

**Session:**

**Setting the Stage for the 2019 Leaders’ Meeting**

Speaker: Jens Stoltenberg, Secretary General, North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Moderator: Lyse Doucet, Chief International Correspondent, BBC

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(Applause.)

LYSE DOUCET: Good afternoon, ladies – well, good morning, ladies and gentlemen. (Pause.) Good morning!

AUDIENCE: Good morning!

MS. DOUCET: And happy birthday!

I have to say that I have never been to such a big birthday party in my life, and on top of it, a 70th birthday party for NATO. What a great privilege for all of us to be here.

The NATO secretary-general describes this seventy-year-old as active, agile, adapting to the future. Wow, not bad for a seventy-year-old. Well, they say seventy is the new forty. (Laughter.) Hashtag #sure.

Now, I’m told about half of this audience is actually under the age of forty. Where are you – all the under-forties? (Laughter.) Ooh-la-la. Seventy is the new forty? You will find out.

But, you know, others are making other comments, commenting on the mental health of this seventy-year-old, saying the seventy-year-old is brain dead. And also, others make ageist comments, saying the seventy-year-old is obsolete. So what kind of a birthday party will this be?

Ladies and gentlemen, please join me in welcoming the man who will set the table for the birthday party, Jens Stoltenberg. (Applause.)

Good morning.

SECRETARY-GENERAL JENS STOLTENBERG: Good morning.

MS. DOUCET: Good morning and happy birthday!

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much, and happy birthday to all of you.

MS. DOUCET: Yes. (Laughter.)

And I must begin with the question, I think, that is on everybody’s mind.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: And that is –

MS. DOUCET: How was your breakfast with President Trump? (Laughter.)

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: It was, as always, a great breakfast, and we had the omelet, and some sausages, and brown toast, and orange juice. So that was a great breakfast, and as always, paid by the United States. (Laughter.) So we have fair burden sharing

MS. DOUCET: Oh! Oh, dear, be careful. (Applause.)

I hope there was a bit of burden sharing there. The Norwegians perhaps provided some sausages or – but a lot of words must have gone back and forth across that table. Let’s just randomly pick three: very, very nasty. That’s what – how President Trump has described President Macron’s comment about the NATO alliance, declaring it strategically brain dead.

Now, I know Norwegians and NATO secretary-generals don’t use words like “nasty,” but at the very least, the comments by President Macron weren’t nice.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: I have a comment on what he has said, and I don’t agree. And I think that more important that I don’t agree is the fact that when you look at NATO, you see that we are actually delivering. We are doing more. We are acting together. We are proving every day that this alliance is agile, is active, and it’s delivering.

I have, for instance – so we have just implemented the biggest reinforcements of our collective defence in a generation since the end of the Cold War. For the first time in our history we have combat-ready troops in the eastern part of the alliance. And we have tripled the size of the NATO response force, we are able to reinforce if needed, and we invest in high-end capabilities to step up in the fight against terrorism in the new training mission in Iraq, and European allies are investing more in the defence. So if you just look at the substance, you can see that this alliance is delivering.

MS. DOUCET: Some say it’s the most successful alliance in history, but there now seems to be some fundamental disagreements about this alliance’s future, its mission, and at the very least, to be the NATO secretary-general at this time, the fact that big people are raising big questions in public must be a matter of concern.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Yes and no because –

MS. DOUCET: Let’s deal with the yes first.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Yeah, because – yes, of course, we should never question the unity and the willingness – the political willingness to stand together and to defend each other because the whole purpose of NATO is to preserve peace. It’s to prevent conflict by sending a clear message to any potential adversary that if one ally is attacked, it would trigger a response from the whole alliance, and by doing that we preserve the peace, we prevent any conflict.

MS. DOUCET: So let’s get clear on this because, as you know, deterrence is not just a question of military hardware, and you’re doing well on that front. It’s also a question of perception and political credibility.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Yes, yes.

