

Remarks on the 75th Anniversary of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization
July 9, 2024

Good evening. Welcome.

In 1949, when leaders of 12 countries, including President Truman, came together in this very room, history was watching. It had been 4 years since the surrender of the Axis powers and the end of the most devastating world war the world had ever, ever known.

Here, these 12 leaders gathered to make a sacred pledge to defend each other against aggression, provide their collective security, and to answer threats as one, because they knew to prevent future wars, to protect democracies, to lay the groundwork for a lasting peace and prosperity, they needed a new approach. They needed to combine their strengths. They needed an alliance.

And here, they signed the Washington Treaty and created the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, the single greatest, most effective defensive alliance in the history of the world.

Mr. Secretary General, leaders of NATO countries, Foreign and Defense Ministers, representatives from partner nations and the European Union, and Members of Congress, distinguished guests, welcome—welcome—to the 2024 NATO summit. It's a pleasure.

It's a pleasure to host you in this milestone year, to look back with pride at all we've achieved and look ahead to our shared future with strength and with resolve. Together, we rebuilt Europe from the ruins of war, held high the torch of liberty during long decades of the cold war.

When former adversaries became fellow democracies, we welcomed them into the alliance. When war broke out in the Balkans, we intervened to restore peace and stop ethnic cleansing. And when the United States was attacked on September 11, our NATO allies—all of you—stood with us, invoking article 5 for the first time in NATO history, treating an attack on us as an attack on all of us, a breathtaking display of friendship that the American people will never ever, ever forget.

Through all this history, when great changes occurred, people would ask, "Can NATO adapt?" And every time, we proved we could adapt. And we did: evolving our strategies to stay ahead of threats, reaching out to new partners to increase our effectiveness.

And here with us today are countries from the Indo-Pacific region. They're here because they have a stake in our success, and we have a stake in theirs.

Today, NATO is more powerful than ever: 32 nations strong. For years, Finland and Sweden were among our closest partners. Now they have chosen to officially join NATO. And because of the power and meaning of article 5 guarantee, that's the reason. It was the most important aspect of the alliance in 1949, and it is still the most important aspect.

I'd also note Finland and Sweden joined the alliance not just because their leaders sought it, because their citizens called for it in overwhelming numbers.

And remember: NATO's character is fundamentally democratic. Always has been and always must continue to be. And today, NATO is better resourced than it ever has been. I want to pause on this because it's significant.

In the year 2020, the year I was—the year I was elected President, only nine NATO allies were spending 2 percent of their defense—GDP on defense. This year, 23 will spend at least 2

percent. And some will spend more than that. And the remaining countries that have not yet reached that milestone will get there soon.

It's remarkable progress, proof that our commitment is broad and deep, that we're ready, that we're willing, and we're able to deter aggression and defend every inch of NATO territory across every domain: land, air, sea, cyber, and space.

My friends, it's good that we're stronger than ever, because this moment in history calls for our collective strength. Autocrats want to overturn global order, which has by and large kept for nearly 80 years and counting. Terrorist groups continue to plot evil schemes to cause mayhem and chaos and suffering.

In Europe, Putin's war of aggression in—against Ukraine continues. And Putin wants nothing less—nothing less—than Ukraine's total subjugation, to end Ukraine's democracy; to destroy Ukraine's culture, and to wipe Ukraine off the map.

And we know Putin won't stop at Ukraine. But make no mistake, Ukraine can and will stop Putin—especially with our full, collective support. And they have our full support.

Even before Russian bombs were falling on Ukraine, the alliance acted. I ordered the U.S. reinforcements at NATO's eastern flank: more troops, more aircraft, more capabilities. And now the United States has more than 100,000 troops on the continent of Europe.

NATO moved swiftly as well, not only reinforcing the four existing battle groups of the east, but also adding four more in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia, essentially doubling NATO's strength on the eastern flank.

Together, we've built a global coalition to stand with Ukraine. Together, we've provided significant economic and humanitarian assistance. And together, we've supplied Ukraine with weapons it needs to defend itself: tanks, armored fighting vehicles, air defense systems, long-range missiles, and millions of munitions.

The United States and nearly two dozen allied partners have signed the bilateral security agreements with Ukraine and more countries will follow.

