area operations” has become. This is due, above all, to the Alliance’s operations in Afghanistan, but one could mention as well the humanitarian operations in Pakistan and Darfur. With the formation of the NRF, NATO has become much more expeditionary and agile, at least in concept.

Additionally, the Prague Capabilities Commitment, or PCC, was launched to address the shortfalls in strategic lift and other key capabilities. The PCC has proven itself to be more successful than the 1999 Defense Capabilities Initiative.

What do you regard as the Alliance’s biggest setbacks during the years you served as SACEUR?

One of the disappointments was the reluctance of the Alliance to continue its transformation at the political level. Transformation has been focused, almost uniquely, on NATO’s military sector. Deep manpower cuts have cut into the fat and the muscle of the Alliance at the expense of the Alliance’s military organization, and not its political superstructure, which remains unchanged even today, despite the best efforts of the Secretary General.

There exists an incomplete understanding as to the depth and the importance of the military transformation that has been underway at SHAPE and in Allied Command Transformation since the Prague Summit. A further lack of understanding with regard to ACT’s most basic missions is particularly serious and needs to be addressed as a matter of priority.

One of the missing elements of transformation has to do with the fact that NATO, perhaps above all else, needs a new strategic concept for this century. Regardless of the many good things NATO is doing in different parts of the world, it has not redefined itself in a way that is understandable to the publics on both sides of the Atlantic. Clearly, it needs to do so as an increasing matter of urgency. Just as clearly, it needs to become more strategic and agile in its deliberations. A healthy examination of its internal structures and operations is long overdue.

Which are the allies slowing down the Alliance’s political transformation?

Actually, the problem is more systemic than anything else. For a period of time France and Germany, prior to a change of national leadership, seemed more interested in the primacy of the European Union than NATO transformation. They appeared to be more committed to the development of the military capability of the European Union. Interestingly, the EU and NATO military establishments have always worked together in a healthy spirit of cooperation, but there has been great difficulty in finding similar harmony at the political level. This must be resolved as a matter of high priority.

How significant from a political and operational viewpoint are the difficulties in relations between NATO and the European Union?

The difficulties in NATO-EU relations that create impediments are significant at the political level, but much less at the military level. EU missions have concentrated on one end of the military spectrum, such as peacekeeping, while NATO missions encompass the other end, the “conventional” use of force. As there is but one pool of forces, however, there are not enough dedicated resources to fund two separate military forces; one for NATO and one for the EU. The GDP percentage of resource commitment to support NATO has been, and remains, inadequate for the missions NATO will face in the future. The EU resource requirements are additive to NATO’s.

Within the EU-led Operation Althea in Bosnia, no big problems have arisen in the military relationships between NATO and the EU. I maintain that the NATO and EU military headquarters ought to be co-located in the future. It would be very unwise to make NATO-EU cooperation harder than it has to be. We should not want to see the two organizations competing to see which has greater relevance. The real danger to both organizations’ effectiveness would be for NATO and the EU to function as stand-alone organizations without real cooperation between them. Such an outcome would wind up diminishing the capabilities and effectiveness of both organizations at a time when the capabilities of both are increasingly needed.

Are there any noteworthy difficulties in the Alliance’s relations with the United Nations?

The NATO-UN relationship has been good. NATO nations much prefer to act with a UN Security Council mandate.

NATO desires, understandably so, a legal justification for whatever it does. However, the UN has proven to be inept in either directing or coordinating Chapter VII missions. The UN, in my view, should “contract out” Chapter VII missions to the Alliance, concentrating itself exclusively on coordinating Chapter VI missions.³ NATO can and should complement the UN. The main problem with most UN missions is that they are very expensive, lack a sense of urgency, and take a long time to reach fruition. NATO has aspirations to reach “end-state” more rapidly.

What are the main practical problems facing the Alliance?

The Allies are not meeting their defense spending commitments. At the Prague Summit an informal agreement was reached to the effect that all Allies would strive to achieve a level of defense spending of 2 percent of GDP. In December 2006 the NATO average was 1.7% of GDP. Indeed, in some member nations defense spending is now in decline while, at the same time, NATO’s missions are increasing in number. This means that we can expect a “train wreck” in the future unless the Allies can generate the political will to commit more resources to NATO.

Another problem is that the Alliance’s acquisition system is ineffective, ponderous, and virtually “broken.” NATO builds buildings and infrastructure quite well, but not so for the military capabilities that are required. A two-year response time to an urgent “off the shelf” acquisition request from the field is all too often the case. It is clear that greater agility is required and it is needed now.

