North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Speech

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the 67th Annual Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly
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(As delivered)

President Connolly, dear Gerry.

We met last week and now we meet again, so this is really good for our friendship, that we continue to meet every week on both sides of the Atlantic. And also thank you for the way you lead this very important assembly which is important for the whole Transatlantic family and for building NATO as a stronger and stronger Alliance.

Also many thanks to you President Rodrigues and the Portuguese delegation for hosting us at very beautiful place. It's great to be back and to see you all. And of course Prime Minister Costa. We also met recently when we inaugurated the new cyber academy here in Portugal, demonstrating how committed Portugal is to our Alliance.

Dear friends and colleagues.

It is great to be able to meet again in person, and not least because then I can, for a long time I haven't seen you Nancy, but it's great to meet

Speaker Nancy Pelosi, not least because you really deserve the award for Woman, Peace and Security that you just received. Because you have been such a strong voice for security and for women for so many years. So really, congratulations.

Then, I would also like to recognise some other members of this assembly, because I understand that 3 longstanding NPA members and friends of the Alliance, Karl Lamers, Ulla Schmidt and Lord Jopling, are going to attend this meeting and that will be the last NPA assembly they attend, so many thanks for your longstanding commitment, for everything you have done and your commitment to strengthening the Transatlantic bond between Europe and North America. Many many thanks to all of you and I will miss you.

It is a pleasure to be back in Portugal.

Portugal is a staunch NATO Ally.

You contribute to our shared security and to our collective defence in many different ways.

You help fight international terrorism, including in Iraq and Africa.

Portuguese jets and ships are part of our air policing missions and the maritime operations.

And Portuguese forces take part in our multinational brigade in Romania.

And you also host a number of different NATO facilities, including our cutting-edge cyber academy, we inaugurated as you said not so many weeks ago.

You were also a host nation and a lead nation for NATO's largest exercise this year – Steadfast Defender 2021.

All of these contributions demonstrate Portugal's strong commitment to NATO and the transatlantic bond.

In turbulent and unpredictable times, this commitment is as important as ever.

And all NATO Allies, on both sides of the Atlantic, continue to stand by it.

And I say this knowing that Allies do not always agree on every issue.

But ultimately, we all agree on what really matters:

That we are stronger when we stand together.

In Afghanistan we stood together for 20 years.

And together, we took the decision to leave, after extensive rounds of consultations.

It was not an easy decision.

Because we faced a dilemma.

To stay and risk renewed combat and an open ended military presence.

Or to leave and risk the Taliban returning to power.

The Taliban's return to Afghanistan is a tragedy for the Afghan people.

And heart-breaking for all of us who supported them over all the years.

I am deeply grateful to all who served under the NATO flag.

The investment and sacrifices we made were not in vain.

For 20 years, no terrorist attacks have been launched from Afghanistan on our countries.

And our military presence helped create the conditions for significant social and economic progress.

Looking ahead, the international community must preserve these gains.

And continue to bring Afghans at risk to safety.

We must use all the leverage we have to hold the Taliban accountable for their commitments.

Including on safe passage, human rights, and terrorism.

At NATO, I have launched a thorough assessment of our engagement in Afghanistan.

To learn the lessons.

Because by learning we adapt.

It is too early to conclude the outcome of this process, but one thing is clear:

the crisis in Afghanistan does not change the need for Europe and North America to stand together in NATO.

In fact, the need for transatlantic unity is bigger now than it has been at any time since the end of the Cold War.

Because the challenges we face are far greater than any country, or continent, can tackle alone.

Russia is responsible for aggressive actions against its neighbours.

A massive military build-up from the Barents Sea to the Mediterranean.

And attempts to interfere in our democracies.

China is assertively using its might to coerce other countries and control its own people.

And China is coming closer to us.

In Africa, in the Arctic and in cyber-space.

And by investing in our own critical infrastructure, from 5G networks to ports and airports.

And other threats are emerging.

Including cyber-attacks, disruptive technologies, nuclear proliferation and climate change.

Brutal terrorism continues to exist as a real threat.

So, we must strengthen NATO.

That is exactly what our leaders decided to do at the Summit in June.

They agreed NATO 2030 – an ambitious agenda for our future security.

This includes increasing national resilience,

to make our societies, infrastructure and supply chains less vulnerable to attacks.

Boosting our cyber defences.

Investing in the latest technologies,

and addressing the impact of climate change on our security.

Together, we will continue to tackle instability, fight terrorism, and safeguard the rules-based international order,

by stepping up training and capacity-building for partners.

And deepening our relations with other countries, international organisations, the private sector and academic institutions.

One partner is of particular importance for our Alliance and we are cooperating ever more closely with the European Union.

And I am glad to be working with President Ursula von der Leyen and President Charles Michel on a new Joint Statement,

to further strengthen NATO-EU relations,

to be ready before the end of this year.

I strongly welcome the EU’s increased efforts on defence.

NATO has been calling on European Allies to invest more and provide more high-end capabilities for many years.

But these efforts should not duplicate NATO.

Our nations have finite resources, and only one set of forces.

And we need to use them in the best possible way.

Delivering on the NATO 2030 decisions requires proper funding.

We are on the right track, with seven consecutive years of increased defence spending by European Allies and Canada.

Including by Portugal, as all other European Allies.

It is essential to keep up this momentum.

For this, I count on your continued support.

Because you are the ones who ultimately decide our defence budgets.

It is not only about spending more.

It is also about doing so together.

More common funding is a force multiplier.

An investment in the transatlantic unity.

And a strong message of our unity and resolve.

So we need to increase NATO's common funding, based on requirements.

Finally, as part of NATO 2030, we also agreed to develop NATO's next Strategic Concept.

It will give us an opportunity to chart the way ahead for the Alliance,

and reaffirm the centrality of the transatlantic bond to our security and our defence.

It provides us also with the opportunity to recommit to our core values, democracy, the rule of law and individual liberty.

Our leaders will endorse the next Strategic Concept at the Madrid Summit in 2022.

In the meantime, I have started internal consultations with Allies on NATO's evolving strategic environment, approach and priorities.

I will also convene seminars in Allied capitals to bring together NATO leadership, officials and expert communities.

And I look forward to a robust engagement with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in the weeks and months ahead.

This Parliamentary Assembly has been a strong voice for our democratic values,

and we need to recommit to them as we continue to adapt our Alliance.

And President Connolly and I, we have addressed how we can do this in many meetings, also at our last meeting in Washington at the Capitol. And I welcome the fact that initiatives have been taken so we can have a real debate on how we can further strengthen NATO as a tool to uphold our core democratic values.

Today, you have agreed important resolutions that will help guide our governments and your parliaments as we turn the NATO 2030 decisions into action.

Looking ahead, I count on your continued support and engagement.

To keep the transatlantic bond solid,

NATO strong,

and our people safe.

Thank you and then I’m ready for all your questions. Thank you.

Gerald E. Connolly, President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly (NPA):

Thank you Mr. Secretary. Thank you, honored guests, thank you so much for joining us today. As is our practice and the enormous generosity of our Secretary General in offering his time, let alone his stamina, we are now going to enter a Q&A session with the Secretary General, which I know we all find very helpful. However, I have 11 groups of three each, to ask questions. And if you use that time to pontificate, we will not get through every question, so I plead with everyone to use their most concise method of asking a question, so that we can maximize this time together. And I know you will. Thank you.

