Remarks

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University
2017-04-13

Jens Stoltenberg (NATO Secretary General): Thank you so much Dr. Knapp for those kind words, and also thanks to all of you for having me here today. And it is a great pleasure to meet you all.

Because to be here today is to be at one of the most recognized institutions when it comes to educating leaders, especially within diplomacy foreign service. And as you mentioned, in NATO we have several people who had their education, who are graduates from the Elliott School. I work very closely with Rose Gottemoeller, Deputy Secretary General, she is a graduate from the Elliott School, and later on I will share the debate with Ambassador Kurt Volker, and he is also a graduate from this school.

So the students at this university and at the Elliott School, they are the leaders of tomorrow, and therefore it is a great honour for me to see you and to meet you all.

Then I also have to say that it's not only because this is a very recognized institution that I appreciate to be here, but I'm also delighted to be here because actually originally my plan was to not become a politician but to become an academic. And my plan was to do research within economics, and I started actually to teach at the University of Oslo in economics, and I did that for two years. Then I was asked to become the deputy minister of the State Secretary, of the Minister of Environment in Norway, and I promised myself and my wife that I would only stay there for one or two years, and then I would go back to the academic life.

And that's a promise I haven't been able to keep, so I stayed in politics since 1990, and I feel that my chances for doing an academic career has diminished ... so therefore I like to visit institutions like this because that's the closest I come to any kind of academic life. So if you fail as an academic, you can become a prime minister or secretary general of NATO.

I will be very brief because the idea is that we will have an interaction. So I will just really share with you some very brief remarks or reflections, and then I will be available for questions, and we have some discussion.

What I will say is that NATO is the most successful alliance in history for two reasons. Reason number one is that we have been loyal to our core value, our core task ever since we were founded back in 1949. And that is that we are an alliance where we have promised to

protect each other; one for all, all for one. If one ally is attacked, it will trigger the response from the whole alliance. And this strength of the unity of the alliance has been the main reason why the alliance has been so successful. And the strength of NATO is not aimed at provoking a conflict, but the strength of NATO is there to prevent the conflict. And by delivering credible deterrence, we have been able for close to seven decades, 70 years, to prevent armed conflicts, armed aggression against any NATO allied country. And that is a great success, especially in Europe, because the normal thing in Europe was that we were fighting each other, and since the end of the Second World War, and since the foundation of NATO, there have been no really serious conflicts, at least involving NATO allies in Europe, no NATO ally has been attacked.

So the unity, one for all, all for one, is the main reason why NATO has been such a successful alliance.

The other reason is that NATO has been able to adapt, to change. So when the world is changing, NATO is changing.

For almost 40 years, actually for 40 years, NATO was focused on one and actually only one task, and that was to deter the Soviet Union from attacking West Europe, NATO allied countries. And we were quite successful. The Cold War ended without firing a single shot, and it ended in a peaceful way. The Berlin Wall came down, and people started to ask whether NATO was needed anymore. And the thing was that NATO either had to go out of business, or out of area. And actually we went out of area after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of the Cold War. We helped ending two ethnic wars in the Balkans, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia-Kosovo, and we also helped fighting terrorism in Afghanistan, fighting piracy off the Horn of Africa, and we did what we call in NATO language crisis management beyond our borders.

We did that for approximately ... from the beginning of the 1990s until today.

But now, NATO has to change again. Because we have to continue to project stability, to manage crisis beyond our borders; in Afghanistan, in North Africa, the wider Middle-East region. But at the same time, we have to come back to Europe, and focus once again on collective defence deterrence in Europe. And that's especially the case after the illegal annexation of Crimea, and the use of force ... Russia's more assertive behaviour, especially against Ukraine.

So therefore NATO is now implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. We are tripling the size of the NATO response force, we are increasing the military presence in the eastern part of the alliance, and we are deploying forces, battles groups to the Baltic countries, to Poland, but also in the southeast of the alliance.

So we are adapting once again to respond to a more challenging and difficult security environment.

