

Draft introduction by the Minister of Defence of The Netherlands, E. van Middelkoop, at the seminar of the Radio Netherlands Worldwide on June 28, 2007

It is a great pleasure to me to introduce this seminar on “Changing Armed Forces in a Changing World”. As minister of Defence, this topic is of daily concern to me. In point of fact, I will soon lay out specific proposals for adapting our armed forces in a policy letter to parliament. Since our cabinet will still have to discuss these proposals tomorrow, I cannot give you any further detail. But I can assure you that the title of this seminar might as well have been the title of this letter.

The setting of this seminar, aboard this Landing Platform Dock, Her Majesty’s Rotterdam, is not only very impressive. It is also very fitting. This ship symbolises the transformation of our armed forces toward a more expeditionary force – a force that can be deployed globally. The ‘Rotterdam’ has performed tasks in operations in Albania, Ethiopia and Eritrea, and Liberia. What is more: I studied in Rotterdam and lived there for ten years, so I feel quite at home.

Fitting, too, is that this seminar is organised by Radio Netherlands Worldwide – the “Wereldomroep”. I congratulate the “Wereldomroep” with its sixtieth birthday last April. It has long developed into one of the world’s finest international public broadcasting stations, broadcasting in nine languages and reaching fifty million listeners every week. Its global mission is as relevant in today’s globalising world as it was in 1947. What is more: the “Wereldomroep” is even two years older than NATO!

Ladies and gentlemen,

Unfortunately I must confine myself to making just a couple of introductory observations because time is short. I will do so by touching very briefly on the four themes under discussion today. I would have liked to stay around to discuss these themes a little further, but my duties prevent me from doing so.

As regards the first theme – “new wars” – I do not hesitate to declare that we are only just beginning to discover the implications of a new kind of military conflict. A kind of conflict that British General Rupert Smith has termed the “war amongst the people”. This kind of conflict is not territorial or industrial. It is societal. It takes place *within* societies rather than *between* states. Our opponents are also mostly non-state. They are often hardly distinguishable from the civilians we are trying to protect. This requires a whole new approach to military operations. The goal is not to annihilate the enemy in a mechanised war, but to create the conditions for a durable political process.

The second theme – that of stability and reconstruction – is therefore closely related to the first. In today’s societal wars our goal is often to support good governance and state building against the forces of evil. This, too, requires a new approach – a more comprehensive approach to the sources of conflict.

There was a time that the three D’s stood for the conditions on which the United States was prepared to support the development of a European security and defence policy: no de-linking between America and Europe, no duplication of efforts and no discrimination against non-

EU members. Today, however, the three D's stand for defence, diplomacy and development – in other words, for a truly integrated approach to solving societal wars.

This is a good development. “Peacekeeping is not a job for soldiers,” former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld once famously remarked, “but only a soldier can do it.” Today one should add: “...but the soldier cannot do it alone.”

The focus has therefore rightly shifted from the institutional debate in Brussels toward achieving practical results in the field by combining the various instruments we have at our disposal. What is important is what NATO and the EU can achieve *together* in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Sudan.

This brings me to today's third theme: the future of NATO.

I venture that NATO is indispensable as ever, not less so than during the Cold War. It will remain indispensable for European security by linking North America and Europe.

But the Afghanistan mission is obviously of great importance to the future of the alliance. This mission defines its ability to bring stability beyond Europe. In a sense, therefore, NATO's future hinges on whether it is capable of dealing with societal wars. This also means that it hinges on being able to play its part in a comprehensive approach to stability and reconstruction that involves many actors.

NATO will therefore need to develop more effective partnerships with other institutions, such as the EU and the United Nations, with other countries, such as Australia (whose troops stand shoulder to shoulder with ours in the province of Uruzgan),

with non-governmental organisations,
with local actors,
even with the best enemy of all: the media !

In addition, we all have to manage expectations about what can be achieved in the short run in the new wars. Our goals must be realistic. They must put security first. They must recognise that our goals are likely to be achieved only in the long run, and that there is no decisive victory.

Today's fourth theme – the domestic relationship between armed forces and society – becomes highly relevant here. I suggest that the greatest challenge for our western societies in dealing with societal wars is to exert patience and to deal with the loss of life. In a country like Afghanistan there are simply no quick fixes.

What is more, in these new wars we need to confront new challenges to our values. Whereas societal wars are often debasing, we are obliged to maintain our high moral standards. We do not wish to stoop to the level of the enemy. This determination is our best hope of prevailing.

Ladies and gentlemen,

If there was a common thread in my observations I would say that the nature of conflict is changing and that our armed forces need to change accordingly. This seminar is therefore well-timed and the location well-chosen. I wish you well in today's deliberations. Thank you.