So, the first group Adeo Silva, the head of the Portuguese delegation, Mimi Kodheli, head of the Albanian delegation and Karl Lamers, the head of the German delegation.

Mr. Silva, you have the floor. There are microphones on the side, if you will go up to a microphone, that way we can hear you.

Adao Silva, head of Portugese delegation:

Thank you mister president, thank you Secretary general….I will continue in Portugese.

Mr. Speaker of the Portugese Parlament, Madame speaker of the House of Representatives, dear colleagues. First, I would like to welcome you all to thank Mr. Secretary General for his presence. Now to talk about the Strategic Concept. The last revision took place in Lisbon in 2010. Today we face new threats and new challenges. This issue about strategic concept has been at the core of our debates and discussion, likely debates. Within this strategic revision, there is the issue of the transatlantic relationship. The Secretary General already mentioned that transatlantic relations. But my question is, if this transatlantic relationship which is crucial since the Washington Treaty 72 years ago, will it remain strong and essential to NATO’s organization, or otherwise it will be weakened in the coming times.

Mimi Kodheli, head of Albanian delegation:

Thank you. NATO Secretary General, good to see you and have you back. Thank you for being here. Dear colleagues. Well, first of all I'd like to honor and pay tribute to all soldiers personnel and civilians, both from NATO members, and from Afghanistan, who served with dedication sacrifying their blood and lives during our engagement in Afghanistan. Considering

the need for a deep reflection over the reasons of the falling back of the country, and the lessons we have to draw from that, my mind goes to our other missions around the world, and more specifically about the one, we have right in Europe since more than 20 years, named KFOR, which continuously to insurance a safe secure environment, not only in the Western Balkans. At this point, recalling the ultimate aim of that Serbian president has recently given to NATO, 24 hours to intervene in case Serbs of Kosovo are threatened before Serbia reacts against his neighboring country. My question would be: what KFOR mission should / would be in order to seal the peace in the country, and to prevent it from any threat, including similar to the one intended by me, above ultimatum, before it withdraws? Thank you.

President of the NPA:

Thank you, Mimi, and Karl Lamers of the German delegation. Karl…

Karl A. Lamers, head of German delegation:

Secretary General. Ladies and gentlemen, first of all thank you very much, dear Secretary General for your great work over the last past years, and especially during these difficult times. And thank you very much for the trustful cooperation over the last years. The developments of the new Strategic Concept you mentioned, will dominate discussions in the coming months. The last Summit communicates, speaks of systemic challenges, and competition. My question is: what role can NATO as a defense alliance play in the confrontation with authoritarian regimes and countries like Russia and China. What new aspects must the future strategic concept take up? Thank you.

President of the NPA: Thank you Carl. Mr. Secretary General.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General:

Thank you so much. First, to the question from Mr. Silva on the strategic concept.

Well the current strategic concept is called the Lisbon strategic concept. The next one will be called the Madrid Strategic concept. So that's a huge different difference because we are going to adapt the next one, at the at the Summit in Madrid, but there will be also other changes, because I think that it is obvious that so much has happened since we agreed the Lisbon Strategic Concept back in 2010, in Lisbon. If you read the current strategic concept, which has served us well, we are still writing about or addressing Russia as a potential strategic partner. That was before Ukraine. We hardly mentioned climate change at all. China is not mentioned with a single word.

So of course, the world has totally changed. We see a much more aggressive Russia, not a strategic partner, climate change, as is now on the top of the NATO agenda, because it matters for our security, and we see the global balance of power really shifting, with the rise of China. These are examples of issues we have to address in the New Strategic Concept.

Then, you asked about whether I'm afraid that we will see a weakening of the transatlantic relationship.

No, I do not think so. Actually, I am fundamental optimist, because I think that if anything, all these changes, the fact that we are faced with more state-to-state rivalry, that we have global competition, makes NATO more important, because we face bigger and more unpredictable security challenges, and therefore it's obvious for Europe, that we need to stand together with North America.

But Speaker Pelosi and others from United States can tell you, perhaps, that actually in the United States, there is increased support for NATO. A very strong bipartisan support. Not least because my feeling is that United States, they understand that when they see the rise of China, when you see more global competition, then it's very good to have friends. And the United States have 29 friends and allies in NATO, and that is something no other major power has. So, I believe that the transatlantic bond is even more needed now, and that's reason why, despite the differences on some issues, Allies will be able to strengthen that bond over the Atlantic.

Then to Mimi Kodheli, first of all, it's always great to see you again. You asked me about KFOR.

Well, KFOR will stay. KFOR plays a very important role in Kosovo, helping not only to keep safe and secure environment, and stability in Kosovo, but also in the broader region by stabilizing Kosovo. We will, of course, do what we believe is needed according to our mandate, meaning for instance that we worked very closely with the European Union. We saw some tensions increasing around some border crossings and all related to some new requirements on licensing of plates for cars, that issue was possible to solve, because we had NATO troops, KFOR troops deployed at the border crossings, working together with the EU diplomats. For me, KFOR is a perfect example on how EU and NATO can work together in addressing a challenge, as we face them in Kosovo.

Then Karl Lamers, you asked me about the Strategic Concept, well I have already in a way addressed that. I think that the strategic concept... first of all, it is important to have a new Strategic Concept, but more ways, it's even more important the process that leads up to that strategic concept, because it needed. We need a discussion, we need real engagement from all capitals, and that's my plan to organize that. So we develop a common understanding on the new security threats and challenges we face, and by developing that common understanding, we are strengthening the unity of this Alliance. So, the good thing with a strategic concept is not only the language that we finally agree, but the process leading up to that language. I am looking forward to continue to engage with this Assembly, as we develop the Strategic Concept.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, and I want to congratulate to the first three questioners for watching time. Next three questioners Osman Bak, I think I see Osman there, from Turkey,

Oudekkia Loone, head of the Estonian delegation, and Ojars Eriksojos Kalnins, head of the Latvian delegation. Osman.

Osman Askin, head of Turkish delegation:

Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, Mr. Secretary General, as you know Turkey and Russia signed a memorandum for the building of non-conflict zones in Idlib province of Syria in 2017. The main idea behind the memorandum was to coop with humanitarian crisis in the region, and ensure the continuance of ceasefire.

Until now, Turkey did its best to ensure the cease-fire is respected, but recent developments are on the way in the province of Syria, that might be effect to Turkey, Europe and our Allies. Syrian regime and Russia are turning up the pressure against the civilians in Idlib by continuous campaign of shelling and airstrikes. It is home to approximately 4 million Syrian, and once the trust is broken, they will start flowing to Turkey and Europe will lead to this new chapter of humanitarian crease crisis.

My question is: what our Allies can do the stop the Syrian regime and Russia? As you know, Turkey has 4 millions Syrian refugees and after Afghanistan developers, we will have another flow of refugees, so that's why we need support from our Allies. Thank you.

Thank you. Good job in staying in time. Oudekkia…

Kerstin-Oudekkia Loone, head of the Estonian delegation:

Thank you. Dear Secretary General, thank you for your most interesting speech. My question relates to the topic that has been extensively discussed here in the past days, namely our future, the revision of the NATO Strategic Concept.

