



NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY ORGANIZATION

Speech by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the United States Military Academy West Point, New York

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General Thomson, thank you for that kind introduction. And thank you, cadets for that warm welcome.

This is a visit I have wanted to make for a long time. During my five years as NATO Secretary General, I have had the privilege of working with many of this institution's outstanding graduates.

Truly exceptional leaders and commanders such as the current commander of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan, General John Campbell. As well as two of his predecessors.

Indeed, the history of West Point and of NATO are intimately linked. The very first NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Eisenhower, was a West Point graduate. And so were twelve of the sixteen SACEURs who followed him.

But West Point graduates are not only superb soldiers. They excel at whatever they do including diplomacy.

Two of my senior staff, Matt Klimow and EJ Herold, graduated from this academy. And so did your country's current ambassador to NATO, Douglas Lute. He was a member of the class of 1975. And he has brought extraordinary experience and insight to our work, as well as a certain directness which I really appreciate.

This institution is almost as old as the nation itself. It was founded as a school of engineering to give a young nation the skills to map the wilderness. Build the railways. The bridges. The harbours. And the roads. In fact, West Point officers not only defend this country. They built it. And they continue to build careers that are of service to your great nation.

West Point also builds character. And I understand that keeping to all the rules is harder work for some of you than for others. I had been told that the best way to start any speech here would be by asking General Thomson's permission for me to grant amnesty to the corps.

But I understand that you received amnesty from the President of Indonesia only yesterday. So I trust that you don't need it again today!

Cadets,

When you graduate, you will leave here to serve your flag. And many of you will likely also serve under the flag of NATO. As American service men and women have done in Afghanistan, Kosovo, off the coast of Somalia, over Libya and in the Mediterranean Sea. And from the Baltic Sea to Turkey's south-eastern border.

NATO is a unique organization. It is an Alliance of 28 nations. 28 democracies.

Our Alliance was founded 65 years ago, on the ruins of World War Two and in the shadow of the Cold War. It binds together North America and Europe to ensure our collective security. It safeguards our common values. And it keeps us unified through our common commitment. Article 5 of our founding Treaty states that we consider an attack against one to be an attack against us all. This remains our solemn pledge. All for one, and one for all.

Article 5 has only been invoked once. Not to protect Europe, as we expected during the Cold War. But in support of the United States, immediately after the 9/11 attacks.

So NATO remains vigilant. But we are also carrying out ongoing operations and preparing for the challenges we will face in the future.

Just a couple of weeks ago, President Obama, joined me and the other Allied leaders in Wales, in the United Kingdom, for a crucial NATO Summit.

We laid out the way ahead for our Alliance. A NATO that will be fitter, faster, and more flexible. I won't go through all the decisions that were made at the Summit. For those of you with interest, and some time, you can read the Summit Declaration on the NATO website. All 113 paragraphs of it. If any of you are suffering from insomnia, it will certainly cure it.

Instead, let me set out the threats we face. NATO's responses. And the missions and operations that could be part of your future.

Today's security challenges are more interconnected and more complex than ever before.

In Iraq and Syria, we see the rise of the so-called Islamic State. I say so-called because it's not Islamic. And it's not a state. It's a group of terrorists that has committed the most savage atrocities against many thousands of people in the region. And against Westerners who were only trying to help those caught up in the Syrian civil war. Brave people like the American journalists James Foley and Steven Sotloff. And the British aid worker David Haines.

These terrorists are pouring oil on the flames of sectarianism that burn across the Middle East and North Africa. And we have already seen examples of our citizens going to those regions as foreign fighters, and then returning to our own countries. And threatening us here at home.

With such groups, there is no negotiation. Only violence and destruction. So we can't just talk. We need to act. And I welcome yesterday's strikes, led by the United States and several regional partners. We also need to support Iraq forces with supplies and training. And provide humanitarian support.

Turning now to Europe, a revanchist Russia has rejected all the rules and commitments that have helped to keep peace since the end of the Cold War. From the Republic of Moldova to Georgia, and now in Ukraine, Russia has used economic pressure, military force and the most cynical propaganda. Hot conflicts and frozen conflicts. To forcibly rebuild its influence in the former Soviet space. And to deny countries in its neighbourhood the right to choose their own path.

