**Atlantic Council**

**NATO Engages: Innovating the Alliance**

**Defence and Deterrence for a New Era**

**Introducer:**

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**Speakers:**

**His Excellency Andrzej Duda,**

**President,**

**Poland**

**His Excellency Zoran Zaev,**

**Prime Minister,**

**Republic of North Macedonia**

**Moderator:**

**Stephen Sackur,**

**Presenter,**

**BBC “HARDTalk”**

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(Applause.)

KARIN VON HIPPEL: Well, good morning, everyone, and welcome to this session on “Defence and Deterrence for a New Era.” I’m Karin Von Hippel, the director of one of the crusty think tanks that Shashank mentioned earlier, but it’s really a privilege for all of us to be part of this consortium. And I’d also like to thank all of our partners and all of our incredibly hard-working colleagues who have been putting in a lot of time over the last few weeks.

Today it’s really a pleasure to welcome two extremely distinguished speakers. They include His Excellency President Duda of Poland. Most of you know that Poland was the largest country of that early wave of new member states 20 years ago, and today, of course, Poland is really one of the most active members of the alliance.

He will be joined by His Excellency Prime Minister Zaev of the Republic of North Macedonia. As we all know, North Macedonia is about to become the 30th member of NATO, its newest member. And I think it’s fair to say that both countries are extremely committed to a strong alliance.

They will be – the two speakers will be really discussing how NATO can meet the challenges of this new era, of the 21st century. I think given all the issues that were raised already in the morning session, there is a lot for them to talk about. And so we’re looking forward to hearing that.

Now I promised – I’m about to introduce our moderator, Stephen Sackur, who, as all of you know, is the presenter for BBC’s “HARDTalk,” and I really promised him a rousing applause from everyone here. So please join me in welcoming this panel. Thank you. (Applause.)

STEPHEN SACKUR: Good morning, everybody! It is a great pleasure to see a packed hall. It’s also my honor and privilege to have two fantastic guest speakers with me today – two leaders who have taken time out from what is, I know, for both of them a very busy schedule here in London with the NATO Summit just ahead. But they’ve taken time out to be here to discuss with me some of the very, very important questions facing the NATO alliance right now.

Just by way of introduction, I’m Stephen Sackur, as Karin said. I present the “HARDTalk” show on BBC News. My day job is grilling and challenging people in power, holding them to account, and I’ll be doing a little bit of that today.

But both of my guests, I think it is fair to say, are viewing this NATO Summit as something of very great significance. President Duda, of course, representing Poland, one of the states which I would say right now is at the forefront of discussions of NATO’s future – Poland very proud to meet the 2 percent of GDP spending commitment on defense.

And we have Prime Minister Zaev of North Macedonia, who of course is on the very cusp of joining the NATO alliance. I was just talking to the prime minister. He believes that the final phase of ratification will be done early in the new year, and then North Macedonia will be the 30th member of NATO – so two wonderful guests to have with us.

We have billed this – as part of the NATO Engages event here, we’ve billed this as a discussion of “Defence and Deterrence in a New Era,” and I think it is fair to say that NATO right now faces hugely important existential questions.

So I’m going to ask both of you to open up with just some short opening remarks addressing the challenges that NATO faces today – I think challenges which get down to what is NATO for in this new era. So with that in mind, President Duda, would you kick us off?

PRESIDENT ANDRZEJ DUDA: Good morning, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, dear friends. He told me that I have two minutes to open this discussion, but this is very difficult to answer this question – a very complicated question – in two minutes because you have to look at the history of my country.

The truth is we’ve been for more than 40 years behind the Iron Curtain, yes, when Poland was not – was not fully independent, was not – was not fully free country. And in 1989, we broke down the Iron Curtain, we won this very important battle, and we became a member of the really free world, democratic Europe, and that was, I can say, our dream to join NATO, the strongest military but defense alliance in the world. We dreamed about it – we dreamed about joining the European Union, and we did it: first NATO in 1999, yes, and after five years, in 2004, we joined the European Union.

And if you ask me about NATO and about our membership and my vision of NATO, I – what I can say? First, we are very proud to be in NATO, yes, because as I said, NATO is the strongest military alliance in the world, and we can say that Europe – especially this Euro-Atlantic area is one of the most peaceful and most – and most safe areas in the world now because of – because of NATO existation, and what can – and what can I say more?

