North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Keynote address

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Three Wise Men Report, Norway House, Brussels
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(As delivered)

Norway House, I will start by saying :
God morgen alle sammen. That is Norwegian.

And, thanks to the Permanent Representatives of Norway, Canada and Italy for taking the initiative to this event.

And also many thanks to Carnegie Europe for organizing it and for being a think tank which is constantly so focused on the Transatlantic relationship. And as you all know we are now approaching Christmas, so I found it extremely natural that we focused on the three wise men.

But today it is not Caspar, Melchior and Baltazar.

But it is Martino, Pearson and Lange.

And even if I heard a lot of nice things about the report they presented 60 years ago, I think it’s too much to call it a miracle.

So it’s not fully or possible to compare it to what happened more than 2000 years ago

but at least it was an important event. But even though the report was not a miracle’ it has had a great influence on the Alliance and the influence on the alliance cannot be overestimated.

The report in many ways paved the way for the Alliance as we know it today, a political and military alliance, and not just the latter.

Let me just start by a short, brief, personal note or reflection and that is back in 1987 I was the chairman of the Young Labour Party back in Norway. And the young Labour party Norway was strongly against NATO and very much in favour of Norway leaving NATO and that was a very fierce debate going on in Norway, it was probably what we today would have called the NOxit debate in Norway.

But one of the things that I am most proud of from my time, as leader of the Young Labour Party was I was actually able to change the position of the Young Labour Party from being strongly against to actually being in favour. Not knowing, that I would end up as Secretary General, but knowing that one of the most important arguments I used back then was that NATO was not only a military alliance but NATO was also a political alliance where, 20, not 28 or I think it was 16 or something allies, met regularly and also developed common policies and common political positions on many different issues. So, without really knowing it, I was, back in 1987, echoing the message from the report that NATO was not only a military alliance but NATO is also a political Alliance and I used that as one of my strongest arguments for turning the Young Labour Party from being against to being in favour to NATO.

As you have already heard in Norwegian politics, Herve Lange is one of the giants.

He was foreign minister for almost 20 years.

He signed the NATO treaty for Norway.

And like the other Wise Men, he is honored with his own room at NATO headquarters.

In that room I sometimes, hold, sometimes have press conferences and meet the press and I think about the 3 wise men, but I also think of about the fact that I lived in another room which is named after Lange because the residence where he lived for 20 years as Foreign Minister was upgraded to become the permanent residence of the Norwegian Prime Minister so I also lived in that house of Herve Lange for many years until 2013. And it was a nice house but it is sometimes, it is hard to get in there.

So, so, yeah but let’s be honest reports from NATO Committees don’t generally receive a great deal of public attention. Certainly not 60 years after they were published. Yet this report proved its enduring value.

It deserves to be read and re-read. Studied and re-studied.

Not as history.

But as a living document with a great deal to offer us in our own time.

NATO itself deserves credit for launching this report.

The North Atlantic Council knew something was missing, something had to be done to strengthen the organization.

It took courage -- and wisdom – to embark on this internal review process.

To ask the necessary questions.

The report helped to change NATO from being almost entirely a military alliance into a political-military alliance.

That might sound like a subtle difference.

But it has made a profound difference.

The Three Wise Men helped to ensure that NATO is what it is today.

That our Alliance has continued to adapt.

And remains as important as ever.

We are first and foremost a defence alliance dedicated to the security of our nations and our people.

But the long-term cohesion and durability of our alliance goes far beyond military matters.

In reference to NATO's Article 5 commitment, the Report makes clear that there must be a "whole-hearted acceptance" by all members in the political commitment to collective defence.

And there must be confidence in the will and ability that all members will "honor that commitment" in response to aggression.

These words are important and they are relevant and important also today.

Our commitment to Article 5 remains as strong today as it was 60 years ago.

And, as the Three Wise Men wisely recognized, Alliance unity is the backbone of our deterrence and defence.

They also saw that greater unity could only come about through increased political consultation.

Increased cultural, economic and scientific relationships.

