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A Stronger NATO for a More Dangerous World

What the Alliance Must Do in Vilnius—and Beyond

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Russia's illegal war against Ukraine is a turning point in history. War has returned to Europe and great-power rivalries are growing. Authoritarian regimes are coming together to challenge the global rules and institutions that underpin peace and stability. Russian President Vladimir Putin is clamping down on freedoms and deepening divisions within his own country, as the Wagner paramilitary company's rebellion clearly demonstrated. But no one should underestimate Russia or the dangers facing the world today.

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization is responding to a more unpredictable world with unity and strength. NATO allies in Europe and North America, and our partners across the globe, have provided unprecedented economic and military support to Ukraine. Over the last decade, NATO has implemented the largest reinforcement of our collective defense in a generation. We have strengthened our military presence in eastern Europe and increased defense spending. With Finland's membership—and soon Sweden's—NATO is growing stronger and larger.

We must continue this momentum and maintain our strength and unity. This is exactly what NATO leaders will do when we meet for our summit in Vilnius tomorrow. I expect NATO allies to confirm our unwavering support for Ukraine, continue to strengthen our own defense, and increase our cooperation with our European and Indo-Pacific partners to defend the global rules-based order. These are my main priorities for Vilnius and beyond, as I have the honor to serve this alliance for another year.

What we do—or do not do—now will define the world we live in for generations. So we will send a clear message: NATO stands united, and authoritarian aggression will not pay off.

FREEDOM FOR UKRAINE

When I visited Ukraine this spring, I witnessed the terrible suffering, but also the tremendous bravery and resolve, of the Ukrainian people in defending their freedom. On the train to Kyiv, I was struck by how many fresh graveyards lined the railway tracks. I visited Bucha, just north of the capital, and heard about the horrors of Russian occupation. I also saw the efforts to rebuild a better, stronger Ukraine.

The Ukrainian forces are now engaged in fierce fighting to reclaim occupied territory, but they face strong Russian defenses and tough terrain. If Russia stops fighting, there will be peace. If Ukraine stops fighting, it will cease to exist as a nation. Ukrainians will not waver, because the more gains they make on the battlefield, the stronger their hand will be at the negotiating table.

Everyone wants this brutal war to end, but a just peace cannot mean freezing the conflict and accepting a deal dictated by Russia. A false peace would only give Moscow time to regroup, rearm, and attack again. We must break the cycle of Russian aggression, and the best way to achieve lasting peace tomorrow is to support Ukraine, so that it prevails as a sovereign nation now.

NATO allies have stood by Ukraine since it gained independence 30 years ago. We provided years of training and support after Russia illegally annexed Crimea and destabilized the Donbas in 2014. Since Moscow's February 2022 invasion, we have stepped up unprecedented support for Ukraine's right to

self-defense, enshrined in the UN Charter. Over the last year and a half, NATO countries have trained and equipped new Ukrainian armored brigades and provided tanks, combat vehicles, and advanced air defenses. NATO allies will also train Ukrainian pilots on fourth-generation fighter jets. This support shows that we are committed to Ukraine for the long haul.

We must break the cycle of Russian aggression.

To strengthen Ukraine, we will agree on a multiyear package of support at the Vilnius summit. So far this year, pledges already amount to over \$500 million. This package will help Ukraine rebuild its defense and security sector, so that it can defend against further aggression. It will ensure that the Ukrainian armed forces are fully interoperable with NATO forces.

Over the last 18 months, Ukraine has taken huge strides in transitioning away from military doctrines, training methods, and equipment dating from the Soviet era, toward NATO standards and equipment. Ukraine is more integrated with our alliance than ever before, and so we must take steps to reflect this reality.

In Vilnius, we will upgrade our political ties by hosting the first meeting of the new NATO-Ukraine Council, together with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. This is a platform for decisions and crisis consultation, where NATO allies and Ukraine will sit as equals to tackle shared security concerns. All NATO allies agree that Ukraine will become a member of NATO. NATO's door remains open, as we have proved by inviting Finland and Sweden to join last year. Ukraine's NATO membership is a matter for NATO allies and Kyiv to decide: Russia does not have a veto. In Vilnius, we will set out a strong vision for Ukraine's future and bring the country closer to NATO.

