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“Reaching Out and Standing Up: Moving the Trans-Atlantic Alliance Forward”

**Remarks to the Oslo Military Society by
U.S. Ambassador Benson K. Whitney**

On June 28th, 1962, young Siegfried Noffke was moments away from completing a tunnel under the watchtowers and barbed wire of the Berlin Wall. The previous August, after visiting relatives in West Berlin, Noffke found his crossing point closed and could only wave to his wife and young daughter on the eastern side. He decided the only chance to reunite his family was to smuggle them to freedom in the west. On that early June morning, Noffke broke through the last of the 200-yard tunnel into a cellar of an East Berlin house. Instead of finding his family, Noffke was met by the Stasi and killed in a hail of gunfire, the first to die for freedom at the Berlin Wall.

For the next 28 years the Berlin Wall stood as the defining symbol of the Cold War, the global struggle between democracy and communism. And we won – the trans-Atlantic alliance won. On a glorious night in November 1989, exactly twenty years ago, Berliners streamed across the border where Siegfried Noffke died and shattered the wall physically and ideologically with hammers, picks, and the joy of freedom. Do you remember that day?

Yes we won. And it was no accident, no lucky break. We prevailed because the trans-Atlantic alliance led the world. We led by staying true to our values. We led by keeping alliance ties strong. We led by making the hard decisions and taking the tough actions needed to win.

This year we celebrate NATO's 60th anniversary and rightly recognize the achievements of the trans-Atlantic alliance. And what a record of almost inconceivable success – a Europe prosperous, whole and free, total victory in the Cold War, the creation of multilateral

institutions that brings global order and progress -- the UN, the EU, the WTO, OSCE, IMF, World Bank. And, of course, NATO itself, the greatest defensive political and military alliance of all time. It is no exaggeration to say that this alliance has been the most powerful global force for peace, development, and progress in all history.

Now, I do not want to be a “festbrems.” But as we raise our glasses, I hope our celebration of alliance success in the 20th century is matched by a hard look at its future in the 21st.

We are far enough into this century to know the trans- Atlantic alliance is operating in a very different world. In this world, shrunken by modern communication and transport, the modern challenges of weapons proliferation, terrorism, environment, disease, and poverty leap borders, oceans, and continents. No nation can hide. All are threatened. These global problems demand global solutions, with simultaneous coordinated action by many nations.

Yet any such global solutions are complicated by fundamental changes in the geo-political scene. One unmistakable trend is the rise of emerging powers – China, India, Iran, Russia, Brazil, South Africa and others – each building some combination of significant economic, political, and military strength. These nations have powerful sovereign interests. Some do not share our beliefs and institutions. All are understandably protective of their right to development and prosperity. Many are less willing to compromise their own progress for the sake of some larger good.

The clear lines of the Cold War are now giving way to this more fragmented geo-political scene. As this more complex framework confronts these global problems, the chances for conflict increase and the barriers to cooperation mount. A Rubik’s cube of diplomatic and political variables emerges. Already multilateral institutions strain to operate successfully as national interests clash with post-Cold War dreams of global order. Witness China’s veto of UN action in Darfur, Russia’s rejection of OSCE monitors in Georgia, the failed WTO negotiations.

This new world seems to call for strong leadership, the kind our trans-Atlantic alliance provided in the 20th century. But nothing is guaranteed in the future. History is littered with alliances that came and went with the tides of political, military, economic, and social change. John F. Kennedy once wrote, “For time and the world do not stand still. Change is the law of life. And those who look only to the past are certain to miss the future.”

So let’s look to the future. Let’s ask the tough questions – will the trans-Atlantic alliance have the same central place in the new century as it did in the last? Will the ties between Europe and the U.S. remain the cornerstone of our global approaches?

Some might laugh these questions off. But, for example, the rising importance of the East to Europe and the U.S. both in economic and security terms, cannot – and will not -- be ignored on either side of the Atlantic. Of course, new relations need not undermine older ones. But an alliance is a choice and to have real relevance, it must be genuinely valued by its members. The trans-Atlantic relationship can remain a central pillar of the geo-political structure – but only if the United States, Norway, and Europe ensure the alliance actually achieves our essential policy goals. To meet that test depends on us. What do we need to do?