And increased public understanding and support for the Alliance.

A culture of political consultation on a wide range of non-military issues and military challenges combined with a wide range of non-military relationships have helped the Alliance adapt to changing security challenges.

Consultation leads to more listening and learning.

And to greater political understanding among Allies and partners.

This has also contributed to consensus-building within the Alliance.

And this strengthens NATO’s unity and cohesion.

And you can see this in our engagement from the Western Balkans to Afghanistan.

When NATO makes a political commitment, we keep our word.

We do what we promise to do.

Over the past few years, NATO has responded with unity and determination to the most serious challenges in a generation.

We are undertaking the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War.

These are political decisions, reached by consensus, by NATO political leadership.

In close consultation with our military commanders.

We remain firmly committed to a two-track approach to Russia.

Strong deterrence and defence coupled with meaningful political dialogue.

And Allies have committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence within a decade.

Again, this is a political commitment, based on a strong consensus within NATO.

And we are now implementing that commitment.

And let me just underline for a moment, the importance of delivering on the defence investment pledge, because the reality is that we need capabilities that we can finance by more investments in defence, but we also need the cohesion and the strengthening of the Transatlantic Bond that will follow when European allies and Canada invest more in defence and, we have a long way to go but, I am actually impressed by the fact that we have turned a corner.

And after many years of decline in defence spending across Europe and Canada, we are now seeing that, at least on average, that defence spending in Europe has started to increase again and this year expect 3% real increase in defence spending which is an important step in the right direction.

The picture is still mixed but is better than it was just 2 years ago when it comes to defence spending.

We also made a commitment to step up efforts to project stability beyond our borders.

Through more capacity building, training and political dialogue for partners.

And we have the momentum for closer NATO-EU cooperation.

All of this shows the positive role of NATO's culture of political consultation and consensus decision-making.

Consensus is not always easy. And sometimes it may take a lot of time;

And I can see a lot of people in the room that knows everything about that.

But consensus is the basis for the strength of the Alliance and when 28 democracies come to consensus, we can move forward and take action as a strong Alliance.

So consensus and unity are two sides of the same coin.

Thanks to the insights and the recommendations of the Three Wise Men, NATO became a more adaptive political organization.

The essence of the Committee's wisdom boils down to this:

Non-military cooperation can be as important for the security of a nation or an alliance "as the building of a battleship or the equipping of an army."

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We are all grateful that the Three Wise Men put forward a blueprint for more consultation to achieve greater unity in the Alliance.

By recognizing the importance of non-military cooperation.

By building on the core values that unite members of the Alliance.

And by pointing the way toward creating a true Atlantic community.

Our duty is to carry out that work.

To keep this unique political and military Alliance between Europe and North America strong, flexible and united.

So we can preserve peace and security for our nations for the next decades.

JUDY DEMPSEY (MODERATOR): If you look ahead how do you really see the NATO-EU relationship developing?

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): I see the NATO-EU relationship really developing in a positive way. I think that's something that we have achieved together, NATO and the European Union, on many different levels from the top political leadership in EU, working with the leadership in NATO, with me, and staff-to-staff talks.

We have really been able to strengthen that political cooperation between NATO and the European Union. We have just agreed, last week, on a package, we endorsed, a package for more than 40 concrete measures on how to further strengthen our cooperation on a wide range of different topics. And NATO-EU cooperation has always been important but, in many ways I think it's even more important now, because we face new kinds of security threats which, which are this combination of military and non-military means of aggression, hybrid cyber threats, really calls upon the joint efforts of NATO and European Union so we work there and we also have seen the will in the European Union to strengthen European defense. We welcome that but, of course, it has to be done in a way which is not competing with NATO, but complimentary, so all this calls upon more NATO-EU cooperation and, we are really delivering and, I'm quite impressed by the way we have been able to move forward.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Do you, you brought up this issue, I mean, do you worry about the competitiveness, I mean, frankly, both, both organizations do compete with each other in some ways, whether nobody wants to say this inside NATO or EU, but they're both completely different culture mindsets, but do you really think that, I mean how would you work in detail, would one do the soft part, would the other do the hard part, how would, what's the nature of this complementarity?