And again the message is that we are investing in our defence not to provoke conflict but to prevent conflict. And therefore what we do is defensive, it is proportionate, and it is measured in a way that we don't want to provoke a new Cold War, we don't want a new arms race, and we continue to seek dialogue with Russia based on the idea that there is no contradiction between strength and dialogue, or defence, deterrence and dialogue. Actually we strongly believe that as long as NATO is united, as long as NATO is firm and predictable, then we can and should engage in political dialogue with Russia because Russia is our neighbour, Russia is there to stay, and we have to manage the relationship with Russia in the best possible way because it is in both our and Russia's interest to try to diffuse the tensions, to reduce tensions, and to find better ways to live together.

This was the main issue I discussed with President Trump yesterday in the White House and his security team. This will be the main issue we are going to discuss when NATO leaders meet in May in Brussels, and this is the main issue I hope to discuss with you in the coming hours.

So thank you so much, and now I am ready to take your questions. Thank you.

Kurt Volker: Well thank you very much Secretary General. Thank you for those remarks. Again my name is Kurt Volker, I am the Executive Director of the McCain Institute for International Leadership which is a part of Arizona State University and a very proud alumnus of the Elliott School even from before it was called the Elliott School, long ago than I care to state publicly but it has been a great privilege to have gone here and then have a career built upon that.

Secretary General I am going to open up the question and answer with you and then I am going turn to the audience here to ask questions. We will bunch them a few at a time. I do want to give priority to students here at the Elliott School, so students think about what you want to ask and get your hands up early.

Secretary General I want to start with a first question for you. We have heard from President Trump and this administration both during the course of the presidential campaign and since them many, many things. NATO is obsolete, NATO is not obsolete, NATO Allies need to pay their share, we will decide whether we defend them based on whether they have paid their dues or not. When Chancellor Merkel was here there was talk about how much Germany owes the United States, NATO needs to reform, it needs to deal with counter-terrorism, we want to work together with Russia, Russia is a threat, Russia has intervened in our elections, just about everything that you can imagine. You could chart this and say okay there has been a progression over time, there’s been a movement and you’ve had a lot of interaction with the President.

I know that you have been on the phone with him. You had a meeting here today or yesterday in Washington. You've met with Secretary Mattis in the Defence Ministers meeting. You've met with Secretary Tillerson in the NATO Foreign Ministers meeting, and you have met Vice President Pence at the Munich Security Conference as well so I want you in your own words where do you see the U.S. Administration on NATO today? How would you characterize U.S. policy, U.S. support, U.S. interests, U.S. concerns?

Jens Stoltenberg (NATO Secretary General): The message to me on NATO has been very consistent all the time in all my interactions, in all my different conversations with the President and also with his security team, the Vice President, Secretary Mattis, Secretary Tillerson, McMaster and his whole team and that message has been all the time that they are strongly committed to NATO and that they see the value of the Transatlantic bond and that they want to make sure that NATO continues to adapt and I welcome that. Both the strong commitment to NATO which was reiterated yesterday in the meeting at the White House but was also then expressed, that was also something that the President expressed to me just a few days after he was elected as we I spoke with him on the phone.

I welcomed the message about the commitment to NATO but also welcomed the message that NATO has to adapt. So when for instance President Trump and Secretary Mattis underline the importance of NATO having to do more in the fight against terrorism yes I welcome that, so we are not (inaudible). And when they stress the importance of fair burden sharing again I welcome that because we need fair burden sharing in NATO, we need more that more NATO Allies invest more in defence. We have to remember that some Allies already spend 2% of GDP on defence: the United States of course, the United Kingdom. We have a country like Estonia which is present here today, they have met the 2%, and this year Romania declared that they will meet the 2% in 2017 and Lithuania and Latvia have declared that they will meet the 2% target next year. So NATO is adapting, NATO is changing but I welcome the strong focus from the U.S. Administration on the need to continue adaptation.

Kurt Volker: Very good and do you believe that Allies are responding to this call to spend more on defence? In case you didn't hear the answer, it was absolutely they are going to 2% and beyond. Again Secretary General, one of the, you've articulated a clear sense of U.S. support for NATO but part of the question from the U.S. is, are Allies willing to support NATO? Do you see them doing that?

Jens Stoltenberg: Yes we have turned the corner because what we have seen is that after many years of decline and cuts in defence spending across Europe and Ca nada we actually saw that in 2016 we saw for the first time a significant increase in defence spending across Europe and Canada and we have, we saw an increase of 3.8% in real terms or $10 billion U.S. dollars and that is a significant increase as an amount of money for defence. We still have a long way to go and much remains but at least the Europeans have started to move in the right direction and as I have said some Allies already meet the 2% guideline, other Allies have declared that they will meet it this year or next year.