First, I want to stress that NATO is extremely strong and effective on its solid ground of military security in the European Theater. Its Charter mandates a regional security organization based on mutual solidarity. To be sure, it's written on its very name North Atlantic Treaty Organization. We are effective, because we take care of security of our own homeland. This is our democratic mandate. Ultimately here, we have, there have been calls to step out of this charted territory to take more global posture, and thus act outside of these regional mandate.

Mr. Secretary General, would you think that this could give a fantastic opportunity for our critics to raise against us, the accusations of colonialism and imperialism. Afghanistan tells us that we are able to provide security, anywhere, but we are outgunned by a single political sentence. This is not your home. So, let's not ignore this bitter lesson from Afghanistan. Thank you.

Thank you, Oudekkia. And finally, Ojars.

Ojars Eriksojos Kalnins, head of the Latvian delegation:

Hello Mr. Secretary General. Greetings from all your friends in Latvia, we're in the back today.

We all agree that it's very important to talk about military mobility and NATO, but I think Afghanistan has demonstrated that we have no plans for civilian mobility at the end of military operations. It appears that there was no consultation between the EU and NATO before the evacuation of troops to provide for logistics and transportation for the thousands of EU civilians who were left stranded. Would you agree that the need for civilian mobility will be amongst the lessons learned from the operations of Afghanistan? Thank you.

Thank you Ojars. Mr. Secretary General.

First, on Syria.

As we are, of course, following developments and everything that takes place in Syria very closely, because it matters for our security. We continue to condemn both the use of violence by the Assad regime, they have used chemical weapons and also the support they received from Russia. But as you know, NATO is not present on the ground in Syria. We support you and efforts to find a political, negotiated solution. I'm aware of that, some NATO Allies are on the ground in Syria, but NATO has not so far. And NATO's approach is that we should not have a NATO mission or a NATO presence on the ground in Syria.

We support the efforts of the global coalition to defeat Daesh, but without having NATO troops on the ground in Syria.

Then on to Estonia.

NATO is, it's a North Atlantic Alliance. And I don't think anyone suggests that we should become a global alliance, meaning that we should open up a membership from Asia or for Africa or for Latin America. NATO, according to the Washington Treaty, consists of North America, Canada and United States, and European Allies, that's it.

The challenge is that this region, the North Atlantic region, we face global threats. So as a regional alliance, we need to respond, to deal with global threats and challenges, which is now, we can say that we only look at North America and Europe, because this region lives in a dangerous world.

This is not something new. Terrorism has been a global threat for many, many years. And that brought NATO to Afghanistan. It started actually, when we had the brutal civil wars in the Balkans. It was not obvious that NATO should go out of territory, but we went out the territory and in Bosnia Hercegovina and in Serbia and ended two brutal ethnic wars.

And now, we face of the global threats. Cyber is global. Everything we see in space, which is great importance to our security, is truly global. And of course, the rise of China matters for

our security. There's no way we can say that does not matter. We see them trying to control critical infrastructure, we see them in cyberspace, we see them in Africa. And of course, freedom of navigation. The fact that China soon will have the biggest economy in the world, are leading in many advanced disruptive technologies, investing heavily new nuclear capabilities, are working more and more closely with Russia. All of that makes it impossible for NATO not to address the security impact of the rise of China.

So I'm not arguing in favor of NATO becoming a global alliance, mean that we should members from all over the world and apply Article 5. from countries all over the world, but I'm arguing in favor of that, as a regional alliance, we need to deal with global threats. That has been the case for many years, but even more so, as we see the global balance of power is shifting.

Mr. Secretary General. I think there's one of the points you're making it and we don't live in the 19th century anymore. You have to take cognizance. Take that doesn't mean we directly get involved in. But taking cognizance of other developments in other parts of the world is in our interest.

Yes, then to Latvia.

First of all, for me, it is important to state the following that, it was difficult to decide the way ahead in Afghanistan. We faced only difficult options. But this idea that we didn't consult is wrong. We had three ministerial meetings this spring. We had almost weekly ambassadorial meetings, meetings in different types of committees discussing the way ahead in Afghanistan. And all Allies didn't agree on all the issues, but we consulted. Then the United States made its decision. And after that, all Allies agreed that we should end our military presence in Afghanistan. So, there are, it's absolutely possible to have different views about whether that was right or wrong. But to say that we didn't consult is factually wrong. We consulted, and made a difficult decision together, knowing the risks.

It was stated clearly in the meetings that, - actually also stated publicly in the media,- that if we leave, there is a risk the Taliban will return. The surprise was not that Taliban returned. What we didn't anticipate was the speed. But we did make that decision, because we knew that the alternative to stay most likely would have meant to stay for 10-20 more years in an open ended military mission with more casualties over our own troops, but also civilians in Afghanistan. And most likely, we have been, we would have been forced to increase number of troops in Afghanistan. I will not mention names, but I know countries who were actually on their way out regardless of the decision, and somehow already left. So, we faced this dilemma and we made that hard decision together.

Then it was not in vain. We were able to fight terrorism for 20 years. We continue to be vigilant, and do whatever we can to prevent Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for international terrorists. And we will of course also support efforts by Allies to preserve the

gains we've made when it comes to also social and economic progress in Afghanistan, not least the fact that women should continue to get education.

On the evacuation, the last NATO troops were out of Afghanistan in mid-June, mid-July. We had several hundred civilians at the airport playing a key role, air traffic controller, providing fuel, communications, running the airport together with United States and some other allies who were at the airport. Turkey was there, UK, Norway was operating a hospital. So, NATO Allies were there, but they were not under NATO command, they were as individual allies and NATO played a coordinating role. And of course the fact that the collapse of Kabul happened so quickly led to the very difficult and chaotic situation in the first days. After that, it was a quite impressive airlift of citizens from NATO countries including many of them from EU countries. So, I think we actually demonstrated that we can work together, European Allies, North America, US, and we were able to get a lot of people out more than 120,000 people, in such a short period of time is actually quite impressive.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary General, group three. Zaida Cantera from Spain. Theo Francken, Belgium, and Salima Belhaj, the new head of the Netherlands delegation. Zaida.

24:05
Zaida Cantera, head of Spanish delegation:

Thank you Mr. President.

[…] It's not about the military. We have other aspects in warfare, you need to be able to combat the enemy without going to war in the first place. We've won the war against terror during the first years in Afghanistan, but we've lost something and that is much more important. That's the narrative. The war of narrative, of the message we want to translate of our values.

What does that mean? We have a profound credibility crisis within NATO. The trust that people place in us, that is not only, so in countries like Afghanistan, where we exited, but also in the neighboring countries of Afghanistan, but also in our own countries. Thus, here comes my question. Our message from NATO to our own audiences to get their support, to neutral audiences to get that support and visa-a-vis the enemy, so that they don't go against us, how can we transmit this message that was strong in NATO, that we have a commitment, and we are definitely assertive and resolute. Thank you so much.

Formidable. You had one second left. Thank you. Theo.

Theo Franken, head of Belgium delegation

Yes, thank you, Mr. Chair, Mr. Secretary General, thank you for being here. I'll make it short, I have two questions.

Afghanistan was not our best episodes in the history of NATO, we're all agreeing on that I think. First of all, the comeback of Taliban. How, why was our intelligence, intel so bad, why was information so bad, that they came, they didn't took 20 months to come back and to take the capital. They took 20 days. What went wrong? Why were we not better informed?

