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Remarks by the Vice President at the Munich Security Conference

The Munich Security Conference
Munich, Germany

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Ambassador Ischinger. Chancellor Merkel, Secretary General, distinguished colleagues, and honored guests, I bring greetings on behalf of the 45th President of the United States, Donald Trump. In my still new capacity as Vice President, I am honored and humbled to have the privilege to address this important annual forum.

I'm also pleased to have with me two members of the President's Cabinet, one of which you've already heard from, our Secretary James Mattis, of the Department of Defense, and Secretary John Kelly, of Homeland Security. We're also joined by a distinguished delegation of United States senators and congressmen, led by Senator John McCain. Please join me in welcoming my fellow Americans here with us today. (Applause.)

It's an honor to be with you all.

Founded in 1963, the Munich Security Conference has long played an important role in international affairs, bringing together political, economic, and social leaders from both sides of the Atlantic to promote peace and prosperity for our nations and our peoples.

History will attest that when the United States and Europe are peaceful and prosperous, we advance the peace and prosperity of the entire world.

Now, the President asked me to be here today to bring his greetings -- and a message.

Today, on behalf of President Trump, I bring you this assurance. The United States of America strongly supports NATO and will be unwavering in our commitment to this transatlantic alliance. (Applause.)

We've been faithful for generations -- and as you keep faith with us, under President Trump we will always keep faith with you.

Now, the fates of the United States and Europe are intertwined. Your struggles are our struggles. Your success is our success, and ultimately, we walk into the future together.

This is President Trump's promise: We will stand with Europe, today and every day, because we are bound together by the same noble ideals -- freedom, democracy, justice, and the rule of law.

So strong is our bond that over the past century, Americans have poured forth from our land to help defend yours. It's remarkable to think that this year marks the 100th anniversary of the United States' entry into World War One.

More than two decades later, in the fires of World War Two, we fought to defeat dictatorship and keep the flame of freedom alive in Europe and across the entire world.

Tens of thousands of my fellow countrymen now rest here for eternity. Tens of thousands more still stand guard here in Europe to this day.

So lest anyone doubt the United States' commitment to Europe and the importance of your defense, they need only look to our nation's investment in your peace and prosperity, in your safety and security, yesterday and today. And it has been an investment of treasure, yes, but so much more than that, America has sent you our best and bravest. (Applause.)

Our shared values and our shared sacrifices are the source of the United States' enduring bond to the nations and peoples of Europe. We honor that history by doing our part -- all of us -- to ensure the horrors of war never return to this continent.

For generations, we have worked side by side with you to strengthen and defend your democracies. Together, we formed the North Atlantic Treaty Organization in 1949 to defend our shared heritage and shared principles, such as sovereignty, territorial integrity, and self-determination. We confronted the menace of Communism, which

threatened to overwhelm Europe and the world in its heartless, inhuman embrace. We stood together in 1990 as this very nation reunited and Eastern Europe chose freedom, free markets, and democracy.

I saw that choice firsthand as a young man. In 1977, at the age of 18, I traveled through Europe with my older brother, and we found ourselves in West Berlin. I marveled at the streets, the people, and the bustling commerce of a city renewed just 30 years after the ravages of war.

Then we crossed through Checkpoint Charlie. The vibrant color of the free world fell away, replaced by the dour greys of still-bombed-out buildings and the shadow of repression hanging over the people.

In that moment, I came face to face with the choice facing the Western World -- the choice between freedom and tyranny.

By the grace of God, and through the leadership of Reagan, Thatcher, Kohl, Mitterrand, Havel, Walesa, the wall fell, communism collapsed, and freedom prevailed.

The fall of the Soviet Union ushered in an opportunity for unprecedented peace and prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic. But the end of that era only marked the beginning of another. The collapse of communism has been followed by the rise of new adversaries and new threats.

Rogue nations developing nuclear weapons now jeopardize the safety of the entire world. Radical Islamic terrorism has fixated on the destruction of Western civilization. In the early days of this new century, that enemy struck ruthlessly at our nation's capital and our greatest city.

With the smoke still rising from Ground Zero and the Pentagon, the strength of our alliance shone forth. Just as the United States stood with Europe through the end of the 20th century, Europe stood tall with the United States at the outset of the 21st. And the American people will be forever grateful.