First we must commit to our values. Without the will to defend the basic values upon which the alliance was founded, it cannot assume any mantle of leadership. This is an

alliance of conviction, not just an alliance of interest. If we do not really believe in a world defined by freedom, democracy, rule of law, human rights, and free enterprise, then we have lost the heart of the alliance, lost the will to act. The alliance must speak out for those values without apology and actively defend them, even when it might be easier to do nothing.

Even if, inspired by our values, we have the will to lead, the trans-Atlantic alliance must have the strength to lead. To me, this means vastly different but equally important work must be done on both sides of the Atlantic.

In a 2008 speech before the Atlantic Council, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair made a simple but powerful recommendation of the basic changes Europe must make and the U.S must make to keep the alliance capable of meeting the demands of the 21st century. He said, "America has to reach out. Europe needs to stand up." I totally agree.

Our European allies have bitterly complained that the United States under President Bush did not "reach out" enough, either to its friends or its adversaries. Many believed the U.S. was not listening or consulting enough. Norway and others called for more dialogue in our foreign policy. Well, much has now changed. President Obama has made "reaching out" a central pillar of his administration.

In Munich, Vice-President Biden stated it simply and clearly – "We'll engage. We'll listen. We'll consult." For Secretary of State Clinton the watchword for U.S. policy is not "hard" or "soft" power" but "smart power," meaning the U.S. will use all its tools – diplomatic, economic, cultural, and military to meet its foreign policy goals.

This has not been just rhetoric. In two short months the President has really put this approach to work. We have explicitly sought the input of allies, including Norway, on key alliance issues like Afghanistan. Ambassador Holbrooke is leading a regional diplomatic push to listen to Afghanistan's neighbors and gain their contributions to stability.

Secretary Clinton has reached out to reset the relationship with Russia and expand our dialogue. In the Middle East, the U.S. is already fully engaged seeking peace under the full-time leadership of George Mitchell and the Secretary who just visited the region.

President Obama eloquently stated in his inaugural address that the U.S. will extend a hand to those who will unclench their fist. So senior diplomats are visiting Syria for the first time in four years. There is interest in appropriate contact with Iran to persuade that nation not to proceed down its destructive path.

The President has promised that the Guantanamo prison will close. He pledged the U.S. will lead in achieving a new agreement on climate change in Copenhagen next year. The Obama administration is putting its words of outreach into action.

But, of course, there remains much more to do. The U.S. must add to its diplomatic arsenal. Both Secretary of Defense Gates and Secretary of State Clinton have called for increasing U.S. diplomatic capacity by adding personnel and funding. The U.S. must continue to improve its active engagement with foreign publics on important policy issues. The U.S. should increase investment in people-to-people contacts through educational exchange and visitor programs. Secretary Clinton has emphasized the importance of increased official development aid to nations that need our help.

These steps at “reaching out” by the U.S. should bolster the strength of the alliance. But as Tony Blair noted, “reaching out” by the U.S. must be matched with a “standing up” by our European allies. Vice-President Biden stated in Munich that the U.S. is totally committed to work in partnership but “America will ask more of its partners.” Another voice, well known to you all, Kai Eide, from his vantage point in Afghanistan, has also called on Europe to assume more responsibility there.

“Standing up” means Europe carrying more of the burdens and risks of leadership. It means building the capacity to have a meaningful impact on global affairs. As much as Norway and Europe want the U.S. to reach out to them, the U.S. wants allies willing and truly able to solve difficult global challenges.

And so, many questions come to mind -- what more is Norway and the rest of Europe going to do in Afghanistan to create a secure and sustainable nation? Keeping that country from returning to a terrorist refuge for Al Qaeda protects all members of the alliance. But is the military burden in Afghanistan equally shared and have caveats to troop deployment crippled the overall security effort? What is the action plan by our European partners to help stabilize the critical nation of Pakistan?

Exactly what carrots and sticks will Europe use to stop Iran from developing nuclear weapons? Is the lure of trade and business undermining sanctions and diplomacy? If effective pressure on Iran is stalled in the Security Council by China or Russia, should not the trans-Atlantic partners do what they can outside the UN framework?