The idea that “costs fall where they lie” as a national responsibility was an acceptable principle for logistics during the Cold War when NATO forces did not leave western Europe, but that principle does not work well in the new century as we undertake expeditionary operations. It is very expensive, for example, to move forces from Spain to Pakistan. Spain was holding the rotation in the NATO Response Force when the need for humanitarian relief came up after the earthquake in Pakistan. Spain wound up with a heavy financial burden. This argues for reform in funding for the NRF, but instead the Alliance appears to be backsliding in its efforts. Some nations do not fully contribute the forces and resources they promised to support NRF rotations.

How would you assess the results of the November 2006 Riga Summit?

The Riga Summit was a disappointment as measured against its potential. There is an urgent need to redefine NATO and carry a new message of relevance to the public. The message should be that the Alliance is still relevant and makes an essential difference in our collective security. Internal public diplomacy has not been done effectively. Allies never had to justify the Alliance during the Cold War because the need for NATO was so obvious. Today the man in the street would have a hard time answering the question: “What is NATO for? What does it do, and why should I care?” The Alliance needs another Prague-type summit to chart the course for its future.

What are your reflections on NATO-Russia relations?

At the end of the day, I believe that Russia should be inside the Euro-Atlantic arc — or community, if you will — and we should be proactively engaging the Russians to that end. We have to be sensitive to how they view issues such as missile defense, and explain how they could be part of the solution. Some of Moscow’s former “vassal states” are now NATO members, and for the Russians NATO enlargement is a sticking point, but the Allies want Russia to be a reliable partner. Enlargement has involved a certain tension with NATO’s efforts to build a constructive relationship with Russia, but NATO and Russia share certain common concerns and interests. NATO and Russia are similarly concerned about terrorism, drugs, Iran, the security of the Black Sea, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and illegal immigration.

What internal factors may threaten the Alliance’s political-military cohesion in the future, and how can the Allies deal effectively with these factors?

We are thus far failing to transform the political structure so that it can deal with the world as it is. The Alliance’s decision-making needs to be more agile, and we need to get away from the idea that the “consensus rule” needs to apply in all of the Alliance’s many committees.

The 350 committees in NATO behave as if they see themselves as mini-NACs — little versions of the North Atlantic Council that must operate on the same consensus system as the NAC itself. This means that slow and painful lowest-com-

³ Chapter VI of the UN Charter is entitled “Pacific Settlement of Disputes,” while Chapter VII is entitled “Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression.”

mon-denominator decision-making prevails. The principle of consensus has been stretched to its limit. Consensus should not be regarded as necessary at the committee level. The committee chairman should note dissenting views and move the business on to the next stage in the decision-making process. The NAC, over time, has surrendered its prerogatives as a decision maker to committees, especially to its financial committees. There are too many committees, and they are much too slow to act.

Another problem is that the role of the Military Committee has been altered, over time — too much politics and not enough pure military advice. Back in the 1950s Field Marshal Montgomery recommended disbanding the Military Committee. I do not support that recommendation. In my view, the Military Committee is essential, because the North Atlantic Council needs unencumbered military advice. The Chairman of the Military Committee should be the coordinator of military advice from SACEUR, SACT [Supreme Allied Commander Transformation], and the Chiefs of Defense staffs (CHODs).

The Military Committee should retain a large “M” for “military” issues and a smaller “P” for “political” issues, rather than the other way around. Some Military Representatives (MilReps) on the Committee look to their national PermReps [Permanent Representatives] on the NAC for national guidance on issues, thus injecting political equities much too early in the process. As a result, the Military Committee is today part of the problem of incomplete transformation.

In an interview with *NATO Review* in 2006, you said with regard to the NATO Response Force, “The difficulties are with force generation for the NRF and this is because I believe we have not successfully addressed the financial reforms with reference to how we support the NRF.”⁴ What financial reforms are required?

Less than 10 percent of NATO’s common budget goes to operations, but operations are the *raison d’être* of the Alliance. The NRF cannot function effectively without common funding for its operations, yet some nations resist and, by doing so, are holding NATO back from progress that must be made. The “costs fall where they lie” principle is obsolete. The Allies need a more agile system, and common funding whenever possible, which could make a positive difference in this regard.

Above all, we need common funding for NATO Response Force missions. Some Allies are reluctant to pursue these ideas; and some in the NATO bureaucracy are highly resistant to innovation. Opponents of the NRF claim that implementation of common funding would increase SACEUR’s ability to act “independently”. This claim is absurd, because SACEUR can never, and will never, act without instructions from the North Atlantic Council.