Again I had the privilege to see our bond firsthand. Only two weeks after those horrific attacks on 9/11, as a member of Congress I traveled to Germany to participate in an international conference on terrorism. I'll never forget what I saw as we arrived at the American Embassy in Berlin -- a wall of flowers, 10-feet high, surrounded it; fragrant tokens of condolences, support, and prayers of your people for ours.

That image will forever be etched in my heart and mind. But the support of the European community went well beyond acts of kindness. For the first and only time in its history, NATO invoked Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, fulfilling our commitment to confront our common enemies together, and the American people will never forget it.

In the global war against radical Islamic terrorists, we have been bound by shared sacrifice. For the past decade and a half, the nations of NATO and many other allies have answered the call to rid the world of this great evil. From Afghanistan to Iraq to many other conflicts across the globe, our sons and daughters have served together and fought together on the field of battle.

Thousands of our citizens, coming from every corner of this alliance and beyond, have given their lives in this struggle. Fighting alongside U.S. servicemembers under NATO's mandate, more than 1,100 brave men and women from allied nations have fallen in Afghanistan since 2001. The Afghans have lost many more in order to free their homeland and keep it free today.

No matter which country they hailed from, these heroes gave the last full measure of their devotion in the cause of our peace and our security. And I hope each one of you will assure their families, the families of their fallen that the American people will never forget their service and sacrifice on our behalf. (Applause.)

Now, those sacrifices, which continue to this day, are the surest sign of our enduring commitment to each other and our future together.

On President Trump's behalf, that future is exactly what I came here to address.

If the past century has taught us anything, it's that peace and prosperity in Europe and the North Atlantic can never be regarded as achieved; it must be continually maintained through shared sacrifice and shared commitment.

Peace only comes through strength.

President Trump believes we must be strong in our military might, able to confront any and all who would threaten our freedom and our way of life. We must be strong in our conviction that our cause is just and that our way of life is worth defending. If we lose the will to do our part to defend ourselves, we jeopardize our shared heritage of freedom.

Under President Trump's leadership, I can assure you, the United States will be strong -- stronger than ever before. We will strengthen our military, restore the arsenal of democracy, and working with many of the members of the Congress who are gathered here today, we're going to provide our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, and Coast Guard with renewed resources to defend our nation and our treaty allies from the known threats of today and the unknown threats of tomorrow.

As we speak, the United States is developing plans for significant increases in military spending to ensure that the strongest military in the world is stronger still.

We will meet our obligations to our people to provide for the common defense, and we'll continue to do our part to support our allies in Europe and in NATO.

But Europe's defense requires your commitment as much as ours. Our transatlantic alliance has at its core two principles that are central to its mission. In Article 5, we pledged to come to each other's aid in the event of an attack.

And to be ready, if and when that day comes, in Article 3 we vowed in that treaty to contribute our fair share to our common defense. The promise to share the burden of our defense has gone unfulfilled for too many for too long, and it erodes the very foundation of our alliance.

When even one ally fails to do their part, it undermines our ability to come to each other's aid. At that Wales summit in 2014, all 28 members of NATO declared their intention to move towards a minimum security commitment of 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense within the decade.

In the words of the summit's declaration, such investments were necessary in "meeting NATO's capability targets and filling NATO's capability shortfalls."

As of this moment, the United States and only four other NATO members meet this basic standard. Now, while we commend the few nations that are on track to achieve that goal, the truth is that many others, including some of our largest allies, still lack a clear and credible path to meeting this minimum goal.

Let me be clear on this point, the President of the United States expects our allies to keep their word to fulfill this commitment, and for most that means the time has come to do more. (Applause.)

We must shoulder this responsibility together because the dangers we face are growing and changing every day. The world is now a more dangerous place than at any point since the collapse of communism a quarter century ago. The threats to our safety and security span the globe, from the rise of radical Islamic terrorism, to the threats posed by Iran and North Korea, and to many others who threaten our security and our way of life.

The rise of adversaries new and old demands a strong response from all of us.

In the east, NATO has markedly improved its deterrent posture by stationing four combat-ready multinational battalions in Poland and the Baltic States.

In the wake of Russian efforts to redraw international borders by force, rest assured the United States, along with the United Kingdom, Canada, and Germany, will continue its leadership role as a framework nation in the Enhanced Forward Presence Initiative, and we will support other critical joint actions to support this alliance. (Applause.)

