

Remarks as prepared for delivery

**“Why NATO Matters to America”
Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen
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Thank you, Fiona, for that generous introduction. I would also like to thank everyone at Brookings for the excellent job in organizing this event.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We live in a different world than we did less than a month ago.

Russia’s military aggression in Ukraine is in blatant breach of its international commitments and it is a violation of Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity. Any attempt to justify the annexation of Crimea through a so-called referendum held at gunpoint is illegal and illegitimate. And it undermines all efforts to find a peaceful political solution. This is a wake-up call. For the Euro-Atlantic community. For NATO. And for all those committed to a Europe whole, free and at peace.

We know that we cannot take our security for granted. We have seen other crises in Europe in the past decades. The Western Balkans in the 1990s. Georgia in 2008. But this is the gravest threat to European security and stability since the end of the Cold War.

First, because of its scale, with one of the largest movement of troops for many decades.

Second, because of the stakes – the freedom of 45 million people and their right to make their own choices.

And third, because this crisis is right on NATO’s border.

But Ukraine cannot be viewed in isolation. And this crisis is not just about Ukraine.

We see what could be called 21st century revisionism. Attempts to turn back the clock. To draw new dividing lines on our maps. To monopolise markets. Subdue populations. Re-write, or simply rip up, the international rule book. And to use force to solve problems -- rather than the international mechanisms that we have spent decades to build.

We had thought that such behaviour had been confined to history. But it is back. And it is dangerous. Because it violates international norms of accepted behaviour. It exports instability. It reduces the potential to cooperate and build trust. And, ultimately it undermines our security. Not just NATO's or Ukraine's security, but also Russia's. If the rules don't apply, if agreements are not honoured, certainly Russia also stands to suffer the consequences.

Russia was among those who committed in 1994 to respect Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty. Russia pledged not to threaten or use force against Ukraine. By turning its back on that agreement, Russia has called into question its credibility and reliability as an international actor. And any steps to annex Crimea would be in clear violation of the United Nations Charter.

Russia must honour its international commitments, cease all military activities against Ukraine, and seek a peaceful political solution. Including through direct dialogue with the government of Ukraine. Because if it continues on its current course, Russia is choosing increased international isolation.

There are no quick and easy ways to stand up to global bullies. Because our democracies debate, deliberate, and consider the options before taking decisions. Because we value transparency and seek legitimacy for our choices. And because we see force as the last, not the first, resort.

The only way to address such challenges is for Europe and North America to stand together. This is what we have done from the start of this crisis. NATO's clear position has been to condemn Russia's military actions in Ukraine. To stand firmly in support of the government in Kyiv. And to make clear that President Putin's decisions to escalate the situation will have consequences.

As a first step we suspended joint planning for a maritime escort mission for the destruction of Syria's chemical weapons. This would have been the first joint operation of the NATO-Russia Council. We also decided that no staff-level civilian or military meetings with Russia will take place for now. And we have put the entire range of NATO-Russia cooperation under review. NATO Foreign Ministers will take decisions when they meet in Brussels early next month. At the same time, we have kept the door open for political dialogue in the NATO-Russia Council to give Russia an opportunity to engage.

We have also taken measures to strengthen NATO's readiness. They include more assets for our Baltic Air Policing mission, surveillance flights over Poland and Romania, and heightened awareness.

Allies have taken further steps to impose diplomatic and economic consequences. These are not our preferred choice. They are the inevitable and appropriate consequences of Russia's choices.

No one wants to turn away from our cooperation with Russia. But no one can ignore that Russia has violated the very principles upon which that cooperation is built. So business as usual is not an option.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In times like this, when the security of the Euro-Atlantic area is challenged, the North Atlantic Alliance has not wavered. And it will not waver. For 65 years, we have been clear in our commitment to one another as Allies. And to the global security system within which NATO is rooted. Our transatlantic foundation is our strength. And it has given us the ability to consult, cooperate and cope with any crisis.

This does not mean that NATO is the only solution to every crisis in the Euro-Atlantic region. But I do believe it is part of every solution. Because the Alliance provides three elements that are crucial for facing modern security challenges. And that are vital for Europe's, and America's, defence.

These are political legitimacy. Tried and tested structures. And military strength.

First, political legitimacy.

The combined and voluntary will of 28 of the world's strongest, sovereign democracies is an extremely powerful source of political legitimacy. Something that unilateral action or coalitions of the willing simply cannot enjoy.

This carries over into our missions and operations. It attracts partners whose political support and military contributions add to our broader international legitimacy.

Our ISAF mission in Afghanistan is a clear example. It has included 50 countries. All 28 Allies and 22 partner nations. That's one-fourth of all the world's countries. The biggest and most effective coalition in recent history. A coalition that only NATO could have gathered. And commanded.

That leads me to my second point. NATO provides tried and tested political and military structures.

We have a unique, permanent forum for political consultation, where North Americans and Europeans meet every day to debate and decide how to ensure our collective security. Just two weeks ago, we met at Poland's request, to consult within the framework of Article 4 of the Washington Treaty. This allowed us to immediately address the security concerns of one of our members. And to reaffirm our solidarity.

