

# Conversation on "The Future of NATO"

with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and students of the University of South Florida (USF)

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(As delivered)

**Golfo Alexopoulos [Professor in the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies and Director of USF Institute on Russia at the University of South Florida in Tampa Bay] (0.00):** Hello everyone and thank you for joining us from Florida and around the world for this exciting event with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg. My name is Golfo Alexopoulos and I am a professor in the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies at the University of South Florida in Tampa Bay. I'm also the Director of the USF Institute on Russia and I will be moderating today's discussion, together with my colleague doctor Thomas Smith.

We are distinctly honoured to welcome the NATO Secretary General virtually to USF. Before we begin, I want to thank everyone who helped make this very special event possible: Admiral John Kirby, the Public Diplomacy Division at NATO Headquarters and the College of Arts and Sciences. This event is co-sponsored by the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies and the USF Institute on Russia. And we are deeply grateful to our generous supporters especially the Institute on Russia's Advisory Council.

Now let's get started. Thomas over to you.

**Thomas Smith [Professor and Associate Dean of the Judy Genshaft Honors College] (1.08):** Welcome everyone. My name is Thomas Smith and I am the Associate Dean of the Judy Genshaft Honors College and also Professor in the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies.

We are delighted to have you with us for this conversation with the Secretary General, as he addresses a range of security issues around the world, but also some that affect us right here, in Florida. It is my pleasure to turn things over to the President of the University of South Florida, Steven Currall, who will introduce our host, our guest. Doctor Currall is the seventh President of the USF. He joined us in 2019, bringing three decades of leadership and academic expertise from top universities, both in the US and abroad. He holds a PhD in organisational psychology from Cornell. He is an expert in innovation, emerging technologies, negotiation and corporate governance. President Currall, over to you.

**Steven Currall: [President of the University of South Florida] (2.08):** Well thank you, Thomas and hello everybody. On behalf of the University of South Florida, I'm honoured to welcome Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to this virtual conversation. And we thank him for joining us today from Brussels. I wish to thank USF Institute on Russia and our School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies for facilitating this event. Professors Golfo Alexopoulos and Thomas Smith have prepared our students for this exciting opportunity to speak with the Secretary General on a variety of current topics. And for me, personally, this is actually the second time I have had the privilege of being with Secretary General. In my previous

institution we hosted him for an event with students and he was brilliant that day as I am sure he will be today as well.

There can be no better time for us to consider the global landscape.

Today an international system is emerging that's defined by both the great power competition as well as by issues that transcend national borders such as pandemics, environment and resources issues, cyber security and disruptive technologies. As the NATO Alliance seeks to collaborate on forward facing solutions, global research universities have an important role to play. At the University of South Florida, our faculty and students are conducting research to improve understanding of an increasingly complex world and to make our world safer and more secure.

Now, we offer academic programmes and a range of fields and disciplines that impact global security. From cyber security, to artificial intelligence, and international studies, to medicine and public health. And we are proud of our partnerships and collaborations too, with US Special Operations Command and US Central Command at MacDill Air Force Base. And we're eager to learn more about NATO's 2030 initiative, so that we can adapt for the future, a future that will be shaped for, and by, the students gathered here today.

Throughout his distinguished career, Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has been a strong advocate for greater global and transatlantic cooperation. He became NATO Secretary General in 2014 after serving as Prime Minister of Norway from 2005-2013. He attended the University of Oslo where he earned his advanced degree in economics and he worked as a journalist before entering politics as a member of the Norwegian Labour Party. I'm grateful to Secretary General for spending time with us today. We have much to learn from his expertise and his experience.

Mr Secretary General, welcome.

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (5.13):** Thanks so much, Steven. It is great to see you again and also great to see your colleagues and to be with you all. I'm really looking forward to this conversation and I am so grateful that you show this interest in NATO, the importance of Europe and North America working together. And I'm here to answer questions and to engage in a conversation with you and the students. So, once again, thank you so much for having me.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (5.41):** Thank you, Secretary General Stoltenberg. I'd like to start with our first question here, to get that get us all started. You have had a very busy week, you hosted all the NATO Foreign Ministers this week and you met the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken for the first time. What in your view was the most significant outcome of this meeting with Secretary Blinken?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (6.10):** So, first of all, it was a very good meeting, a very positive meeting for many different reasons. One reason was actually that this is our first in person meeting for more than a year. So the reality is that for Foreign Ministers, and especially for Foreign Ministers, to not be able to travel that has really been difficult. But because we were able to also follow very strict, or respect, strict COVID-19 measures to prevent the spread of the virus, we were able also to hold in person meeting over two days this week. And of course perhaps the most important thing was the message that Secretary Blinken conveyed to all of us. And that was at the United States is very committed to the transatlantic bond in NATO, the steadfast commitment to our collective defence clause and a message from President Biden, which Blinken express to us, that the new Biden

administration is really looking into how they can rebuild alliances and also strengthening NATO.