MS. DOUCET: And therefore, NATO’s credibility has been dented by these very public rows about even your founding principle: one for one – all for one and one for all, collective security.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Yes, but then I think – but also strongly believe that the best way of expressing as well is actually through what we do. Action speaks louder than words. And the fact that we have these troops in the eastern part of the alliance for the first time – combat-ready troops – which are multilateral – multinational troops headed by or led by the U.S., Canada, United Kingdom, Germany, that sends a very clear message that if any of these countries are attacked, NATO is already there. It will trigger a response from the whole alliance.

MS. DOUCET: The Baltic expansion was a huge achievement, but you have President Erdogan coming, telling you that if you don’t recognize his Kurdish enemies, the Kurds in Syria, as terrorists, he’s not going – he’s going to block the Baltic expansion.

Can you find a form of words to come out of this summit with – healing that rift and keeping the Baltic expansion –

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Well, it’s well known that we have some issues related to how to designate the YPG – PYG (sic), the organization in Syria. There are different views among the NATO allies. But we have plans in place to protect all the Baltic countries, and Poland, and all the allies, and more than plans. We have forces – the fact that we have forces there sends a very clear message about our readiness to protect and defend all allies.

And sometimes we also hear that the US is leaving Europe. That’s not correct. The US is actually increasing their presence in Europe.

It’s correct that after the end of the Cold War the US gradually reduced its military presence. The last US battle tank left Bremerhaven in December 2013, but now the US is back with a full armoured brigade and pre-positioned equipment for yet another brigade and even more.

So there is more US presence in Europe, more US troops in Europe. I can’t think about any strong way to demonstrate the US commitment to Europe than that.

MS. DOUCET: OK, well, let’s do with it – just one issue by issue. So do you think by tomorrow when the declaration of some kind is made you will have found a form of words to resolve this growing rift with Turkey?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: I will not promise that, but what I can say is that we are working on that and that we already have plans in place. What we are discussing is the revision of plans. We are constantly updating and revising plans, but it’s not like NATO doesn’t have a plan to defend the Baltic countries. We have a plan, and as I said, we have the forces, so – and we have the presence. So I think that’s the strongest expression of our collective defence commitment to NATO’s collective defence clause.

MS. DOUCET: President Macron has defended his comments, and he actually says it has been a wake-up call for NATO, so it has been helpful.

Others in the alliance look at it differently. They are saying actually his comments backfired because some big NATO partners like Germany doubled down on their commitment to NATO.

How would you describe his intervention? Well, we’ll take – I know you can’t criticize – let’s just take the personality out of it – that intervention.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Well –

MS. DOUCET: Helpful? A wakeup call or backfire?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: No, I will – I will not go into that. What I will say is that I don’t agree.

And then the most important thing is for me actually what NATO does. I expect NATO –

MS. DOUCET: But did it force you – for example, I understand there is going to be at this – at this meeting – it’s not a summit – there’s going to be an agreement on a wise persons group to look at NATO’s future strategy?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: What I expect the leaders to agree is that we will conduct a process, a reflection on how to further strengthen the political dimension of NATO. Exactly how we organize that I expect the allies to also meet to put forward proposals. But the important thing is not exactly how we organize such a reflection; the important thing is that we reflect on not whether we need NATO, not the question of fundamentals of NATO, but that we reflect on how can we further strengthen NATO, especially the political dimension of NATO.

And I think that’s a good thing, because we are twenty-nine allies from both sides of the Atlantic. Of course there are differences. It would be strange if twenty-nine allies with different political parties, different history, different geography, all of us agreed on everything. But the lesson we have learned from history is that despite these differences, we have always been able to unite around our core task to protect and defend each other because it’s in our international – our national security interest to do so.

And we have to sometimes remember that this is not the first time there are differences between NATO allies. Going back to the Suez crisis in ’56, or when France decided to leave the military cooperation in ‘66, or the Iraq War in 2003, and many other examples, there have been differences. But this alliance has shown incredible strength, resilience, and ability to deal with these differences without weakening the core task of this alliance.

MS. DOUCET: But still – you’re absolutely right that NATO has had to deal with these challenges consistently throughout its – throughout the decades. But there wasn’t Twitter in 1956 –

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: No, that’s true.

