North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

The Three Ages of NATO: An Evolving Alliance

Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Harvard Kennedy School
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(As delivered)

Thank you Nick and thank you for that kind welcome and it's great to be here and it's great to meet you. You have so much experience both from academic life but also as a practitioner or as practical politics, being an ambassador to NATO and in public life in the United States. So, you have experience, you have knowledge which we highly value in NATO but I also know that you are highly valued here at Harvard and the Kennedy School with all the knowledge and experience you bring to this school. So, it's great to be here and it's great to be at the Kennedy School at Harvard because Harvard is one the world's most recognized and premier institutions for learning, for public life and I remember very well last time I was here, I was Prime Minister of Norway and I gave a lecture on the sovereign wealth fund of Norway and whether the oil revenue for Norway is a blessing or a curse.

This time, my topic is very different. My topic is NATO and the challenges NATO is facing. I will deliver a speech and then afterwards, I'm more than ready to and happy to answer your questions on many different topics but let me start with the fact that the Kennedy School has alumni which have served all over the world in different positions, as prime ministers and presidents, as politicians from many different political parties and as ambassadors and generals and admirals and I also read that there has been some astronauts that are alumni from the Kennedy School. So there are many people who have served in different positions and many of the people that have served in NATO, they're also alumni from the Kennedy School and I think that if we gathered all of them in a room, they could tell us many different tales. They could tell us about Cuban missiles and razor wire border posts, of velvet revolutions and the tearing down of the Wall, of wars halted and genocide prevented. They would tell you about 9/11 and the first and only use of Article 5 of NATO's founding treaty, as Nick just referred to treating an attack on one as an attack on all; a moment which Nick remembers very well because at that time, he was the Ambassador to NATO as he just told all of us and they would speak of an organization based on the values of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, on common interests and close friendships. They would paint the picture of an organization that constantly changes to meet the challenges of the day.

Shakespeare once wrote of the seven ages of man. Today, I would like to talk about the three ages of NATO, about where NATO has been, about how it's evolved and about where NATO is going. The first age of NATO began 67 years ago in Washington. After the horrors of the

Second World War, the countries of North America and Western Europe came together to find a new, different way forward. They realized back then that going it alone doesn't work. It never has and it never will. Going it alone had only led to centuries of war in Europe and of the United States being drawn into two devastating world wars which started in Europe. By standing together to collective defence, things could be different. By being united, NATO allies could stand up to the bullies of the international arena and say no. We could protect our allies, we could protect our territory, we could protect our people. As a result, the following 40 years were among the most stable and certainly the most prosperous that Western Europe and North America had ever experienced. And then, in what felt like a moment, the world changed. The Cold War ended without a shot being fired on European soil. The Soviet Union collapsed, the people of the Eastern Bloc were free, new countries appeared as others vanished from the map and Europe rushed to be united with many countries in central and eastern Europe joining NATO and the European Union. Russia, no longer an enemy, became a partner of NATO.

This was a time of great optimism and hope for some but for others, it was a time of fear and violence. The wars in the Balkans in the 1990s were brutal and bloody. The threat of another genocide just half a century after the Holocaust was real. So NATO stepped up and we entered our second age, moving from purely collective defence, NATO set its sights on managing conflicts beyond its borders, bringing an end to the war in Bosnia and later stopping potential genocide in Kosovo. This was a new role for NATO, a role we proved adept at playing. So it was no surprise that after 9/11, NATO took charge in Afghanistan too. Troops from every NATO country from the United States, Britain, Italy, Germany, Romania, Estonia and all the other allies joined in. Troops from our partners from around the world all joined together to eradicate al-Qaeda, to fight the Taliban and to bring stability to Afghanistan. Together, Canada and the European allies have lost over 1,000 soldiers in that mission, a mission launched in response to an attack on the United States and we are still in Afghanistan. Supporting the Afghan armed forces which we helped build from almost nothing to an effective force of more than 350,000 soldiers and police. Standing together as we have always done, stronger together as we have always been.