So the security landscape has dramatically changed. And we have to adapt. At our NATO Summit in Wales a few weeks ago we did exactly that. We approved a Readiness Action Plan that will increase our ability to respond swiftly and effectively to threats to our territory. Our priority is to provide for the collective defence of all our Allies. This means having the right forces in the right place with the right equipment.

We also agreed to create a special spearhead force. Ready and deployable at short notice. In the years ahead, some of you may exercise and train with other NATO soldiers as part of this force.

At the Summit, we also launched a Defence Capacity Building Initiative. Which is aimed at helping nations with security challenges to help themselves. By deploying advisors or small training teams, rather than large combat forces, we can empower our partners to look after their security at home and in their region.

As an initial step, we extended this Initiative to Georgia, Jordan and Moldova. And we are also considering how to provide this type of support to support Iraq, if the new government requests our help.

Here again, I would expect some of you might participate in these teams. To pass on your advice, your experience, and the wealth of knowledge that you acquire during your time in this academy and during your Army service.

Cadets,

You may know that just a few miles south from West Point is Stony Point, An important site from the Revolutionary War. The military historians amongst you might also know that in 1779, a Dane played a key part in the battle there.

His name was Christian Febiger. He was born in Faaborg, not too far from where I grew up. He crossed the Atlantic and became a businessman and then a Colonel in the Revolutionary Army. And he distinguished himself at the Battle of Stony Point, to protect this very ground.

Over a century later, many Americans, and many graduates from West Point, would twice cross the Atlantic in the other direction. To fight for freedom in Europe.

I have visited Normandy and seen the thousands of white headstones that mark the graves of American servicemen who stormed those beaches. I have been to Bastogne and walked the now-peaceful fields of the Battle of the Bulge.

These Americans and their Allied brothers-in-arms fought on the frontline so that tyranny would not prevail. So that democracy could take root across Europe. And after the Second World War, we understood that the freedom of the United States and Europe could not be divided.

For over 60 years, American soldiers, including many West Point graduates, continued to put their lives on the line. To preserve not just American security, but the security of the entire Euro-Atlantic region.

In recent years, many brave Americans have served in Afghanistan. To deny safe haven to international terrorists. And to make Afghanistan strong enough to take charge of its own security. We have done that together. In a coalition of over 50 nations. Led by NATO.

Today, members of the Long Gray Line can be found from Japan and the Demilitarized Zone in South Korea all the way to the Baltic states in northern Europe.

The Long Gray Line has stood firm. And you have not stood alone. NATO's flag is blue. So we must ensure that a long blue line of security continues to protect all our Allies and their freedom.

That tradition of shared sacrifice, that unbreakable bond between North America and Europe, has protected our freedom and security ever since Christian Febiger marched up Stony Point over two centuries ago. This bond is our anchor in a stormy sea of insecurity. And the cornerstone of that bond is the NATO Alliance. An Alliance that we have preserved and strengthened not because we want war, but because we want peace.

Throughout my political career, a belief in the transformative power of freedom has always been my compass. I strongly believe that, no matter what happens beyond our borders, our transatlantic community of nations must remain a beacon of freedom. And that we must be prepared to act whenever necessary to keep the flame of freedom burning bright. So that even when autocracy grows elsewhere, the world will always have a shining example of what it means to be free.

Ladies and gentlemen,

When we held our NATO Summit in Wales a few weeks ago, we started with a tribute to the men and women of our armed forces who have served on NATO operations. We thanked them for their constant commitment, and courage.

Today, as I approach my last few days as Secretary General, I want to conclude my tenure and these remarks by paying my own very personal tribute. Because NATO would be nothing without the exceptional men and women who put on the uniform. Many of you will put your lives on the line for the sake of others. There is no greater act of selflessness. I want to thank every man and woman

who has served on NATO-led operations. And has played their part in making our world a better, and safer, place.

I also want to thank you, for the commitment you have undertaken. The defence of freedom isn't easy. It never will be. It takes work. It takes resources. It takes determination. And it takes exceptional people like you.

So study hard. Train Well. And most importantly Beat Navy!

Thank you.