So that was a positive message, a message that was very much welcomed by all Allies, and we are looking forward to also welcoming President Biden to the upcoming NATO Summit here in Brussels later on this year. And of course we made some preparations, we discussed NATO 2030, Russia, but also the situation in Afghanistan. So, we covered many topics in a very positive atmosphere knowing that there are many problems, many challenges but as long as we work together, North America and Europe we are able to tackle all of them as a strong, united Alliance. So, I think that was the main message from that meeting.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (8.05):** Thank you, we will pick up this idea of the transatlantic bond and how to strengthen it in a moment, but I want to turn to Russia. You mentioned Russia and I'm the Director of the Institute on Russia here at USF, so my question is: some have argued that NATO's expansion has embolden hardliners in Russia and convinced ordinary Russians that the West poses an existential threat to their country. Even some members of the Russian opposition, the democratic opposition, have expressed this view. What would you say to those who argue that NATO's expansion has fuelled a Russian aggression and what is your view regarding the expansion of NATO to include Georgia and Ukraine?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (8.54):** First of all, I really believe that just the idea that an expansion of NATO is a kind of threat or a provocation towards Russia, is a very dangerous idea and it's completely wrong. Because we have to understand that what we have done is that we have respected the free and independent choice of sovereign nations. After the end of the Cold War and the end of the Warsaw Pact, a lot of countries in Central and Eastern Europe they got their freedom, they got the possibility to decide their own future themselves. And this is enshrined in many documents, which are also subscribed to by Russia, that it is actually a sovereign right of every sovereign nation to choose their own path and to decide what kind of security arrangements, military alliances, they want to be part of not want to be part of. So, the whole idea that NATO, in a kind of an aggressive way is moving East is wrong, it is the countries in the East that has decided through democratic processes to join NATO. And for many years after the end of the Cold War we actually were in the process of not only getting new members from East and Central Europe, but Poland, the Baltic countries, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria and so on, but we also gradually developed a more and more close partnership with Russia. I have attended many NATO summits, NATO meetings, where, for instance, President Putin, Prime Minister Medvedev had participated. It is Russia that has now stopped, in a way, believe in the idea working together, cooperating, trusting each other and that was partly triggered by the military, the use of military force against Georgia in 2008, but even more so by the aggressive actions against Ukraine where Russia illegally annexed Crimea and used military force against the neighbour Ukraine in 2014.

For me, as a Norwegian, it is extremely important to underline the right of every nation to decide their own future and also whether they want to be part of a military alliance or not. Because back in 1949, there was a big discussion whether Norway should join NATO. And of course at that time, the Soviet Union, our neighbour - Norway is bordering Russia - or before that the Soviet Union, and of course Joseph Stalin didn't like the idea of a neighbour Norway joining NATO. But we made our independent decision as a small country that we wanted to be part of NATO and I'm very glad that in Washington, or in London, or in Paris, that they did not say that because Russia or Soviet Union disliked that Norway is joining then we don't accept Norway as a member. And exactly the same idea should apply for the Baltic countries, for Poland, for all the others, who have joined. They have decided to join and it's only for

NATO Allies and the applicant country to decide whether NATO is going to enlarge or not. It is not for Russia, they have no say in this and there is no way it is a provocation that sovereign nations make their own sovereign decisions.

Then on Georgia and Ukraine, we stated in 2008, NATO, at the summit in Bucharest, and I was there as Norwegian Prime Minister, that Georgia and Ukraine will become members of NATO. We didn't set any date for that, we have repeated that decision at summits after 2008. What we do now is that we help and support Ukraine and Georgia as they move towards membership. We help them with the security sector reform, with strengthening democratic control of the armed forces to gradually meet NATO standards, and by doing that moving closer to the NATO membership. But NATO membership has to be agreed by consensus. All Allies have to agree. And therefore, I am not able to give you a date for when Allies assess that Georgia and Ukraine are ready to fully join the Alliance.