Our unity was essential to managing crisis in our second age but then, in a moment, our world changed again. That moment was 2014. It was the year that for the first time since World War II, a European country seized part of another by force. With its annexation of Crimea, Russia had torn up the national rulebook that had served all nations, including itself, so well for so many years. It rejected the principals set out in the Helsinki Final Act, where all nations are sovereign and independent and should solve their differences through peaceful means, ideas that Russia has helped create. Instead, Russia looked backwards to worn out notions of spheres of influence and of strong nations having dominion over the weak with the fate of millions of people decided by big men in smoke-filled rooms and this is an outdated vision we can never accept. 2014 was also the year that witnessed the breakthrough of the terrorist group ISIL or Daesh, combining extraordinary brutality with a twisted mission of a

Caliphate. ISIL has proved a destructive force in Syria and in Iraq. It is attempting to spread its influence through North Africa and around the world and acts of terror have been committed in its name from Ankara to Orlando.

So now, NATO has entered its third age, an age where we must do both collective defence and manage crisis and promote stability beyond our borders. We do not have the luxury of choosing one or the other. We must do both at the same time and this is exactly what we are doing. We have implemented the strongest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. We will soon deploy 4 multi-national battalions, one each to Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania led in turn by the U.S., Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom. We will also increase our presence in southeast Europe. With a stronger multi-national presence in the East of our Alliance, it is clear that any action against any ally will be treated as an attack on all allies.

NATO stands strong and we stand united but we do not seek confrontation with Russia. The Cold War is history and it should stay history. Instead, we want a meaningful and constructive dialogue with Russia. That is why we have held two meetings this year of the NATO-Russia Council, to make plain our differences and to find a way forward; and this is also why I met with Foreign Minister Lavrov a couple of days ago in New York because while we need more defence, we also need more dialogue with Russia. Russia is our biggest neighbour and it’s here to stay.

ISIL, however, is totally different. ISIL must be eradicated. Combating terrorism is an essential part of promoting stability beyond our borders. In Afghanistan and elsewhere, NATO has long played a key role in the fight against terrorism and we are stepping up our efforts. Through the global coalition to counter ISIL, every single NATO ally is already in the fight, standing side by side with America and our partners in the region and that coalition is as effective as it is thanks to the long history of cooperation brought about by decades of NATO operations and exercises. NATO’s long experience in the Balkans and Afghanistan tells us that an essential ingredient of long term stability is the strength of local forces and local institutions. That’s the reason why NATO is building local capacity and NATO has already trained Iraqi officers to better fight ISIL and we are expanding this program. We will also deploy a team to Baghdad to provide strategic advice and support to the Iraqis security forces and our advanced AWACS surveillance planes will provide valuable information to support the air operations of the coalition to counter ISIL in Syria.

Of course, all of this comes at a price. Freedom has never come for free. After the Cold War, defence spending fell across the alliance but last year, the cuts stopped and this year, 22 NATO allies will increase defence spending in real terms. The United States contributes to the collective defence of the alliance in many different ways. Financially, of course, but also by virtue of being the world’s only superpower, with its nuclear weapons, its huge armed forces at home and around the world willing to make the ultimate sacrifice to defence the

nations and their allies and its moral authority and clout as the world's richest and most powerful democracy.

Assuring European stability has been a central pillar of U.S. foreign policy since World War II, both to prevent conflict from leading to another global war and as the U.S. and Europe form the world's largest trading relationship to ensure its own prosperity. NATO has been the vehicle for securing this goal. It has given the United States a unique role, a unique influence, in European affairs and without NATO, that influence, that stability and that prosperity, would be put at risk and it's something we should all try to avoid. Of course, the United States may be the guarantor of European security but it is far from its sole provider. All allies contribute through the men and women of the armed forces, through the use of the territory and their bases, through their military equipment, from satellites up into space to submarines deep under the ocean. European allies are taking the lead in a new high readiness force we have established in NATO and the forward presence in the Eastern part of our Alliance will also see European allies in the lead; and I continue to press European allies to contribute even more.

In return for this commitment, every ally, including the United States, gets the unwavering support of 27 other democracies, they get tried and tested command and control and deep relationships from the soldiers on the front line to the generals calling the shots. Relationships forged over many years are working and fighting side by side. They get the most powerful, most enduring, most effective and most reliable alliance the world has ever seen.

The world has changed and NATO evolves. This is the way we have kept our nations safe for almost 70 years but while NATO evolves, it also stands true to its founding principles, that united in common cause and common values, we are stronger together than we ever could be apart.