The system has been that NRF “bills” are borne by the nation providing forces in a specific operation. This is no longer the best way to proceed as it slows things down and places excessive burdens on certain individual nations, and none on others.

Other internal problems are critical capability gaps and failures to act coherently as an Alliance. Allies need to pursue multinational logistics, multinational intelligence, and multinational command, control, and communications that are fully interoperable. In short, we need common architectures for expeditionary operations.

Why is there not more strategic thinking in the Alliance? Why did the initiative to promote strategic thinking that you and the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation took create some controversy?

The *Strategic Vision* document that Admiral Giambastiani and I put together in 2004 was controversial partly because of the “not invented here” syndrome.⁵ The advantage of such “non-papers” is that they will be read with greater interest than a thoroughly coordinated and “politically correct” document. While many liked our document, they resented the fact that we did not get political approval before preparing it and distributing it. However, we never intended it to be a “NATO-approved” paper, and it represented only the private views of the two Strategic Commanders. On balance, the document had productive effects — even though officially it had no status. It is not, even today, an officially blessed Alliance document.

This raises the question as to why it is so hard to propose new ideas and get things done through formal channels in NATO. For one thing, the terms of reference for the Strategic Commanders and the Military Committee are dated and obsolete documents — vestiges of another century that need to

⁴ Interview with General James L. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, Riga Summit special issue of *NATO Review*, November 2006, p. 48.

⁵ *Strategic Vision: The Military Challenge*, by NATO’s Strategic Commanders, General James L. Jones, U.S. Marine Corps, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and Admiral Edmund P. Giambastiani, Jr., U.S. Navy, Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (Mons, Belgium: Public Information Office, Allied Command Operations; and Norfolk, Virginia: Public Information Office, Allied Command Transformation, August 2004), available at www.ndc.nato.int/download/sc/stratvis0804.pdf.

be re-written — but there is reluctance to take on these issues, partly because it is time-consuming and it is always extremely difficult to obtain consensus on new proposals for such documents.

What are the most probable practical applications of the NATO Response Force?

The problem with employing the NATO Response Force has been that some nations have re-invented the NATO “catechism” which was agreed to at the Prague Summit. The list of approved NRF missions is clear, unambiguous, and straightforward, yet there are some who would like to pretend that such a list doesn’t exist. More importantly, however, there is reluctance to accept the funding mechanism which, though flawed, is based on the traditional “costs fall where they lie” model which has been used for decades in NATO. I agree that the funding policies for NRF operations need to be overhauled as they are not equitable in their current form, but nations cannot deny what has been agreed to in the past.

The NRF is designed to be most important in executing a proactive strategy to counter the family of asymmetric threats which face us collectively. It is most apparent that for the NRF to attain its full potential, NATO needs a new Strategic Concept for the 21st century.

During the Cold War collective defense was based on a defensive and reactive strategic stance up until an attack by the Soviet Union. However, a reactive strategy of the 20th century is not what the Alliance needs today or in the future. Allies need a proactive approach to defend energy supplies, critical infrastructures, and the flow of commerce. The Alliance needs to consider a role in countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the global flow of illegal arms, the flow of global narcotics traffic which fund insurgencies such as in Afghanistan, illegal immigration and human trafficking, and what it can do to reverse the spread of terror in different parts of the globe. In short, the Alliance also needs to rethink, in proactive terms, the role it can play regarding rendering assistance to struggling democracies. The word “proactive” is correct because it better describes the potential engagement strategy for the Alliance, and it is more appropriate than the words “preemptive” and “preventive,” which are sometimes used interchangeably. Passiveness and timidity should have no place in the future of this Alliance.

NATO could become extremely important to global security, but some seem to want to keep NATO in the 20th century, both philosophically and in terms of operational capability. The situation in this regard is not as bad today as it was in

2003, thanks in part to the accession of new member nations from eastern and northern Europe - all of whom have brought new ideas and energy to the Alliance.

What is the key political and strategic question that no one ever asks?

NATO is still a well known international organization, but NATO has yet to answer the following question: What is the case for NATO being as relevant today as it was during the Cold War? Why should our publics care about NATO in this century?

These questions can be answered, but the Alliance failed to do so either in Istanbul or at the Riga Summit. The Alliance needs a restatement of its relevance and *raison d’être* as well as a new Strategic Concept. A summit meeting which introduces a new Strategic Concept might be the setting for a more effective public information message.