JENS STOLTENBERG: EU has its own capabilities and NATO has some capabilities but none, but none of us have all the tools to respond to all the different security challenges we are faced with. So, therefore, if we combine we are able to provide a formidable force and that's exactly what we do. For instance, when we address hybrid threats, one of the things we have done is to develop a playbook describing who's going to do what. If one of our member countries are under hybrid attacks, we need to defend infrastructure, we need to look at energy security, we need to defend our cyber networks. EU has some capabilities, we have some capabilities, we have to make sure that they work together. NATO has some unique capabilities for instance, when it comes to collective defense, major military operations, we have the command structure, which the European Union do not have; but I think that we have a much more relaxed relationship to these issues now, than my impression was the case, ten or twenty years ago.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Indeed.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So it's easier to work together.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Do you think the EU should have its own command structure?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The EU should not develop command structures which are shaped-like or, compete with, NATO. They need of course the ability to plan and to conduct a kind of military presence which we have seen. The EU has, for instance, in parts of Africa, but it's absolutely possible to do that without competing or establishing something which is competing with, or parallel structures of, NATO. And my impression after attending several NATO, sorry EU Ministerial meetings, but also I'm going to make, on Thursday I will attend a

NATO, sorry the European Union Summit and I and I have what they have told me, again and again, the EU leaders, is that this is not about creating a European Army; this is not about competing with NATO; this is not about creating parallel command structures; but this is about strengthening European defense and strong European defense that is something NATO is in favour of because we have asked the Europeans to invest more in capabilities, to increase defense spending, to coordinate more their efforts, that will strengthen Europe, the European Union and NATO, and therefore, I welcome it as long as we avoid the pitfalls where the European Union start to compete with NATO.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Now I'm intrigued by this answer. Now, imagine if you told a teenager this, having EU defense ambitions, you have NATO, imagine if a teenager said to you, well why don't you just join together.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Well, I have tried twice to convince Norway to join the European Union and that was not a success. [laughter]

So that's the problem with democracy, so there is that, you cannot just decide in Brussels. There are some people out there and they have different views on, for instance, both NATO and the European Union.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Oh yes. Oh yes.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So, so the reality is that, reality is that Canada and the United States, they'll never become members of the European Union, but they of course contribute to Europe, the security of Europe. Norway well, [chuckles] we can try, good luck but I've lost two referendums so I know exactly how to lose and not to win them.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Yes.

JENS STOLTENBERG: And then, and then, you have Turkey. So the thing is, that there are 6 allies, Norway, Iceland in the north, Canada, United States in the west, Albania and Turkey in the southeast, which all are essential for the security of Europe. Eighty percent of NATO's defense spending after Brexit…

JUDY DEMPSEY: After Brexit.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Will be non-EU. The EU four battalions which we'll have in the Eastern part of the alliance will be led by non-EU allies, so there is no way we cannot, we have to work together to protect Europe.

JUDY DEMPSEY: But just before we end this discussion on the EU nation and I see our Turkish Ambassador here, I wasn't actually thinking of those not in EU joining the EU, those in NATO or those not in the EU, joining NATO; I was thinking of maybe a different kind of Atlanticist construction. I'm just, just throwing out the idea before my next (inaudible) question.

JENS STOLTENBERG: But what we said last week when we agreed at the NATO Foreign Ministerial meeting on this 40 more than 42 concrete measures was that this is the beginning.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Okay.

JENS STOLTENBERG: This is not the end. So now we have delivered the package, we will implement that package and you have to remember that just this year we have been able to agree on a technical arrangement when it comes to cyber cooperation between NATO and the EU. We have reached agreement on how to work together with the European Union in the Aegean Sea, this is two formal arrangements this year and that is more than agreed with the European Union over the last decade. So we are making progress in NATO-EU cooperation and maybe that we should create big Council sometime in the future but so so so so that will be later on.