On the 12th of September, 2001, the day after those horrific attacks on this nation, national security advisor Condoleezza Rice received a phone call from the U.S. Ambassador to NATO, from Nick. He told her that every NATO ally stood as one with America and that every ally was willing to defend America. On that moment, Rice would later write, "It is really good to have friends". In its NATO allies, America has the best of friends and it always will. So, my message is that NATO is good for Europe but it's also good for the United States and that's the reason why we are so proud of the Transatlantic Bond. Thank you.

Q: I sort of understand that like the goal of NATO might be to justify its existence [inaudible] understand that if you use the same logic then you're probably right, try to convince that your existence should be continued. But I was wondering whether you have ever thought about it in a different way that NATO tries to present itself as a guarantor against instability [inaudible] for example when Russia - USSR or whatever - it's like this time it's Warsaw Pact unilaterally moved its troops from Eastern Europe and say like, guys, let's live in peace together, let's create one Europe from [inaudible]. But it's like [inaudible] was that like [inaudible] expansion, indeed[?] Russia has like seven bases outside of Russia and NATO has like, all the allies[??]

[inaudible] 800 bases. What kind of aggression are we talking about? It's like, of course, [inaudible] for the sole purpose of destroying [inaudible] from your side [inaudible] of course it would be [inaudible] and, of course, you provoke and, of course, you create some kind of tension, of course, you create some kind of instability in the region and you need [inaudible] to respond to[??], if you say like I will come [inaudible] America[?] and I will save you, save you from something that maybe we can move [inaudible] like there is no tension from the site[??] and we will trust each other [inaudible] than just once you aid us to donate[?] more like support [inaudible] it's like it's not the… it will not resolve[?] [inaudible] in this way [inaudible] I was wondering [inaudible] you have thought about it in this way, or for you it's a settled question, it's like you just have some kind of a, like, [inaudible] some kind of [inaudible].

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): NATO does not seek confrontation with… does not seek confrontation with… with Russia. Actually NATO strives for a more cooperative and constructive relationship with Russia. And we believe that we should try to develop a political dialogue with Russia; that we should try to keep tensions down, that we should do whatever we can to prevent a new arms race. And actually, after the end of the Cold War NATO invited Russia into a broad partnership, and we were able to establish a lot of cooperation with Russia. And I think we moved step by step in the right direction.

But then we have to understand what happened is that Russia partly continued a very substantial military build-up. Since 2000, Russia has tripled defence spending in real terms, but not only… and at the same time, we reduced defense spending every year. But not only has Russia tripled defence spending, invested in many modern military capabilities, exercised their forces in a more aggressive pattern and ways. But the most important thing is that Russia used military force against neighbours, against Georgia. They violated the international recognized borders of Georgia. Russia has military troops in Moldova, against the wish of the government of Moldova. And then the last example which is perhaps also the most serious example is that they annexed Crimea, despite that they have signed an agreement recognizing Crimea as part of Ukraine. And they used military force to achieve that goal. And then they have continued to destabilize Eastern Ukraine, supporting the separatists.

So if NATO hadn't reacted to that, then NATO wouldn't have served this main sort of purpose which is to provide defence and deterrence for all allies, including for instance the Baltic countries which feel that it's really a serious situation when Russia used military force against neighbours, which has been part of the Soviet Union, which has also been the case for these Baltic countries.

I say this because… because I believe that NATO has to be strong. We have to provide deterrence. We have to stand united, not to provoke a war, but to prevent the war. And this has been very successful for 70 years, and… and we have seen peace and stability in

Europe for many reasons, but one reason is that NATO has been there making sure that we have stability and security for our allies.

Yeah, I can say more about Russia, but I will just end by saying that I will continue to work for dialogue with Russia, and I… and I believe that there is no contradiction between strong defence and dialogue. I actually believe that as long as NATO is strong, as long as we stand together and we provide deterrence, we can also engage in dialogue with Russia. And I don't believe we should try to isolate Russia. I believe that Russia is… not only believe, but Russia is our biggest neighbour. It's there's to say. So we have to develop a relationship with Russia and try to reduce tensions as much as possible.

