



Address by the Netherlands Minister of Defence, J.A. Hennis-Plasschaert, for the American Chamber of Commerce in the Netherlands, 18 May 2016

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me evoke a little bit of transatlantic history to clarify why I, the Dutch Defence minister, decided to be here today.

Let us return to the days of Thomas Jefferson and the Dutch politician Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp.

Jefferson and Van Hogendorp befriended each other when the latter paid a visit to the United States in the 1780s. They would henceforth maintain a lifelong correspondence.

When they first met Jefferson was already known as the author of the American Constitution. Van Hogendorp later became known as one of the Founding Fathers of the Kingdom of the Netherlands.

Most probably, you already know that Jefferson - *as secretary of state and president* - was determined to steer clear of European entanglements. Always refusing to choose sides in Europe's wars, he even spoke of the need to place "*an ocean of fire between us and the old world [i.e. Europe].*"



Jefferson's policy of detachment towards Europe, made his assertive use of American naval force in Europe against the threat of the Barbary States all the more remarkable. These states had made a living out of seizing American and European ships, *as well as sailors*, for ransom.

It was one the most vexing questions confronting him as president.

American naval commerce in the Mediterranean would not be fully respected until the pirates were routed in 1815.

Jefferson's assertiveness was fed by indignation at the brutal treatment given to Americans who had been taken hostage.

It also showed a willingness to use military force in the European realm in order to protect the freedom of commerce.

And it made clear that the interests of the United States simply compelled it to get militarily involved on this side of the Atlantic, despite Jefferson's preference to keep a distance.

As Jefferson explained in one of his letters to Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp:

[quote] *"our people have a decided taste for navigation and commerce. Their servants are duty bound to calculate all their measures on this datum."* [unquote]



Jefferson wrote these words to Van Hogendorp knowing full well that much the same was true for The Netherlands. And indeed, commerce and security have unified the United States and the Netherlands to this very day.

I am therefore more than pleased with the invitation to speak to you at this annual meeting of the American Chamber of Commerce.

(...)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, our – successful – mission to combat the piracy threat of the Horn of Africa may be the most visible example of the continuing nexus between commerce and security.

It even serves as a reminder that the threat of piracy has not disappeared after Jefferson's military campaigns against the Barbary States.

More fundamentally, our present economic well-being is predicated on the existence of a zone of peace and stability in Europe and North America. This is a clear difference with Jefferson's days, when Europe was still the cockpit of wars.

So, let us not forget the wisdom and the sacrifices that it took to establish this zone of peace and stability. And yes, we remain thankful for the crucial role the United States has



played in this regard.

Listen to the words of George Marshall, the soldier statesman who played a key role in crafting America's post-war policy: [quote] *"It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist [Europe] in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace.*

Our policy is directed not against any country or doctrine but against hunger, poverty, desperation and chaos.

Its purpose should be the revival of a working economy in the world so as to permit the emergence of political and social conditions in which free institutions can exist." [unquote]

These lines are, of course, from Marshall's famous speech at Harvard University in 1947. The speech that launched the Marshall Plan and gave impetus to the European integration movement.

Shortly thereafter, transatlantic cooperation within NATO, established in 1949, became the chief guarantor of this peace and stability.

This transatlantic partnership still stands out as one of the greatest achievements of American foreign and economic policy since the Second World War.

And it continues to be of the utmost importance to the future of our security and well-being.

Let there be no doubt about that.

(...)

Ladies and gentlemen,

This partnership is all the more important because today's security situation is deeply disconcerting and demands our full attention.

The world has become a rougher and more fragmented place. It is also increasingly complex.

According to Dr. Henry Kissinger - in his most recent book on 'World Order' - we are witnessing:

[quote] *"not simply a multipolarity of power, but a world of increasingly contradictory realities."* [unquote]

Clearly, this makes it a lot more difficult to comprehend what is going on and to anticipate the next crisis.

- For instance, we have been surprised too often by Russian behaviour.
- We were not sufficiently prepared for the disruptions in the Arab World.
- We are uncertain about the regional and global implications of the rise of China.



