

Jens Stoltenberg: Some people ask, so, does climate change matter for NATO? And the answer is, yes. Because climate change matters for security. Climate change, global warming, is what we call a crisis multiplier.

INTRO MUSIC

John Waldron: Hello everyone and welcome to Talks at GS. I am honored to be joined today by Jens Stoltenberg, the Secretary General of NATO. Before serving in his current role, Secretary General Stoltenberg was the UN Special Envoy on Climate Change. And also served as the Prime Minister of Norway. Secretary General, thank you very much for joining us today.

Jens Stoltenberg: Thank you so much for having me. It's really a great pleasure and honor to be with you all today.

John Waldron: So, let me ask you. You've transitioned, obviously, from prime minister of an important country to, you know, to now running an important global organization, obviously, and you know, dealing with alliances and so forth. I'm interested in how your time running Norway has influenced how you've thought about, you know, sitting in your current seat.

Jens Stoltenberg: So, first of all, I'd like to say that Norway's an important country. We regard ourselves as a very important country. But we are 5 million people. NATO represents close to 1 billion people. So, when it comes to numbers, it's at least much bigger.

I think the most important thing I bring from Norwegian politics is the importance of compromise. To understand that when there are different views, different interests, the main task for a political leader is to find a way to reconcile the different views. And to create some kind of a unity so we as a country can move forward, in Norway, but this is even more so in NATO. Because in national politics, a majority can always vote through a bill or legislation in the parliament, in the United States, in Norway, and in all the democratic parliaments. While in NATO we need consensus. We need all to agree. So, the need to see the beauty and the strength of a compromise is even bigger and more important in NATO. So, that has been, perhaps, the most important experience I bring from national politics to NATO and international politics.

John Waldron: I'm just interested in drawing you out a little

bit more and talking about how you try to balance the 30 countries, you know, and their individual desires with the broader alliance, and how you think about that tension. You know, any insight you have there, which I imagine is, you know, a challenge of your position.

Jens Stoltenberg: I think that first of all, it is to recognize that when you are 30 different nations, as we are in NATO, from both sides of the Atlantic, different geography, different history, different political parties in government, there will be differences. So, we should not panic when we see differences between NATO allies. We have seen, of course, that over the last years. We had some challenging times. And we had, also, disagreements between allies over the last few years in NATO. But we can also go back, all the way back to the Suez Crisis in 1956 or when France decided in 1960 to actually leave the military cooperation in NATO or, yeah, the Vietnam War or the Iraq War in 2003 that divided NATO allies.

But the beauty or the strength of NATO is that despite these differences, we have always been able to unite around our core task. And our core task is to protect and defend each other. If one ally is attacked, that will be regarded as an attack on the whole alliance. And the reason why this commitment is important is that by conveying that message to any potential adversary, we prevent war. We preserve peace. The purpose of NATO is not to provoke conflict, but to prevent conflict by having this collective defense clause.

John Waldron: So, I believe you spoke with President Biden just a few days after he took office. And one of the things that you discussed was the continued presence of troops in Afghanistan, which is obviously an important issue. I'm interested in how you're thinking about the future of NATO troops in that region.

Jens Stoltenberg: So, I've spoken with President Biden actually twice. And I'm looking forward to welcoming him to Brussels to the NATO Summit as soon as that's possible to convene. Now it's a bit difficult because of the pandemic. But in both of those conversations, NATO's presence in after has been a key topic.

It is important because we have been there now for 20 years. We went into Afghanistan as a response to the 9/11 attacks. We went in there to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for international terrorists. A place where they can plan, organize, finance attacks on the United States and all the NATO

allied countries. But no ally would like to stay there longer than necessary. And therefore, the United States and all of the NATO allies, we strongly support the peace talks which are now taking place in Doha.

These talks are difficult. They're fragile. There is no guarantee for success. But they are the only path to peace. And the first time, actually, Taliban and the government sits down together and tries to find a way forward for a peaceful negotiated solution. So, we support those.

There is an agreement between the Taliban and the United States that all international troops, also NATO troops, should be out of Afghanistan by the first of May. Taliban has to negotiate in good faith. They have to reduce violence. We see a lot of targeted killing. And they have to break all ties with international terrorists.