MS. DOUCET: – or in 1966. There wasn’t the kind of social media, which means our perceptions are forged by the fact that there’s this instantaneous information. And this is something that every morning you wake up, you must wonder what’s going to be on Twitter today.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Yes, but I think you just have to realize that that’s a different world. That’s true. But if you look at for instance the opinion polls, especially in the United States, it’s record high support for NATO. And not only in the public opinion in the United States, but also in the Congress. They have stated again and again the strong support for NATO. So there is this big – (inaudible) – all of a sudden. Why? People are questioning the strength of the transatlantic bond on both the sides of the Atlantic. Actually, there is stronger public, popular support for NATO than it has been for many, many, many years in most of the NATO allied countries, especially in the United States.

Second, we are doing more together, North America and Europe, than we have done for decades, with more U.S. presence and European allies stepping up.

You know, I’m a politician and I’m used to being criticized for having good rhetoric – rhetorics, but bad substance. In NATO it’s the opposite. We have bad rhetorics, but extremely good substance. And that’s a good thing. (Applause.)

MS. DOUCET: Let’s take some questions from the audience. The lady in red and the man in blue.

Q: I’m Patricia Sasnal (ph) from the Polish Institute of International Affairs, and I want to ask you about the substance, Mr. Secretary-General.

It seems to me that there is one country behind the controversies in the political lack of cohesion within NATO, both when it comes to President Trump’s criticism of NATO and President Macron’s ideas for NATO in the future, and that’s China. So my simple question to you is, what is NATO’s idea for China?

MS. DOUCET: And it’s on the agenda the first – for the first time in a NATO – a NATO meeting, China.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Yeah. I think the answer is that it is a very important thing that we have agreed in NATO that we need to address the rise of China together because until now China was not on our agenda, in a way. We left that to the different allies, especially the United States and some other allies which are present in the Pacific, but China was not a NATO issue. But we have now, of course, recognized that the rise of China has security implications for all allies. There are some opportunities, but also some obvious challenges.

China has the second-largest defence budget in the world. They recently displayed a lot of new, modern capabilities, including long-range missiles able to reach all of Europe and the United States, hypersonic missiles, gliders. And we also see that – this is not about moving NATO into the South China Sea, but it is about taking into account that China’s coming closer to us in the Arctic, in Africa, investing heavily in our infrastructure in Europe, in cyberspace. So we just have to understand that this has implications for NATO.

And this – and so for the first time we have then decided that we need to address this together. And we have work going on in NATO to then develop a common approach to China – not to create a new adversary, but just to analyze, understand, and then respond in a balanced way to the challenges that China poses.

MS. DOUCET: And there was a question here? No? Question went away? Then to this gentleman.

Q: Solomon Passy, the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria. One question and one invitation, Secretary-General.

The question is to follow up on the question on China. Isn’t it time not to make a new adversary from China, but to make a new sort of a dialogue establishing NATO-China Council in the way in which we have NATO-Russia Council? It may work better than the previous one. This was a suggestion which the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria made some ten years ago, but today I would upgrade it with one idea more. In order to understand the Chinese we need sort of a technological bridge with Taiwan, which may help us a lot.

And the invitation follows. Since Lord Carrington, your predecessor, you are the first secretary-general of NATO who hasn’t had the chance to address the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria.

MS. DOUCET: OK. OK. (Laughs.)

Q: I was not persuasive enough, so I make use of this occasion to invite you to address the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria, like your first predecessor did.

MS. DOUCET: All 500 of us will be there, don’t worry. OK. (Laughter.)

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: OK, but I recently visited Bulgaria, so I’ll have to come back, I understand.

MS. DOUCET: OK. Let’s just take a – just take a – just get a sprinkling to see what the mood is in the audience. Can we get a microphone? The gentleman with the – with the – yeah, with the – people think it’s an auction here, with their papers and the –

Q: I’m Harlan Ullman with the Atlantic Council. Secretary-General, thank you for your comments.

