

Keynote address

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the 60th Plenary Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in The Hague



Mr. President,

Distinguished members of parliament,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for that very kind welcome. It is a pleasure to be here at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. For more than 20 years, I was elected to serve my constituents as a proud member of the Norwegian Parliament until I became Secretary General of NATO.

That experience taught me the true value of Parliaments. To hold governments to account. Ensure that tax payers' money is well spent. And that the views of the people are heard.

This is my first opportunity to speak with you. But it will not be my last. I intend to meet with you regularly. To consult with you and seek your ideas. This is important to me.

Today, NATO needs your support more than ever.

We are working hard to turn the decisions we took at the Wales Summit into reality.

On my first day in office, I outlined my three priorities.

To keep NATO strong as a political and a military Alliance.

To work with our partners to bring more stability to our neighbourhood.

And to keep the bond between Europe and North America rock-solid.

Each of these priorities requires financial resources, underpinned by political will.

But without them, there can be no security. And without security there can be little else. No safety. No prosperity. No freedom.

The link you provide to our parliaments and our citizens is vital for NATO. This is why today I would like to discuss with you core issue: keeping the defence pledge that we made at the Wales Summit.

With the end of the Cold War, the world changed. And defence budgets were cut. As people – rightly – demanded a peace dividend. With no imminent territorial threat, this made sense. Later, with the financial crisis, the cuts became even deeper.

We have gone from standing armies to smaller, deployable forces. From a NATO command structure of 22,000 to less than 9,000. And from over 33,000 tanks, to less than 7,000.

We have also postponed new investments. Reduced our exercises. And cut back on the maintenance of equipment.

I'm not arguing that we need to return to where we were. And have exactly the same forces, capabilities and structures.

But once more, our world has changed.

To our East, Russia is trying to replace the rule of law with the rule of force.

To our South, we also see the terrible human cost of conflict. We see violence and extremism across North Africa and the Middle East. And we continue to face many other challenges – from missile proliferation to cyber attacks.

We must face up to these changes. We must have more and better equipped armed forces. We must have the right balance of forces and capabilities.

Let me be clear. This is not just an exercise in accountancy. The stakes are high. The threats are real.

So we must redouble our efforts to resource our Alliance.

The Readiness Action Plan we adopted at the Wales Summit is the most significant strengthening of our collective defence. It will help us deal with threats from wherever they come.

From the east or the south.

So it is vital that we implement the plan on time and in full.

A key part of it is the new 'Spearhead Force'. A very high readiness force able to react quickly. With a command and control presence in the Eastern part of our Alliance. And a demanding new exercise programme. So we can have the right forces, in the right place, at the right time.

At Wales, we also decided to launch a new mission in Afghanistan. To train, advise and assist the Afghan Security Forces from January.

And we also decided to increase our support for our partners, such as Iraq, to build their own defence capacity if they request it. And project stability in our neighbourhood.

All these efforts must be properly resourced.

And our military needs long term investment and political support. For readiness comes at a cost.

If we look around the world, while NATO has cut defence spending, others have rapidly increased it. Over the last 5 years, Russia increased its spending by fifty percent. And it plans further increases.

At the same time, total NATO defence spending fell by twenty percent. And some nations are cutting further.

In more peaceful times, it was right to reduce defence spending. But we do not live in peaceful times. So it is right to stop the cuts and to increase investment in our defence.

This is not just about NATO in comparison to the rest of the world. It is also about the balance within NATO. And within Europe.

All Allies are expected to shoulder their fair share of the burden. In terms of spending, in terms of capabilities, and in terms of contributing to our operations.

The GDP of the United States and that of Europe is almost exactly the same. Yet the United States spends more than twice as much on defence than all the other Allies combined. Providing over two thirds of total defence spending by NATO Allies.

For all these reasons, at our Wales Summit, we agreed to invest in our collective defence. And to have a more balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities. We made a joint pledge:

To stop the cuts

To increase spending in real terms as our economies improve

To aim to spend 2% of GDP on defence within a decade

To spend better

And to deliver the capabilities we need.

We also agreed that progress will be reviewed annually. We will start at the meeting of defence ministers in June. And we will also place it on the agenda of future summits.

By the Warsaw Summit in 2016, we must show progress. And a way forward to further improvement in the years ahead. So we need to make the best of the time we have.

I know that increasing defence spending is not easy. But it is possible. Step by step. And every step counts. Starting now.

The United States, the United Kingdom, Greece and Estonia are already meeting the 2 % guideline. And other Allies have outlined their own roadmap to get there.

Of course, this is not just about how much money we spend on defence. It's also about what we spend that money on. And how we spend it.

At Wales, we committed to spending 20% of defence budgets on new equipment, including research and development, within a decade.

We have identified specific areas where we need to improve our capabilities. Such as ballistic missile defence, training and exercises, and fully equipping our land forces.

We must make progress in all of these areas. To ensure that our forces remain strong and able to deploy at short notice.

NATO can really add value when it comes to how defence budgets are spent By helping Allies to align their priorities, to plan together, pool their resources, and get the most for tax-payers money.

There are many examples of how we're doing just this.

For example, the new system of drones and other capabilities that make up the Alliance Ground Surveillance system. Operated and maintained by NATO. Giving our commanders a comprehensive picture of the situation on the ground.

Or the Framework Nations Concept agreed at Wales. Where groups of European Allies work together to develop particular forces or capabilities, guided by a lead nation.

And here in the Netherlands, we are in a country that is a prime example of regional cooperation. Dutch armed forces cooperate closely with their counterparts in Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany and the United Kingdom. Naval forces combine with Belgian naval forces under a single Admiral.

Allies gain a great deal from Smart Defence and other types of multinational cooperation. Getting the most out of every dollar, euro and pound.

But this is not a substitute for more resources. We cannot do more with less indefinitely. And defence cannot take an excessive share of the austerity burden.

We must be clear with our publics about why we need to increase defence investment. And we must continue our efforts towards greater transparency.

When it comes to NATO's own budget, Allies maintain full control over how much and how effectively tax-payers' money is spent in the interest of our shared security. The budget is rigorously audited by an independent team of auditors. And this independent board regularly reports to the North Atlantic Council.

Allies review all reports. And all unclassified reports are now published on the NATO website. I also intend to continue publishing an annual report on everything that NATO does, including defence spending.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The time has come to stop defence cuts. We must invest more in defence and spend our money better. And you, the parliamentarians, play a vital role in fulfilling the defence pledge we made at the Wales Summit.

This is first time that heads of state and government have made such a pledge. And it is a pledge that we must honour.

Defence investment in times of austerity calls for hard choices at home. In every government. And in every parliament.

It is my responsibility to work with you to implement what was decided. And I am personally committed to this.

We all need to work hard. And we will all be judged on the progress we make.

So I need you to make the case at home. To speak up for defence. To increase the momentum for more defence spending. To reach out across the political spectrum. And to persuade your constituents of the value of defence investment.

If we fulfil the Defence Pledge that we made at Wales, we will keep ourselves safe. And, working with others, we will help to keep peace around the world.

So we have much to do together. And I thank you for your support.

Thank you.