What is our goal looking at NATO, yes? We would like to have NATO strong. We would like to have NATO united. We would like to preserve this cohesion of NATO, and what was our – NATO’s best achievement during the last few years? I can say that was the establishing of NATO presence on the – in the eastern flank, yes? That was very important for our country, that was very important for Baltic States. After the Russian invasion first in Georgia – 2008 – and then in Ukraine in 2014, this enhanced forward presence in the eastern flank is one of the – one of the – one of the greatest achievements of NATO now.

MR. SACKUR: Great. Well, if I may then, I’m going to stop you there, President Duda, because what you’ve laid out there is a vision based – as you put it, your words – on cohesion, on unity, and a real focus right now on NATO’s eastern flank. So those are all key points that I want to keep in my head, and we will come back to in the discussion.

Now, Prime Minister Zaev, I want you – again, briefly if you can – just as we approach this NATO Summit, to lay out for me, as an incoming member, what you see as the purpose of NATO right now, and particularly bearing in mind your own interests in the Balkans.

PRIME MINISTER ZORAN ZAEV: So thank you very much. Thank you for inviting us. It’s, for us, a specific pleasure because we are the next member country of NATO – 30th member country of NATO. It’s good for NATO because 30 is better than 29 – (laughter) – but of course for the region, for the Western Balkans, southeastern Europe, it’s a precious one – achievement because it mean more stability, security, safety, and immediately mean investment – foreign and direct investment.

Everybody who is here must remember then that Balkan in the past was full of conflicts, wars, ethnical wars, a lot of damage – damage for the region, but for the whole European continent. Now NATO membership, after Montenegro, we are next member of NATO. That mean really a lot of stability and security. Our citizens for this region – can talk from the citizens from Republic of North Macedonia – so much belief in NATO, in unity, in stability, so we even change our constitutional name. We became Republic of North Macedonia, of course, because of building good relations with our neighbors. We are a country without open bilateral issues with any countries in the neighborhood. But of course, that opened the doors for our strategic goal.

We fulfill our dream now, like Poland fulfilled 1999, because strategic goal for us means security, stability, no any more young people to be part of conflicts, to die, et cetera. But also to participate to keep peace all around the world and share peace all around the world. But also, as I mentioned, that bring a lot of economic aspects because also that strength ruling of law, democracy values, freedoms, et cetera, et cetera.

MR. SACKUR: Excellent. Well, Prime Minister, thank you very much. Thank you both.

So you both, as I frankly expected, are leaders who have come to NATO using the rhetoric of unity, of cohesion, of stability within the NATO alliance. But now that we get to the Q&A, I’m going to introduce perhaps a little bit of sort of skepticism into the conversation.

And by the way, ladies and gentlemen, I should say I’m going to sort of quiz the two of them for 10 minutes or so, and then before we end the session I absolutely want to see hands in the air and I want to get you guys involved as well. This is going to be question-and-answer. It’s going to be proactive and interactive. So do frame your own questions as well.

But let me start, President Duda, by suggesting to you that everything we’ve seen, whether it be from President Donald Trump and his deep skepticism about the preparedness of Europe to burden share in a realistic way; or whether it be from President Macron, who as we know in recent days has expressed his fear that NATO is brain dead in terms of having a meaningful conversation about its future strategy; there are deep divisions and disagreements within the NATO alliance. Would you accept that?

PRESIDENT DUDA: You are talking about the political discussions, yes? But I also look at the results, yes? What is the result? The result is NATO presence on the eastern flank. This is the result for me, yes? This is what I – what I expected. This is what we have now in Poland.

MR. SACKUR: But with respect, even in that, Mr. President, you have big problems. The Turkish government is now saying that it will block some of the new arrangements on the eastern flank – defense of the Baltics and I guess Poland as well – unless you all as a united alliance sign onto the notion that the Kurdish groups in northern Syria are terrorists and formally acknowledge that fact.

PRESIDENT DUDA: Yes, but NATO is an alliance of almost 30 states, yes, 30 countries, and there are many interests, yes? And of course, this is a huge field of the discussion of the – of the negotiation. I talked yesterday with Mr. President Erdogan, and I hope that we will find a good solution.