As you know, NATO spends about fifteen times more on defence than Russia does. Only four NATO states physically border on Russia, six if you count the – Kaliningrad. So I’m wondering, why is spending more money going to make NATO more secure? And spending more money doesn’t address what I think is a primary Russian threat, namely active measures. Could you comment on both those, please?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: I didn’t get the –

Q: Active measures.

MS. DOUCET: Active measures. Why spend more? So let’s take first the issue, a NATO-China Council.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: We don’t have any plans to establish a NATO-China Council, but we believe – and also of course have political contacts with China. We have some military lines of communications. The deputy secretary-general – the former deputy secretary-general visited China I think a year ago or something. And then, of course, we are not going to establish a new adversary, but just have to take into account that the rise of China has implications for our security, and we are now analyzing and addressing that together.

On defence spending, you know, I’m always a bit careful about these figures, partly because, you know, when you compare NATO defence spending with Russia defence spending, you use market prices for currency and you don’t take into account the huge cost differences. So of course the cost for a soldier, an officer in Russia, is totally different than the cost in a NATO-allied country, or in Norway or in the United States or Britain. So if you tried to introduce some kind of purchasing-power comparisons, then those figures are totally different. So I’m not saying – I’m only saying that to find precise and accurate ways to measure, it’s not so easy when you compare so different economies with so total different cost levels.

Second, NATO’s increased defence spending is not only about Russia. It’s correct that it was triggered by the fact that Russia used military force against neighbours in Ukraine, in Georgia, but also by the fact that we had to step up in the fight against terrorism. It’s not – it was a big military undertaking to liberate all the territory that ISIS controlled in Iraq and Syria. And we need to respond also to new threats, including in cyber. We need high readiness of forces and all that. So we all reduced defence spending after the end of the Cold War to record low numbers, but then when we do that when tensions are going down we have to be able to increase defence spending when tensions are going up. And 2 percent is historically not that high. During the Cold War it’s more like 3 and 4 percent.

So, yeah, I think it’s the right thing to do, and I welcome the fact that actually allies now are increasing. When we made the pledge, three allies met the 2 percent guideline. Now nine allies meet the 2 percent guideline. All allies have stopped the cuts. All allies are increasing. And the majority of allies have plans in place to meet 2 percent by 2024. So this is a huge difference, and that shows that NATO is delivering. We are agile and active.

MS. DOUCET: You’ve often said, Secretary-General, that there’s a two-track approach to Russia, dialogue and deterrence.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Yeah.

MS. DOUCET: Some NATO members are saying there should be more dialogue. Do you think the balance is right now, or is this something you think should be discussed here in London or outside London?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: First of all, I strongly believe in this dual-track approach, because I think there’s no contradiction between deterrence, defence and dialogue. Actually, I believe as long as we are strong, as long as we are firm, we can also engage in dialogue with Russia.

And I say that also because that’s my Norwegian experience. Even during the coldest period of the Cold War, we were able to work with Russia on issues like the delimitation line in the Barents Sea, fishery, energy, environment, many other things. So it’s possible to make deals with Russia. And I strongly believe that NATO and NATO allies can do the same.

I agree we need to deliver on deterrence and defence, and we are delivering on that. But at the same time, I think that we could do more and should do more on dialogue. This is partly to try to strive for a better relationship with Russia. But even if we don’t believe that we’re able to improve the relationship with Russia, at least in the near future, we need to manage a difficult relationship, avoid incidents, accidents, with more military presence. With high tensions, we have to make sure that we have as much transparency and predictability as possible to avoid dangerous situations from occurring.

The last thing I’d say about dialogue with Russia is arms control. We need to find new ways of addressing arms control. The demise of the INF Treaty is really a serious setback. We need to find – and that is one of the issues we will discuss at the leaders’ meeting tomorrow – how to reinvigorate, how to find ways to conduct credible, real arms control, especially in the nuclear domain.

