

**Speech to the NATO Summit of Heads of State and Government  
Strasbourg, France, 4 April 2009  
by  
Hon. John Tanner (United States), President of the NATO PA**

*Secretary General de Hoop Scheffer, distinguished Heads of State and Government,*

As President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly it is a great honour to address this distinguished gathering.

I am privileged to lead an organization of Alliance parliamentarians and on their behalf, I want to raise three key points that we NATO parliamentarians believe are critical to our Alliance; the mission in Afghanistan, our relationship with Russia, and the need for a new Strategic Concept. Our members stand ready to work with national governments in all these areas.

Our Alliance's most serious challenge is the mission in Afghanistan. NATO's presence in Afghanistan underlines NATO's political and military transformation.

Our brave men and women deployed in Afghanistan are capable, willing and professional, but they are too few in number and too constrained by national caveats. The Assembly fully recognizes these problems and will do all it can to support your efforts to solve them.

The Alliance is a community united by its beliefs in democracy, individual freedom, human rights, and the rule of law. We cannot permit Afghanistan to once again become a haven for those who seek to destroy societies based on those beliefs and principles.

We must help to bring stability to Afghanistan, and we must maintain and build public support for that mission.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly has an important role to play here. Our members are inevitably engaged in public discussion about Afghanistan. We must make it clear that it is not just NATO's reputation that we risk. At stake is the future of the Afghan people, and the credibility and security of the international community, including the EU and the UN.

Let me now turn to the Russian Federation. Clearly, NATO and Russia's interests do not always coincide. Yet, there are important areas where they do. We must build a relationship to address our common strategic interests. But we also need to be clear that Russia has no veto over the sovereign decisions of its neighbours. Russia needs to understand that NATO enlargement threatens no-one. Allied nations make good neighbours, and new members promote regional and Euro-Atlantic stability – ends that serve everyone's interests.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly has built a constructive relationship with Russia through its strong ties with the State Duma and Federation Council. We will continue to work with our Russian partners to achieve a common understanding of the dangers we face and how, together, we can best confront these threats.

Now, I need not remind you that NATO's current Strategic Concept was approved in 1999. The legislators of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly are convinced that the Alliance must update its Strategic Concept to remain relevant and they are working to draft their contribution. We look forward to presenting our proposals to Allied leaders so that you are aware of parliamentary concerns as we go forward.

I hope that you will give those concerns serious consideration because parliamentarians play a vital role in our Alliance. They approve defence budgets, they authorize the use of national armed forces in operations, they ratify and amend treaties and they engage the broader public in democratic dialogue about these matters.

Parliamentarians are also ambassadors for Alliance values. Our legislators both embody and advance Allied ideals and principles in parts of the world where NATO's image is sadly coloured by outdated Cold War stereotypes.

Within our own nations, legislators can help to explain NATO's roles and missions to their constituencies. They listen to public concerns and, in turn, communicate these to national governments.

Time and again, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly has demonstrated that inter-parliamentary cooperation reinforces inter-governmental partnership.

Distinguished leaders, I acknowledge the security challenges that our Alliance confronts. But I am supremely confident that we can rise to those challenges and thereby reinforce our alliance. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly will do all it can to support this effort, and I hope that you will continue to look to us as a trusted and valuable partner for the Alliance's next 60 years and beyond.

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