So, well, my short answer is that it's not the provocation, it is not a threat to Russia that European countries have joined NATO in Central and Eastern Europe, we don't want to live in a world where big powers are establishing a sphere of influence when they decide what small neighbours can do. It is a sovereign democratic right and the Baltic countries, the Eastern Europeans have demonstrated that democratic right and we have respected that.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (14.02):** Thank you.

**Thomas Smith (14.04):** Thank you Secretary General for being here. I know that much of what you talk about today will be a reflection of NATO 2030, your own, sort of, strategic initiative. As you, sort of, survey the coming decade and you are thinking about adapting to change, how does a big organisation like NATO to go about changing itself instead of staying current and abreast of current threat?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (14.33):** NATO is the most successful alliance in the history for one reason and that is that we have been able to change when the world is changing. After the Cold War, we totally changed what NATO did. We went into the Balkans and helped to end two ethnic wars there: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia. We enlarged with many new members from Eastern and Central Europe. Then, after the 9/11 attacks against United States, we changed again. Suddenly NATO was at the forefront fighting international terrorism and we have [been] there since then. And then, after 2014, we changed because we saw more aggressive Russia and we have implemented the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence in a generation since 2014. We need to continue to change, continue to adapt, because the world is changing. We are faced with more cyberattacks, a more brutal form of terrorism with [the] rise of Daesh, proliferation of nuclear weapons and we see also the global balance of power shifting with the rise of China. And we see many other challenges in a much more complex security environment which we have to address. Therefore, we have put forward and launched what we called NATO 2030 which is a project to make NATO future-proof.

It addresses a wide range of issues: how to strengthen our deterrence and defence, including by more NATO funded budgets or funding for our deterrence and defence activities. It's about resilience, making sure that we have reliable infrastructure, telecommunications, power grids and so on. Extremely important because we see that, we are actually, we see more means of aggression against, for instance our infrastructure that we have seen before. It's about technology, making sure that we maintain our technological edge. It's about building partnerships also with partners in the Asia-Pacific, addressing partly also the rise of China, protecting the rules-based order. It's about strengthening NATO's as a training alliance

because we strongly believe that prevention is better than intervention. If we can train local forces, it also makes us more safe and secure. It's about strengthening NATO as a political alliance, consultations among Allies. And is also about renewing NATO's Strategic Concept and about taking into account the security consequences of global warming or climate change. All of this is in the NATO 2030 initiative. We discussed it at the Foreign Ministers Meeting at this week. I sense a very broad support. We will continue to discuss, negotiate, develop the proposals and then I'm very confident that when President Biden and all the other NATO leaders meet in Brussels later on this year, they will agree bold, forward looking conclusions on how to continue to strengthen NATO along these lines which are now presented in NATO 2030 project. So, change is the key for NATO's success, and therefore, we need to continue to change.

**Thomas Smith (18.06):** Thank you, I heard you say the most important and the most difficult part of your job is managing the internal politics of a 30-member Alliance. I'm sure for example, if you have a meeting in Ankara one week, you are probably likely to have a meeting in Athens soon thereafter. How do you keep the Alliance moving more or less that everyone is moving in the same direction?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (18.34):** You are right, of course NATO being an alliance of 30 different countries, with different geography, with different history, from both sides of the Atlantic and always with different political parties in power, there are differences. That is a kind of natural consequence of being 30 democracies. And we have seen some disagreements and differences between Allies over decades, back to the Suez crisis in 1956 or when France decided in 1960s to actually leave the military cooperation in NATO, and NATO had to move its headquarters from Paris to Brussels and Belgium. Or the Iraq war in 2003, where some Allies were heavily in favour of the intervention, others were heavily against. So, we have seen differences between NATO Allies before, as we see them today. But the strength and the success of NATO is that we have been able to always unite around our core task and stay committed to protecting and defending each other based on NATO's core principle, one for all, all for one. If one Ally is attacked, it is regarded as an attack on all Allies. And I'm not saying this is easy, but I'm saying that the reason why NATO is able to make decisions, is able to function despite the differences, is that it is in the national security interest of each and every Ally that we stand together. A strong NATO is good for Europe but it's also good for United States. It's a unique thing for the United States, the only big power in the world, that it actually has 29 friends and allies. We saw that after the 9/11 attacks, NATO Allies invoked the Article 5, the collective defence clause, for the first time in our history to support the United States. And more than 100,000 soldiers from Europe, from Canada, from partner nations, have served shoulder to shoulder with American soldiers in Afghanistan for two decades. And more than 1000 have paid the ultimate price. This shows that NATO has been good also for the United State, and with the rise of China, it is good to have friends, so it is the security interests, the fact that we are stronger together than apart, that is the main reason why I'm, and all NATO Allies, are able to find consensus, find ways to create compromises and then be able to make decisions despite the differences we see. So, yes it's not always easy, there are disagreements, I don't deny that, but it is encouraging to see how the Alliance is able to cope with the differences and then continue to move on.

