



Comment by Mr Jacques CHIRAC, President of the French Republic.

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"Riga Summit : the Europe-North America link for peace"

Peace can never be taken for granted, and the first responsibility of any government is security. That is why France wishes to contribute to a political organization of the world that averts perils. It wishes to help in the exercise of a shared responsibility within the framework of strong, legitimate and accepted international institutions, particularly through reforms of the United Nations and Security Council. It is working for a managed globalization serving people in harmony, justice and solidarity. It is working to build a political Europe capable of meeting its international responsibilities in the service of peace.

The Atlantic Alliance has a central place in this project. For ten years France has been involved in the effort to adapt the Alliance to the new realities while preserving its original mission. That is why at tomorrow's NATO summit in Riga, I shall reaffirm the pre-eminent role of the Atlantic Alliance, a military organization, guarantor of the collective security of the allies, and a forum where Europeans and Americans can combine their efforts to further peace.

The threat of generalized war in Europe has disappeared, and NATO has been profoundly remodelled and adapted. It has been enlarged to include the new democracies. It is building a trustful relationship with Russia, a relationship we must constantly strengthen because preserving peace on the European continent means first avoiding the creation of new fault lines. In this same spirit, we want to see a partnership relation between NATO and Ukraine, and we hope that the Alliance will welcome the candidate States from the Western Balkans once they are ready.

Because we live in an age full of promise, some people infer that the time has come to reap the dividends of peace and go back on our commitments. That would be a grave error in my view. Lowering our guard would be to ignore the threats of terrorism, aggressive nationalism and the desire of certain States to engage in power politics in violation of their international commitments. Now, as in the past, we need a strong, mutually-supportive and adapted Alliance.



PRESIDENCE DE LA REPUBLIQUE

The first imperative of the Alliance is the credibility of its military assets. Consequently we have begun to transform them to enhance their effectiveness and reaction time. In Riga the NATO Rapid Response Force will be declared fully operational. So with the NRF, the Alliance will have an unequalled multinational instrument.

It is essential for each member State to agree to an appropriate defence effort. The Europeans have relied on their American allies for too long. They have to shoulder their share of the burden by making a national defence effort commensurate with their ambitions for the Atlantic Alliance and also for the European Union. This is a mark of the solidarity which links the two sides of the Atlantic. This is what France, one of the leading contributors to the Alliance, is doing through its Military Estimates Act [authorizing defence spending over several years]. The aim is to ensure the ongoing modernization of its strategic force - in compliance with the principle of strict sufficiency - as well as the equipment, rapid-response capability and deployability of French conventional forces.

Adapting the Alliance also means enabling it to work smoothly and on an equal footing with other international organizations whose mission, sphere of competence and means are clearly established, particularly in the areas of reconstruction aid, humanitarian assistance and civil security. The international community's success in resolving conflicts will be the product of such cooperation, without needless duplication.

Adapting the Alliance also means providing a political framework for our action. France welcomes in this regard the adoption of a global political directive which sets out the political directions of the transformation for the next ten to fifteen years.

The same goes for the operations which the Alliance is engaged in to further international peace and security. I am thinking first of Afghanistan. France has been present there since 2001 and currently commands the Kabul region. To bring about the conditions for success, we must act in the framework of a comprehensive strategy, a reaffirmed political and economic process. The establishment of a contact group encompassing the countries in the region, the principal countries involved and international organizations on the lines of what exists in Kosovo is, I think, necessary to give our forces the means to succeed in their mission in support of the Afghan authorities, and refocus the Alliance on military operations.

Adapting the Alliance means strengthening its capacity for joint action with other powers. I am thinking first of countries that are members of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council with which we must further strengthen our relations in this sphere. I am also thinking of the other troop contributors from outside the Alliance with which we must be able to confer in the event of crisis.

This expanded dialogue and consultations in individual situations must not distract us from the Alliance's central mission. Such dialogue must remain



confined to practical matters and focused on situations that may require military intervention by the Alliance and its partners. The United Nations must remain the sole political forum with universal authority.

Adapting the Alliance, lastly, means taking into account the new reality of the European Union, most of whose members also belong to the Atlantic Alliance. Defence Europe has made greater progress since the St Malo summit than in the past 50 years. I am pleased that the Europeans are beginning to go for joint equipment such as the A400M [multipurpose heavy transport aircraft] and Tiger attack helicopter and that we are working with the United Kingdom on a joint aircraft-carrier project. There is progress in the pooling of our assets, particularly strategic transport and officer training. We must now think of giving a permanent dimension to our collective command and operations instruments through the Operations Centre set up in the European Union.

This development is necessary because the European Union's involvement in peace support is growing. A stronger Defence Europe, more effective and more certain of its assets, enhances Alliance capability as a whole and contributes to global equilibrium. We are seeing Defence Europe and NATO complementing each other to the benefit of both. Where Europe is better placed to act, for geographical or historical reasons or by the nature of the action, the EU is taking on its share of the responsibilities as it should.

For instance, it is for the European Union to play a major role in the Western Balkans, to which it has offered the prospect of membership. The EU also took over from the Alliance in FYROM (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia) and Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Kosovo it is preparing - as an initial step - to send a police mission that will constitute a key component in the international presence at a critical period, when the future of the province is at stake. In Lebanon, lastly, it is the Europeans who, at the request of the entire international community, are the backbone of the new UNIFIL, whose credibility is essential to prevent a further spiral of violence.

This development calls for a more substantive political and strategic dialogue between the United States and the European Union following on from the February 2005 Brussels summit. It probably also implies closer relations between NATO and the European Union. France is naturally ready for this but wishes the EU's voice to be heard within the Alliance. That implies in particular the possibility of EU members consulting between themselves within the Alliance.

Such a development will contribute to an ever-stronger and mutually-supportive Alliance in which North American and European allies will be able to formulate their objectives together and continue to work, side by side, for international peace and security in accordance with the principles and objectives of the United Nations Charter.

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