

EXCLUSIVE

THE NEW ARCHITECT OF TRANSFORMATION

GENERAL DENIS MERCIER



General Denis Mercier, SACT.
Photo by NATO.

French Air Force General Denis Mercier currently leads the Transformation of NATO. He was appointed Supreme Allied Commander Transformation (SACT) during a change of command ceremony held on 30 September in Norfolk, Virginia, the United States. Being one of the two NATO Strategic Commands and the only permanent NATO headquarters in North America, Allied Command Transformation plays an essential role in maintaining and strengthening the vital transatlantic link between Europe and North America and leading the transformation of NATO's military structure, forces, capabilities and doctrine. Previous to this assignment, General Mercier served as the French Air Force Chief of Staff, leading French airmen and airwomen on many fronts, including North Africa and the Middle East, as well during the air policing mission over the Baltic States. The following interview took place on 9 November 2015, during SACT's first official visit to the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC).

Interview by Inci Kucukaksoy, JWC PAO. Photographs by CPO Vincent Micheletti, French Navy.

Sir, first we would like to thank you for giving us this exclusive interview for *The Three Swords Magazine*. What were your thoughts when you learned that you had been designated as NATO's new SACT?

— It is a Commander's duty and my pleasure to answer questions from all ACT members and organizations. Thank you for giving me this opportunity to address the JWC and to reach out to your readers. Upon my appointment, I felt a strong sense of pride and motivation to

lead the Allied Command Transformation, but I was also humbled by the faith and trust placed in me. The very uncertain world we live in makes leading the Transformation a challenging mission; and also ensuring that we will enable our Alliance to continue to fulfil its three core tasks, namely Collective Defence, Crisis Management and Cooperative Security, today and in the future. All in all, I remain confident in our ability to keep this Transformation moving forward.





SACT's ALL HANDS ADDRESS TO ACT

During his first All Hands address to the leaders and staff of Allied Command Transformation on 13 October 2015, General Denis Mercier advocated a full capacity-based approach to Transformation. General Mercier said: "I want this Command to be resolutely oriented towards the development of NATO's future capacity, while concurrently and coherently addressing short-term adaptation requirements, such as the Readiness Action Plan and other important preparatory works for Warsaw."

According to General Mercier, the foundation stones for NATO's future capacity were built upon the following:

1. C4ISTAR (Command, Control, Computers, Communications, Intelligence, Surveillance, Target, Acquisition and Reconnaissance): General Mercier said that C4ISTAR would "increasingly become the heart of modern warfare." He added: "In a nutshell, we have to think 'system'. And the backbone of our system will be C4ISTAR."

2. Projection, mobility and sustainability: General Mercier said that this was a key area for NATO's fighting capacity as it would "continue to enable our forces to deploy and to sustain their operations."

3. Training and Partnerships: Exercises and training benefit everyone involved and give NATO greater flexibility in long-range planning as well as increased readiness and interoperability. The very nature of present conflicts indicates that military leaders and their civilian counterparts will work in even closer coordination than ever before. "At the end, exercises will send an underlying message of the credibility of our Alliance's capacity and posture, and finally bolster the deterrence," said General Mercier.

4. Manpower: The General's focus was on enriching education and individual training by introducing new ways of delivery and also by leveraging new information technologies. "NATO's fighting capacity will rely on the quality and on the competencies of the people who will be part of it," General Mercier underlined.

5. Capabilities: "Building NATO's fighting capacity means providing the Alliance with the required capabilities to meet its level of ambition with each capability being developed along the DOTMLPFI (Doctrine,

Organization, Training, Material, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities, Information/ Interoperability) framework," the General said, citing the Readiness Action Plan as a great example of NATO's capacity.

General Mercier then highlighted the five strategic military focus areas in his speech. He said: "I believe that all the solutions and proposals that this headquarters will provide to NATO and the Nations to enhance or adapt part of the capacity must be cross-checked against their ability to increase: NATO's operational agility, strategic awareness, security networking, shared resilience and/or Strategic Communications—the five strategic military perspectives addressed in the Framework for Future Alliance Operations."

General Mercier listed his core values as Respect, Service and Excellence. In conclusion, he said that each and all of the Transformation family played a role in strengthening NATO's capacity. General Mercier concluded: "There may be some of you who think that their work, as good as it may be, has no impact on today's and tomorrow's changing world. Let me assure you, it is not true. As economist Peter Drucker said: The best way to predict the future is to create it. The Future starts here, with you, with all of us as **one team**."

What does Transformation mean to you?