**Thomas Smith (21.48)** Thank you.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (21.50):** Secretary General, we are going to pick up on this point that you made about Article 5, an attack on one Ally is considered an attack on all Allies. Our first question comes from a USF alum who has question particularly on this notion of collective

defence. You published a piece in the Tampa Bay Times this week where you mentioned that you visited MacDill Air Force Base in Tampa, home to US Central Command and US Special Operations Command. Our first audience question comes from a USF alum, who works there. So, let's listen.

**Carters Burns (22.30):** *[My name is Carters Burns, and I'm a 1997 recipient of a Master of Arts degree in History and an Active Duty Army Commission from the University of South Florida. I've also served with NATO forces in Afghanistan and Europe over the course of my military career.]* Secretary General Stoltenberg and USF, thank you for the opportunity to ask a question on the important topic of NATO's future. My question is: given Russia's use of irregular warfare such as disinformation, cyber attacks, the use of private military companies and attacks involving nerve agents, all to advance his foreign policy goals, how does NATO interpret these activities in the context of collective defence? More specifically, do you anticipate Russia's continued use of irregular warfare will drive NATO to reevaluate the threshold of an Article 5 violation?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (23.22):** Thank you so much for your question. First of all, I'd like to say that it was really a pleasure and a great to visit to the MacDill Air Force Base back in 2017 and also to meet with the US Central Command and US Special Operations Command. Both these commands are of course providing extremely valuable support to different NATO missions and operations. I have seen US Special Operations Forces in Afghanistan, in Iraq and elsewhere. And of course Central Command is of course key, for instance, the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, where also NATO and NATO Allies are participating. So, Florida may be far away from some of the theatres where NATO troops are operating but their commands we see there are critical and extremely important for the NATO in many different ways. Then, what you point out is something which is extremely important, and that is that before it was a very clear line between peace and war, it was either peace or war. Now there is a much more blurred line, we have disinformation campaigns, we have cyber attacks, we have economic coercion, we have many different kinds of intelligence operations and we have seen NATO Allies been subject [to] aggressive actions by all the countries, where they use non-traditional military means but all these non-military means and to try to undermine us, divide us, attack us. And that's exactly what NATO has to adapt to, and what we actually have over some years now responded to, by changing the way NATO is operating. For instance in cyberspace, we have realised that cyber is a domain where we need to be present and we have been there of course for several years but we are constantly stepping up, and we decided not so many years ago that an attack in cyber, the cyber attack, may trigger Article 5. That is a totally new message meaning that before, we regarded, you know, an armed attack as something that had battle tanks or planes, or ships, but now we have stated clearly that cyber attacks could also trigger Article 5. So, we need to be ready to respond also to attacks which are conducted with different means of aggressions, not only the traditional, military means. I think also we need to realise that NATO has a lot to do even before we trigger Article 5. To counter disinformation, as we do every day, to protect critical infrastructure. So, that's the reason why we are focusing on, in our NATO 2030 project, how can we develop more concrete targets for the resilience of airports, energy grids, telecommunications, 5G. We had a big debate about Huawei and 5G and so on, and again technology and the other areas where we are working, broadening our security agenda. We will never give our adversaries, or our potential adversaries, the privilege of knowing exactly when we trigger Article 5. But what we have stated clearly is that we will trigger Article 5 when we find that necessary, and we can also trigger Article 5 when we see aggression conducted with other means than normal military means.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (27.27):** Thank you. Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin made a surprise visit to Afghanistan on Sunday and this is at a time when the new administration is deciding whether to adhere to the previous administrations agreement with the Taliban to remove all US forces from the country by May 1<sup>st</sup>. The US and NATO have fought side by side in this conflict so this is an issue on the minds of many, including one of our graduate students who experience this conflict in his home country. I now turn to him for our next question. Let's listen.

**Mary Partao (28.2):** [*Greetings, Mr Stoltenberg, the Honorable Secretary General of NATO. My name is Mary Partao, and I'm a PhD student here at the School of Interdisciplinary Global Studies at the University of South Florida. I'm originally from Afghanistan, and I specialize in Middle Eastern and South Asian politics. My question is regarding NATO's mission in Afghanistan*] As the US is currently withdrawing its forces and negotiating a political settlement with the Taliban, what is NATO's role in these negotiations? Would NATO and US withdrawal together in case there is a decision on full withdrawal from the country or will NATO countries stay the course and train and advice Afghan security forces under the democratic government? Thank you.