Q: Thank you. My name is Andrew McLauren, I'm a student here in an MPA degree programme. So my question is about Turkey today. When you look at Turkey following the coup this summer, what do you make of that country's increasing slide away from democratic principles and increasing authoritarian [inaudible]? What sort of message would you relay to the leaders of [inaudible]?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Let me start by underlining the importance of Turkey as a NATO ally. Turkey is a highly valued and essential ally for NATO, for several reasons. One obvious reason is that geographic location of Turkey, being so close to much of the turmoil, instability, and the challenges NATO is facing. Turkey is a country bordering the Black Sea, close to Crimea, Ukraine, and the instability to the north of Turkey. They're bordering Georgia where we have instability, and Russia is present with forces in two regions of Georgia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

And then, of course, Turkey is bordering Iraq and Syria. So Turkey is by far the NATO ally most affected by the instability, the violence and the terrorist threats coming from ISIL. And they have hosted or they are hosting around three million refugees. And Turkey plays a key role in the fight against ISIL, partly because they contribute themselves with their own forces, their own capabilities in the fight against ISIL, but also of course because Turkey provides the bases, infrastructure for other NATO allies to conduct airstrikes and operations against ISIL.

So I think to just imagine a NATO without Turkey would just really underline how dangerous that would be and how close much of the turmoil and the violence we see in the Middle East would come even closer to the heart of Europe. So Turkey is important for NATO, not least confronting and standing up against all the turmoil and violence we see in the south.

The coup attempt was an attempt to overthrow a democratic elected government. They bombed the presidential palace. They bombed the… the parliament. And I visited the parliament just a couple of weeks ago, and it's a quite strong impression to be there in the parliament and to see the main assembly hall and just outside that hall, you see the damage caused by the F-16 or bombs from F-16 fighter jets bombing the parliament. And it's hard to imagine any stronger expression of disrespect for the democracy than using military power against the elected parliament, with the parliamentarians inside.

So, of course, Turkey has the right to protect itself. Turkey has the right to protect itself against terrorist attacks. They have suffered many terrorist attacks. And, of course, Turkey has the right also to prosecute those behind the failed coup.

I'm confident—and I discussed this with the Turkish leaders—that when they prosecute those responsible, that the principles of individual liberty, the rule of law and democratic values should be respected because that's core values for NATO, and I personally attach great importance to those values.

Q: Thank you very much.

Q: Thank you so much, Mr. Secretary General. My name is [inaudible] and I'm a first-year MPP student… I'm sorry, second-year MPP student.

Q: Earlier you mentioned speaking with Foreign Secretary Lavrov earlier this week, so I'm sure you're aware of the very precarious nature of the ceasefire deal in Syria, as well as the recent bombing of the U.N. convoy on its way to Aleppo. Some have suggested the only way to ensure civilian [inaudible] in Syria [inaudible] and humanitarian [inaudible]. However that would quit[?] [inaudible] allies[?], particularly Turkey on the ground and potentially U.S. air forces, in direct confrontation with Russia.

So, giving your stated goal of not bringing back[??] [inaudible] Cold War tensions with Russia, how can NATO allies continue to collaborate, as far as our confrontation [inaudible] and ISIL while simultaneously ensuring civilian [inaudible]? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The crisis in Syria is really, really appalling, and it's so heartbreaking to see all the civilians that suffer. And every time we think it cannot get worse, it becomes even worse. And the latest example is the example you referred to—the bombing of an aid convoy with aid to aid and help to civilians, and the killing of the many aid workers. This is morally totally unacceptable and it's a blatant violation of basic international law.

For me, that just underlines the importance of continuing to support all efforts to try to find a political negotiated solution. I'm not saying it's easy. I'm not saying that we have not tried before and failed. But there is, in the long run, there is no other way. So we will just continue to support the efforts of the U.N., of the United States and others to try to at least agree on a ceasefire which is respected and unhindered access, safe access of aid to… to civilians.

NATO supports the U.S.-led coalition fighting ISIL. We support them in different ways, but especially now with AWACS surveillance planes, helping them to have a better picture of the airspace over Syria. And all NATO allies participate in different ways. Several NATO allies also conduct airstrikes and, of course, for the efficiency or for the impact of the efforts of the alliance, it is a great advantage that they have developed a lot of interoperability, the ability to work together, to communicate, to understand each other, to have this kind of advanced

military operations based on NATO exercises, NATO standards, and just experience from other operations in Afghanistan or in Libya or elsewhere.