Where NATO has been and what it has done, especially in the past, is widely known and appreciated. In the 20th century, the mission of the Alliance had great clarity. The man in the street knew what NATO was, and knew that it was conceived and built up out of necessity. Furthermore, he knew that NATO was principally defensive and organized to protect the Allies against attack. NATO had a linear, static posture against an ever-present threat. There were clear boundaries and borders to defend. The bipolar world was dangerous but relatively simple to understand. The multipolar world is much more complex, more difficult to understand, but perhaps much more dangerous.

What are the Alliance’s greatest problems in Afghanistan?

Afghanistan is symptomatic of the new types of challenges the Alliance faces. The greatest problem in Afghanistan is the pervasive influence of narcotics, which is fueling crime, corruption, and an insurgency – all of which act in opposition to the government. Narcotics are the foundation of an illegal economy. It is consistently estimated that at least 50 percent of the economy is linked to the drug trade. Afghanistan is clearly becoming a “narco-state,” if it is not one already. The Karzai government’s reach is still too ineffective beyond Kabul, and the trend line on narcotics is negative. Narcotics constitute the country’s Achilles’ heel. Additionally, the quantity and quality of the national police are inadequate, and judicial reform is not only badly needed, it appears to be at a standstill. The Karzai government needs to be held to metrics of performance, such as in judi-

cial reform which, if enacted, could more successfully prosecute and punish drug traffickers, but the Karzai government needs help to meet these metrics. Some point towards the failure of Britain, Germany, and Italy, three nations that agreed to lead in taking on narcotics, police capacity, and judicial reform respectively. It is clear that any solution to these problems must be much more comprehensive and strategic, with multiple nations reinforcing the work of the three lead nations. Sadly, it isn't happening. Future solutions are the responsibility of all nations and organizations involved in Afghanistan, but their efforts need much greater integration and cohesion. NATO can be a great integrator, but NATO's role is limited to providing security and stability. NATO has a minor role with regard to the more difficult problems, such as narcotics and police and judicial reform, but the future of the country and the perception of NATO's success or failure depend on the outcome of these problems.

The UN is to provide overall leadership and coordination of the international effort in Afghanistan, which is a Chapter VII (Peace Enforcing) environment with continuing combat. The 26 NATO nations should be able to push, cajole, and influence other nations in the UN to obtain better leadership from the UN in Afghanistan. Thanks to UN Security Council resolutions, NATO and the other organizations active in Afghanistan have legitimacy for their work. However, their efforts are loosely integrated at best, and they are not having a focused effect. The strategic consequences of failure in Afghanistan will be devastatingly high, and the NATO Allies and other nations need to rethink their missions, strategies, and organization. There is a lot in Afghanistan, but the international effort suffers from ineffective coordination and lack of focus on the top issues that absolutely must be addressed if we are to be successful. The problems in Pakistan have only made matters worse in Afghanistan, and the global community now faces a regional problem of growing importance.

How great is the caveats problem? In a speech in 2004, you said, "A national caveat is generally a formal written restriction that most nations place on the use of their forces. A second facet of this 'cancer' is unofficial 'unwritten' caveats imposed by a military officer's superiors at home. The NATO tactical commander usually knows nothing about 'unwritten caveats' until he asks a deployed commander to take an action, and the subordinate commander says, 'I cannot do this. . . .' Collective-

ly, these restrictions limit the tactical commander's operational flexibility."⁶ What would you add to this statement today?

Caveats are restrictions that virtually all capitals put on their forces when they provide them to NATO. I accept caveats as a political fact of life. It is partly an economic issue, because logistics are still a national responsibility and there exists a lack of common funding to pay for force redeployments. More broadly, it is also a national sovereignty issue, owing to the fear of casualties and domestic political consequences. Political fear is real, and therefore governments put "strings" on how their forces can be used. While all nations have imposed caveats at one time or another (yes, even the United States), some are much more damaging to our missions than others. To be fair, in Kosovo, for example, there have been some improvements over time. After the near-disaster in the 2004 uprisings in Kosovo, caveats were dramatically reduced or eliminated. However, caveats are still cancers that weaken efforts to conduct a successful NATO mission. The most insidious caveat is the "undeclared caveat." Caveats go too far if they degrade the operational utility of NATO's forces. They then become an anchor holding NATO back.

What more needs to be done regarding Afghanistan?

The Alliance is losing the battle of the media regarding Afghanistan. The opposition gets its message on the websites, but the Allies still have to explain why Afghanistan is strategically important as well as the consequences of failure....and success, to our publics. Afghanistan produces 90 percent of the drugs sold in Europe and that money funds the production of improvised explosive devices used against NATO troops. Failure in Afghanistan — the victory of the Taliban and Al Qaeda — would mean a major boost for radical jihadists and the recruitment of more terrorists in different parts of the world, and much closer to European capitals.