MR. SACKUR: But the point is, the outside world looking at NATO today hears your language about unity and cohesion, but sees a reality – you called it politics – but sees a reality where increasingly the alliance isn’t functioning as it should because of these internal divisions.

PRESIDENT DUDA: In general, I don’t agree because look at the – look at the perspective of last 30 years, yes? In the ’90s we can say that NATO didn’t exist. Do you remember something about NATO in the ’90s?

MR. SACKUR: Well, it was a different era in the ’90s.

PRESIDENT DUDA: Yes.

MR. SACKUR: Of course, NATO was still –

PRESIDENT DUDA: Yes, and time –

MR. SACKUR: It was defending Europe’s borders, but the context was different.

PRESIDENT DUDA: Time changed, yes – yes, but we had – we had new events, yes? We had – as I said before, we had – we had Russian aggression on Georgia – in Georgia, yes, in 2008. We had – we have now Russian occupation of Crimea and part of Ukraine, and it started in 2014, so five years ago. And we still have a threat of the next invasion.

And what about NATO? And NATO – in my opinion, NATO has shown that is alive because there was –

MR. SACKUR: But –

PRESIDENT DUDA: – there was a very – a very fast reaction of NATO for all this – for all this changing of the situation.

MR. SACKUR: Just one point and then I want to get to Prime Minister Zaev. But President Macron – and I’m sure you read through his Economist interview, just as I did – he is suggesting now that NATO has to move beyond regarding Russia as the prime threat. And your focus is on the eastern flank, but he’s saying it’s time for NATO to actually move beyond the eastern flank question and look at what is happening in the Sahel, for example, look what’s happening in terms of the global terror threat, in terms of cybersecurity, in terms of artificial intelligence. He actually wants a fundamental reset of the NATO strategic mind. You’re suggesting NATO’s strategic mind is stuck on Russia.

PRESIDENT DUDA: Yes, but I don’t – but I still don’t see a problem. We can discuss about this. Because, you know, I believe in a 360-degree policy, yes, and for me it’s crucial that we have to look around. This is not the only problem of the eastern flank. We are a member of NATO, but we do not – we understand what it means that we are a member of NATO. This is not only the problem of our security, of the defense of Polish and/or Baltic states’ borders, yes? This is also the problem of the – of the Southern Europe, yes? This is also the problem of the – of the – of terrorist threat and other. So I understand it very well and I’m ready to discuss about it. So that’s why we spent more than 2 percent of our GDP for – on defense, because we are ready to fulfill all our duties or our responsibilities as a NATO member.

MR. SACKUR: Fascinating stuff. Thank you very much.

Prime Minister Zaev, I want to come to you. Just some quick-fire questions.

Number one, we’ve just been talking about Poland’s commitment to beating that 2 percent of GDP threshold on defense spending. You’re the new member coming in in the new year. Can you guarantee to us all that you will be spending more than 2 percent of GDP on defense?

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: I think that in the last two-and-a-half years we have achievement that is very rare in the European continent. We even doubled our expenditures for defense. We was 0.8, 0.9 (percent); now we are more than 1.4 percent of our GDP. And of course –

MR. SACKUR: Right. So you’re still far short of what the Americans have demanded for a long time.

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: Yes, but the goal is not later than 2024 to achieve 2 percent. I think that we will get to that earlier. And also, we spent more than 20 percent – in the moment 24 percent – for modernization of our army, what is also one of the very important – very important thing, what is financially very rare in the other member countries in the European Union. Poland is a good example. But also we are the next member country, and we started two-and-a-half years, and we do it 0.2 percent every year more.

MR. SACKUR: I wouldn’t say patience is Donald Trump’s greatest virtue. And when he hears you saying, well, we’ll get to 1.4 percent and then hopefully we’ll move to 2 percent over a period of time, he may not regard that as hugely impressive. And when – you said to me, you know, we’ve dreamed in Macedonia for a long time – North Macedonia – (laughs) – for a long time about joining NATO, I just wonder whether you worry that at the time you are now joining the alliance the Americans are clearly having a conversation back home about whether they have a future in this alliance. You probably saw John Bolton, the former national security adviser to Donald Trump, said that he believed that if Donald Trump wins a second term the United States may go into full isolationist mode. Are you worried about the viability of the alliance, and in particular America’s role in the alliance?