Second. When do we start a counter terrorism operation in Afghanistan? Because, al Qaeda is regrouping on Afghanistan soil, and we need to be ready to counter terrorism.

Thank you very much.

Thank you. And finally, Salima.

Salima Belhaj, the new head of the Netherlands delegation:

Dear Secretary General Stoltenberg. On behalf of the Dutch delegation, I would like to send out a message, and we have a question.

First, we are proud of our military deployments, civil servants, human rights activists, and NGOs who helped out during unknown crisis and evacuation, saving people trying to guide people to the Kabul airport. I hope the Secretary General underlines the importance of appreciating, those who did everything that was in their power during this evacuation. The image of all those Afghans running with emigration planes, is an image that we can and should never forget. The desperate Afghans, and the fear of terror.

We need to learn from this evacuation. So now we'll come to the question. A lot of colleagues have, besides the inquiry into what went wrong, and what we can learn, and on the side effect that we emphasize the important for our NATO relationship, would it be possible to elaborate on how we must deal with the uncomfortable feeling of being left alone by ourselves as European NATO countries. Besides the fact that European NATO countries must try to learn to work together, could you already reflect on the question, what were to help to continue to make the NATO relationship stronger.

Thank you Salima. Mr. Secretary General.

Thanks so much, they are very relevant and good questions, you’re actually very good at keeping the time limits. The problem is not the question. The problem is the answers. They are too long. So, now you all asked about Afghanistan, so I will try to group that together to try to save a bit of time.

First of all, I think it's important that we focus on Afghanistan, because that was our biggest mission for 20 years, military mission. And of course we really need to have a lessons learned process. We organize that that NATO, and other different allies will do the same. We have to be honest, we have to be frank, we have to be clear-eyed, because we need to learn some serious lessons about what worked, and what did not work. I'm motivated to conclude, and to give you the final answers on all these aspects. What I say now is more or to say my

thinking, or my reflections, but I stand ready to adjust my analysis as we move forward with the lessons learn project.

First, on the credibility.

Sometimes, I think we have to remind ourselves why went in. We invoked Article 5 to protect the United States, and all other Allies against terrorist threats. That was reason we went in. And, actually, that tasked, on that task we achieved a lot. We degraded al Qaeda, and we have prevented Afghanistan being a platform where terrorist organization can train, organize, plan, finance terrorist attacks against our own countries. That's not a small thing to achieve, it's a big thing. We achieved that for 20 years. Now the task is to stay vigilant, be coordinated, put pressure on the Taliban regime, but also be ready to strike from distance, if needed to prevent Afghanistan again becoming a safe haven.

So task number one. Fighting international terrorism, we did not fail, actually, we achieved the goal. The challenge is to preserve that.

Then we had this state-building effort.

And then, I think it's important to remember, that that in a way that was an effort, not only by NATO. Actually NATO played a minor role. It was an effort by the whole international community, the UN and the EU, individual NATO Allies. I was at that time Prime Minister of Norway, we sent in development aid workers and a lot of people helped them to build state institutions, fight corruption, modernize their whole society.

Well, we have not, we were not able to do that, because we saw the collapse of the state institutions like that. So, there are some serious lessons to be learned about nation building. But that's lessons to be learned for NATO, but also for a whole, the rest of the international community, who actually worked more deeply, involved in that part of the task than NATO.

So that's lesson learned, that we need to do as EU, as UN, as individual NATO Allies, and of course, NATO should be part of it, but this is much more than NATO. On that, I will say that much has been lost. When it comes to democracy, rule of law, and those efforts in Afghanistan, but some of those social and economic gains have not been lost. The education that millions of people have received is still there. They can still read and write, and we should continue to do whatever we can to use support for NGOs, for private organizations to continue to provide support to education, social and economic progress in Afghanistan.

Then maybe I don't fully understand it, but you may see Europeans were left alone.

As we all helped to evacuate each other. First of all, there were many European, the evacuation, yes it was a very chaotic and difficult situation the first two days. But after that, it was actually quite impressive. That the effort, that was very much the United States, but also the effort of many other Allies, they were able to get so many people out. UK deployed

significant number of troops get the people out, not only the British citizens but European, and many other countries, including Afghans.

As I said Norway was running a hospital at the airport, critical for all operation, NATO civilian staff, they were actually at the airport helping Allies out from all countries. And Turkey played also a key role at the airport, and I also know that Germany, and Spain, and many other countries, the Netherlands sent in planes and helped to evacuate.

So for me, it was a tragedy what happened with the Taliban takeover and the lives lost. Also, at the airport, but it was a demonstration of what we can do together, when North America and Europe stand together and conduct a big operation as that air lift was. So, this notion that in a way, someone was left alone is not correct. We did that together. So, that's my… I think it's important, because I think, it is a bit dangerous if now you start to talk as if we, in a way, only took out some citizens from some nations and actually we took out everyone.

The challenge now is the Afghans, at risk. We were able to get out thousands. But there are thousands more who helped, supported us, who worked with us all these years. NATO, NATO Allies have received a lot of support from Afghans. And we need to continue, and I welcome the efforts by several allies to continue to get people out. Because that's the least we owe them, is to continue to help them.

Then to try to be shorter, just answer one more aspect of this Afghan question on intelligence.

I receive a lot of intelligence. And in my previous life, I received a lot of economic forecasts, because when I was prime minister of Norway for instance we studied the oil market very carefully. And I've been impressed all the numbers and all the figures, and all the facts I can get, but still not able to predict the oil price.

Intelligence is a bit the same. You can get a lot of facts about the strength of the Taliban where there are, what kind of weapon systems, you can get numbers for the Afghan security forces, but what is hard to predict, is the political dynamic. What happens at the top, at the political processes, at the top of the Afghan government. And we saw rapid collapse, all the political leadership in Afghanistan, and that led to the collapse of the defense of Kabul and the rest of Afghanistan. There were many brave Afghan soldiers, but without leadership, without logistics, without ammunition and fuel, the whole thing collapsed. That was very hard to predict. Well part of the lessons learned should be to, how can we look into that.

But it doesn't change the main issue, was it right or wrong to believe.

And Allies agreed that the time had come to leave. And I didn't sense an urgency, great interest among European Allies to fill the void of the United States, which I fully understand, because we went in, because of the attack on the United States. Article 5 was not invoked to protect Afghanistan; it was invoked to protect our nations. We have fought terrorism and then

the United States decided to end its military mission. Then we all left after close consultations.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, footnote. We have reports that a number of Afghan military units had not received pay for seven months. And if that, if those reports are true, it makes you wonder, well, more than wonder, what was going on. Lots of money pouring into the central government. I don't mean that as a criticism of NATO, that if you're wondering why were people bought off by the Taliban. Oh, you're not being paid for seven months and you're a soldier on the field, putting your life in the line. That might help explain it.

Group number four. First Pryemzslaw Czarnecki from Poland. Alec Shelbrooke from the United Kingdom, and Linda Sanchez from the United States. Mr. Czarnecki. Are you here? He's not there. Okay. Alec.