ADDRESSING AUTHORITARIANISM

After the Cold War, NATO worked hard to forge more constructive relations with Moscow, including on arms control, countering terrorism, combating piracy, and increasing our scientific cooperation. But Putin walked away from peaceful cooperation, with a pattern of increasingly reckless behavior from Chechnya to Georgia, and Syria to Ukraine. He has dismantled the international arms control architecture and is engaging in dangerous nuclear saber-rattling.

Even if the war were to end tomorrow, there is no sign that Putin's broader ambitions have changed. He sees freedom and democracy as a threat and wants a world where big states dictate what their neighbors do. This puts him in constant confrontation with NATO's values and international law.

If Putin wins in Ukraine, it would be a tragedy for Ukrainians and dangerous for the world at large. It would send a message to other authoritarian regimes that they can achieve their objectives through force. China, in particular, is watching to see the price Russia pays, or the reward it receives, for its aggression. It is learning from Moscow's military failures and the response of the international community. When I visited Japan and South Korea at the start of this year, their leaders were clearly concerned that what is happening in Europe today could happen in Asia tomorrow.

NATO does not see China as an adversary. We must continue to engage with Beijing to tackle today's global challenges, including nuclear proliferation and climate change. At the same time, China should use its considerable influence over Russia to end its illegal war in Ukraine. So far, however, Beijing has not condemned Moscow's aggression and is instead increasing its economic, diplomatic, and military cooperation with Russia. The Chinese government's increasingly coercive behavior abroad and repressive policies at home challenge NATO's security, values, and interests. Beijing is threatening its neighbors and bullying other countries. It is trying to take control of critical supply chains and infrastructure in NATO states. We must be clear-eyed about these challenges and not trade security interests for economic gains.

As autocratic regimes draw closer to one another, those of us who believe in freedom and democracy must stand together. NATO is a regional alliance of Europe and North America, but the challenges we face are global. That is why I have invited the leaders of the European Union and of our Indo-Pacific

partners—Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea—to join us in Vilnius. We must have a common understanding of the security risks we face and work together to strengthen the resilience of our societies, economies, and democracies.

HARDER, BETTER, FASTER, STRONGER

Russia's pattern of aggression is a stark reminder that we cannot rule out the possibility of an attack against NATO countries. We must continue to strengthen and invest in our deterrence and defense. But we are not starting from scratch. Since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, the alliance has undertaken a fundamental shift from military missions beyond its borders back to collective defense. The last ten years were a decisive decade of adaptation, preparing NATO for an unpredictable future.

Since 2014, we have deployed combat-ready troops to the eastern part of NATO territory for the first time, put more troops on higher readiness across the alliance, and adapted to defend NATO states in space and cyberspace as effectively as we do on land, at sea, and in the air. This year, the defense spending of European allies and Canada will grow by 8.3 percent in real terms. This is the biggest increase in decades, and the ninth consecutive year of increased defense spending across NATO. The United States is increasing its spending as well.

Now we are taking further major steps to strengthen our deterrence and defense. We will agree to new, detailed regional defense plans, which are fully connected with the forces, capabilities, and command and control needed to execute them. NATO will have 300,000 troops on higher alert, including substantial air and naval combat power.

NATO is a regional alliance, but the challenges we face are global.

We are adapting our command structures to reflect the new geography of the alliance, with Finland's membership, which has doubled NATO's land border with Russia, and soon Sweden's membership. This is a game-changer for European security and will provide an uninterrupted shield from the Baltic to the Black Sea. We are also substantially increasing cooperation with the defense industry to ramp up production, both for Ukraine's defenses and for ours.

This fundamental shift in our collective defense requires a generational commitment to increase defense spending. We are making real progress, but not as quickly as this dangerous world demands. In Vilnius, NATO allies will make a more ambitious commitment to invest two percent of GDP in our defense. This figure should be a floor to build on, not a ceiling to reach. We need to invest more and invest it now, because security is the foundation for our economies and societies to thrive. Preventing aggression today is less costly than fighting a war tomorrow.

Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine has shattered any remaining illusions of peaceful cooperation, so we must spend more and do more together to stay safe. The challenges are great, but NATO has been an anchor of stability for Europe and North America for almost 75 years. In a world of growing dangers, NATO will continue to protect our people, defend our democratic values, and keep our nations strong.