But NATO is not on the ground in Syria and, therefore, I have been always careful going into the operational details or different questions related to exactly how to conduct the military operations in Syria. I will leave that to the U.S.-led coalition, and… but I think we all have to understand that a no-fly zone can create a very challenging situation. And that's also the reason why there has been some reluctance to establish a no-fly zone because then it has to be implemented and… and, as I say, fully respected, which can be a quite demanding situation to put the forces in the area into.

So we will continue to support the U.N.-led peace process. We will continue to support the U.S.-led coalition to fight ISIL. But NATO will not be present with military forces inside Syria under NATO command.

Q: Hi, my name is Greg Almond[sp] [inaudible] student [inaudible]. We just [inaudible] recently [inaudible] the Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work who gave a presentation wherein he listed[?] some very important facts. First, he said that the Russian military and the Chinese military have reached or will soon reach [inaudible] munitions with the Western alliance. Second, he said the future of United States and Western military superiority[?] will be based on the effective incorporation of artificial intelligence technologies into [inaudible] strategy, are expecting that by 2030, 30 percent of their armed forces will be… to be in the form of robotic weapons.

So I'm curious, what is NATO's strategy for the incorporation of robotics and artificial intelligence?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Robert Work and his assessments of what kind of, as I say, the importance of technology and the importance of different kinds of even more advanced weapon systems than we have today, has been something which we have discussed a lot at NATO. He actually visited the North Atlantic Council and perhaps he didn't give exactly the same presentation, but at least he addressed the same issues.

And I think that the message from him is that we have always had a technological edge or advantage compared to our… to other nations in… in the world. We have to keep that edge. We have to continue to develop our… our different capabilities and technologies.

And that's exactly one of the reasons why we also have to invest more in defence because this requires investments in research and development, and it requires that we work together so we get more out of our investments when we do it together. And it also requires an understanding that I think that open societies like NATO countries, they have a big advantage that we will… we are better able to utilize some of these technologies.

A lot of networks, a lot of… a lot of, for instance, the development of different kinds of artificial technology, artificial intelligence, is something which we have the advantage of applying because we have many more people who are utilizing and using these kind of technologies for peaceful purposes already today.

So the thing is that we have to stay focused, we have to invest in technology, research, to be able to keep the technological edge also in the future.

Q: Thank you [inaudible]. Thank you, Secretary General. My name is [inaudible], I'm a [inaudible] and thank you for coming to our class this morning. It's great. My question is about regional alliances that we've touched upon briefly. What is NATO doing in its capacity to further facilitate regional alliances and showing leadership so that other regional alliances all together [inaudible]?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I think the most important thing NATO does is that we work together, with partners all over the world actually, but especially in our neighbourhood. And it's not always about regional alliances, but it's more about working with different partner nations in our vicinity or our neighbourhood.

It means for instance that we have something called the Mediterranean Dialogue which is the countries in North Africa and the Middle East, including Israel, and we sit down with them and we discuss common challenges, common, as I say, tasks which we address together, everything from fighting terrorism to stabilizing the region. And I believe very much in this partnership concept because it's a way of trying to project stability or to stabilize our neighbourhood based on the idea that if our neighbourhood is stable, we are more secure.

And that's everything from a political dialogue to, for instance, training and helping Tunisia to develop their special operation forces and intelligence.

So it's less about regional alliances, more about regional cooperation between NATO and different countries in different regions, especially in our neighbourhood.

Q: Thank you. My name is [inaudible]. I'm a student of the MPIE[?]. My question is considering that [inaudible] in this evolution of actors[?] that might be considered as [inaudible], you know, the so-called hybrid war, how do you really find the criteria for activating Article 5 so as to maintain NATO's credibility? And I'm thinking particularly about [inaudible] small country, small NATO member country, and small destabilizing actions in which some of the other members might not have the incentives to activate the Article.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The fundamental task for NATO, the core task for NATO is to protect all allies against any threat, and we have been able to do so for close to 70 years. And that applies for both big and small allies, and there has to be… and an important thing is that there is no doubt about that. Because the important thing with deterrence is that as long as deterrence is credible, as long as deterrence is… is real, then we prevent the war. And that's

the best thing, to never really be able or to never be forced to use military force, because if you are strong, you prevent anyone from trying to test your capabilities.

Then you are pointing out something which is a challenge. And that is, during the Cold War the idea of an attack was, in a way, armoured vehicles or battle tanks from the Soviet Union rolling over the border between East and West Germany, and there was no doubt when a war started.

