

Former Shell CEO Helps Shape Nato's Future

By [Global Research](#)

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Nato has set up an expert group to contribute to its Strategic Concept, which will be updated next year. Jeroen van der Veer, the recently retired CEO of Shell, was the odd pick for vice chair. "Nato will still be here after we leave Afghanistan," he told NRC Handelsblad. By Petra de Koning in Brussels

When he left oil giant Shell last summer, after five years as its CEO, Jeroen van der Veer knew as much about Nato as the average newspaper reader, he admits. So his nomination as the Dutch candidate for membership of an expert panel formed to help draft the new Nato's Strategic Concept, the fundamentals of the military alliance, came as a surprise, even to him.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen, secretary general of the Nato, had made it clear he wanted a diverse panel, rather than one comprised solely of diplomatic heavyweights, former ministers and professors. Dutch foreign ministry officials knew this and proposed a candidate with such an impressive track record in international business, Rasmussen made him the vice chairman of the committee, second to Madeleine Albright, the former US secretary of state.

In his first interview in his new job, Van der Veer says he did wonder if he would be able to "contribute" enough. He even told Rasmussen as much. But Nato wanted him for his experience in business and particularly in planning strategies. "Besides, energy is becoming an increasingly important issue," Van der Veer says.

Your experience in doing business with Russia must have helped? You negotiated contracts with Putin worth billions of euros.

"Yes, I have dealt with Russia extensively. To make complex deals you have to analyse the way the other party thinks and what its aims are. The secretary general wants a revised relationship with Russia. To come up with a strategy for this, you have to know what their rationale is and what their expectations are."

What do you tell the other members of the committee? What is the reasoning in Russia and what does that mean for Nato?

"I can't get into that. But I am not the only member who has experience with Russia." Italian Giancarlo Aragona and Hans-Friedrich von Ploet from Germany, both members of the committee, were ambassadors in Russia.

The foreign minister has supplied Van der Veer with an assistant and gave him a file of reading material. The Nato documents were "ponderous", he says, and "thick with

subordinate clauses and full of footnotes”.

The reason Nato is revising its strategic concept is that the world has changed since its current strategy was devised in 1999. Back then terrorism was considered a ‘risk’ rather than a ‘threat’. Today, the talk at Nato headquarters in Brussels is about energy supply and climate change and questions such as: what will Nato do if computer systems in one of its member states are paralysed?

Albright, Van der Veer and the rest of the group attend meetings on these subjects to find answers to these strategic questions. They plan to visit Russia in early 2010 as well as all Nato capitals.

“It is far from certain,” Van der Veer says. “That there is a role for Nato on all these topics. You have to consider: should Nato play a part and, if so, should Nato go at it alone? But keep in mind we are advising the secretary general. He is the one who writes the strategy.”

Another reason for Nato to reposition its strategy is it now has 28 members, 9 more than in 1999. “If you want to make a decision with 28 parties at the table, one will always object,” Van der Veer says.

Nato currently rules by consensus. Is the committee interfering in the decision making process?

“We can advise whatever we want. When it comes to strategy two things are important: what do you want and what means do you have to achieve that? There are all kinds of consensus. If you have reached consensus at the highest level, you should not go over the process again in the execution.”

Van der Veer suggests another reason for Nato’s imperative for a new strategy: it needs the support of the public. “In Europe Nato has public support from 60 to 70 percent of the population. That is substantial, but these ratings are lower in the US. That is a concern. We see support for international organisations foundering across the board. For me a good strategy is doing the right things at the right price. You should be able to explain what Nato does in an elevator pitch, in less than a minute.”

This assumption has sparked debate at Nato headquarters. Rasmussen wants the strategy to be clear and concise, but Nato countries all have different stakes and wishes.

How long will the group’s advice be?

“We talked about it and I can’t say anything about it now. Realise it has to be explained on television. I want people to know after three sentences: this is what Nato stands for, and I support that. Nato asks for sacrifices. Human lives.”

A document that short would be revolutionary for Nato?

“Yes, but part of our challenge is to get the support of the public. I want a text that is straightforward.”

And the entire committee agrees on that?

“I am using all my Dutch down-to-earthness to push for it. If you say something brief and

clear, it has a bigger impact. Complexity doesn't justify an illegible document."

What will a strategic concept mean if Nato fails in Afghanistan? Won't that be the end of its credibility?

"Afghanistan is complex. There are no guarantees our efforts will be successful. You can argue about whether Afghanistan is a test or a task for Nato."

Do you think it it will make or break Nato?

"I see it as a task, not a test. Nato will still exist after Afghanistan. No matter how things end there. Unfortunately the world is such that the need for power, for deterrence, will continue."

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