

Prime Minister
Gro Harlem Brundtland

Dinner speech at Akershus Castle, 9 September, 1992.
NATO's Military Committee.

Mr. President and Mrs. Corcione,
Mr. Chairman and Mrs. Eide,
Honoured Guests,

It is a great pleasure for me, on behalf of the Norwegian Government, to welcome the Military Committee of NATO and the Allied Chiefs of Defence to Oslo and to Akershus Castle. As the military and strategic experts that you are, you will already have seen that this fortress is hardly at military state-of-the-art level. However, let me point out that it has never been conquered by military force.

Since the last time we were privileged to have the Military Committee and the Chiefs of Defence as our guests in this hall, six years ago, the world has been witness to tremendous change.

NATO has succeeded in adapting to the new situation, thus proving its dynamism as well as its political nature and viability. Major shifts in outlook and strategy have been made in close cooperation between the military and political authorities. The Military Committee and the Chiefs of Defence have served as an engine of change. This is a hallmark of the political culture that gives the Alliance its edge.

This kind of cooperation between the political and military sides is far from preordained. With all due respect to the generals among you we might remind ourselves of Churchill, who said that it is hard to meddle with Admirals when they say that things cannot be done. They always have the weather or something else to argue about.

Luckily, we do not have such problems, neither with the Admirals nor with the Generals.

The risks to which we are exposed have changed. The new democracies are facing serious economic problems. The new openness has revealed a level of environmental degradation which represents a very grave threat to all of us.

Ethnic, religious and social conflicts can also pose a dangerous threat to our security. If we fail to deal with these challenges, we risk a negative development which could undermine the positive process of change. Our own security would then be seriously affected.

Presently, the hearts of millions ache for the suffering people of Bosnia-Herzegovina. We all ask ourselves if there was more we could have done to keep the conflict from escalating.

As a major contributor to UN peace-keeping operations we have carefully followed the studies undertaken in the Military Committee. Again the Committee proved itself able to adapt to changing situations, quickly laying out options for member countries' contributions, speaking up when called upon. At other times and when needed, you have mastered the difficult art of keeping silent in several languages.

The transatlantic link is an essential element of our cooperation within the Alliance. No other forum of cooperation underlines better than NATO the fundamental community of values and interests that exist between Europe and the North American democracies. A continued US and Canadian commitment to peace and security in Europe is of vital importance.

Norway's geographic and strategic position illustrates more aptly than any other the need to uphold this commitment. Norway remains a neighbour of Europe's greatest military power. What is new is that today, we are the only Alliance member in that position.

Let me add that I find it particularly valuable that your annual trip has brought you here to Norway, offering you an opportunity to reacquaint yourselves with our situation.

The changes in NATO's command structure will affect Norway in many ways. First of all, we will no longer have the significant Allied presence in Oslo, as the North European Command Headquarters at Kolsås will be closed. This will require extra efforts on both sides to make up for the reduced Allied presence and to maintain the close contacts between NATO's military officers in Norway and at the Northwest Command and the Norwegian Government.

Mr. President, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to propose a toast to you, Mr. President, to all our guests, and to a continued, fruitful cooperation within our Alliance.