— The question could equally have been: What do we do in ACT? My concern here is what do we transform. We all need to understand the results and the objectives of our Transformation. We are not transforming for the sake of transforming. And, as to what we transform, it is best described as NATO's posture, which enables and will continue to enable our Alliance to fulfil its three core tasks. Our output is, therefore, operational. We transform our posture, so that when SACEUR uses it, be it today, tomorrow, or in the future, he has at his disposal the right forces and the overall posture required to deliver the right effects. And it is very important that we all understand this. Because we need to bear in mind that all the processes in ACT, such as Smart Defence, Connected Forces Initiative (CFI) and most of our projects are intended to provide the Alliance with a strong posture, which is the operational ability

to face any challenge. And this is what I want this command to concentrate on.

What will be your main focus areas in the near future and which areas, in your view, require further attention?

— This is a great question, as it allows me to highlight the areas we will be working on. The posture is composed of forces (conventional, nuclear, missile defence) at an appropriate level of readiness. But, to make this posture relevant and credible at the military level, we must ensure that it develops on a robust foundation based on six focus areas:

- Command and Control,
- Logistics and Sustainment,
- Collective Training,
- Partnership,
- Manpower,
- Capabilities.

Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine have changed the security environment in Europe. NATO's Secretary General said that NATO is now implementing its biggest reinforcement of Collective Defence since the end of Cold War; how do you define NATO's new challenges? What concerns you most?

— I believe there is, in fact, one vital challenge, which is to develop the appropriate posture to fulfil our three core tasks and to confront all the threats we face, irrespective of where they originate from. This posture must take into account ongoing threats as well as potential strategic surprises, which we must be able to face with the appropriate level of readiness. Our main challenge is therefore to define this posture and adapt it to current and future situations. However, we must not forget that this posture must face challenges from 360 degrees, and that we are not only focused on threats from the east.





"BE AMBITIOUS AND AIM HIGH"

Supreme Allied Commander Transformation, General Denis Mercier, during a Joint Press Conference following TRIDENT JUNCTURE 2015 live demonstration at San Gregorio training area, Spain. NATO photo by Edouard Bocquet.

JWC is NATO's premier organization for joint operational level training and warfare. What are your expectations from the Centre?

— NATO's posture requires a high level of training in all kinds of environments and development of future concepts and doctrine. It is JWC's role to take into account new and emerging threats, such as cyber threats, hybrid warfare, ballistic missiles, etc. Let me share something with you: when I went to the three consecutive Distinguished Visitor (DV) days of exercise TRIDENT JUNCTURE 15 (TRJE15), I had one concern, which was "were we being too ambitious?" But the feedback I got from the various levels involved was overwhelmingly positive, participating headquarters came away delighted and felt that the experience that this exercise had given them had changed them. To me this indicated that the more ambitious we are with our exercises, the better they become. So, I would encourage you to always aim high, be more ambitious in your scenarios and in preparing the exercises you are entrusted with.

How effective are exercises in achieving NATO's effectiveness and efficiency?

— In these exercises we can train all the different

levels of the Chain of Command, from the tactical units up to the Strategic Commands. This full range of effectiveness, from a clear demonstration of the credibility of our posture at the strategic level down to the proof of our interoperability at the tactical level, is the guarantee of the effectiveness of the exercises. They are built around realistic scenarios, which can cover all the range of the threats that the Alliance must face. What I saw during TRJE15 has completely fulfilled those requirements, and the lessons learned during the exercise will help us to further strengthen the efficiency of our Alliance.

What are your observations from TRJE15?

— I am very satisfied with exercise TRJE15 and with what I witnessed during the DV days in Italy, Spain and Portugal. This large-scale and very ambitious exercise has achieved its objectives and will help the Alliance develop the right posture. It also pleases me to see that TRJE15 allowed us to experiment with new concepts and train on new threats, such as hybrid warfare and cyber-attacks. Further, the exercise involved many Partners and international organizations (IOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as industry ob-

servers. However, the aim was not to train together, but to test our interoperability and coordination efforts in all kinds of environments, which we also achieved.

Do you have people that you look to for guidance and inspiration?

— You, the JWC, first of all. You and the other ACT Centres, the JALLC in Monsanto, Portugal, and the JFTC in Bydgoszcz, Poland. In the ACT organization as a whole, we have a wide spectrum of capabilities and we need to exploit them all. I would like to stress that you are not working *for* me; you are working *with* me, in order to enable the NATO Alliance to face any future challenge.

To conclude, what is your message to NATO's Transformation community?

— I have been impressed with the professionalism and the unique skills that I've seen during my visits to the various Centres. We will continue to rely on you for the preparation of Allied forces, and we will be asking more and more of you, in order to reach the highest level of readiness for our Alliance. In other words: we must strive to become even more ambitious! ✦