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (28.47):** First of all, NATO strongly supports the peace talks and we also strongly support the renewed efforts by the United States to reenergise, to reinvigorate the ongoing peace talks between the Taliban and the Afghan government. These talks are not easy and of course the whole process is fragile and this was also very much addressed when Foreign Ministers met here in Brussels this week, also with the Secretary Blinken. We discussed how can we continue to support the difficult but important peace talk. But these talks, despite the fact that we don't have any guarantee for success, they are the only path to peace. They are the only way to achieve a lasting political solution in Afghanistan, preventing Afghanistan from again becoming at safe haven for international terrorists. And therefore, the renewed initiative is strongly supported by NATO Allies, this is the first time [the] Taliban and the Afghan Government actually sit around the same table and negotiate. It has to be, and it is, an Afghan owned process and at the same time United States, NATO Allies, of course support the negotiating process, and we consult closely. We have our NATO Senior Civilian Representative in Kabul. He has attended [inaudible] in Doha and followed the negotiations, and of course Allies are closely consulting as we try to re-energize the process. There will be a meeting in Istanbul, NATO Ally, where all the parties are expected to come and we will really make a renew effort to try to get some concrete results. If we succeed and if the Afghan succeed because at the end of the day it has to be the Afghan that agree a peace deal for Afghanistan, then of course that will be a great achievement. But at the same time we have to be realistic and there is of course a possibility that the peace process does not succeed, then we are faced with a very difficult dilemma because then we either we leave, but then we risk to jeopardise, to lose the gains we have made over two decades in Afghanistan. Or we stay, but then we have to be prepared for a long-term continued military presence, also with increased violence. So, again we are back to the peace efforts, the message to all parties at the negotiating table is that they have to show a real willingness to make compromises, to negotiate in good faith. We need to see the Taliban reduce violence, and we also need to see the Taliban stop supporting international terrorists. I think we have to remember that now, the NATO presence in Afghanistan has changed a lot over the last years. Not so many years ago, we had more than 100,000 troops in the combat operations. Now there are roughly 10,000 troops in Afghanistan: NATO troops, international troops, and most of them are conducting training, assisting, support of the Afghan national security forces which are on the frontline. The Afghans are themselves on the front frontline. The majority of the NATO troops, the majority of the 10,000 troops in Afghanistan, there are

non US, showing the importance of close coordination, consultation in Afghanistan or among NATO Allies regarding our future presence in Afghanistan. At the Foreign Ministerial meeting this week, it was clearly stated by all Allies that as now we discuss our future presence there, we need to adhere to the principle we have established over some years that we went into Afghanistan together, we have adjusted our presence there together, and when the time is right, we will leave together. So, we need close coordination between Allies that's exactly what we do and we will make decisions on our future presence there together, based on the assessment of the peace negotiations and based on the conditions on the ground in Afghanistan.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (33.51):** We now have a question about China. This comes from one of the Honors College here who actually studied abroad in China. Let's listen.

**Nobel Piranza (34.01):** *[Hello. My name is Nobel Piranza from Tampa, Florida. I am a senior here at USF, graduating this semester. I am studying international studies and world languages and cultures, with a double concentration in Mandarin Chinese and French. Thank you so much for allowing me to participate today. My question is, you know]* NATO was originally created to provide collective security against the Soviet Union but has expanded to deal with a variety of security threats or issues, you know how does NATO respond or view the growing influence of China in Europe and in the Mediterranean. For example, the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and China's Belt and Road Initiative, expansion into Africa, Latin America and other places with NATO influence? Thank you.