The implications of failure in Afghanistan would be profound. NATO has accepted responsibility for security and stability in Afghanistan, and NATO should not countenance failure in Afghanistan. By this logic, NATO should have a more proactive and forward-leaning stance against drugs and for police reform and judicial reform, and should insist on some metrics of performance from the current government.

Why doesn't NATO take an active role against narcotics? The answer is politics. The mandate for the operation was agreed following the rule of consensus. The lowest common denom-

⁶ General James L. Jones, USMC, address to the 21st International Workshop on Global Security, Berlin, Germany, 8 May 2004, available at www.nato.int/shape/opinions/2004/s040508a.htm.

inator in the Alliance was to agree on a mission for providing stability, security, and reconstruction.

Reconstruction, the war on drugs, the reform of the judicial system, and the police are all closely connected. As I mentioned earlier, I believe the international community needs to hold the Karzai government to some clear metrics, but it also needs to recognize the Karzai government's limitations. It is unfortunate that several years after a great democratic election, the President is still virtually invisible inside the country beyond Kabul.

The civilian side of the international effort in Afghanistan must become more proactive if the necessary changes are to be accomplished. The United Nations has failed to unify the efforts of the various contributors in Afghanistan. The UN has yet to define an effective campaign plan for the necessary reforms in Afghanistan.

What are your reflections about the future of the Alliance's partnership activities?

The Alliance should think in terms of a two-track partnership system. One track would consist of nations aspiring to become members of the Alliance. The other track would involve nations interested in an operational relationship with NATO. Nations such as Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and Sweden have been reaching out to NATO in pursuit of greater interoperability and security.

Future enlargement of the Alliance, in my view, should be limited to new member countries that bring "value", and not problems, to the Alliance. The enlargement standard cannot be simply that the people in a candidate country have stopped killing each other. Potential member states need to demonstrate that they have established democracy, the rule of law, and a stable judicial system. The Allies should resist the worrisome trend to hasten the accession of new members before they are ready for the responsibilities of membership. The Allies should not sacrifice standards for the sake of short-term political expediency.

What are likely to be the most serious external security challenges for the NATO Allies in the coming years and decades?

The external security challenges at hand are asymmetric threats — that is, threats other than from the 20th century standing armies. These threats include non-state actors, some sponsored by states; the proliferation of weapons of

mass destruction; illegal immigration; drugs and arms trafficking; and terror itself. NATO is failing to act as effectively as it could in these areas.

NATO needs to become much more agile in its deliberations to meet asymmetric challenges, because a traditional enemy is not likely to appear soon. NATO transformation is incomplete as it has only addressed military reforms to date. Much more needs to be done to transform the political side of NATO so that it can more effectively deal with the challenges of our times.

For example, the Gulf of Guinea and much of the west coast of Africa is under attack by pirates who cause great loss of economic development, fuel crime as a viable alternative to honest work, and contribute to corruption in governments. If this situation is not countered before it increases in magnitude, it will have profound effects on energy supplies for Europe and the rest of the world. There is much that can be done in the naval domain to guarantee a more secure flow of commerce and vital energy resources, as well as to the economic benefit of nations in the region. We must act, not simply react, in partnership with our African friends.

Key elements of the energy infrastructure remain unprotected despite the stated intentions of terrorist groups to attack and disrupt them. Do we have to wait for an attack to recognize that critical infrastructure assets need to be protected? A proactive mentality to deter and prevent conflicts will require political will and resources. Some have not yet understood that proactive engagement is cheaper than a reactive approach. NATO has to get involved in international security in a broader way. The Allies need to think in proactive terms if they are to succeed in deterring and defeating asymmetric threats.

In sum, we all face a number of security issues: energy, critical infrastructure protection, climate change, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and terrorist groups and other non-state actors operating on their own or as the proxies of states. As an Alliance that still has enormous potential to contribute to a more peaceful world in this century, we need to be thinking about how the rise of new economic powers, such as China and India, may change the dynamics of world politics and global security.

I am convinced that NATO's best days still lie in the future, and that NATO can take on expanded roles and make positive contributions to global security, but that will take vision, political will, and the resources to guarantee success. Unless and until NATO fixes all three of these things, it should be very cautious in accepting any new global responsibilities. The time for taking on new missions all the while reducing resource support to those missions is over.

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