Today I'm announcing the historic donation of air defense equipment for Ukraine. The United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania, and Italy will provide Ukraine with the equipment for five additional strategic air defense systems.

And in the coming months, the United States and our partners intend to provide Ukraine with dozens of additional tactical air defense systems. The United States will make sure that when we export critical air defense interceptors, Ukraine goes to the front of the line. They will get this assistance before anyone else gets it.

All told, Ukraine will receive hundreds of additional interceptors over the next year, helping protect Ukrainian cities against Russian missiles and Ukrainian troops facing air attacks on their front lines.

Make no mistake: Russia is failing in this war. More than 2 years into Putin's war of choice, his losses are staggering: more than 350,000 Russian troops dead or wounded; nearly 1 million Russians, many of them young people, have left Russia because they no longer see a future in Russia.

And Kyiv—remember, fellows and ladies—was supposed to fall in 5 days. Remember? Well, it's still standing 2½ years later and will continue to stand. All of the allies knew that before this war, Putin thought NATO would break. Today, NATO is stronger than it's ever been in its history.

When this senseless war began, Ukraine was a free country. Today, it is still a free country, and the war will end with Ukraine remaining a free and independent country. Russia will not prevail. Ukraine will prevail.

Ladies and gentlemen, this is a pivotal moment for Europe, for the transatlantic community, and, I might add, for the world. Let's remember: The fact that NATO remains the bulwark of global security did not happen by accident. It wasn't inevitable. Again and again, at critical moments, we chose unity over disunion, progress over retreat, freedom over tyranny, and hope over fear.

Again and again, we stood behind our shared vision of a peaceful and prosperous transatlantic community. Here at this summit, we gather to proclaim NATO is ready and able to secure that vision today and well into the future.

Let me say this. An overwhelming bipartisan majority of Americans understand that NATO makes us all safer. The fact that both Democratic and Republican parties are represented here today is a testament to that fact.

The American people know that all the progress we've made in the past 75 years has happened behind the shield of NATO. And the American people understand what would happen if there was no NATO: another war in Europe, American troops fighting and dying, dictators spreading chaos, economic collapse, catastrophe.

Americans, they know we're stronger with our friends. And we understand this is a sacred obligation. As President Reagan put it, and I quote: "If our fellow democracies are not secure, we cannot be secure. If you are threatened, we are threatened. And if you are not at peace, we cannot be at peace."

Reagan knew it then, and we know it now. Our nations will continue to keep faith with what we pledged in the years to come.

Now, if you'll indulge me, I'd like to end my remarks in a slightly unusual way. NATO is an alliance of nations, but also made up of leaders. And one person in particular has done an extraordinary job leading NATO for the last decade: Secretary General Stoltenberg.

Will you come forward?

[At this point, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization joined the President on stage.]

So much of the progress we've made in the alliance is thanks to the Secretary. He's a man of integrity and intellectual rigor, a calm temperament in a moment of crisis, a consummate diplomat who works with leaders across the political spectrum and always finds a way to keep us moving forward.

Mr. Secretary, you've guided this alliance through one of the most consequential periods in its history. I realize I—as I was talking to your wife—I personally asked you to extend your service. *[Laughter]* Forgive me. *[Laughter]* And you put your own plans on hold.

When the Russian war on Ukraine began, you didn't hesitate. Today, NATO is stronger, smarter, and more energized than when you began. And a billion people across Europe and North America and, indeed, the whole world will reap the rewards of your labor for years to come in the form of security, opportunity, and greater freedoms.

For these reasons, I am pleased to award you the highest civilian honor that the United States can bestow: the Presidential Medal of Freedom.

Ask the—*[applause]*—Military Aide to come forward and ask him to read the citation.

[Lt. Cmdr. Kasey L. Arguelles, USCG, Coast Guard Aide to the President, read the citation, and the President presented the medal, assisted by Lt. Cmdr. Anthony J. Lichi, USN, Navy Aide to the President.]

NOTE: The President spoke at 5:46 p.m. at the Andrew W. Mellon Auditorium. In his remarks, he referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia; and Ingrid Schulerud, wife of Secretary General Stoltenberg.

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