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (34.52):** Thank you so much, and thank you for a very important and relevant question. I think we had to start with the following: and that is that NATO is a regional alliance. North America and Europe standing together and we have been that for more than 70 years. And NATO would remain a regional alliance of North America and Europe, but the threats and the challenges we face in this region they are becoming more and more global. International terrorism, cyber, proliferation of nuclear weapons, but also of course the rise of China, which is shifting the global balance of powers. Soon China will be the biggest economy in the world. They already have the largest defence budget in the world and they are investing heavily in new military capabilities, and they are also coming closer to us in cyberspace, investing in our infrastructure in Europe and in other NATO Allied countries. And we see them in the Arctic, we see them in Africa, so they are in many ways coming closer to us. The rise of China poses some opportunities for all of [inaudible]: economic growth, trade, the rise of China has helped to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty, and we need to work with China, engage with China on common challenges like, for instance, climate change. At the same time, we need to also realise the security consequences of the rise of China, because China is a power that doesn't share our values. We see how they treat the minorities, the Uighurs, in their own country. We see how they coerce neighbours, close to their borders, but also countries all over the world. We see how they are hampering, undermining freedom of navigation in the South China Sea, and so on. So that's reason why NATO has to make sure that we, first of all, are engaging with China to address the concerns we have. Second, that we work with partners, that we establish a platform of like-minded democracies, standing up for the rules-based order, standing up for the values we believe in. And when we see that China is actually violating basic human rights, we need to call that out as we have done, for instance, when it comes to their cracking down on democratic rights in Hong Kong. So, this is again part of something which is reflecting that NATO is changing. For many years we focused on the Soviet Union, now we need to focus a much more broad security spectrum of challenges. We remain the regional alliance, but in our region we need to respond to many more challenges that we did not so many decades ago.

**Thomas Smith (38.17):** Thank you. Another one of our Honours College students has a question about genocide. Let's listen.

**Sam Recheck (38.26):** [*My name is Sam Recheck, and I am a sophomore student in the Judy Again Chap Honors College, studying political science, philosophy in economics.*] Thank you for taking the time to share your wisdom with the University of South Florida community today. I am honoured to have the opportunity to ask you a question about your work. In my freshman year I took a class by a leading genocide scholar at USF on the history and theory of genocide and international affairs. This class, as one can guess, is one I won't soon forget. Since taking it, however, I have kept up to date on news and genocide and suspected genocide around the globe. What realistic steps can NATO take to prevent genocide in China and around the world? Is it possible that western recognition of its own past genocide in the West might create more momentum to act on this threat to the Uighurs populations in China? How can western democracies build alliances against China and what is NATO's role in that?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (39.18):** First of all, I think that European nations and NATO allies, the United States, all of us have been very clear, for instance, on the genocide we saw during the Second World War and we have stated very clearly many, many times that of course genocide is something which is absolutely unacceptable. It is violating international law and we have been very clear on that. Second, I strongly believe that China's treatment of the Uighurs is absolutely unacceptable. We have seen mass detentions; we have seen forced labour and we also see population control measures such as forced sterilisation. So, this is apparent, this is appalling, and it runs directly against the core values that NATO is founded on: democracy, rule of law, individual liberty. And the way China is dealing with minorities and the human rights is absolutely violating these values. So, this is a clear message from NATO Allies and there's no doubt where we stand on that issue.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (40.41):** So, you said at the start of our programme at NATO was the most successful alliance in history. Our next question concerns the health of the Alliance. Let's listen.

**Bocasa Beta (40.51):** [*I'm from Tampa, Florida. I'm currently in my first semester in the masters program of political Science with the Concentration of American Government, and I'm also expected to be graduating in 2022.*] Thank you so much for this opportunity and for answering all the questions. Now it is proposed that one of this year's goal will be to strengthen the bond between Europe and North America. My question is what are going to be the active objectives in order to achieve this goal and improve the relations? Thank you so much.

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (41.17):** Sorry, I didn't get the last question.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (41.25):** How would you, what are the goals, how would you strengthen the Alliance? What concrete measures would you take to strengthen the Alliance?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (41.35):** Okay, well, I think that the most important thing we do is that we do what we actually discussed also doing the Foreign Ministerial Meeting today. And that is to demonstrate that a strong NATO is good for all Allies. To demonstrate that, for European Allies, that of course this is a great advantage that United States, the strongest military power in the world, is providing them with security guarantees. And as long as all potential adversaries know that if they in anyway attack a NATO Ally it would trigger a response from all Allies, this is the best way to prevent conflict.

NATO's task is not to provoke a conflict but to prevent a conflict and for European Allies to have US and also Canada providing security guarantees of course is of great importance. And vice versa. Because as I already alluded to, it is a great advantage for the United States to have so many friends and allies, not least in dealing with the shifting global balance of power with the rise of China soon being the biggest economy in the world. The United States represents like 25% of the world's GDP and the world's economic power. But if you add the NATO Allies we together represent 50% of the world's GDP, 50% of the world's military might and close to 1 billion people. So, it is a great advantage also for the United States to have NATO and so many friends and allies. And the best way to strengthen this Alliance is to demonstrate the value of that as we do in the fight against terrorism, in dealing more and more assertive Russia or in responding and acting when we see the rise of China. So, that is, in short, the best way to answer your question.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (43.39):** Mr Secretary General, we know that climate and its impact on global security is an issue that you care very much about and you've worked on for a long time even before, when you were a Prime Minister of Norway and served as UN special envoy on climate change. Climate change is an issue that our students also care about deeply as evidenced by the next question. Let's listen.