Alec Shelbrooke, head of British delegation:

Thank you, Mr President. Secretary General, you quite rightly made the point that the Strategic Concept is more about the negotiations and build up that come before that is published. And within that it needs to be recognized that there is now a fundamental shift in how military allies have operated up to now. PESCO has many positive aspects to it in increasing the investment of European nations into defense procurement and the ability to operate, but it also creates a new political concept. And that potentially in the future could create a tension that may not be able to do operations if certain countries don't want to take part, which has been an acceptable part of NATO. So therefore, could I ask you about the strategy, which needs to be employed leading up to the strategic concept being published to establish protocols which can easily be solved at this point to ensure that those issues do not become a problem at the time when we need to be able to move quickly.

Linda Sanchez, head of US delegation:

Thank you Mr. President and Mr. Secretary General. Thank you so much for sharing your time with us this morning.

NATO is a political, military Alliance built on a foundation of the democratic principles that are enshrined in NATO's founding treaty. But as I'm sure you're aware we're facing growing competition from authoritarian regimes that explicitly challenged these principles. And we, in the Assembly think that it's vital that the Alliance take steps to bolster our own commitment to democracy, individual liberty and rule of law. And as we sadly learned on January 6th, nobody is immune from these challenges. The Assembly has proposed the creation of a Center for Democratic Resilience at NATO Headquarters to monitor the health of our democracies, and to provide support to allies who seek to strengthen democratic institutions. My question for you is what is your view of the assembly's proposal? And how can Member States put this on the agenda of the new Strategic Concept, given that it is in line with the principles of the Brussels 2021 Communiqué. Thank you.

Thank you Linda penetrating question, Mr. Secretary General,

Thank you so much. First on PESCO my overall message is that I support EU efforts on defense, especially when it comes to developing new capabilities, as long as these capabilities, of course, are owned by the nations, and are available also for NATO, NATO operations. So more than 90% of the people living in the European Union, they live in a NATO country, and we have only one set of forces, and therefore we must ensure that these new capabilities are available also of course to NATO. But that has been stated again and again from the European Union, and from all European Allies, that that's the case. So, given that, I'm strongly in favor of PESCO and the European Defense Fund, because they are tools they're going to help European Allies to provide, develop new capabilities. Something which NATO has been asking for many years. Then of course, we also would like to prevent those mechanisms to create new barriers between NATO Allies. Therefore in our dialogue with the European Union, we have highlighted again, and again the need to really look into the details, and there are many details here, about that we ensure as far as possible that non-EU Allies can be included. And for instance develop the projects where Canada, and an EU Members are going together. So we don't create new barriers between NATO Allies, and EU members. So, I don't know if your question was about that then my answer is that we should welcome these tools, but we should ensure that it's not duplicating or competing with or creating new barriers against those NATO Allies who are not EU members.

Then on the Democratic Resilience Coordination Center. First of all, I think, it's extremely important that you raise that issue what, how can NATO do more to stand up for and protect our core values.

Because we see that these values are under pressure and threat in some NATO Allied countries. And of course the most shocking example was what we saw the 6th of January in Washington. Because a peaceful transition of power is the core idea of any democracy. And when that is challenged, of course, that's an attack on the heart, on the core of any democratic institution in any democratic country. And it was and this was the United States, the biggest ally. But I think it was also regardless the attack on the whole idea, that NATO is based on democratic democracy, the rule of law, and individual liberty.

I also believe that the new Strategic Concept is a way for us to re-commit but also step up when it comes to addressing our democratic values, and we should work on your proposal, but as you know, for that to be agreed, we need consensus. So sometimes, it takes some time to get consensus, but that's for all of us and all those who engaged to work at the Member States. And then at the end, if all the 30 Allies to decide whether we are able to agree on this or not.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary General, group number five. We have Velizar Shalamanov, head of the Bulgarian delegation, Christian Tybring-Gjedde, head of the Norwegian delegation and then Audronius Azubalis, head of the Lithuanian delegation. Velizar.

Velizar Shalamanov, head of the Bulgarian delegation:

Thank you Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, thank you for your leadership of the many years after 2014 that was the turning point for NATO, especially in Eastern Europe. A lot was achieved with not only [….] plan, but many other initiatives, but still we experienced dependence in defense from Russia. That is absolutely unacceptable and creates vulnerabilities. So in this context, what could we do more as Alliance to cut this dependence that creates unacceptable vulnerabilities, and how could we use common funding, and NATO agencies in order to improve resilience in the Black Sea region. I just want to add that in Afghanistan, there are many lessons but the one positive lesson is that NATO agencies, both NSPA and NCIA were very instrumental in supporting the efforts of NATO nations, so maybe we could use this in Eastern Europe as well. Thank you.

Thank you, Velizar. Christian.

Christian Tybring-Gjedde, head of the Norwegian delegation:

[President] and Dear Jens, we have known each other from Norway. My question is about Taiwan and China. We've seen Chinese provocation towards Taiwan. The last month is being steadily worse. And also we have the bombers going there with nuclear weapons passing through over a tiny Taiwan airspace. We talked about strategic concept. China is not waiting for a strategic concept. Taiwan is not cannot afford to wait for is the concept and strategic concept is just, it's not just talk but it's on the paper, is written on the paper and it doesn't really help either of Taiwan for defending Taiwan so my question is, what is actually NATO's role in defending Taiwan against China? And what is NATO now doing to prepare or have a contingency plan to help Taiwan in case it's going to be military challenge there in the future? Thank you.

Thank you. Audronius.

Audronius Azubalis, head of the Lithuanian delegation

Thank you Mr. President, dear Secretary General. First of all, I would like to say about so-called trust crisis to NATO, at least in my country in Lithuania, where NATO is among the most trusted organizations and the NATO forward, troops presence are very much respected in Lithuania. But, Secretary General, discussing the Alliance future, we cannot avoid the question of its enlargement. But we must admit that some NATO countries are skeptical about NATO’s enlargement and often used so-called explanation that we should not provoke Russia. Secretary General, could you name advantages that Alliance’s enlargement might bring? And how do you understand the phrase, not provoke Russia? Does it mean that Russia has a veto power to enlargement. Thank you.

Thank you, Audronius. Good questions. Mr. Secretary General.

Okay, first on Bulgaria, and the common funding and how to deal with a more aggressive Russia.

Well I think what, what we have seen since 2014 is the fundamental shift in NATO. Our resources and our efforts have actually been taken away, been reduced, how much we allocate to big combat operations out of NATO territory for different reasons. We have to remember that more than 130,000 people in Afghanistan or troops there, not so long ago. Now we're down to zero, we've also reduced some other big operations and missions, outside NATO territory. Instead, we have seen a significant buildup of collective defense in Europe with, for the first time in our history, battle groups in eastern part Alliance, high readiness forces, tripling the size of the NATO Response Force, increased spending for seven consecutive years. Also, before 2014 the European Allies were cutting defense budgets for years of the years, now all of us have increased defense spending for seven years, adding a 260 billion extra. This is a huge reinforcement of collective defense, the biggest since the end of the Cold War. So this is a fundamental shift. And this is about the trust credibility. And it demonstrates our willingness to stand together and support each other. Common funding as part of that, because common funding is only a tiny fraction of total defense spending, but that is what we're spending together. That can provide a key enablers money for preposition the equipment for more exercises, air defense, these kind of stuff that combine NATO Allies together and demonstrate our unity and our resolve that actually is a force multiplier. And that's the reason why recently the Heads of State and Government decided at the Summit that we should do more on all three budgets, the civilian budget on the defense investment budget, and also the military budget. We'll come back to the requirements and the concrete proposals by the Summit next year, but we're working on that now.

