



**Keynote Speech
by
Federal Minister of Defence**

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**Opening the
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Check against delivery!

Ambassador Ischinger, once more, you have put together an impressive agenda this year. The MSC continues to be a unique forum because it connects tradition with the future.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please allow me to switch to English to say that it is my distinct pleasure to inaugurate this year's conference with my colleague from the United Kingdom, Gavin Williamson.

There is no better place, no better time, to underline the friendship between our two countries. Germany and the UK stand together, shoulder to shoulder, as our soldiers do every day on their missions.

We have agreed to deepen our partnership even further – especially in the context of Brexit. We signed our Joint Vision Statement in Germany in October. Our Typhoons and Eurofighters are patrolling the Baltic skies, wing to wing. And I am looking forward to our meeting in Oxford next week.

Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is important to have partners in this world that we live in.

We are currently experiencing powerful dynamics – in technological progress, in climate change, in wealth distribution, and in the global balance of power. While these changes bring uncertainty, they also provide opportunities.

All nations strive to find partners to help them harness these opportunities – and protect their citizens from the risks they entail. No nation can successfully do this solely at national level.

We need and seek cooperation – all of us. China, for example, is developing the New Silk Road project. Russia is pushing the Eurasian Union. And Germany is determined to strengthen NATO and the EU.

But our approaches differ fundamentally. In NATO and the EU we seek true partnership. Our partnerships are not built on domination. They do not create political and economic dependencies.

Our partnerships make us stronger – by strengthening our sovereignty. For in our partnerships, interests and values are aligned. While to some, the world is a zero-sum game, we see the opportunity for growing together and prospering together.

This is why NATO remains our first choice when it comes to security. For NATO members are more than partners. We are Allies.

Because every single one of us stands by the commitment laid down in Article 5. Because we stand by the weakest among our Allies just as we stood by the strongest – by invoking Article 5 for the first and so far only time after 9/11. And because NATO is more than just a military alliance. It is a political alliance.

And as a political alliance, we are faced with what is a prominent feature of the new security situation: the return of great power competition.

Our American friends recognised that early on. We, too, understand this now and we realise: Whether we want to or not, Germany and Europe are a part of this competition. We are not neutral. We side with freedom and human dignity. We side with democracy and the rule of law.

This is what NATO has stood for in the past 70 years. NATO provides reliability in an unreliable world.

Allow me to make three statements on the future of NATO.

1. We Europeans must carry more weight.

The American call for fairer burden-sharing – we have been hearing it for years –, it is justified.

It took Russia's aggression against Ukraine for us to change our course. Since then, all European Allies have increased their defence spending. The German defence budget has increased by 36% since 2014 in accordance with NATO criteria.

And we have a clear plan: The White Paper and the Capability Profile both detail how the Bundeswehr will modernise its equipment by 2024. Our budget will thus have increased by 80%, ten years after Wales.

Facing the facts, we know that we must do more. Especially Germany.

We are committed to the 2% target. The German government has just confirmed this to NATO – and it has been laid down in our coalition agreement.

Europe, too, is doing more. We have set a course towards a European Defence Union. We have finally found ways and means to overcome our fragmentation. We are harmonising planning, procurement and operational readiness. This creates new, common European capabilities. NATO directly and immediately benefits from these capabilities as well. They enable us Europeans to act in times of crisis. This, too, is transatlantic burden-sharing.

In order to be able to carry more weight, however, we must resolve some contradictions.

Germany is in favour of adopting the majority principle in European foreign policy decisions. Given that, we must accept that German maximum positions will not win a majority. Our external economic policy should be coordinated within Europe. Only then will it be consistent.

Also, it is imperative that we achieve clarity concerning armaments exports.

We Germans should not claim that we have better morals than France, or a more insightful human rights policy than the United Kingdom. We have to muster the political strength to adopt a reliable, common approach, which combines our security interests and our humanitarian principles. Just like our European partners do.

2. We must uphold the principle of fairness in our transatlantic friendship.

Fairness is a principle in military burden-sharing, and fairness is a principle in political decision-making.

Our military missions are based on the rule: Go in together, come out together.

It applies to Afghanistan, to Resolute Support. This week, the German cabinet has extended the Bundeswehr mandate for another year. This is a very clear sign that we stand by our responsibilities. The Afghan security forces need more advice and training in order to be able to keep the Taliban at bay on their own.

It is a good thing that we agreed in Europe that every development of the military mission is tied to the progress of the peace talks. And decisions will be discussed and made in the Alliance in light of that progress.

We know that only an Afghan peace can be a true peace. This also means that the results of talks with the Taliban must be supported by the Afghan government and society.

Taking decisions together – this must also apply to Syria, where almost all NATO members are joined in the fight against ISIL. This morning, we discussed further steps in the Defeat ISIL core group together.

Our mission continues because ISIL has not yet been completely defeated and because it is changing its character into an underground network. Therefore our emphasis is shifting from the military component towards stabilization.

A new government has been formed in Iraq. That is a good thing! We should support it, so that all groups – Shia, Sunni, Kurds, who fought so bravely with us, and all other groups – can participate equally in reconstruction.

The INF Treaty is another example of the fact that a common approach makes us stronger.

It is right that

- we as NATO condemn the Russian breach of the Treaty.
- we will do everything in our power to preserve the substance of the Treaty.
- we make it clear that we must respond to the increased risk posed by Russian arms, especially to us in Europe.

- we conduct an analysis to find a smart mix of measures to take in the event that Russia does not relent.

The tit-for-tat strategy practiced in the 1980s is not going to help us here. It is also certain that arms control initiatives will be an important but by no means sufficient part of the measures.

The most important thing is that we, as Allies, follow a common approach. That way all of us gain in credibility and legitimacy.

3. As NATO Allies, we must always be guided by both interests and values.

Especially since we are living in times in which politics is increasingly driven by emotions. Especially since we see people manipulate fears to gain power and playing fast and loose with the truth, poisoning our discourse.

This is precisely why it is so important that our actions as Atlantic Allies are determined by interests and values. The truth is: We are not always successful in doing that. But unlike others, we want our success to be measured by whether we meet this standard.

Of course, NATO is about cash, capabilities and contributions. But it is also about dignity, decency and dependability. Only if we can combine these elements will NATO maintain its unity and inner strength.

Thank you.