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: As the president mention it, it’s a political debate. Really, I think that every member country will never forget the reasons of preparing NATO, like, biggest alliance in the world, keeping – fighting for keeping peace and stability and security. And in that mind, of course, there will be inside debate, of course, in the future. Can be happen a lot of reforms in NATO and alliance. We must be more prepared for defense and deterring. Of course, it’s third decade for 21st century will start next year and NATO must be prepared for the new challenges, but I don’t believe that something big will happen with somebody who will go out from NATO. So the power of attraction of NATO, it’s really big, and I think that will continue in this direction. But of course, there must be inside debate for final decisions, I think, of that matter. You know how you mentioned hard talks can be easiest one if we have really clear vision for our future also in NATO, because we believe that we will be very soon full members of NATO.

MR. SACKUR: Well, I’m all for a bit of hard talk, that’s for sure.

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: (Laughs.)

MR. SACKUR: But I suspect some in our audience may be for a bit of hard talk, too. So let me just quickly scan the room now, see if there are any hands going up who want to join the conversation at this moment. I’ve got lots more questions, but I do want to make this as interactive as possible. So if anybody at this point would like to ask a question of President Duda or Prime Minister Zaev. You, sir, have a hand up, so we’ll go to you. There’s a microphone there.

Q: Hello. My name is Phillipe Derevenda (ph). I’m a student from the University of Kent.

This is a question to North Macedonia. Do you believe that Poland has become a global – I mean, a regional power with the Three Seas Initiative and its close link with the United States? Do you see working closer with Poland and its initiatives? I mean, as you – as you spoke about Donald Trump cutting his kind of, you know, ties with Europe, do you believe that Poland could be a bridge between the U.S. and Europe in that sense?

MR. SACKUR: OK.

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: Yes. Of course.

MR. SACKUR: Well – (inaudible) – so I didn’t think you were going to – (laughter) –

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: No, no, no. So Poland is one of the countries who was in the – in the past one of the biggest supporter for our country to achieve not only solutions of all these bilateral issues, but standards, what is needed to fulfill to be full members of NATO and also a member of European Union. Of course, that kind of politics from all Visegrad Group before, and especially Poland, was good example for us how they managed with the situation, how to help each other. So they shared the whole experience with us in six Western Balkan countries to achieve as soon as possible all needed criteria.

So we fulfill all criteria, having in mind that we are a democratic country, that ruling of law is very important like the criteria in NATO, complete freedoms of course. And that is – that is very helpful for us.

MR. SACKUR: If I may, Prime Minister – and I want the president’s view on this as well – I want to pick up on that question by just reflecting, again, on politics. Now, you two say, oh, Stephen, you know, politics is politics but the alliance goes on. But the fact is, just last month you received a major kick in the teeth from France as President Macron basically blocked accession talks going ahead for North Macedonia and for Albania. And he said, you know what, I’m not happy anymore with the entire accession process; we’ve got to restructure it, reframe it. We’re going to call a halt to further accessions. It seems to me that creates another big political tension inside NATO because here’s Macron saying I want more focus on the EU as a strategic defense alliance platform, and at the same time he’s blocking you from EU membership, which creates tensions inside NATO. How worried are you about these new tensions within Europe?

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: Well, it’s really unfair for us candidate countries. We are a candidate country 15 years and we have 10 positive recommendation, and now they confirm all 28 countries there in the European Union Council – they confirm that we fulfill 100 percent of the reforms. Upon that, we find solution with Bulgaria. Upon that, we find solution with this – through this historical agreement with Greece. Through this agreement we even change our constitutional name normally. And he decide – also he mention it – that now Europe need more time because of future reforms. Of course, was very disturbing for us, and we was very much disappointed. But we’re continuing with these reforms what we do, and we hope that this mistake – because it was mistake for Europe, not only for us – will be changed very soon.

All countries, only France was the only one who expect the debate for the new methodology for enlargement of European Union. And we hope that we will continuing very soon our path to full membership of European Union.

MR. SACKUR: So to be blunt about it, President Duda, do you see the things that President Macron is doing right now in a European context and in a NATO context as being deeply problematic? Would you use the same language of mistakes being made?

PRESIDENT DUDA: I’m sure that the Euro-Atlantic alliance is one of the crucial elements of our stability. I’m talking about Europe, not only about Poland, our stability and our security, yes? And the question is, what shall we do to preserve and to protect all this achievement we have now? Because I can say that look at the European Union and look at the NATO.