The problem with hybrid warfare is it's much more difficult to define exactly when it starts and actually when you are under attack, or who is behind the attack. Because hybrid warfare is this combination of civil and military means of aggression. It's this combination of overt and covert operations. It's cyber. One of the big problems with cyberattacks is, of course, that you can be under attack but you don't know who is attacking you. And so on.

So we have to adapt. Meaning for instance that we have to develop our intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities so we have a better picture, a better understanding that we are more able to see what's going on on the ground. And that's exactly what we are doing. We are developing our intelligence capabilities.

We have now invested… we are now soon to deploy a new system of drones to be able to have a better picture on the ground if anything happens. We need to be able to react fast because with hybrid warfare there is less warning time. That's the reason why we are increasing the readiness of our forces. We have tripled the size of the NATO response force so we can quickly deploy forces if needed. And also one of the reasons why we have decided to have forces deployed in the three Baltic countries and Poland, augmenting or increasing their capabilities to respond if there is an attack of any sort against one of these countries.

So we are adapting to a security environment where the threats are less easy to identify and an attack is less easy or more difficult to define. But, you know, hybrid attacks are often just, in a way, the first step, the prelude to a bigger conventional attack.

And part of that is cyber, and we are really stepping up the efforts to defend our cyber networks. We have defined cyber as a military domain. We have sea, land, air, and cyber. All of this to enable us to respond to different kinds of threats.

The last thing is that… is that the Article 5 is something which applies, as I said, for all countries. There can be no doubt about that, and NATO will live up to the guarantees we have provided.

Q: Thank you. My name is Dorothy Zinberg. And I have a two-part question, or one is a long story, the other is a question. I was the American delegate to the NATO science policy committee during the years when expansion was being debated, and I would love to hear some of your thoughts about that.

But I think more important for our students is a short history of faith, changes in politics, all kinds of things. It was about 40 years ago that a man by the name of Johan Holst, who became the head of the Oslo Peace Accords, called me and said, "I would like to bring a friend to meet you." I said come on over to my house. I can assure you 40 years ago I was a very, very junior member of the Faculty of Arts and Sciences. And Johan Holst arrives with this man. And his name is Thorvald Stoltenberg, the Father of Jens. And it looked as if he … [inaudible] political office, and Johan was looking for a job with your Father, and he said… He did not tell me he was your uncle at that point [inaudible], but this is what is so fascinating about politics and the way the world changes. Thorvald was about to be voted out of office, the party was going, but the elections changed and he won and he became minister of defense, the minister of foreign affairs, later in life the ambassador to Denmark, ahead of everything in… yeah, ambassador to Denmark, ahead of everything in Norway today [inaudible].

And out of those chance meetings, your life really changes. Beginning with meeting him then, I began to work [inaudible] sciences [inaudible] Wales[?], on energy, nuclear power. And, again, it's so much that you never anticipate. So that old phrase "Seize the day." And your mother who should not go unmentioned here was the leading the leading feminist in Norway, cabinet post, major policy decisions, and bringing about major social change in Norway.

MODERATOR: We all thank you, Dorothy. Do you have a question?

Q: I want to know about NATO expansion because I voted against it once.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First of all, thank you for the nice words about my family, and you actually know almost more about my family than I do myself.

JENS STOLTENBERG: And I phone my father every day. So I will phone him now when I get into the car on my way to the airport, then I will tell him that I met you, yeah.

JENS STOLTENBERG: And… and you all[?]… you can all see[??] [inaudible] my uncle, and Norway… Norway is a small country, but we are not the only family, so there are at least some families. So, yeah, then… then about expansion. Well, it has been debated all the time, and… and some allies have been skeptical, yeah, almost… and some have also been against some of the… around some enlargement. But at the end, we have always agreed because the only way NATO can enlarge is by consensus. So at the end, all allies have to agree to invite a new ally.

And I believe that if even there are… or even if there have always been, you know, pro and cons, I really believe that the overall message is that it has been a great success because it has contributed to stability, to a Europe more whole, free and at peace. And of course, for those countries that for many of them they have… they lived for decades under the… under the rule of the Soviet Union either as part of the Soviet Union or as a republic in the Soviet

Union and/or a part of the Warsaw Pact. So for them to be able to join NATO was a way to make sure that they can remain free, independent, with the protection of NATO.