MS. DOUCET: I wonder if there’s more under-35s –

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: There is a woman –

MS. DOUCET: – who want to ask a question.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: There is – there is a woman over there and –

MS. DOUCET: Oh, there. OK.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: You’re not able to see her because she’s –

MS. DOUCET: And then there’s – we’ll take – OK, there’s two women here. And, oh, there’s a man here.

Q: Thank you. I’m 32. Dr. Katharine Wright, lecturer in international politics at Newcastle University.

So NATO reaffirmed its commitment to U.N. Security Council Resolution 1325 in the Women, Peace and Security Agenda last year and the revised NATO/EAPC policy. I wondered if you could tell us, Secretary-General, what is the value of Women, Peace and Security to NATO? Thank you.

MS. DOUCET: OK, and let’s hold that. So just get – there’s two – there’s three – OK. Oh, the man took the microphone. OK.

Q: Hi. Good morning. Sandro Marrone (sp) from Denshofis Institute (ph), Roma.

As NATO is a political-military alliance, not just a military one, how do you see possible developments in terms of partnership with countries in North Africa and the Middle East in an effort to stabilize the southern flank of NATO? Thank you.

Q: OK, 1325, the Women, Peace and Security.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: The Women, Peace and Security is extremely important for NATO. And actually, when I was prime minister of Norway, Norway actually was the first country to finance a special post, a special representative on Women, Peace and Security. And now this is a permanent position in NATO, because we realize that gender equality is not only the right thing to do, but also the smart thing to do.

This is partly about mobilizing women as part of the armed forces in our member states, but also, of course, when we do missions operations, to make sure that we do everything we can to prevent sexual abuse and other ways of misconduct, partly by our own forces, so they’re all trained, and in a way also learned how to behave, but not least by reporting when we see examples of misconduct or sexual abuse or bad behavior against women and children, and also when we train. We train Afghan forces. We train forces elsewhere in the world; Iraqi forces. Then Women, Peace and Security is part of that.

MS. DOUCET: OK. And in terms of counterterrorism and cooperation to the south?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Oh, yeah, sorry.

MS. DOUCET: Yes.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: No – sorry – no, that’s, of course, important. I strongly believe that NATO has to be able to deploy large number of troops in big combat operations to fight terrorism, as we have done, or addresses crisis, as we have done in the Balkans and in Afghanistan. We have to be able to do that again.

But in the long run, it’s better to train local forces. Prevention is better than intervention. So I strongly believe in working with partners and enabling them to stabilize their own country. And therefore we work also with partners in North Africa, especially Tunisia, but also other partners in North Africa, helping them to develop their defence and security institutions, intelligence, special-operation forces, because if we are able to do that, then they will more – it is more likely they will succeed in stabilizing their own countries. And that’s important for them, but, of course, also important for us. If our neighbours are more stable, we are more secure.

MS. DOUCET: OK, the two – the ladies here.

Q: Nadia Skuria (sp). I’m an associate fellow at RUSI.

Thank you very much, Mr. Stoltenberg, for your very useful comments. And most importantly, thank you so much for your continued support to Georgia. Yet we see that almost every single day Russia keeps violating the Georgian sovereignty. So my question to you is, how likely it is that countries like Georgia and Ukraine, that suffered the most from the Russian occupation, may be offered membership into the – into an alliance in any foreseeable future? Thank you.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: So NATO decided at the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008 – I was there myself in a different capacity; I remember we decided then that Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO. This decision still stands.

At the same time, we are not put in place any exact timetable. What we focus on now is how we can help both Georgia and Ukraine moving towards Euro-Atlantic integration, implementing reforms, modernizing the defence and security institutions. And speaking about Georgia, we have more NATO presence in Georgia now than ever before. We have a training centre outside Tbilisi. We have a big exercise there. We have political close contacts. I visited and North Atlantic Council visited Tbilisi not so long ago. We actually also went to Ukraine.

So we are working with both Georgia and Ukraine. And I think that there is a lot between full membership and nothing. And what we do is that while we are helping Georgia and Ukraine moving towards NATO, we are also delivering more cooperation. That’s good for Georgia and Ukraine, but it’s also good for NATO, because Georgia and Ukraine participate in NATO missions and operations, for instance, in Afghanistan.