So what we discussed, what I discussed with the President yesterday was how can we make sure that we keep up to momentum that we are able to continue to see these positive developments because what we promised in Wales in 2014 when we made what in NATO we call the Defence Investment Pledge was to stop the cuts, gradual increase and then move towards spending 2% within a decade and we have started to do that and my top priority as Secretary General has been to focus on defence spending because it is important for the strength of the whole alliance.

To add one more thing, and that is that what we call the Defence Investment Pledge is not only about spending, it's about spending more but also spending better, to be more efficient, to work closer together and it's about the capabilities we need in NATO and it's about contributions to NATO operations and missions. So very often we speak about the pledge, it's about cash, capabilities and contributions and all of that is important at the same time.

Kurt Volker: In your remarks you said that NATO wants to deal with Russia from a position of strength and to have deterrence and defence but also to have dialogue and outreach toward Russia to try and work together with Russia. Does Russia want to work together with NATO?

Jens Stoltenberg: Yes and no. In a way that we see some areas where they are willing to work together with us; in other areas we see that it is much more difficult to establish any kind of understanding or real dialogue but we have to continue to work for dialogue because the world is safer when Russia and NATO are able to speak, to talk and to strengthen, or to improve our relationship. It's hard to predict how the relationship between NATO and Russia will be in the future but I am absolutely certain that we have do everything that we can to diffuse the tensions and to avoid a new Cold War and that's why we pursue this dual track approach with Russia, deterrence, defence and dialogue.

And this is also something which is very much based on my own experience as a Norwegian politician because Norway as you all know is bordering Russia up in the North. We have a land border and we have a border in the sea - the Continental Shelf - where there is a lot of oil and gas and fisheries and so on. And Norway was able to develop a pragmatic working relationship with the Soviet Union during the Cold War and later on with Russia on issues like energy, like border, as we agreed on the border in the sea, the delimitation line, environment, fishery. But also military issues where we have some search and rescue exercises together and so with regular contact within the Norwegian Armed Forces and Six Fleet or the Russian Armed Forces up in the North.

This cooperation in the North between Norway a NATO Ally and Russia takes place not despite Norway's membership in NATO but because of Norway's membership with NATO because our membership in NATO provides the strength, the platform to engage with Russia. So I strongly believe that we should not be afraid of talking to Russians. They are there to stay, they are our biggest neighbour and it will help all of us if we are able to improve the relationship with Russia.

Kurt Volker: And a final question from me and then we are going pull from the audience and students in particular. Did you and the President discuss Ukraine and how does Ukraine fit in that scenario of West-Russia relations and giving Ukraine a feeling of security so it can deal with Russia?

Jens Stoltenberg: We discussed Ukraine and of course we are concerned about the situation in especially Eastern Ukraine and the fact that Russia illegally annexed a part of Ukraine, Crimea, and that is the first time since the end of the Second World War that one country annexed a part of another country in Europe by force. So this is of course serious for Ukraine but it also undermining the whole idea of a rules based order in Europe which has been so important for the peace and stability in Europe. So NATO, the United States, NATO Allies provide support to Ukraine. We help them to modernize their defence structures, their armed forces, their defence institutions, train them.

We have different trust funds for cyber, for command and control, so NATO, NATO Allies provided political and practical support to Ukraine and the same time I think it's important to understand that this is not only about Ukraine, because NATO has ... the main reason why we have implemented this strong reinforcement to our collective defence, tripling the size of the NATO response force, deploying forces in the Eastern part of the Alliance is because of Ukraine. So actually the illegal annexation of Crimea and the support of Russia to the separatists in Eastern Ukraine who continue the destabilization of Eastern Ukraine is the main reason why NATO has strengthened its collective defence in Europe making sure that no NATO Ally experiences anything like what Ukraine has experienced with Russia since 2014.

Kurt Volker: It's very important for the NATO Allies, but for Ukraine itself?