Then, Christian or Norway. You are completely right, that of course a strategic concept that's words, but words matters because it defines and clarify the direction for our travel, what we want to obtain, and that is important. If we have very strong military capabilities, but not the political will to use them, then those military capabilities are useless. So we need both the capabilities, but also the resolve, the unity and the clear direction and the strategic concept that helps to create that unity, which is so important for credible events and events which is the combination of resolve and capabilities. But of course, strategic concept alone is not enough. Taiwan is not a NATO member, there will never become a NATO member, NATO is an Alliance for Europe and North America.

But of course, we see a China which, which is behaving in a more coarse way against the neighbors. We see what they do in the South China Sea. Also, undermining the freedom of navigation and, and we see also China and Russia operating more and more closely together. So all this matters for NATO. And that's reason why we need to invest more in technology that's reason why we had to work more closely with our Asia Pacific partners as we also decided at the Summit, Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea. And that's the reason why we need to for instance invest more in our resilience over societies.

So, we are doing a lot, which is about how to adapt to a world well, where the global balance of power is shifting and China is rising. I'm certain that we'll continue to step up.

Then, on the enlargement and this idea of enlargement that will provoke Russia. First of all, it is an absolutely fundamental principle that every sovereign nation has the right to decide his own path. So whether nation would like to become a member of NATO or not is up to that nation to decide. And of course, it is for that nation and the NATO allies to decide whether the aspirant nation meets the standards to become a NATO member. Russia has not the veto and Russia must never get the veto. Because it's about respecting the sovereignty of every nation to decide its own future. And I said, this also knowing that, of course, Russia always tries to say that it's a provocation.

So when, for instance, the Baltic countries and Poland joined, they said that that was a provocation, but I'm very glad that we had the strength in our country to say that they are welcome. And I can speak, sometimes I use my own country. That when Norway joined in 1949, Norway's border country over Russia or the Soviet Union at that time, Stalin was heavily against. He didn't want Norway to join, but because Washington, London, Paris, all the other capitals in what was then the founding members of NATO, said Norway's welcome, even though they border Russia, and Russia, don't, don't like it. I'm very glad that that was the approach at that time. So, it's for NATO Allies to decide when the aspirant countries for instance Georgia and Ukraine, meet the NATO standards and are ready to join there is no one else.

Good point. Group number six: is the Zdravka Busic, acting head of the Croatian delegation. Philippe Michel-Kleisbaucher, deputy head and acting head of the French delegation, and Athanasios Davakis, deputy head of the Greek delegation. Zdravka.

Zdravka Busic, acting head of the Croatian delegation:

Thank you. Thank you very much Mr. President, I have two questions and I'll try to be very brief. Mr. Secretary General, as an active member of NATO, Croatia guards and promotes the values this organization stands for. Having said that, Croatia is concerned that our neighbor, Bosnia-Herzegovina, did not make much progress on her path towards NATO membership. In this vacuum, Mr. Secretary General, others are watching for the right opportunity. President of our Parliamentary Assembly, Hon. Connolly, in his address this morning said, and I'll quote, that NATO is going to go for strategic concepts, clear commitments, and for rededication of NATO for democratic transformation. Bosnia- Herzegovina badly needs all of these, let us apply them to this country in our immediate neighborhood. Second question is about the recent developments in Kosovo and Montenegro, Montenegro, being a member of NATO. How closely is NATO following these developments in this very strategic area? Thank you, Mr. President, and thank you, Mr. Secretary General.

Thank you, Zdravka. And you have eight seconds left. Great job, Philippe Michel.

Philippe Michel-Kleisbaucher, deputy head and acting head of the French delegation:

Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General, dear colleagues, the AUKUS context is what leads me to take the floor today. You know this context, so I won't get back to that.

Let me tell you though that it's not about a sudden end to an industrial contract between allies, it leads to vulnerabilities, the French defense industry is performing well and it is resistant so it will overcome this challenge. The presidents of France and the United States have taken the floor. They have talked about the way ahead this is now to be implemented. It is up to each of us to contribute to this way ahead. Because of course, these words spoken by Allied presidents have a weight and importance for all of us, Secretary of State Blinken has already started to implement the words added by the presidents, they've spoken about a stronger and more capable European defense that positively contributes to the global transatlantic security, and it is complimentary to NATO.

Mr. Secretary General, what divides us, weakens us, our democracies face threats in their own allied countries and this is a source of worry. It is the same for the weakening of norms, I'm thinking here of nuclear proliferation and the non-compliance with Article 4 at several times in the past years. Don't you think that this is more important that the Europeans will to contribute greater to their own security, their commitment towards protecting the Euro-Atlantic space? Hasn't the time now come to realize what is obvious, and to fully dedicate ourselves to overcome the contemporary challenges we face?

Thank you, Philippe Michel. Athanasios.

Athanasios Davakis, deputy head of the Greek delegation:

Mr. President, Mr. Secretary, with a NATO 2030 agenda, the Alliance has taken important steps to leverage the power of the private sector, with projects, such as the Defense Innovation, accelerator for the North-Atlantic. Cooperation with the private sector is, however, also important in another context, but of increasing our resilience against cyber-attacks and cyber terrorism. What step is NATO taking, this is my question.

What step is NATO taking, or planning to take, to assist and speed up the process of securing critical infrastructure in member states, particularly those systems controlled by private sector entities against cyberattacks and cyberterrorism? Thank you.
President of the NPA:

Thank you, Athanasios. Mr. Secretary General.

So first, on Bosnia-Herzegovina. We strongly support their efforts to reform and modernize to their country, we work with them, we brought them support. But of course, we see that there are huge challenges in Bosnia-Herzegovina but we will continue to provide the support and help.

Then on Kosovo, as I said, we are absolutely present in Kosovo, we have a KFOR presence with about 3,000-4,000 NATO troops. They have been important for many years but they continue to be important. Not least now with the new agreement where KFOR NATO took responsibility to control some of the disputed, or some of the border crossings, where we had some, some disputes related to crossings from Serbia into Kosovo and the other way around, also from Kosovo into Serbia.

And, and I think it also demonstrated a very good way of NATO-EU cooperation and what we achieved there, and we strongly support the continued efforts within the EU facilitated dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade.

Then, on to France. Well, first of all, I very much welcome the joint statement, between President Biden and President Macron. I'm also absolutely confident that the Allies involved in this will find a way forward. It is not the first time we have some differences between Allies, we just have to prevent that this becomes a dispute or a rift in the Transatlantic Alliance. I of course understand that France is disappointed. But we should prevent this from becoming an issue that that creates a more deep and lasting rift in the relationship between Allies and especially between North America and Europe.

And Aukus deal is not directed against Europe or NATO. It is a deal between two NATO Allies, United States and the United Kingdom with a close partner Australia. And again, I understand France is disappointed, but I also strongly believe that Allies are agreeing or that they agree on the big picture, that we need to stand together, and we need to step up our cooperation with the countries in Asia Pacific, like Australia. We agreed, agreed to that, at the Summit in June, we need to deliver on that, on maritime security, on cyber and many other areas where we can work together with these countries.