- And the emergence of the cyber domain – *in itself a hugely positive source of wealth and creativity* – has introduced a whole new layer of threats and challenges, thereby adding to the complexity.

I am convinced that in this increasingly complex world the best thing we can do is to act in unity and to reaffirm the transatlantic partnership in all domains.

There is no reason to be fatalistic, for together we are still strong. But it would be foolish to underestimate the challenge at hand.

And part of this challenge lies in the domestic realm: convincing Europeans and Americans that this remains the best choice. That peace and prosperity cannot thrive on free rider behaviour.

And yes, it is clear that the US cannot and should not bear all of the security burden. And that the European nations should do more. As President Obama reminded us during his speech in Hannover on April 25th, *[quote] “every NATO member should be contributing its full share towards our common security”. [unquote]*

And rightly so.



Not surprisingly, the next NATO summit in Warsaw, in July, will (in part) be devoted to this topic.

And let me be clear: none of us can address the threats and risks to our security on our own and we all have a responsibility to do our share.

This realisation, *if anything*, tops my own 'Agenda of Priority Points'.

(...)

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me thank you for handing me your "2016 Investors Agenda of Priority Points".

This agenda is important for further developing commerce and trade between the United States and the Netherlands. I won't dwell on the already impressive record of our commerce and trade relationship. You are well aware of this record.

Though, I would like to state that I was struck by some of the similarities between your agenda and my priorities as minister of Defence. The first priority on the agenda, for instance, is to "secure and support the great elements of the Dutch investment climate".



I believe that the Dutch Defence organisation has an important role to play in this regard.

Without any doubt, the Dutch economy thrives in part because it is an important hub in the world, with its harbours, its international airport and its excellent IT infrastructure. It is a hub for people, for services and for goods. And increasingly also for data.

The security of this hub - *as well of the many flows leading to it* - cannot be ensured without the military.

On a daily basis the Dutch Ministry of Defence is much involved in - *as well as taking care of* - maritime security, combating terrorism, ensuring border control, protecting our air space, and improving cyber security.

Its work is indispensable for preserving the Netherlands as a safe place to do business.

It is also important for preserving the free access to the global commons, such as the high oceans, the atmosphere, the Antarctic and the internet.

(...)



Ladies and gentlemen,

Not surprisingly, your Agenda also refers to the importance of the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership or TTIP.

The American Chamber for the EU, too, recently published a report on TTIP, stating its benefits for Europe and the United States.

Let there be no doubt that the Dutch Government fully backs the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and your reasons for supporting it.

On both sides of the ocean, however, we will have to do our utmost to convince a sceptic public-at-large.

Here, *as elsewhere*, we have to counter the forces of fragmentation and strengthen those of integration and cooperation.

This requires that we work together as closely as we can!

(...)

Let me underline that no other strategic partnership is as important to me as the one with the United States.



Together we are the world's strongest advocates for the values we cherish: human rights, democracy, a market-based economy.

And there are many ways in which we can and should cooperate in preserving peace, prosperity and well-being.

You represent some of the greatest and most innovative companies in the world.

I am convinced that we can work together on many of the issues that are facing us today.

There is much to be gained.

To me the importance of our cooperation is beyond any doubt. We simply need each other in order to remain secure and prosperous in the twenty-first century.

Fortunately, American and Dutch Defence industries also know how to strengthen each other. As a matter of fact, your sister organization, the American Chamber of Commerce of New England, will organise the next International Aerospace and Defence Trade Summit in Rotterdam on the 15th and 16th of November, together with the American embassy in the Netherlands and the Netherlands Industries for Defence and Security (NIDV).

Obviously, I strongly support this initiative.



(...)

Ladies and gentlemen, in closing...

As for the correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and Gijsbert Karel van Hogendorp, one could say that it symbolizes the enduring friendship between the United States and the Netherlands as well as the congruence of enduring commercial and security interests.

So, let us make sure that we maintain our friendship in a world that is rapidly becoming more rough and more complex.

And let me express my sincere appreciation for the great role the American Chamber of Commerce is playing in this regard.

We cannot afford to be driven apart. We share global interests.

And one thing is certain: if we do not take the initiative, others will take the helm and decide international events.

Thank you.