Our political and military structures also provide us with a permanent crisis response system – so we can react quickly and effectively to any concern. With political measures. With military measures. Or an appropriate mix of the two.

We also have the permanent NATO military command structure. So when we decide to take any military action, we have the right framework, with the right skills and the right people, already in place. We have headquarters that can be deployed quickly to command operations and missions. We have reaction forces on standby. And we can bring the necessary military contributions together quickly. From NATO Allies, as well as from over 40 partner nations on 5 continents.

Time and again, when an Ally has felt its security under threat, we have come together and quickly provided the necessary support. After 9/11, when we deployed surveillance planes here to the United States. During the Syria crisis, when we deployed Patriot missile defense systems to Turkey. And today, when our surveillance aircraft are monitoring our borders in Eastern Europe.

Now imagine that NATO did not exist.

Every time a crisis broke out, a political and military framework would have to be built from scratch. Political consensus would have to be forged. Partners found. Military plans developed. And capabilities designed, delivered and deployed.

This would be costly in terms of effectiveness. Money. And time. Indeed, once the necessary elements for a response were in place, it could be too late to stem the crisis.

So our standing structures save time. They save effort. And they save taxpayers money. They bring other advantages too. They allow us to harmonise military requirements across the Alliance. They support the equipping, training and exercising of our troops. And they have helped us to build the most capable and connected military forces in history.

This is my third point. NATO's unique military strength. It is a force multiplier. And it allows every Ally – even its most powerful one – to pack a bigger punch.

Let me point out a few of the ways that American security has benefited from NATO's collective strength.

Again, Afghanistan is a good example. In 2010, as American forces surged, European Allies surged. And partners surged too. Over the past ten years, for every two US soldiers who have served in Afghanistan, one European soldier has always served with them. Some 400,000 European soldiers have rotated through Afghanistan, to help make sure it would never again be a launching pad for international terrorists.

In Libya three years ago, European Allies, Canada and NATO partners played a crucial role in enforcing an arms embargo, maintaining a no-fly zone, and protecting the people from attacks by their own leader.

Today in Kosovo, over thirty-one NATO European and partner countries are keeping the peace.

And off the coast of Somalia, ships from four Allied navies – Spain, Turkey, Italy and the Netherlands – are sailing with US ships. Patrolling against pirates. And keeping vital sea lanes safe.

European nations are helping to ease America's security burden in other ways too. For example, the European Union is running its own counter-piracy operation. And several European nations have stepped up to respond to the growing instability in Africa, in particular in Mali and Central Africa.

So NATO makes a unique contribution to our security. Because only NATO brings together the world's most capable democracies in a permanent, integrated political and military structure.

And only NATO delivers the political legitimacy and military strength that no one nation or *ad-hoc* coalition can deliver on its own.

It comes down to a simple truth: shared security is better than solitary insecurity. And it's cheaper too. It's why NATO is a great defender *of* America. A great deal *for* America. And it's why NATO matters *to* America.

That said, I am the first to stress that Europe must do more. I take every opportunity to point out that there should be a fairer sharing of the costs and the responsibilities. Both between North America and Europe. And within Europe. Developments in Ukraine are a stark reminder that security in Europe cannot be taken for granted. And that neither Europe, nor America, can come up with a solution alone.

That is why I will continue to remind European nations that they need to step up politically and militarily. To hold the line on defence cuts. To increase their defence spending again as their economies recover. And to work together to fill key capability gaps. Including missile defence, cyber defence, and joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

Later this year, in Wales in the United Kingdom, we will hold our next NATO Summit. We need to focus on the long-term strategic impact of Russia's aggression on our own security.

We will bring our ISAF mission to a close and prepare our future partnership with Afghanistan. We will ensure we have the right capabilities we need to address the modern threats we face, like cyber attacks and ballistic missile proliferation. And we will strengthen our partnerships with like-minded countries in our neighborhood and around the world.

Our Wales Summit will move us along a path we have paved together. To ensure our Alliance is even better suited to meet the collective security requirements of every Allied nation – including your own. And fit to face any challenge the future may hold.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As recent events have shown, we continue to face critical security challenges. And new challenges are emerging all the time. The danger is not one country, or weapon or terrorist group. It is an environment where countries decide they can redraw the geopolitical map. Use the cyber domain to cause harm. Or attack innocent people because of political and ideological disagreement. We must stand united in the face of all those challenges, which make our world more dangerous and unpredictable.

Our common history shows us the way. In June, we will commemorate the 70th anniversary of the D-Day landings. I remember my own visit to Normandy, together with my family. Seeing the beaches where so many Allied troops – European and American – gave their lives for freedom. Walking past the rows of white headstones that mark those soldiers' graves.

Those brave soldiers who stormed the Normandy beaches knew then what we must not forget now. That sharing security today means preserving freedom, democracy and prosperity for tomorrow.

That is the spirit in which NATO was founded. And that is why NATO matters for the United States, and for all the Allies today and in decades to come.

Thank you.