2004-11-16

International Conference: The United States and Europe: partnership or competition

Boston University Institute for Human Sciences

http://hdl.handle.net/2144/20166

Boston University
Nato chief calls for a radical shake-up

Secretary-general wants changes in planning and funding to meet needs of 21st century

By Judy Dempsey in Brussels

Nato's top diplomat is proposing a radical shake-up of the way the military alliance plans and finances its operations as part of an overall strategy to adapt to the needs of the 21st century.

Jaap de Hoop Scheffer's proposals, set out in an interview with the Financial Times, come amid warnings that the US-led alliance could become irrelevant if it is not reformed. The alternative, diplomats say, is that the Pentagon would use Nato to create ad hoc “coalitions of the willing”, undermining its status as a collective defence organisation capable of dealing with new threats.

The reforms would create a small but essential pool of military assets that Nato could call on without having to assemble a force from scratch for each mission. They would also spread the cost of missions across the alliance's 26 members.

Mr de Hoop Scheffer, who became Nato secretary-general in January, said he would spell out his plans during next month's summit in Istanbul.

The reform agenda has gained new urgency because of Nato's ambitious mission in Afghanistan. Begun in August, it is considered the big test for the alliance's credibility and ability to function outside its traditional transatlantic area of operations.

"Afghanistan is a complicated operation," said Mr de Hoop Scheffer. "If Nato enters into a political commitment, Nato cannot, will not and must not fail. And we will not fail."

The 6,500-strong Nato-led International Security Assistance Force, based in Kabul, has for months been trying to obtain long-promised military equipment such as transport helicopters and aircraft from many of the alliance members.