We will coordinate, we will assess the situation together. And then we will make a decision together.

John Waldron: Okay, so let's just shift to the pandemic, which obviously, you know, at the moment, is kind of front of mind as a collective threat around the world and is certainly having a real impact on the way we're all navigating policy and our-- you know, the fact that we're not physically together right now is an example of, you know, some of the challenges that we face.

You've stated that NATO's main task is to make sure the health crisis does not become a security crisis. How has NATO been executing on that task now? Is there any change today versus what you would have been doing at the beginning of the pandemic?

Jens Stoltenberg: Well, of course, we have adapted some of our activities, at these headquarters, people work from home as they do in most places around the world. We have reduced-- changed the format of some of our exercises. And there's much less traveling. But the main message is that the readiness of our forces, the deployment in Afghanistan or Iran also and other places, they have continued. We have big battle groups in the eastern part of the alliance, combat ready. They are fully operational. So, with some minor adjustments in the way we conduct our task and do our-- conduct our activities, NATO has maintained what we call its operational readiness. And that's a good thing. NATO is a military alliance. Of course, we have to be able to function also throughout or in the midst of a pandemic.

John Waldron: So, in addition to the pandemic and other global threats, you are focused on Russia and you've certainly been focused on Russia, I know, for a long time. Maybe just talk about what threat you see Russia posing to democracies around the world as we sit here today. And any commentary on how NATO is focused on meeting those challenges?

Jens Stoltenberg: The Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact, that was the main reason for NATO's existence for decades. Russia is very different from the Soviet Union. And for some years after the end of the Cold War, we developed a more and more close partnership with Russia. There were actually some people talking about the possibility of Russia joining NATO because we had all the members-- the Warsaw Pact, there were eight members of the Warsaw Pact: The Soviet Union, Poland, Eastern Germany, Romania, and these central and eastern European countries. Out of those eight countries, seven are today a member of NATO. And the eighth, the Soviet Union, doesn't exist. But three former republics in the Soviet Union, the Baltic countries, are a member of NATO.

So, of course, it was not impossible to imagine that Russia could also join NATO. This is not the case anymore. And things have really changed. And especially in 2014 when Russia used military force to annex a part of another country, Crimea, in the Ukraine.

And we see a more assertive Russia. We see Russia investing heavily in new military capabilities, new nuclear weapons, new advanced delivery systems. And of course, that's the reason also why NATO has implemented the biggest enforcement of our collective defense since the end of the Cold War with combat ready battle groups in the eastern part of the alliance. We didn't have that before. We have that now. Higher readiness of our forces. Increased defense spending after years of cutting defense spending. All allies are to increase defense spending. And also change our command structure and implanted truly big changes of this alliance since 2014.

But then this is not all about military. Because what we see is that Russia is using a wide range of tools: military tools as they've done, for instance in Syria or in Libya or against Ukraine. But the use of economic tools and the use of cyber and political tools. And they've tried to meddle in our domestic political processes. We have seen that in the United States. We have seen it in other European countries. We have seen many

reports about cyber attacks. So, we need, in a way, to develop this whole range of different tools in responding to a more assertive Russia, including the fact that they are using propaganda disinformation to try to undermine the trust in our democratic institutions, social media, disinformation.

And for NATO of course, that's a different threat. It's a different challenge. NATO has a role to play. We counter disinformation when we see. We provide facts. We try to push back. But I think, actually, that when we see disinformation, when we see the use of social media to try to undermine trust, I think that the best and most important tool we have is a free and independent press. Journalists that are asking the difficult questions, checking their sources, and making sure that they're not victims to organized disinformation campaigns from, for instance, Russia or others.

John Waldron: Let's talk about China. You know, the size, the military might, the economic picture, you know, their achievements in technology. Just talk a bit about how you think NATO should address China and how you think it will address China.

Jens Stoltenberg: China is not an advisory. And the rise of China also represents a lot of opportunities for our economies, markets, for working together with China on initiatives like climate change. And we should seize these opportunities and work with China on many different areas.