So, then responsibility for all Allies, all Allies when there are differences, there will be differences also in the future that we try to solve them bilaterally, without bringing all the difficulties into NATO, because we need to prove in the future as we are proven over more than seven decades that yes, we are 30 different Allies from both sides of the Atlantic, with different parties, different culture, different history, but we are able to agree, around the courthouse, stand together, North America and Europe. And I'm absolutely confident that we will be able to do that also in the future.

Then, Greece, resilience.

Yes, absolutely, that's one of the main messages in NATO 2030 and also some of the main one of the most important decisions you made at the NATO Summit is that we have to strengthen further what we call resilience guidelines, as guidelines for critical infrastructure, including cyber, to make sure that we have critical infrastructure that can operate in peace, crisis, and conflict. And we see more hybrid attacks we see more cyberattacks, what NATO has done is to significantly strengthen our cyber defenses. We shared best practices among NATO Allies, we conduct big exercises, and, and we will continue to work together. I also

believe strongly that the 5G discussion was the kind of a turning point in NATO, because not so many years ago, many Allies thought that 5G was only a commercial thing that had nothing to do with security. We had some very frank and good discussions at NATO, and now Allies have realized that 5G is essential for our security. And not many of them have chosen a Chinese provider of 5G networks. We have been able to find other solutions, and that demonstrates that NATO is a platform also to address this kind of threats and challenges we see related to for instance critical infrastructure.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary, and we're halfway through, I want to thank you for your stamina.

We have two questions in group seven, Paolo Formentini, deputy head of the Italian delegation, and Zsolt Németh, deputy head of the Hungarian delegation. Paolo.

Paolo Formentini, deputy head of the Italian delegation:

Thank you. In my personal opinion, European leaders keep stressing the importance of the transatlantic bond, but sadly, facts are different. Today we celebrate the Italian-American heritage. Remembering Grand Admiral Columbus, a true symbol of transatlantic unity, but are European public opinions still really committed to this relationship, unique link? Strategic autonomy of Europe means leaving U.S. alone in the containment of China? Isn’t it wiser to reinforce Europe inside NATO, instead of duplicating NATO. Thank you.

Thank you, Paolo, and Zsolt.

Zsolt Németh, deputy head of the Hungarian delegation:

President, Secretary General, I would like to greet all of you, Colleagues, in the name of the Hungarian delegation.

And my question relates the Western Balkans in general. Secretary General, that is another mission, which has 20 years passed, and that is the involvement of us in the stabilization of the Western Balkans, which is still going on, and which might be successful. I am very proud that Hungary has just taken over the command of KFOR, and we have hundreds of Hungarian troops participating in the last 20 years in that mission.

And my question is, Secretary General: Do you find relevant the open door, and the enlargement policy in the peace and democracy, and the stabilization of the Western Balkans? And if yes, how do you, and what do you think about the joint statement between NATO and EU you are planning to sign in the near foreseeable future? Should it relate the enlargement and the stabilization of Western Balkans? What is your opinion about this question? Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary General.

Okay, now I'll start with the last one. Yes, of course, open doors matter for the Western Balkans, and we have demonstrated that over the last few years. First of all, we have countries like Slovenia and Croatia. Sometimes I know they don't like, they are not referring to themselves as Western Balkans, but South East Europe, but they have been many members for many years but, but over the last few years, we've actually been able to get two new members from the Western Balkans, that's Montenegro, and North Macedonia, and that's a big achievement. That's good for these two countries. It's good for NATO, and it demonstrates that, that our door is open, NATO's door is open, that's not only something we say, we have actually been able to enlarge our Alliance with new members from that region over the last few years.

We will continue to work for enlargement but as I said, to become a member we need consensus in NATO and we need the aspirant countries to meet the NATO standards and we are working on that with, with Georgia, with Ukraine and also with Bosnia-Herzogovina.

Then, then, on strategic autonomy and on the European defense.

Well, I think that part of this discussion is sometimes a bit difficult, because I think people mean different things with the same words. So for instance, for me, I always say that I support European defense. I support European defense efforts, as long as they happen within the NATO framework. So, but all the times you get the impression that that that strategic autonomy or European Defense, with a capital E and D is something outside alternative to NATO. And that I don't support. It has been stated again again for European leaders that they don't want to do something outside NATO, but for instance. So for instance, NATO as a precondition for any stronger European efforts on defense is to spend more.

There is no way you can get more European defense without European Allies spending more. And there is one institution that's been pushing for more European defense spending for years, and that is NATO. Actually, we made the decision at the NATO Summit in Wales in 2014 where we called on all your all European Allies and Canada to step up. The good news is that after that NATO decision European Allies have started to invest more. So that's more more European Defense because you're gonna get more money, stronger defense budgets, then you can buy more capabilities and exercise your forces more. That's some European defense, but not despite of NATO, but because of NATO. Because NATO is actually the organization that pushed, it was President Obama, then later President Trump and then now President Biden and the whole of NATO has been very clear about the need for European Allies to invest more. Second, NATO has also been pushing very hard for more European efforts on capabilities, because European Allies need more high-end capabilities. Drones, planes, many other things.

The challenge I think I mentioned that for some of you before is that there's a challenge or the fragmentation of the European defense industry; in the United States there are many thousands of battle tanks, and there are only one type. In Europe, we have fewer battle tanks

and we have nine different types. So, the economy of scale is almost nonexistent. The cost of all the spare parts, training, maintenance, development, all that is much higher. So, if Europe, with the European Defense Fund, with PESCO, can overcome some of the fragmentation of the European defense industry, that will be a big advantage for European defense for NATO for all of us. And NATO is actually trying to push for that.

What we must avoid is duplication. The backbone of NATO is the command structure. And we cannot have two command structures.

The other, the main responsibility for NATO is Article 5. We cannot have two collective defense clauses. Because then if a NATO EU ally attacks then that there will be a big discussion on whether the EU or NATO shall come to rescue, there can be no doubt about that.

And again, I know that this has been clearly not the intent, but of course the EU cannot defend Europe because 80% of NATO's defense expenditure comes from non-EU allies.

And you can also only look at geography, Norway and Iceland, the north, Turkey in the South and the West, US, Canada and UK, they are all important for the defense of Europe, so we are 30 Allies, some EU members, some not, who have decided that we should protect and defend each other. And then, we should do it together, not start to establish groups within that because that will undermine the trust that third allies have in each other.

But my main message is I'm confident that this is not the goal. Because Europe and North America, we are the most successful alliance, but then we have to stand together and that will, it must be the case also in the future.

Lord Campbell of Pittenweem:

There has been no putsch, the President has not been assassinated. But I've received a battlefield commission. It's also […] slightly unpleasant to ask, now saying that group eight will, I fear, have to be the last group, and I apologize to those who may be disappointed. And, my second piece of instruction is that we must finish by 11:50 so that imposes discipline on all of us, not least me in my introduction. So, the next questions will be for Michal Szczerba, deputy head of the Polish delegation; Andrea Giorgio Orsini, member of the Italian delegation, and Ana Miguel dos Santos, member of the Portuguese delegation. Michal Szczerba, please.