And I sometimes use the word "expansion" because that's how it's often referred to, but expansion is more like, in a way, NATO moving east, and so taking in Poland and Lithuania and Estonia and so on. But the reality is that it's more that the east has moved west, meaning that those nations, the Baltic nations, Poland, Hungary and so on, and all the other new allies, they have strongly asked for the possibility to become members. And they have decided so by democratic decisions in their own countries. It's not NATO grabbing land. It's the land that moves into NATO, in a way.

And that's that a big difference, because… because this is not an aggressive policy of NATO, but it is to respect the free independent choice of free and independent nations, including that they have to… they have the right to decide their own path and what kind of security arrangements they want to be part of, including a military alliance as NATO.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Other questions? Yes, sir?

Q: Thank you, Secretary General. My name is [inaudible]. My question is on NATO and Israel. So in May 2016, NATO allowed Israel to [inaudible] missions [inaudible] Brussels[?] [inaudible] cooperation. And I was wondering, many Israelis [inaudible] seem to be very skeptical [inaudible] and he said, and I quote, "NATO is hollow. Everybody knows this except the leaders of NATO." My question is [inaudible] what are NATO's or your personal objectives or priorities with regard to Israel and NATO?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First of all, I think it's good that NATO has been able to develop a partnership to many different countries. And that's the way we work with countries, we cooperate with them, and some of… and many of our partners, they actually contribute and are part of NATO operations and missions.

NATO has been in Afghanistan for many years, but we have to remember that many of the soldiers that NATO has deployed there, they're not coming from NATO allied countries but they're coming from partner nations. For instance, Georgia has been one of the major force contributors to NATO, contributors to NATO's presence in Afghanistan, and so on. Jordan has participated, and so on.

So I think that the partnerships are important for NATO and for the partner nations. We welcome the partnership with… with Israel, and I am proud that we were able to then make it possible for Israel to open a mission. It's some kind of… well, it's a kind of symbolic thing, but I think it is important that NATO as an alliance, 28 allies, have said, "Yes, we would like to have Israel with a diplomatic mission to NATO."

It's a strong political signal. And politics is also about symbols and signals, and this is a strong signal. And it also facilitates some practical cooperation. We can now move further

with different kinds of practical programs, something called the Individual Partnership Program which now can develop with Israel. Benefit for NATO, benefit for Israel.

I didn't get exactly who said that NATO was hollow, but, well…

Q: [Inaudible]. Barak.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Okay. He is actually a friend, but…

[LAUGHS]

JENS STOLTENBERG: … but… yeah, and he's a good man. But… but… and a Labour politician, so… but the thing is that I don't know exactly why he said that, but what I know is that we are the strongest military alliance in the world and we provide deterrence every day. And we have been there for 70 years, close to 70 years, deterring the old Soviet Union.

And I think that if you go to Afghanistan, you have seen NATO presence there with more than 100,000 troops providing security, training local forces. We are there today. And if you ask the Afghans whether we are hollow, they will not understand, because we are there, we help them, we train them, we advise them, and we help them to fight the Taliban and to protect them against, you know, all the violence and all the intolerance that the Taliban and all the other terrorist groups in Afghanistan represent.

If you go to Bosnia, they had started genocide. At least it was… they killed each other and there was war. NATO troops went in, and we stopped it.

If you… if you… Kosovo, 5000 NATO soldiers contributing to stability in Kosovo. And if you go to Latvia, Lithuania or Estonia, they will now see that NATO troops are coming there, they stand there, and the important thing with the NATO presence in these countries is not that the battle group, battalion is so big, but the thing is that the NATO battalion in Estonia is going to be… is going to consist of forces, troops from many different NATO allied countries, signal very clearly that if Estonia is attacked, it will trigger a response from the whole alliance. So the multinational presence of NATO troops in for instance Estonia sends an extremely strong signal that Estonia will not be left alone, but it will immediately trigger the response from the whole alliance.

So for them, this is not hollow. What's hollow for Barak, I don't know, but that doesn't matter so much.

Q: [Inaudible] the operations in Afghanistan are dwindling[?]. So I'm curious about how strategic in Central Asia for NATO [inaudible] relationship with the country's [inaudible].

JENS STOLTENBERG: Central Asia is still important for NATO, and we have many partner nations in the region. But you are right that of course, because we are now reducing our presence, we have already reduced our presence in Afghanistan, the importance of Central

Asia at least for the operations in Afghanistan has been significantly reduced. Because before, we had many… at least we had bases there and we has troops there, not because… because there was… as a way into Afghanistan.