Of course, we know there are many problems in both alliances. Yes, there is – there are tensions and we have Brexit in European Union. OK. I know. But do – can you – but can you show me the greatest successes in the entire world than those two unions, yes, two alliances, NATO alliance and European Union alliance? No. This is – this is two best institutions created in the world during last 100 years, yes?

And of course we have tensions because we have many countries. As I said, many countries with their own interests, yes? And we have to discuss how to improve the problems, how to improve mechanisms. And if you – if you hear the voice of Mr. President Macron, yes, I would like to ask him: Mr. President, don’t talk about the brain of the – of the NATO and et cetera, et cetera. Let’s please propose us what can we do to improve our cooperation in NATO, in European Union, yes?

MR. SACKUR: OK. Yes.

PRESIDENT DUDA: But concrete. Please, please give us concrete proposition, yes? What shall we do? This is the – this is the first element. But the –

MR. SACKUR: Forgive me, Mr. President.

PRESIDENT DUDA: (Laughs.)

MR. SACKUR: We’re running short of time and I want to ask you very quick-fire questions, but I also want to get at least one more audience question in, and we’re short of time. Sorry, Mr. President, but we’ll come back to you, I promise you.

Q: Hello.

MR. SACKUR: Yes, sir.

Q: Paul Taylor from Friends of Europe.

To both presidents, you’ve talked really only about the eastern front and the Balkans, but many people inside NATO also see security challenges in the south. And really, there’s been no thought apparently given at all to that at the moment. So what do you – what more do you think NATO should be doing in the south? Who should be taking care of security in the Sahel, stabilizing Libya, looking at possibly peacekeeping in the Near East and so on? Are those roles for NATO? Or if not, for whom? Thank you.

MR. SACKUR: OK. Good question, but I – both of you, can I ask now for really brief answers, to the point? Because we want to squeeze in as much as possible. So President Duda first on that one?

PRESIDENT DUDA: I have no doubts that we have to look at the NATO as the alliance of all member states, yes? So this approach, NATO 360 degrees, is a crucial idea in NATO, and we should look at the eastern flank of NATO and we also should look at the – at the southern flank of the NATO, and we have to achieve all – and we have to try to answer for all the challenges we have there. So this is – I have no doubts.

MR. SACKUR: All right.

And Prime Minister Zaev.

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: I think if we mention that this – that NATO is the biggest alliance in the world and the more important war and peace factor in the world, also have responsibility to keep peace all around the world. And of course, some aspects of more focus in the – in the south because there is really need as soon as possible peace. Everybody who can help can address there and to be more focused also. NATO have bigger responsibility for that.

MR. SACKUR: All right. So you’re both talking about, you know, the 360-degree approach. But let me ask you a very simple question. You can almost answer it yes or no. Is Vladimir Putin’s Russia still the number-one threat to NATO?

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: I think that the NATO have the threats in front of alliance connected with the modern world, with 21st century – cyber threats, security threats, that kind of hybrid threats, what has happened very much. And we much – we very much focus all together to share experience how to fight that, to deter that, and of course to defense from that. That is the modern threats. Sometimes can happen also from inside of NATO countries, is depend on what kind of radical structures are playing or not.

MR. SACKUR: Russia, still the number-one threat?

PRESIDENT DUDA: I don’t want to assess which threat is higher, which threat is more dangerous, yes? We have terrorist threat now. We have threat of Russian imperialism. We have threats on the – in Middle East, yes? We have many threats around, and we have answered.

MR. SACKUR: I, sadly, have a threat of my own to deal with now because I’ve got a red badge up there saying time’s up, which is most unfortunate because I know there are lots more questions in the hall and I know hands are still going up. But I have been told on the strict pain of punishment that if I overrun too much I’ll be carted off and sent to the Tower of London or something.

So, ladies and gentlemen, I’m sorry that I haven’t managed to squeeze more questions in. I think you’ll all agree that the input from both of our leaders here has been fascinating – nuanced, but fascinating. So I thank you, President Duda and Prime Minister Zaev, very much indeed. And I thank you all for listening so carefully. Thank you very much.

PRESIDENT DUDA: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

MR. SACKUR: Thank you.

PRIME MIN. ZAEV: Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)