Michal Szczerba, deputy head of the Polish delegation:

Good morning, everybody. Mr. Secretary General. Belarus wants to remain a priority on the international agenda. That's why our committee has prepared the report on Belarus that will be accepted by the Assembly. The crisis in Belarus following the rigged presidential election is deepening. There are now more than 800 political prisoners. The regime has orchestrated a hijacking of a commercial Ryanair flight. At the NATO Summit in June, Allies stated that

they have deep concerns about the recent developments and pledged their support for a democratic sovereign and stable Belarus. Last month the Lukashenko regime, likely with the support of Russia, has enhanced hybrid activities against Alliance members. One of these is manufacturing a recent migrant crisis. Lukashenko has encouraged hundreds of non-Belarusian migrants to cross the border into EU territory. Forcing Poland, for instance, to issue a state of emergency in the border area. Mr. Secretary General, do you agree that NATO needs to account for a broad range of contingencies to ensure credible deterrence? Thank you very much.

Thank you for that and for keeping it to the speedy limit. Now, Andrea Giorgio Orsini, member of the Italian delegation

Andrea Giorgio Orsini, member of the Italian delegation:

Mr. Secretary General, I'd like to go back once again to the topic raised by my colleague Mr. Formentini a few minutes ago.

Europe’s strategic autonomy, aka European common defense, as you yourself were mentioning, there are a number of ambiguities in terms of terminology; we often use the same terms with different meanings in mind. And this creates a climate of suspicion on both sides of the Atlantic, which on the one hand, leads for U.S. to seeing the idea of your common European defense as an attempt to shrink from strategic cooperation within the Atlantic Alliance and, on the other hand, some European countries think that the Alliance is an obstacle when it comes to Europe's desire to equip itself with a common defense structure. You were mentioning a number of reasons including economies of scale and therefore, Europe has to work on finding a common defense structure, which has to take place within the framework of the Atlantic Alliance.

So, my question is, how can we overcome these political and cultural misunderstandings, which have emerged on this topic? It's not just a matter of resources to allocate for our defense, I think it's a broader issue regarding how Allies, understand one another. Thank you.

And finally, Ana Miguel de Santos, member of the Portuguese delegation.

Ana Miguel de Santos, member of the Portuguese delegation:

Thank you President, Lord Campbell, what an honor. First of all, let me greet every everyone here present, and especially to Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, to be in my country, Portugal, what an honor for us.

So, it's one of the most important moments of our recent history, when we all face challenges, social, economic and health, reflecting on the organization must be a moment of rebirth for an Alliance between peoples who nurtures a common idea, peace. It is therefore an important moment to talk about the need to strengthen the political dimension as the way to reach

consensus, but also to strengthen the organization's relationship with citizens; intensify empathy with citizens is a way to achieve greater social acceptance.

That's why I ask you: do you not consider these two dimensions, social and political important to improve public perception in greater acceptance by citizens of NATO's mission and role? and also as a way to fight misinformation? Thank you.

Secretary General.

I'll start with the last one. Absolutely, I think it's a very important thing to strengthen NATO as a political alliance. Also, to communicate what we do. And NATO has been and continues to be a military political alliance; our, our main task is to preserve peace and of course, any social progress is totally dependent on that we are able to live in peace. So there's a close connection between NATO as a military alliance and NATO as an alliance that that helps people to strive for a better life, and, and to make social and economic progress. Maybe we should be better at communicating this, and again I hope that the strategic concept, the process in itself, can help to convey this narrative. Then, there have been actually several questions about the credibility and trust, and so on. Of course, it varies. But we follow the public support to NATO very thoroughly, very closely, and the main picture is that throughout the alliance is there is record-high support for NATO. If you ask people to vote in favor of leaving or in favor of staying in NATO, there is a huge majority across the whole Alliance.

So, yes we have problems and yes there are issues, and there are some differences and something doesn't go as well as we planned. But, overall [the] message is that NATO is a strongly supported organization with high credibility, both in North America and in Europe. Then I will do Belarus. Belarus. Well, another question from Poland. While we are of course very, we are monitoring what is going on there, on the border between Belarus and Poland, Lithuania, Latvia. It has been addressed in NATO several times. And we also see how in a way, the regime means Lukashenka, president Lukashenko, is, is using migrants as an instrument. And we also deployed something called, some experts to Lithuania to help, to deal with, and respond to, to what we have seen. So, of course, this is something we will monitor closely as it develops, and stay ready to support and work with allies, most affected. Then, then the question about strategic autonomy. Now, I think you're absolutely right, that, that there is some ambiguity, and, and phrases are interpreted, are understood in different ways. Sometimes if my, my, my impression is that the President is coming.

So, Mr President. Good to see you again.

Well, as I said, if this means more European spending on defense, it's not only something we are not against, we are heavily in favor, we have been pushing for many years. If it means more European defense capabilities, heavily in favor of pushing it for many years. But if it means to start to build the kind of alternative command structure that will weaken NATO, and actually undermine the whole backbone, on a NATO, which is a command structure that gathers, rallies 30 allies together, we exercise, we operate together. If we have two half to

full-manned command structures that is neither good for Europe nor good for the rest of NATO. So, anything that competes, overlaps is not good. And, and I know that some allies, also some allies outside the EU, they are a bit also afraid of the narrative. Perception matters, because we are actually 30 allies who have decided that we will protect and defend each other. And that's actually [means] really offering, making sacrifices in the defense of each other. And then, if they get the impression that there are 22 that we're going to kind of build their own club that undermines that trust, and especially with the narrative is that we should go alone. I don't think [so], the United States should not go alone. Europe should not go alone, we should go together.

Strategic solidarity, that was NATO is about that we protect each other, and any, anything that can undermine that perception is not good for the whole idea of standing together in a very successful lines. You know, if this is about EU's ability to deploy some, some forces in some operations in Africa or somewhere else, not the problem. You already do that. But I know that some Allies, they think that strategic is not about small operations, strategic is about the big things, it sounds like the big. And actually NATO's strategic is nuclear, so strategic is normally thought about as the big issues, not, not the small operations. And autonomy sounds like alone. So, I don't know exactly what that phrase means but I only know that some allies, think that this means that someone is trying to do big things alone, without the whole Alliance.

I strongly believe European allies should do, more invest more, more capabilities, more planes, more helicopters, all of that, but not outside, but inside the NATO family. Thank you.

Thank you, Mr Stoltenberg. Secretary General, listening to what you just said I'm reminded of Benjamin Franklin. One of the great American figures of the Revolutionary War. And he once said about the American colonies in revolution, he said we must hang together, or we almost assuredly hang separately. So, I think your point is very well taken.

Mr. Secretary General, thank you so much for such an enlightening willingness to listen to our concerns and answer questions as forthrightly as you have, your candor and your stamina and appreciation of this dynamic with parliamentarians who ultimately do determine our respective national participation in NATO is deeply appreciated. You've been a great friend and we deeply appreciate your role, and we very much respect it, and you. Thank you for being with us again.

Thank you Mr. Secretary. Thank you, honored guests, thank you so much for joining us today. As is our practice and the enormous generosity of our Secretary General in offering his time, let alone his stamina, we are now going to enter a Q&A session with the Secretary General, which I know we all find very helpful. However, I have 11 groups of three each, to ask questions. And if you use that time to pontificate, we will not get through every question, so I plead with everyone to use their most concise method of asking a question, so that we can maximize this time together. And I know you will. Thank you.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2021/10/11/speech