We… at the top, we had close to 140,000 troops, and we conducted big military combat operations in Afghanistan. Now we have reduced that to 12 …, close to 13,000, 12,800 troops, and they don't participate in combat operations anymore. What they do is to train, assist and advise the Afghan forces. So it's a completely different world. And I think it's a very good thing that NATO has ended the combat operations and that we have enabled the Afghans themselves to protect their own country. And I really believe that in the long run it's much better than NATO deploying combat forces, that we enable local forces to protect themselves and to stabilize their own countries.

So therefore also our presence in Central Asia and Uzbekistan has been reduced in many, many cases to zero, because we don't need it for military purposes inside Afghanistan anymore.

MODERATOR: We have time for two more questions, so we will go to be back.

Q: Thank you for coming, Mr. Secretary General. My name is [inaudible] year one at Kennedy School. I have a question that there's a lot of conversation around ISIL, and Syria right now is being used as a playground by Iran and Saudi Arabia. All of these countries are regional [inaudible], regional powerhouses. They have their strategic objectives. What do you think NATO can do in terms of reconciling the strategic objectives of both Iran and Saudi Arabia? And then is there a way that NATO can bring these two powers at the table and create [inaudible] peaceful workable solution in the short term? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I recently visited the Gulf Region, and I met also with the Conference of Saudi Arabia recently in Brussels. And one of the things I really have learned a lot more about since I became secretary general is the complexity and the challenges in the whole region, the Gulf Region, Iran, also affecting of course the turmoil, the violence in countries like Iraq and Syria. And I think it is important to be realistic that of course NATO can play a role, NATO can contribute in many different ways, but NATO cannot solve all problems.

So NATO is part of the answer to many problems, but we are not the only answer to all problems. Meaning that to, for instance, solve the… or to reconcile the tensions, the problems we see between Saudi Arabia and Iran is not an easy task. And I don't believe that NATO can just go in and solve it. That's actually not for NATO to do.

But what I think is that NATO can, through our corporation for instance with the Gulf States, our dialog with different states in the region, can at least help contribute to reduce tensions. And we can of course contribute to the fight against ISIL, and I have stated several times what we are doing.

We train local forces, especially in Iraq. We work with other countries in the region. I mentioned especially Jordan and Tunisia. We have a very close corporation with several states in the Gulf Region. We will later on this fall open a new NATO regional training centre in Kuwait which will be some kind of hub for partnership, for political dialog, and for training in the region. And of course we… even if… yeah, we work with Turkey which is bordering and very close to all the turmoil and the violence in Syria and Iraq.

But you know, the extreme difficult relationship, or the different complex relationships in the Middle East is not for NATO just to solve. But we can help, contribute, and that's exactly what we are doing.

Q: Thank you.

MODERATOR: Another question right here.

Q: Thank you, Secretary General. My name is [inaudible] but my question does not actually concern Russia. I'm more interested in NATO policy in another region, in Asia, because there are other partners [inaudible] such as [inaudible]. So in case there is a conflict in the South China Sea specifically[?], [inaudible] how engaged should NATO be in the region[?] [inaudible] NATO [inaudible]?

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO has many partners all over the world, including Japan, Korea and others. And we have political dialog with them, they participate and contribute to some of our operations. South Korea and Japan contribute financially to, for instance, our activities in Afghanistan, and so on. And so they are partners.

But I think we have to distinguish very clearly between partners and members. Meaning that the NATO collective defence security guarantees an attack on one is an attack on all, applies for the members and members only. Meaning that NATO do not have any security guarantees that covers the South China Sea. That's… we are a regional… we are a regional organization which covers Europe and North America, Canada and United States.

The important thing in the South China Sea is that the… is that the conflicts, the disagreements there are resolved according to the International Law and the Law of the Sea, and we support all efforts to try to find, you know, ways to resolve the disputes by applying International Law. But for NATO, it's not an issue to have any guarantees or a military presence. It may be NATO allies. The United States is present in the Pacific and in that region, but that's as an individual nation, not as… not on behalf of NATO.

So the short answer is that NATO has a close partnership with countries in Asia, but we don't have any security guarantees which apply for Asia.

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