JUDY DEMPSEY: By the way you never, you never did mention, you were quite modest, you never did mention that you negotiated the Norwegian border deal with Russia.

JENS STOLTENBERG: No, but Russia is not member of the European Union. So…

JUDY DEMPSEY: No. [laughter] No, NATO, no NATO. But it was about; it brings me to my next question.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, yeah yeah.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Now it's interesting, the Warsaw Summit and the Global, the EU Global Plan, the Global Action Plan, both of them make references to resilience and resilience has different meanings but, as an EU citizen and, although my country is not in NATO, but that's another story, I mean resilience is not just about outside our neighbourhood, it's about being able to recover quickly in an event, not it it doesn't even have to be a terrorist attack but an explosion of some sort, the degradation of the railway system, what the enormous effect would have on Western democracies. Is NATO ready for this resilience?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yes, and we are stepping up our efforts because we see more threats and challenges related to, for instance, civilian infrastructure and again, this is an area where we work closely together with the European Union, but recently we we, we agreed on guidelines for how to have this necessary resilience and and, and sustainability of our different kinds of civilian infrastructure, energy, the continuation of government and cyber and so on. So these, these are issues which we are now also doing more to address. Resilience was one of the key issues we addressed at the Warsaw Summit, so we are ready, but we also understand that we need to do more, so that's something we are working on.

JUDY DEMPSEY: But you brought up this this consensus thing, I don't mean to call it a thing.

JENS STOLTENBERG: No, no.

JUDY DEMPSEY: But this consensus, you know, you know how debilitating…

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, yeah.

JUDY DEMPSEY: You know how debilitating it is but, imagine if if part of the railway or airport system was destroyed, where's, how, how could NATO and the EU, particularly NATO, kick in really quickly to respond to this?

JENS STOLTENBERG: So, first of all the first responders is always the nation and the whole idea is to enable them to take care of their own railway systems or ports or whatever it is. So, and and but then, of course, both NATO and the EU have different capabilities to assist and help different member nations, partly by providing guidelines to set some kind of standards for what kind of quality and what kind of systems the different nations have to have in place, to to protect their systems and to re-establish them if they are under attack.

And that's especially when it comes to cyber. We have developed that by also having teams in NATO being able to deploy quickly (inaudible) to member State and help them to protect their cyber systems if they are under attack. But the main focus is always what can we do to enable nations to protect their own systems and to have the quality on the infrastructure which which is good enough.

JUDY DEMPSEY: This is really interesting; you mentioned the cyber security issue. Given the whole, the constant worries by the Baltic States particularly, but we've seen it with the German Bundesbank, we have seen what has happened to the communication system there, last week the Deutsche telecom was attacked, do you think Article 5 should be updated to include this idea of cyber security because these nations are threatened and they are coming under a new kind of modern attack. Should Article 5 be updated?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Article 5 is already updated because NATO is a modern alliance and we have agreed that a cyber-attack can trigger our collected defense. So actually cyber-attack is now regarded as serious, as a conventional or other kind of military attack, because we know that cyber-attack can destroy infrastructure, it can also cause…

JUDY DEMPSEY: Absolutely.

JENS STOLTENBERG: It can also cause the casualties, human casualties, so we have already defined cyber as a, that cyber-attacks can trigger Article 5. But more than that, we also decided at the Warsaw Summit in July that we will establish cyber as a military domain, we have sea, land and air and now we also have cyber because it's impossible to imagine a military conflict without the cyber dimension. And we have to be able to protect our own networks being when we are in operations in Afghanistan or in Kosovo and any military conflict will have a cyber-dimension. So so cyber is part of Article 5.

JUDY DEMPSEY: But to have, that's interesting you don't have to change the text of Article 5, clearly, but it's implied.

JENS STOLTENBERG: No.