**Maria Bocas (44.03):** [*My name is Maria Bocas. I am currently a third year student at the University of South Florida, and I am majoring in international studies with the minor economics. My question is,*] How would climate change impact global security and how would that affect the relationship between countries and international relations? In addition, is there anything that the world could do that has not been done already in order to limit the effects of climate change long-term? Thank you very much.

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (44.31):** So, climate change matters for our security. Climate change is a crisis multiplier. More extreme weather, global warming, rising sea levels, will force people to move, will increase competition about scarce resources like water, land and all of that will exacerbate crisis, conflict many places in the world. So, climate change matters for NATO because climate change matters for security. And I think that NATO has at least three important tasks.

One is to be the leading organisation in understanding, assessing and analysing the link between climate change and crisis, military conflict. Second, NATO has an important role when it comes to adapting to climate change. Because our militaries they are operating out there, in nature. And of course when the sea level is rising it will affect our naval bases and NATO infrastructure. When we see more extreme heat, for instance as we have seen in Iraq over last year, we saw many days with more than 50 degrees Celsius, which is extremely high and warm weather, I do not know what that is in Fahrenheit, but extremely warm. And then of course it matters for soldiers who are going to operate out there. So, it is about uniforms, how we conduct our operations, vehicles, everything has to function in more extreme weather. And melting of ice of course affects our operations in the High North. And lastly, we need to make sure that we also look into how the military can help contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases. How we actually going to have less emissions from different military operations and activities. And we've made an important step in our Foreign Ministerial Meeting this week, where we agreed a report on how to integrate climate change into our planning, into our exercises and also how to make sure that we have an assessment of the consequences of climate change for our security. So, we are moving forward as an Alliance. You ask me what is the most important thing? Well, the most important thing is that we all help to reduce emissions of greenhouse gases because that's the only way to reduce the effect of global warming.

**Thomas Smith (47.09):** Of course, Turkey has now been the sort of anchor for the south-eastern part of the NATO region, but that has now been challenged. But we now have a questions from another of our Honours students about Turkey. Let's listen.

**XY (47.23):** [*First sentence not understandable.— I am a senior political science student at USF*]. Recently, we have seen Turkey make concerted efforts to improve its relations with Russia. Even that Turkey is such a strategic NATO member state, how do we incentivise Turkey to not further align itself with Russia?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (47.41):** Turkey is an important member of this Alliance, not least because they border Iraq and Syria and they have been extremely important in the fight against ISIS, liberating the territory ISIS controlled in Iraq considered not so many months ago. At the same time, there are serious concerns expressed by Allies, for instance on the Turkish decision to acquire a Russian air defence system S-400. And I have expressed concerns about the consequences of that decision, the United States have done it. And we also have all the issues in the eastern Mediterranean and where we see differences and concerns expressed by Allies. I think what NATO does is that we provide a platform for when we disagree, and when there are differences between Allies, to sit down, to discuss, consult and try to find ways to reduce tensions, differences and sometimes also solve the underlying issues. We have discussed of course the S-400 many times. We have been able to make some progress on the eastern Mediterranean, where we have been able to establish what we call a deconfliction mechanism here at NATO. And we will continue to use NATO as the platform for Allies to try to look for ways to address the differences we see. Turkey remains a committed Ally but there are differences and, as have eluded and already talked about, differences between Allies is nothing new, but NATO has proven to be extremely capable of dealing with differences and I am absolutely certain we can deal with that also now.

**Thomas Smith (49.27):** We have a lot of students on the call today and many of them are interested in careers in the foreign service or with international organisations. And I'm sure they would appreciate your advice and insights you have. Let's listen to a question.

**Vivico Mwani (49.42):** [*Hello. My name is Vivico McWani. I am from St. Thomas, one of the three US Virgin Islands. I am a USF senior majoring in international studies and minoring in intelligent studies, with a plan of graduating this year in the fall of 2021.*] My question for you, Mr Stoltenberg, is what would you suggest to a new graduate who is interested in a career in foreign affairs? The qualities, the experience, what should they possess in order to make themselves stand out? Thank you for the opportunity to ask a question.