But the rise of China also represents some serious challenges. China is an authoritarian regime. They don't share our values. They don't pretend that they share our democratic values. They believe in another set of principles and values. And it will be the first time, actually, in centuries that the biggest economy in the world doesn't share our liberal, democratic values. And that's just something with the balance between the different powers and, you know these numbers better than I do, but based on the purchasing power China already has, the biggest economy, and in market value, it will soon have the largest economy in the world. And that makes something-- it really impacts the power, that real global balance of power.

And again, for me, that's just an argument in favor of NATO. Because yes, China will have the biggest economy. But they don't have friends and allies as NATO. And together NATO allies are 50 percent of the world's GDP and 50 percent of the world's military might. So yes, the US is big. But together with the

United Kingdom, France, Germany, Norway, and many other countries, Italy, Spain, and all the other NATO allies, we are able to deal and handle any threat.

John Waldron: You mentioned climate change. So, I want to spend some-- I want to linger on climate change a little bit with you because I know you've got strong feelings about it. And you've spent a lot of your career focused on it as a security issue. So, maybe you can talk about climate change from that perspective in terms of how that shapes NATO's thinking and response to dealing with it as a security issue.

Jens Stoltenberg: So, NATO is a military alliance. Actually, NATO is a military and political alliance, but our main responsibility is to preserve peace, is to provide security, and is to maintain the strong commitment to defend and protect each other. So, therefore, some people ask, so, does climate change matter for NATO? And the answer is, yes. Because climate change matters for security. Climate change, global warming, is what we call a crisis multiplier. It will increase the competition for scarce resources, for water, for land. It will force people to move. Migration. And we've all seen an analysis about the conflict in the Sahara region in Syria, it's partly fueled by climate change. I'm not saying that climate change is the only reason for crisis and conflicts, but it may exacerbate and fuel and multiply the consequences of different conflicts in many places in the world.

So, NATO, since we are concerned about security, we have to understand all the factors that impact our security. And climate change impacts our security. It's a crisis multiplier. And therefore, the first thing NATO should do, and we are starting to do that, is to have the best possible understanding of the link between climate change, global warming, and security threats and conflicts. So, that's the first thing. Analysis. Understanding. But that's a precondition for any response is to understand the problem.

The second thing we should do is that we need to adapt the way we conduct our missions, operations, how we do our work. Because we have to understand that the military, they operate, at least mostly, out there in nature. And when we have wilder, wetter, windier weather, it will impact the way we can operate. The melting of the ice, the polar ice, is opening up new sea routes, but also new possibilities for military operations in the north, for good or for bad. So, this will affect everything from investments in military infrastructure, to the uniforms, the

equipment, or military-- of our soldiers. Where to operate. How to operate. And so, we have to implement the necessarily adaptation or military structure, infrastructure, operations, missions caused by global warming.

And the third thing I think NATO could do is that we could try to reduce emissions. We should-- we are, of course we cannot be the main-- the first responder to the call for reduced emissions. But NATO and our military forces, they can play their part. Because today military operations are normally extremely energy consuming. And they're very much dependent on fossil fuels. So, all of these are tasks where NATO is now stepping up trying to do more because we should play our part in addressing climate change. But also realize that this has really security implications. And therefore, climate change matters

John Waldron: You announced an initiative that you called NATO 2030. Maybe you can just expand a little bit further into what you're trying to achieve there and what we might expect that comes out of that initiative and how that shapes the future of NATO going forward?

Jens Stoltenberg: So, partly, we have already talked a lot about NATO 2030 without calling it NATO 2030 in our conversation today because the main idea with NATO 2030 is to have a forward looking, ambitious agenda for this alliance that makes sure that we continue to adapt. Because we are the most successful alliance in history. And because we have constantly changed. Change, change, change. And that's never easy. It's quite often a bit painful. But if NATO is going to continue to be a successful alliance we need to continue to adapt and change as the world is changing.

John Waldron: Well Jens, as an American and as a member of the alliance, we really appreciate everything you're doing. And thank you for taking time out of your day to join us.

Jens Stoltenberg: Thank you so much for having me. It was a great thing to see you all.

John Waldron: Appreciate it. Stay well. Take care.

Jens Stoltenberg: Thank you.

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