

Press Releases: Remarks at the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Foreign Ministers' Session 1

Remarks
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Secretary of State

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SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: Good morning. Seventy years ago today, NATO's founding treaty was signed in this great city, and I would start by thanking Secretary Pompeo for hosting us all today to mark the 70th anniversary of our great alliance. And by that, I actually give the floor directly to you, Mike, to give some public opening remarks. Again, welcome to all of you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Thank you. Thank you, Secretary General Stoltenberg. It's a great pleasure working with you during my now almost one year as Secretary of State. And I'm delighted to welcome each of you here today, as well, to this historic place at this historic time. I'm proud to have the opportunity to

join with you to celebrate seven decades.

I have personal experience with this organization. As a young armor officer a couple decades back, I patrolled the border between then-East Germany and West Germany. I know the nature of the regimes that want to undermine what it is we're here to talk about today.

I want, too, to give a special welcome to our colleague, Nikola Dimitrov from North Macedonia. I had a chance to speak with you last night. This is your first NATO foreign ministerial as we prepare for your country to become NATO's 30th ally, and I'm pleased to say last week that we formally submitted the documents for North Macedonia's accession to NATO to the United States Senate.

This is a memorable occasion for each of us. Seventy years ago, 12 nations banded together in a historic experiment in security and democracy. We signed what was called the Washington Treaty, establishing NATO.

As I mentioned last night at the reception, President Truman said that we hoped to create a shield against aggression. It's worked. That unique shield we have carried these 70 years is made strong because of our belief in deterrence, not aggression. It is made strong because of our democratic underpinnings. It is made strong through our collective defense commitment as enshrined in Article 5, to which we all recommit today.

And we have rightly sought peace through strength here in NATO. We must continue to do so, especially in this new era of great power competition from Russia, from China, and the Islamic Republic of Iran.

But there's a second anniversary of significance to the West that we celebrate this year too: the crumbling of the Iron Curtain. To borrow a phrase from Abraham Lincoln, 1989 marked a new birth of freedom.

That anniversary is intimately connected to NATO. For 40 years, the NATO alliance was a bulwark against communist expansion in Europe. We were ready to invoke Article 5 at any moment if the Soviets poured through the Fulda Gap, the way that we did after 9/11.

Our military superiority deterred them from acting on their designs of dominating Europe, and in the meantime, President Reagan's military buildup drove the evil empire into bankruptcy.

A few weeks ago, I had the opportunity to meet with a group of young people in Slovakia. Virtually all of them were too young to remember the history that I just described, but they were certain – they knew it and they did not want to return to that history.

That's why we have work to do here. It's why we must continue to strengthen our alliance. And the good news is we're in a good position – a position of strength today. Our structure is designed to empower each ally, not to subjugate it. We maintain an outstanding degree of unity.

I saw this firsthand, as you all did, when we demonstrated the unanimous

denunciation of Russia's INF Treaty violation and with unanimous allied support for America's decision to suspend our INF obligations and declare our intent to withdraw.

This organization continues to add new members, and we welcome the aspiration of other non-members.

No military alliance in the world can remotely do what we do. No alliance can remotely match the power of the nations represented here today.

We should all be proud. These are great accomplishments, but we must adapt our alliance to confront emerging threats too, whether that's Russian aggression, uncontrolled migration, cyber attacks, threats to energy security, Chinese strategic competition – including technology in 5G – and many other issues that jeopardize our people's ideals and our collective security.

These are real challenges, to be sure, and now is not the time to repeat tired excuses that our citizens don't support increased defense spending or security spending. Each nation has a duty to make the case to our people. We, as leaders, have a duty to make the case to our citizens about why this work, why these resources are important to keep not only our own countries but our alliance strong. This work to convince our citizens of the importance, the relevance, the intrinsic centrality of this institution falls to each of us and the other leaders of our countries. It's a key step in confronting these threats head on.

I'll close with this: The founders of NATO perceived with absolute and total clarity that the threat, the Soviet menace was real, and that communism posed a true threat. They were not timid in responding to it.

They took a risk in creating this alliance and it paid a massive dividend: decades of peace and prosperity for the West on a scale unrivaled in world history.

Today, we are the beneficiaries of that work. We celebrate their accomplishment with great pride. But the true way to honor the genius of their compact is to make it ever stronger, and to recommit to our principles of deterrence, democracy, and collective defense.

I look forward to the conversations today so that we can do just that.

It is indeed my pleasure to invite – welcome you all here to Washington, and it is my privilege to work with each of you, my NATO counterparts. Thank you.

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much, Secretary Pompeo, Mike, for those opening remarks. And also, once again, thank you for hosting us all here in Washington. This concludes the public part of this meeting, so then I will kindly ask the media to leave the room before we continue with our working session.

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