JUDY DEMPSEY: If you, if you say that NATO is prepared for this and updating it, I wonder about this, what about the interoperability issue because one of the weaknesses of NATO is in fact the, not the lack, that's far to strong, but interoperability is a problem, not only between the European allies but particularly between some of the European allies and the United States. I mean don't, this all plays into resilience and cyber-security, do you worry about the lack of or the this issue of interoperability?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I will not say I'm worried, but I am, we are focused and we are very much aware of the importance of interoperability and as I said interoperability is perhaps is one of the most important tasks of NATO to make sure that forces from 28 nations soon to be 29…

JENS STOLTENBERG: And also with partner nations are able to really work together and to fight together and that needs a very high degree of interoperability both when it comes to equipment that equipment can work together…

JUDY DEMPSEY: That's right.

JENS STOLTENBERG: But also command, control that we understand when we talk to each other and and of course we always have, what should I say, room for improvements, but I think that one of the lessons we learned for instance in Afghanistan, a big military operation where hundreds of thousands of soldiers from European or from NATO allied countries and partners participated, we learned that we we we had to develop better interoperability and actually have been able to do so, partly based on big military operations like Afghanistan, but also more and more training. So one of the reasons why we are now doing more exercises is to increase our ability to, to work very closely together.

JUDY DEMPSEY: But interoperability is just not about military capabilities and making things click together, it's also about, I suppose, the interoperability of trust, I mean, and intelligence sharing, and let's leave aside the EU intelligence as a different matter. I mean the intelligence sharing is a problem inside NATO?

JENS STOLTENBERG: So, of course we can be better, and that's the reason why we have just established a new division in NATO and a division which is only going to be working with intelligence; and we and we are just appointed a new Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence and the reason that we have established a new division and the reason why we are going to have a new Assistant Secretary General, already appointed him, is that we can do more when it comes to both improve the way we collect intelligence, but also the way we share and understand and analyze intelligence. And that's that again has always been important, but in the more unpredictable and more uncertain security environment with all the instability we see in Iraq, Syria, North Africa and and around NATO, of course the importance

of early warning, the importance of situational awareness, the importance of sharing intelligence has just become even more important.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Yes, but I mean this where the Three Wise Men report is still relevant because they they discussed in detail the idea of trust and the lack of trust, but intelligence requires trust and you know frankly it would be hard to see, I see Ambassador Luc there, hello Ambassador it would be hard to imagine you know maybe the Americans sharing intelligence with certain other NATO countries. I mean this this this isn't there yet the full, trust is a very difficult commodity in any case but you, a little bit more trust is needed inside NATO.

JENS STOLTENBERG: But you know, NATO is the most successful military alliance in history and that is because we have made the strong political commitment to defend each other, to stand together and to provide the necessary deterrence to prevent the conflict. The reason for NATO to be strong, is not because we want to provoke a conflict, but because we know that as long as we are strong, as long as we are united we, we prevent the conflict and of course if we trust each other to fight together, then we should also trust each other to share intelligence and we are sharing intelligence and also some big allies, which of course have more intelligence than smaller allies, actually I know about one small ally which has a lot of intelligence up North.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Yes. [laughter] And you're not going to share it.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Oh I think…(inaudible)

JUDY DEMPSEY: It depends, case by case.

JENS STOLTENBERG: …sharing it too, yeah. But but but so we have mechanisms and assistance for sharing intelligence but of course always some nations would perhaps keep some intelligence just for themselves, but but we have developed, we have long history of sharing intelligence much more than any other international institution or organization.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Well that's not much of a comparison because other international organizations are different.

JENS STOLTENBERG: That's true.

JUDY DEMPSEY: You know so…

JENS STOLTENBERG: But I just used an example…

JUDY DEMPSEY: So I mean I can't let you…

JENS STOLTENBERG: …but of course it sounded good. [laughter]