Jens Stoltenberg: Of course it is important for Ukraine itself that we provide support and that we help them with modernizing their armed forces, fighting corruption and helping them in command control, cyber and many other areas where we work with Ukraine and some Allies also provide training of Ukrainian forces. But the way to solve the problem and the crisis in Ukraine is through negotiations, through a political solution and the best basis ... the only basis for that is the Minsk Agreements and we are calling on Russia to use all its influence on the separatists in Eastern Ukraine to make sure that they fully respect the Minsk Agreements - meaning respect the cease fire which is not respected now, withdraw all heavy weapons from the contact line and allow the international observers to do their work, to observe the implementation of the cease fire because that is a pre-condition of any effective implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Kurt Volker: Thank you. All right, students I see in the third row here in the centre, we can take this one here.

Question: Given the current Eurosceptic and anti-globalist governments in Poland and Hungary; the election in France, as well as German President Steinmeier's comments on

NATO as war mongering, do you think that there are any internal threats to NATO within its members.

Kurt Volker: So internal threats from within members. We are going to take a couple. There is another one in the centre aisle to your left.

Question: Since the end of the Cold War what do you believe has been NATO's biggest mistake in its interactions with Russia and what do you believe has been NATO's biggest success in its interactions with Russia?

Kurt Volker: And we will stay on the centre aisle for now at the very back in the blue sweatshirt.

Question: First of all thank you for coming to speak here. I have a question in regards to how NATO is going to respond in Syria. You spoke about successful interventions in the Balkans as well as preventing conflicts in Afghanistan. But keeping in mind the 2011 NATO bombing of Libya how do you propose to respond to Syrian use of chemical weapons and the United States missile strike two days later.

Kurt Volker: Terrific questions. You can see why the students of this school go places. Over to you.

Jens Stoltenberg: Well they are actually more difficult than the questions I get from the journalists. First on internal threats or challenges. I think it's extremely important to remember that NATO is an alliance of 28 democracies and in democracies there are different political parties, different political views, open discussions, some are in favour of NATO, others are against NATO and in my own country some parties and some politicians have been against NATO the whole time. Actually, to be honest with you when I was a member of, ... when I was young I was also against NATO. But the reason why I say that is that we should not be afraid of open debate, we should not be afraid of people having different opinions even criticizing us. They are always wrong but I think that's part of living in democratic societies.

So yes there are political parties, organizations in NATO countries which are critical either towards NATO as an institution or at least critical towards part of what we do and to be honest I am not afraid or that because I think that NATO has proven again and again that it is a strength that we have open debate, different views and that we are developing our thinking by confronting different views and then improving our outstanding of many different and difficult issues and policies and NATO has proven again and again that despite differences, despite the fact that we elect some conservatives or some liberals or some social-democrats or Christian-democrats, people coming from many different political, Republicans or Democrats, whatever it is, coming from different parties with different views, they have always been able to agree on NATO's core task and that is that we are safer together than alone and that as long as we stand together and protect each other we prevent conflict and the best way to prevent conflict is to send a very clear message to any potential adversary that we are

so strong, so there's no chance that if you try to attack one Ally because the whole Alliance will be there.

And again coming from a small country like Norway that the strength that we feel, being a neighbour to Russia, by having the whole Alliance supporting us, is the reason why Europeans feel as safe as they do. So my answer is that we should not be afraid of the fact that there are different political tendencies in European countries because that's part of a natural development and debate process in democratic societies. The next question was Russia.

Kurt Volker: Greatest mistakes and greatest successes.

Jens Stoltenberg: First of all I not that kind of person that has a list where I remember my greatest mistakes. I forget them. But I think, I am not able to point at one thing which was NATO's greatest mistake and again it's partly linked to the first question because we are an alliance of 28 democracies so sometimes it takes a long time to make decisions, sometimes I would like a clearer way to an implementation but that's very often effects the fact that in a democratic institution which has 28 democracies it's not always the perfect solutions but they are sustainable and they are very strong because there are 28 nations.

I think the biggest success is just the fact that we have been able to prevent war. That we've been able to not only prevent war with 12 and 16 members which what we had in the beginning but now actually 28 members an enlargement of NATO where former countries in the Warsaw Pact now have joined NATO and again Europe was traditionally the Middle East of the world. We were fighting and fighting each other for centuries and then since the Second World War there has been no conflict directly involving a NATO country, or attacking a NATO country.