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (50.21):** Thank you so much for the question. I don't know to what extent I really have any good advice to give you because I have never made so many plans for my career. I actually only made one decision when I was in my early twenties and that I was not going to become a politician. So, I actually went into economics and statistics. And I worked as a researcher in the Norwegian Centre Bureau of Statistic for some years, because I was very much oriented towards mathematics and economics. And then, suddenly, I was asked to become the Deputy Minister for Environment, and I promised myself and my wife that I would only be in politics for a few years and then go back to research. But then things happened and I ended up in politics and then I was in Norwegian politics and I didn't dream about becoming Secretary General of NATO. But after I stepped down as Prime Minister, suddenly that was an opportunity. So, I have never been able to plan my career and it has gone in different directions over the years. But if there's anything I would like to say, then it is that focus on the work, the job you have today. And be

focused on how you can do that as good as possible. So for the students just do your homework, study hard and be focused on that. And for those who have started in a new job, be focused on delivering good results in the job you have. I think sometimes it's a bit dangerous to think too much about the next job, because then you are less focused on where you are. And if you are delivering good in the work, or the position, or the job you have today, I am absolutely certain that there will be some new opportunities in the future. So, stay focused, work hard, own the responsibilities you have, and then something nice will happen.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (52.21):** Thank you so much. I want to ask one other question. We had we're running short on time, but I think we have a little bit of time for a couple more questions. Today, March 25<sup>th</sup>, is the 200th anniversary of Greek independence. So, I wanted to ask you a question about Greece on this bicentennial. You just talked about the tensions in the eastern Mediterranean. Greece has accused Turkey of gas exploration in its waters and making territorial claims. These tensions are probably the worst among any two NATO Allies. How do you mitigate these tensions? You talked about some of the response that NATO has made, but what more can you say about how NATO can defend Greece's territorial sovereignty?

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (53.11):** You are absolutely right that those tensions are perhaps the most difficult tensions between two NATO Allies. Not only because there are serious differences, tensions, but also because they have been there for so many years. I have expressed my concerns both in Ankara and in other capitals, but I think also what NATO is doing is that at least we are bringing the parties together. And one of the concerns we had, especially few months ago, was the risk for any military incidents, accidents in the eastern Mediterranean, because we significantly increased military presence of Turkey and Greece in the eastern Mediterranean with planes, ships, submarines. There was high tensions, it was a real risk for military incidents. As we have seen, for instance back in the 1990s where actually those incidents led to casualties, downing of planes and casualties. It was extremely, and still is, extremely important for NATO to prevent this from happening again. And that's reason why we used the NATO platform, we brought together Greece and Turkey, established what we call a deconfliction mechanism as very operative lines of communications, direct lines of communications, 24/7, some agreed procedures. Greece and Turkey also agreed to reduce tensions by cancelling some exercises. We still work on how we can expand this mechanism for deconflicting between two Allies in eastern Med. And we welcome the progress we have seen, and there is less military presence, less tension. It is not solved but at least the tension has been reduced. And this has also helped to pave the way for what is called exploratory talks between Greece and Turkey on the underline disputes in the eastern Mediterranean. We also have a NATO presence in the Aegean, we have something called the Aegean activity, another is NATO ships sailing there, to help implement the agreement between Turkey and Greece on the migration challenges in the Aegean. And that NATO presence is important because it actually brings together Turkey and Greece, Turkey and the European Union, FRONTEX - the Border Agency, and again, I think just the fact that we bring them together is at least one important step in the right direction. So, since NATO is an organisation based on consensus, when Allies disagree, that makes it hard for us to make decisions. But at least we can be a tool, a vehicle for trying to find solutions. Either to solve a whole underlying dispute or problem if we have that between Allies or at least reduce tensions and prevent the situation from escalating and coming out of control. And that is exactly what we do. When two valued Allies, important Allies, Greece and Turkey, have some tensions and some difficulties as we see for instance in the eastern Mediterranean.

**Golfo Alexopoulos (56.28):** Thank you so much, Mr Secretary General. I think we are out of time, sadly. We thank you so much for joining us and for your generous and thoughtful questions. We all learned so much, it was a distinct honour to host you at USF.

**Jens Stoltenberg [Secretary General of NATO] (57.05):** Again, thank you so much. It has been a great privilege to be together with you and to listen to all the very relevant and important questions. And I wish you all the best and hope to see you in person at some stage where we can start to travel again. All the best, thank you.

[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_182812.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_182812.htm)