JUDY DEMPSEY: Yes, now since you bring in this the North and the intelligence it brings us to Russia because this all feeds into resilience, cyber warfare, hybrid warfare. First of all the

easy question inside NATO is there now a common threat perception about Russia?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yes, and more important it is a common agreement on how to approach Russia based on the strong message from Warsaw that we want a strong, firm alliance delivering the necessary defense and deterrence but at the same time striving for more constructive and cooperative relationship with Russia, keeping the channels for political dialogue open and and and trying to keep tensions down, avoid escalating the situation and and avoiding a new Cold War or a new arms race. This is a balance, this is a this is not always easy but we have a very strong united position in NATO that that is what we are working for and and I have many times used my own experience as a Norwegian politician but even during the coldest period of the Cold War Norway bordering Soviet Union and then later Russia were able to have a pragmatic working relationship with Russia on energy, on border relations, on military matters, on on vis-à-vis travel, on fishing quotas and a lot of things and that was not not despite of Norway's membership in in NATO but it was because of NATO, Norway's membership in NATO because that provided the predictability, the platform for a small nation as NATO to engage with with Russia. That benefitted Norway, but it also benefitted Russia and, for instance, when we agreed on the borderline up in the Baron Sea now both, Russia and Norway, is exploring for oil up there which would not have been possible without a borderline. So this is good for Russia and Norway, good for everyone.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Yes. Well since you bring up Norway, I mean then it brings up the whole Arctic issue which I presume will become a political discussion inside NATO.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, but the Arctic issue is I think you have to remember that in the Arctic area we have seen more military presence we have seen also more Russian military presence.

JENS STOLTENBERG: But at the same time I think the Arctic issue is also an area or an area where we have been able to maintain cooperation and maintain maintain a relatively low level of tensions. I know that several NATO allies, Canada and the United States, Norway, Denmark work closely with Russia in the Arctic Council.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Yeah, yeah.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The Norwegian Army meet every week with the Russian Army the 6th Fleet up in the North and discuss search and rescue and other issues so in the Arctic area we have managed, in close cooperation with Russia, to at least avoid the same tensions and problems we have seen in other parts of Europe.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Umm Secretary General I'm going to stop now because I'm sure everybody wants to ask you questions and I didn't mention the T-word by the way, no doubt somebody will want, Trans-Atlanticism, Trump-Atlanticism. So, if anybody likes, we have five minutes we're going to stick to a very tight schedule. One question identifies a first year, second year, third year, yes please. Keep it, yes you and keep it, identify yourself, keep it

very direct we have very little time. Thank you. Yeah, over there Marie back at the back. And the question here, raise your hand again.

Q: Thank you very much my name is Mohammad Raje-Baraquette (sic). What do you think about the liberation of Aleppo by Syrian Army, Russians? Don't you think that as Europeans we have to be happy that Russia and Syrian Army are fighting against ISIS, ISIS and the others are our enemies, but I noticed that it's not the case, thank you very much?

JUDY DEMPSEY: Okay, next we'll take Secretary, we'll take the next question please identify yourself.

Q: Hi, thank you very much. My name is Doctor (inaudible) and I'm happy to bring up the T-word.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Yeah.

Q: As you mentioned. There is some anxiety about the incoming Trump administration and that's U.S. ties to its European allies might weaken. So since the topic was civil non-military cooperation so what can NATO do to ensure that unity among its European allies will be strong, despite of what happens across the Atlantic?

JUDY DEMPSEY: Thank you. And the third question here then we go on to another group of questions. Thank you.

Q: Julian Barnes with the Wall Street Journal. To follow up on your cyber question: could interference in a political election by a foreign power constitute an Article 5 situation?

JUDY DEMPSEY: Great, thank you Julian. Thank you very much. [laughter, talking] So, Secretary General I think we should work backwards, the cyber security Article 5.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So first of all, any any interference, outside interference in a democratic election is of course unacceptable and it's important that all facts will also will also will have all facts on the table but it is up to the United States and the U.S. authorities now to decide the next steps on how to look into the alleged meddling or interference in the U.S. elections. What I can say is that we have seen more and more reports about States being behind cyber-attacks against NATO allies and that's one of the reasons why we are stepping up our efforts to strengthen our cyber defenses to strengthen the cyber defenses of NATO networks but also help allies to strengthen their defenses. And one important part of that is of course to develop the techniques to make sure that we are able to attribute who's behind, because that's one of the important and difficult challenges related to cyber-attacks is that not, not always known who's attacking you so attribution is a key issue and one of the key challenges we are addressing.