Then in response to Syria, Syria is a very difficult, very dangerous and very complex situation which affects NATO very much because Syria is bordering NATO. Syria is bordering Turkey which is a NATO Ally. We participate and support the fight against ISIL. NATO is not on the ground but we provide AWACS surveillance planes, we help them with their air pictures but when it comes to the use of chemical weapons that is totally unacceptable, it's horrendous and it's violating international law and those who are responsible must be held accountable for any use of chemical weapons. Therefore the air strikes against the Syrian air base some days ago was a U.S. operation, a military operation based on U.S. intelligence but it has received great understanding among NATO Allies. Because they understand that it is has to have a consequence when someone is using chemical weapons.

Kurt Volker: And what is next for NATO in Syria?

Jens Stoltenberg: There has been no call for any NATO presence on the ground in Syria. Some NATO Allies are present there, the United States are present there with special operation forces, the U.K. and some other Allies help train forces to fight ISIL, and Turkey is

also present in the northern part of Syria but I think that just underlines the complexity of the situation in Syria and there has been no call for NATO as an Alliance to get involved directly in the conflict in Syria.

Kurt Volker: Very good. More questions, we are going to take this side of the room and then next time we will do that side of the room. So over here in the third row in the middle with the glasses and the tie.

Question: Good afternoon Mister Secretary General. My question is reflecting on your opening speech. So in the recent years we have seen changes in the global security, the cyber attack, the lone wolf terrorism attack are some new challenges to the global security so my question is how will NATO adjust itself to facing the new challenges in global security and how will NATO working with its members to fight against the unconventional warfare that a lot of countries have been facing recently. Thank you.

Kurt Volker: Great thank you very much. We are going to go to the front row. Right here on the corner.

Question: I am student here at the Elliott School and I want to ask what is the NATO role in Libya after they destabilized the country and now it is basically stateless. Like, do you have any part, like there many militias fighting, do you support a certain militia to take control of the country, or you just like forgotten now?

Kurt Volker: Okay and do we have one further back. Let's go back on the left-hand side here. There's a woman with her hand up. Stand up. There you go yes and wait for the microphone. I am making it easy for the mike carriers.

Question: Hi. Thank you for coming. My question is how to you ensure that countries in NATO fund within ratio basically?

Jens Stoltenberg: So fund…

Question: How do you ensure that countries fund NATO in ratio so one country isn't paying more than others.

Kurt Volker: So countries paying according to their proportionate size or wealth.

Question: Yes

Kurt Volker: Or wealth. Okay. Great: proportionality, Libya - cleaning up our mess, and cyber ... modern threats in general, just broader.

Jens Stoltenberg: First on the cyber, hybrid - all these new threats. I think that one thing that we have to understand is that before it was easy to distinguish whether it was peace or war and actually nations declared war and it was possible to say that now it's war and now it's peace and the war was taking place in a well defined geographical area and it was very clear

when the war ended. But now there's a much more blurred line between peace and war and it's much harder to say exactly when did the war against ISIL start and when will it end and where does it take place. Of course it takes place in Syria and Iraq ,but it takes place also in the streets of NATO Allied capitals where ISIL is responsible terrorist attacks against innocent civilians and it takes place in cyber space. And I guess it's much harder to say we don't have exact date for when it started and I am afraid we don't have an exact date for when it will end.

So the new threats - they are partly characterized by the fact that it's a mixture of civilian and military means of aggression and the much more blurred line between peace and war. NATO is adapting to that too. The high readiness of our forces, more intelligence, more surveillance, more ability to early warning all of that is aimed at being able to respond to more hybrid threats which is a phrase that we use for that kind of threat and also the fact that we are really stepping up when it comes to cyber defences. We have declared that cyber attacks can trigger Article 5 meaning that we regard cyber attacks as serious - or potentially as serious as a kinetic attack and therefore if we have serious cyber attack we can trigger the Article 5 the Collective Defence Clause of the Alliance And we are in the process of establishing cyber as a military domain. We have air, sea, land but now we also have cyber as a military domain and we have done a lot of other things for instance helping Allies, Estonia has played a key role again in sharing best practices improving their cyber defences. So again NATO can do more of course and we are constantly looking for much more that we can do but NATO is adapting to these kinds of new threats.