After yet another experience of gas cut offs in Europe, what real action is going to be taken to diversify energy supplies? What can Europe do to get a resurgent and more aggressive Russia to play a more responsible role in world affairs? Is Norway willing to use its strong ties to influence Russia in a more positive direction?

On the issue of climate, is it enough to just say if the U.S. leads, that China and India will follow? After all, when else has that been true? What concrete steps are Norway and Europe taking to persuade these nations that they must be a key part of emissions reductions to make any real difference on global temperature?

Isn't it time for Norway and other opponents of the Iraq War to put behind them the beginning of the conflict and start supporting the Iraqi people and their democratically elected government? What is Norway and Europe actually going to do to help close down Guantanamo Bay?

While many do not like to talk about it, another critical area where Europe could greatly strengthen alliance capability and impact is military force. While deeply committed to diplomacy and development, the U.S. still recognizes that the use of force remains an essential tool of peace keeping and peace making. There is simply no evidence that we have reached a post conflict world where force is irrelevant. One need only look to Iran's aggressive pursuit of conventional arms and WMD, active support of terrorists, and destructive interference in neighbors' affairs for proof that the world remains a dangerous place.

The new U.S. administration has said we will ask our allies to rethink some of their approaches – including their willingness to use military force. Force should never be our first choice, but a choice it must be. To keep the alliance relevant, all the members must have the political will to use it.

Beyond will, there is the issue of capacity. While the U.S. spends about 4% of GDP on defense, only five nations spend the 2% goal set by NATO alliance. Norway ranks 20th in NATO spending at 1.3% of GDP, dropping from 1.9% just five years ago. Norway is making real and important contributions to NATO in Afghanistan but has stated it has no more troops to give. This may be true, but proves the very problem -- capacity.

I know it is an uncomfortable subject for some, but if the wealthiest countries in Europe with real security needs don't spend enough on military strength, who will? To be truly relevant to the 21st century, the trans-Atlantic alliance cannot fall into functional pacifism. Instead, as the Vice-President stated in Munich, we need to "support the strengthening of European defense."

No doubt the challenges of the 21st century are complex and daunting. Yet by sticking to our values, by reaching out to build ties, by standing up to carry the burdens together, this great trans-Atlantic alliance can remain the cornerstone of global stability and progress.

But again, there is nothing inevitable about it. We have before us a choice. And our decision will shape the world and affect not just nations, but the lives of many real individual people. Here is an example.

Every day in the Logar Province of Afghanistan, Lida Ahmadyr walks to school by the exact spot her sister was murdered by terrorists who believed girls should not get an education. Lida dreams of being a doctor. She says "I am afraid...but...with [an] education I can save my country."

Norway, Europe, and the United States led the world to break down the Berlin Wall and grant freedom for prisoners of Communism, like the surviving wife and daughter of Siegfried Noffke. Is that same alliance still truly ready in this 21st century to lead the world to ensure freedom for Lida Ahmadyr to become a doctor, to save her country?

Let us respect NATO's anniversary by recognizing that we can be ready for the 21st century. That we should be. I suspect many in this very room share my commitment to this great alliance. On the special anniversary, I hope we honor the alliance's glorious past by working hard to fulfill its future in a changing world. By reaching out and standing up the U.S. and Europe will meet this future.

Let me end on a personal note. In just a few weeks, my sojourn in Norway as my nation's ambassador will come to an end. Other than my responsibility as father and husband, this position will always be the greatest honor of my life. I love my country deeply and I love and admire this country. To be a mediator between these wonderful nations – interpreting America to Norwegians and interpreting Norway to Americans – has been a challenge and a joy. My greatest hope is that I have helped make the relationship just a little stronger than it was before I came.

Thank you to the Oslo Military Society. Over the past three years I have come to admire many aspects of Norwegian character – your commitment to family, your love of the environment and "friluftsliv," and your strong sense of fairness. I also greatly appreciate your keen interest in the broader world around you. It is a good lesson for my fellow Americans. The Oslo Military Society represents the finest example of Norway's genuine interest in public policy. I am deeply grateful to have the opportunity to present my views to this prestigious institution and its members.

Thank you.