JUDY DEMPSEY: And you're reassuring the, the European allies reassuring the other side.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The Trans-Atlantic bond, yeah. First of all, we are an alliance of democracies and in democracies people elect different political leaders, coming from different political parties that has always been the case in NATO and we have seen different political leaders from different political families disagreeing on many different issues and that will always be the case in an alliance of 28 democracies. So, different views, open debates, discussions, disagreements is not a sign of weakness it is a sign of strength as long as we are able to agree on the most important thing and that is that we stand together and defend each other. And that has been the case and I'm absolutely, for almost seven decades and I'm absolutely certain that will continue to be the case. Yes there are different views, different opinions but yes we are always able to agree on the core task of NATO to defend each other and I'm absolutely certain that the U.S. will continue to maintain its NATO commitments.

JUDY DEMPSEY: May we look forward to the Brussels, look forward to the Brussels Summit. Question, the ISIS question please.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Ah, sorry, Aleppo. Aleppo is a humanitarian catastrophe which has become even worse because of the new offensive by the Assad regime supported by Russia. The important thing now is to do whatever possible to have a cease-fire a cessation of hostilities as soon as possible and then enable resumption of humanitarian aid and have a cease-fire which can be then the first step towards a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Would you have time for another set, to be very brief I promise?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, very brief.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Thank you, okay. Three more questions. One here, second and okay there's only two, I think that's probably (inaudible) yes.

Q: Thank you I'm Pauline Massaud from Friends of Europe (sic). Secretary General you mentioned resilience obviously, and you mentioned that we are 28 democracies but we're seeing very, very dangerous path being taken throughout several allies, it would be too easy to focus only on Turkey, does NATO have a plan for resilience for when we are still 28 but not all democracies?

JUDY DEMPSEY: Okay, and there was a question near you Pauline, somebody put up their hand, yes please.

Q: Tom Savard (sic) Professor from University of Antwerp here in Belgium. About nuclear weapons policy also more political than military maybe. Now all NATO member States are also members of the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty, they have the obligations to start negotiations to eliminate nuclear weapons. Now in 2017 unilateral negotiations will be started up for Nuclear Weapons Ban Treaty first step towards elimination in the United Nations. How do you explain that all NATO member States except the Netherlands voted against the proposal a couple of weeks ago?

JUDY DEMPSEY: Thank you. No, okay I'm going to stop here. Will you take the nuclear question then…

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, because we believe that the best way to address the important issue of nuclear disarmament is to use existing tools like for instance Non-Proliferation Treaty. We think to establish other as I say platforms will only undermine the important work which takes place in the NPT. So, so NATO has clearly stated that we will remain a nuclear alliance as long as there are nuclear weapons in the world but we have also stated that our long term goal is a world without nuclear weapons, but we don't believe, but we do not believe that a world becomes safer if we have unilateral nuclear disarmament so NATO and the NATO allies especially the United States have actually been able to agree on substantial reductions in the number of nuclear warheads and we are, and the United States has also clearly conveyed the message that they're ready to continue to reduce but it has to be a balanced reduction. So we don't believe that to establish other platforms for addressing the same issue will make it easier, actually it will make that work more difficult.

JUDY DEMPSEY: And we want to get the last question, resilience and democracies.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So we are always in favour of resilience among all NATO allies and and, I don't know exactly what you are hinting at, but, democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty are core values for NATO and I have stressed the importance of respecting these core values in my meetings with many NATO leaders and they are important because, I'm absolutely certain that in the long run, open democratic societies are more resilient than closed autocratic societies. So, I really believe that democracy will win because we are stronger when we are open and democratic than we try to be autocratic and not respect democratic values.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Your time is up, thank you for giving us an extra round. Everybody will remain seated. Thank you very much Secretary General. [applause]

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

JUDY DEMPSEY: Thank you Secretary, thank you, thank you. [applause]

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