Libya, I think it's important, Libya was not a stable country when NATO into Libya. There was a civil war going on and we implemented the U.N. mandate and we helped to stop the killing of civilians which the Kaddafi regime was responsible for. I think if there's anything that we can learn from the Libya operation is that one thing is to implement the military operation as we did but it's extremely important to stabilize the country afterwards. NATO didn't have a mandate but of course the whole international community including NATO, the U.N. the E.U. all of us have a responsibility for not being more present afterwards and for me that underscores the message about prevention is better than intervention and also the importance of training local forces, enabling them to stabilize their own country. So we are now in dialogue with the Libyan government, or the government of National Accord and Prime Minister Al-Sarraj on how NATO can provide support to build defence institutions to help them stabilize their own country. It's not an easy situation but as least I think that's the best thing to do is to try to work with the U.N. recognized government and help them to stabilize their own country.

Then burden sharing of defence spending. In one way there a very simple rule or guideline, and that is that every NATO Ally should spend or invest in defence 2% of GDP and GDP reflects in a way the income or the wealth of the nation. So rich countries spend more than not so rich countries and as long as they spend 2% there is a kind of fair burden sharing. The problem is that many Allies spend much less than 2% of GDP and therefore a way to obtain more fair or balanced burden sharing is to make sure that all spend 2% or perhaps even

more. And that's exactly what I have been focusing on. That's exactly what has been the main message from President Trump. But that's a very bipartisan message from the United States that Canada and those European Allies that spend less than 2% have to increase defence spending and we have started. We have a long way to go but we have started to move in the right direction.

Kurt Volker: And we will take from this side of the room now. Students here in the second row, right here the young woman with the gray sweater.

Question: We are seeing the largest military build up since the 1950s. How is the Alliance interpreting Russia's actions in the High North?

Kurt Volker: Where is the military build up again. Is it Russia?

Question: Yeah it's Russia.

Kurt Volker: Russia's military build up. Okay back further the gentleman with the beard.

Question: Thank you Your Excellency. So following the coup in Turkey various staff on NATO who were part of the Turkish military were targeted by President Erdogan's purges, political purges, so how has this affected NATO's day to day operations and how does NATO plan to respond to future political upheavals or even human rights abuses in its members states?

Kurt Volker: All right thank you. And we will go in front of you the woman there with her hand up. Thank you.

Question: Thank you so much Mister Secretary General. Earlier in your, in your earlier remarks you mentioned that NATO's greatest strength is that it is able to deter with credibility and given the actions of Russia in Crimea in 2014 which you referred to earlier how will NATO reassert their credibility in Europe and in what ways should the United States also take action to reassert their credibility within the NATO organization? Thank you so much.

Kurt Volker: Great. Thank you very much. Over to you Secretary General: Russia's military build up, restoring credibility and the situation of military officers assigned to NATO billets being called home after the coup.

Jens Stoltenberg: First on the Russian military build up. We have seen a significant military build up in Russia over many years as you have said. Since 2000 they have approximately tripled defence spending in real terms but not only spending more but you know they have developed a new and more modern equipment, they are exercising more and they have a more aggressive pattern of exercises. They are also exercise their nuclear forces and their conventional forces. They have a more rhetoric which is aiming at intimidating neighbours and most importantly they have been willing to use force, use force against Georgia in 2008, against Ukraine in 2014 and they continue to use military personnel to support and help, to

support and destabilize Eastern Ukraine and add to that they are also active in cyber hybrid threats and actions against NATO Allied countries.

So again, this is the reason why NATO has adapted. This is the reason why after many years of reducing defence spending we have started to increase defence spending and it's the reason why have started to deploy forces to the Eastern part of the Alliance. Having said that it is extremely important that we don't overdo it or over react because if we end up with a new arms race, a new Cold War we are risking just to increase tensions even further and not increase our security but decrease our security. So that's the reason why NATO has been focused on what to do, it's proportionate and defensive and continuing to work for political dialogue with Russia.