And with regard to Ukraine, we must continue to hold Russia accountable and demand that they honor the Minsk Agreements, beginning by de-escalating the violence in eastern Ukraine.

And know this: The United States will continue to hold Russia accountable, even as we search for new common ground, which, as you know, President Trump believes can be found.

To the south, upheavals in Africa and the Middle East have sent violence rippling in every direction, reaching not only Europe but also the United States.

Today, the leading state sponsor of terrorism continues to destabilize the Middle East, and thanks to the end of nuclear-related sanctions under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, Iran now has additional resources to devote to these efforts.

Let me be clear again: Under President Trump, the United States will remain fully committed to ensuring that Iran never obtains a nuclear weapon capable of threatening our countries, our allies in the region, especially Israel. (Applause.)

Throughout the Middle East, radical Islamic terrorists have found safe havens and secured vast resources that have allowed them to launch attacks here in Europe and inspire attacks in the United States.

Driven by evil, they target their own communities, their fellow Muslims, indiscriminately killing or enslaving those who reject their apocalyptic mania.

From Yemen to Libya, Nigeria to Syria, the rise of extremist groups ranging from ISIS and al-Qaeda, to al-Shabaab and Boko Haram endanger millions, including many faith-based peoples whose roots in their homelands extend into the mists of history.

ISIS is perhaps the greatest evil of them all. It showed a savagery unseen in the Middle East since the Middle Ages.

As President Trump has made clear, the United States will fight tirelessly to crush these enemies -- especially ISIS and its so-called caliphate -- and consign them to the ash heap of history, where they belong. (Applause.)

Last month, the President ordered the development of a comprehensive plan to utterly defeat ISIS. President Trump has no higher priority than the safety and security of the American people and ensuring the security of our treaty allies.

To confront the threats facing our alliance today, NATO must build upon its 20th century tactics and continue to evolve to confront the crises of today and tomorrow.

Last summer President Trump called on NATO to step up its efforts to disrupt terrorist plots before they ever reach our borders. And we've made great progress in expanding cooperation and information sharing between our intelligence and security services in recent years. But we must do more -- much more.

Consistent with the President's call, we are heartened to see that NATO has taken steps to increase focus on counter-terrorism and collaboration. The appointment of a new

intelligence chief, charged with facilitating collaboration on counterterrorism, marks a positive strategic shift in NATO's ability to fulfill its mission.

Going forward, we must intensify our efforts to cut off terrorists' funding, increase our cyber capabilities. We must be as dominant in the digital world as we are in the physical world. (Applause.)

We must always stay at least one step ahead of our adversaries. For our shared goal of peace and prosperity can only be achieved through superiority and strength.

For our part, thanks to President Trump, the United States will be stronger than ever before. Our leadership of the free world will not falter, even for a moment. Our strength, and that of this alliance, is not derived solely from our strength of arms, though. It's borne of our shared principles, the principles and ideals that we cherish -- freedom, democracy, justice, and the rule of law. These are the wellspring of the United States' strength and of Europe's strength.

They spring from that timeless notion that our unalienable rights -- of life and liberty -- are not granted to us by sovereigns, or governments, or kings. They are, as the American Founders observed, endowed by our Creator. Marshalling the will to confront the evils of the 21st century will require faith, faith in these timeless ideals.

And as President Trump has said in his Inaugural Address, it's important to know: "We do not seek to impose our way of life on anyone, but rather to let it shine as an example for everyone to follow."

This then is our cause. It's why NATO exists. It's why, after so many centuries of strife and division, Europe is unified.

The United States has been faithful to Europe for generations, and we will keep the faith that drove our forefathers to sacrifice so much in defense of our shared heritage.

We share a past, and after all we've been through, we share a future. Today, tomorrow, and every day hence be confident that the United States is now and will always be your greatest ally. (Applause.)

Be assured, President Trump and the American people are fully devoted to our transatlantic union.

Our choice today is the same as it was in ages past: security through shared sacrifice and strength, or an uncertain future characterized by disunity and faltering will.

Well, the United States chooses strength. The United States chooses friendship with Europe and a strong North Atlantic alliance.

And in the name of all the sacrifices of the generations who have gone before, who have fought and bled and died for this alliance, with confidence in all of you, and firm reliance

on Providence, I know the best days for America, for Europe, and for the free world are yet to come.

Thank you for the honor of joining you today and God bless you all. (Applause.)

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