

Press Releases: Remarks at Bemowo Piskie Training Area

Remarks

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Secretary of State

Bemowo Piskie Training Area

Orzysz, Poland

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It's truly an honor to be here alongside Foreign Minister Czaputowicz, Deputy Minister Lipinski, and the members of the NATO battle group, and my thanks also to Lieutenant Colonel Hebel for hosting us. It fills me with great pride to see American, British, Croatian, Polish, and Romanian troops serving alongside one another. Thank you for serving our NATO mission in unity.

Thirty years ago, almost exactly, I was patrolling the Iron Curtain in Germany as a young cavalry officer. Things were a little different then. My Van Halen cassettes are still in my closet somewhere right next to my VHS tape of Top Gun. But some things haven't changed. In my day, our generals were concerned about a Soviet offensive through the Fulda Gap. Today, the gap in which we stand occupies the same priority focus for NATO commanders that the Fulda Gap did back then, once again because of Russian aggression.

As we enter the fifth year of Vladimir Putin's war on Ukraine, a war he launched on European soil, we take seriously those concerns that Russia may one day try to open a front along a line right here. In light of this threat, the NATO alliance remains indispensable for the protection of the free peoples of Europe. Many of them, like our Croatian, Polish, and Romanian friends, have a special appreciation for freedom that is, by the world's standards, still very young.

I was proud to honor Eastern Europe's struggle for liberty yesterday at the Gate of Freedom Memorial in Bratislava. Now, it is every ally's responsibility to keep Europe free. Russia has grand designs of dominating Europe and reasserting its influence on the world stage. Vladimir Putin seeks to splinter the NATO alliance, weaken the United States, and disrupt Western democracies. Russia's invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, its unprovoked attack on Ukrainian naval vessels in the Black Sea this past November, and its ongoing hybrid warfare against us and our allies are direct challenges to our security and to our way of life.

But NATO's commitment to counter Russian lawlessness and destabilizing activity is growing. One thing we have done is launch an enhanced forward presence, an EFP, here on Europe's eastern flank. This EFP embodies NATO's foundational principles that an attack on one country is an attack on all. Poland's own history reminds us that strong deterrence measures should be at the forefront of our strategic thinking. This is all the more true in our area of renewed great power competition – in our era of renewed great power competition. Poland's robust defense spending, now on track to surpass two and a half percent of its GDP, is a clear-eyed response to the threats that we face. Those threats must be met with similarly strong commitments from each and every NATO ally.

This spring, we will celebrate NATO's 70th anniversary. I'm looking forward to hosting that gathering in Washington, D.C. The men who set NATO's foundation were determined that Europe would never again face tyranny and war. As I made clear in a speech in Brussels last year, it's time for all NATO allies to follow Poland's lead and reinvigorate the alliance in the interest of lasting peace. May we all remain committed to NATO's founding ideals for the sake of our nations, our people, and those serving in uniform to protect us.

Finally, as a former tank commander, I'm eager to see a test of our firepower in action today. Let's go get after it. Thank you. (Applause.)

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