Then Turkey, it's correct that they recalled staff from the NATO command structure after the failed coup attempt. This has in a very limited degree affected NATO activities and operations because they have replaced them. So there are new officers there now from Turkey. I have underlined very much that of course Turkey has the right to protect itself. They have suffered terrorist attacks and also a failed coup attempt where actually the ... [inaudible] bombed the National Assembly. I was in the National Assembly in Ankara and it was a very strong impression to see the National Assembly and the damaged building and the Parliament was bombed when parliamentarians were inside the building. So this was a serious incident and hundreds of people were killed and of course those behind this failed coup they should be held responsible. The important thing is that this is done in accordance with the rule of law and this is something that I have raised in Ankara several times and because or course the rule of law is important when you have this kind of process after a failed coup attempt.

Then, deterrence. Russia used military force against Ukraine but it is important not to mix that with NATO deterrence because NATO deterrence is about deterring any adversary from attacking a NATO Allied country and we have been extremely successful in doing that because there have been no attack against any NATO Allied country since NATO was established. Ukraine is not a NATO member so it's not a failure in any way of NATO deterrence that Russia used military power or force against Ukraine but we or course condemn that use of military force against Ukraine regardless of whether Ukraine is a NATO member or not because it's violating international law, it's violating the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine and we support Ukraine but our deterrence is credible and we have made sure that it continues to be credible by deploying forces especially to the Eastern part of the Alliance.

Kurt Volker: We are going start to wrap up a little bit. I would like to engage you in a dialogue about a couple of things here. One of them, I am not as forgetful perhaps as the Secretary General because I do think of some NATO mistakes. But one I think that is current in modern times, I think NATO was a little slow to recognize that Russia had changed. It wasn't the Russia of the 90s we were dealing with anymore, we were seeing military build up, we were seeing aggressive behaviour, the invasion of Georgia, the pressure on Georgia before that

and NATO was still playing by the old book and I think that NATO has adapted. I think the decisions of the Wales Summit, the European Reassurance Initiative from the United States, the positioning of forces in the Baltics, I think this has compensated for that tremendously but I think we were slow and maybe that's the way democracies behave, maybe democracies naturally don't want to go there unless they absolutely have to.

But on the other side of that I think the greatest thing that NATO has done, at least in the last 25 years, keeping the peace is obviously the obvious one but the other thing that NATO has done was to inspire countries to reform, to become democracies, market economies, establish the rule of law, protect human rights and to then allow them to join with other countries to share that common security in a wider area. This is often referred to as NATO enlargement but I think that even that terminology gets it wrong because what it really is is about widening a space of prosperity and democracy and security in Europe and we have here today the Ambassador of Montenegro which will be NATO's next Ally. The documents were signed two days ago I believe here by President Trump and then we also have the Ambassador of Georgia is here, the Ambassador of Estonia is here. They joined NATO in the Prague Enlargement Round and if that is the, first off I wonder if you agree is that the one of the greater achievements of NATO and if it is one of the greater achievements of NATO where do we go from here on this process of inspiring that kind of reform and seeing more countries become part of that democratic and secure community.

Jens Stoltenberg: I absolutely agree with you. I mentioned preserving the peace but of course the fact so many more countries are now part of a family of democratic nations, being a member or NATO and/or the European Union has really helped to promote stability, peace, prosperity in Europe and NATO enlargement is very much a part of that. So I agree. Second, NATO is continuing to expand meaning that we will soon have Montenegro as our 29th Member. The United States has now finished the ratification process so it only remains to have the accession protocol ... complete the ratification process in the Netherland and Spain that I think it is and then we hope to see Montenegro as a full member in June within not so many weeks. Then we are working with Georgia, Georgia is as you said implementing impressive reforms, strengthening their democratic institutions, modernizing their defence institutions, structures and fighting corruption and all of this is - partly at least - because of their aspiration to join NATO.

I always underline that of course to implement that kind of reforms is good because you move closer to NATO but even if their aim is not to move closer to NATO you should be able to fight corruption and to strengthen democratic institutions but they have double reason to do it in a country like Georgia which is aiming for NATO membership. And we support them, NATO supports them with this reform process. So NATO's door is open and we will continue to stress the message that the enlargement or whether NATO is going to have more members is up to the applicant country to decide and the 28 or soon to be 29 Members. No one else has the right to intervene or to say that they don't accept that a new country becomes a NATO member.

Kurt Volker: Very good. Ladies and Gentlemen I am afraid that’s all we are going to have time for today. Please join me in thanking the Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg.

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