MS. DOUCET: OK. It’s fantastic there are so many hands going up. This is truly the spirit of NATO Engages. But sadly, we have four minutes and 18 seconds.

To you.

Q: Thank very much. Anamerec Sholi (ph), political scientist.

My question is about 2 percent. You say 2 percent. I think it’s more quantitative measurement. And it has taken a lot of attention of NATO member states, though you kind of underestimate the importance of qualitative aspect and qualitative feedback you need from your previous operations in terms of, as you said, managing difficult relations with Russia, and also, as my previous colleague said, about active measures.

So how helpful is it to talk about quantitative metrics when we have qualitative problems? Thank you.

MS. DOUCET: Qualitative response.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: We need both. And what we agreed when we made the pledge to invest more was that we agreed to spend more and spend better. So therefore, this is part about spending more, investing more, but it is also about spending better. So we also agreed, for instance, that we should invest more in research and development. We have this 20 percent, that 20 percent of the defence budget should be allocated for research, development and investments in new capabilities. So we have to do both.

But I think in the long run it’s obvious that you cannot get more out of less. So we cannot continue to cut. You need input to have some output. And the problem is that, of course, I agree that it is quality. It is output that matters at the end of the day. It’s harder to measure output. So therefore, I think it’s important that we focus on both, both on quality but also on the need for having more resources. And the good thing is that’s exactly what NATO is doing now.

MS. DOUCET: OK, there’s a question over on this side. The hand went down. It is this one here, yeah. The woman with her hand up, yeah. I’m really, really sorry.

Q: Hi. I’m a student at the University of Sheffield.

With regards to emerging security threats, how important do you think the Arctic will be as a setting of increasing tensions with American attempted intervention, perhaps more jokingly with Greenland, but also Russia’s involvement with the increased presence there?

MS. DOUCET: Thank you.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Well, the Arctic is – the importance of the Arctic is increasing, for several reasons; partly because we see more Russian presence up in the Arctic. We see also China is increasing their presence in the Arctic. They define themselves as a near-Arctic country, trying to be a member of the Arctic Council.

And, of course, the melting of the ice means also that the whole geography is going to change, because it will be easier to have economic activity, sea lines of communications and so on, also in the Arctic, and also from the Northeast Passage, and actually perhaps also the Northwest Passage.

So this is changing the importance of the Arctic. Therefore, we also need to make sure that NATO is present in the Arctic. And some of the investments we make in new ships, maritime capabilities, surveillance capabilities, but also aircraft capabilities, are relevant for the Arctic.

At the same time, I have always been part of this tradition where we used to say that we have the high north and low tensions. And we should at least try to maintain cooperation with all the Arctic states, including Russia, in the Arctic Council, and also in the Barents Sea Council.

So, again, we have this balance between military presence but also political cooperation with Russia over the Arctic.

MS. DOUCET: I’m very sorry. We only have thirty seconds left. And I think – let’s try to give a message to the secretary-general to bring to these very important meetings of the alliance at the 70th birthday. How many of you in this room are in a mood to celebrate the alliance at 70? OK, and how many of you are coming to this birthday party, well, a little bit worried that some things have to change?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Well, I would like to change. NATO has to change.

MS. DOUCET: Just one last word from here. I mean, if you Google NATO 70th, the words which would come up on social media would be muted celebration, dysfunctional family, fractious, headaches for you. What words would you use to describe this moment, in light of both the challenges and successes at your door?

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: That NATO is the most successful alliance in history because we have always been able to change. And as long as we continue to change, we will continue to be the most successful alliance in history. So I’m extremely in favour of change.

You ask people whether we’re in favour of change or whether we’re in favour of celebration. I’m in favour of change and celebration. And that’s the message. (Applause.)

MS. DOUCET: Happy birthday. Thank you for joining us, ladies and gentlemen.

SEC.-GEN. STOLTENBERG: Thank you. (Applause.)

(END)