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PRIME MINISTER ODVAR NORDLI'S SPEECH AT THE OPENING  
CEREMONY IN THE OSLO CITY HALL ON THE OCCASION OF THE  
NATO MINISTERIAL MEETING 20TH-21ST MAY, 1976

Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me on behalf of the Norwegian Government to wish the Foreign Ministers of the NATO countries, the Secretary General of our Organization and their collaborators welcome to Norway and its capital city. It is a great pleasure indeed to see such a distinguished group of friends and allies assembled here in the City Hall of Oslo.

Our Alliance was born out of necessity more than a quarter of a century ago. It continues to reflect the determination of free people to remain free. The new world has joined the old in a common effort to protect shared values and joint interests.

In the nuclear age peace has become a necessity. This is our goal as well as our point of departure. Of one thing we can all be certain; a nuclear war would mean a disastrous defeat for all efforts to build a just and prosperous future for the people of this world.

NATO is a defensive Alliance. It threatens nobody. However, we must recognise the basic requirement of interdependence. That requirement makes it necessary to follow policies of reciprocal restraint. Both East and West have a stake in the efforts to build a peaceful future. The strength of our Alliance is necessary to assure that it be a just future as well.

Since the Foreign Ministers last met in Oslo in 1961 we have experienced a gradual change from cold war to the beginning of detente. This has found concrete expression in closer and more comprehensive contacts and co-operation as well as in mutually binding agreements between East and West. At the same time we have attempted to resolve vital problems of security, both through direct negotiations between the two principal powers and through multilateral negotiations such as the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe and the Vienna negotiations on force reductions, in which all interested countries - large and small - have been able to have their say.

This positive trend has given us hope. We all see it as the only feasible way forward if we are to create a lasting foundation for security and peace in Europe and thus improve the conditions of life and the possibilities for individual self-fulfilment.

At the same time we must recognize that the real contents of detente, as well as the prospects ahead, seem to be uncertain. We find ourselves in a period dominated by conflicting trends. The levels of military preparedness are higher than ever before. New areas of conflict have emerged and the ideological climate seems to have hardened.

What are the consequences for the Alliance of this development? What will it require of us?

Above all, I think it will require patience and adaptability. In a changing world we will daily be confronted with new challenges which will place great demands on our capacity and on our will to reassess and adjust our attitudes to the course of events.

At the same time it is important to be faithful to the fundamental principles upon which our co-operation is based. Here I am first of all thinking of the Alliance's dual aim of security and detente.

Adequate defence is a costly affair. Defence consumes huge resources which we all would prefer could be used for other purposes. But history has taught us that the security and peace we seek must be based on a credible defence system. For this reason we must always be prepared to make the necessary economic sacrifices to ensure that our defence effort matches our security needs.

At the same time we must recognize that there is no acceptable alternative to our constant endeavour to create real detente through contacts, co-operation and negotiations with the countries in the East. We must also strive to gain acceptance for the idea that detente is indivisible, and that in order to become a lasting reality, it must be accompanied by a mutual and balanced reduction of the high level of armaments in Europe.

However, the co-operation and the policies of the NATO Alliance do only represent a viable reality when they are respected and accepted by the people of the member countries.

But the support for the Alliance, and the unity within the Alliance, do also depend on other factors.

In the first place it is a matter of how we live up to the ideals we have set for ourselves and how we organize our own societies. I am inter alia thinking of the provisions in the Treaty concerning democratic rule, individual liberty and the rule of law. At a time when ideological issues have once again come to the fore, it is more than ever essential that we live up to and respect these ideals.

In this context I wish to extend a particular greeting to the Representatives of the democratic Governments of Greece, and of Portugal.

In a period marked by economic recession and pessimism we must not forget that it is in the democratic system, which we all wish to preserve, that we find our strength. Democracy is not static. It is a constantly developing system of government, a system which must all the time be consolidated and expanded in order to meet the aspirations of our peoples and the demands of our time. The democratic decision making process may sometimes seem laboriously slow and ineffective. It can certainly create problems and dissent. But at the same time it gives strength, because through the constructive interplay of ideas it is able to renew itself and engage the individual in quite a different manner than any totalitarian regime is able to do.

Furthermore it is also of fundamental importance for the standing of the Alliance in its struggle for freedom, democracy and human dignity that we demonstrate through action that the Western countries are now really prepared to take the measures necessary to secure a narrowing of the gap between rich and poor nations.

The situation will not only require an increasing flow of genuine development aid. It is even more essential to change traditional features of the international trade system. We must give the poor countries a real opportunity to improve and develop their economy. Their earnings must be raised, and we have to introduce a higher degree of stability in their foreign trade. I am not yet fully convinced that we will achieve what appears desirable and possible at the UNCTAD IV.

Our efforts in this field must be reflected in an international policy of co-operation and solidarity, based on respect for the independence, self-determination and individuality of the developing countries. Nor must there be any doubt as to where we stand in the struggle between white minority regimes and the large underprivileged majorities.

The strength of NATO, as an Alliance of independent, democratic countries, is that each member expresses himself freely on all subjects of common interest. However, if our Alliance shall not lose its cohesion as a defence organization for the North Atlantic area, we shall have to show moderation and willingness to compromise in certain matters. When a point of disagreement remains unsolved for a prolonged period of time, this may be harmful not only to the parties concerned, but also to other members, and to the whole Alliance. It is my deep, personal wish, and that of my government, that we shall make some progress during these days in order to reach a common ground of understanding for such problems which otherwise may erode the basic principles of NATO.

I invite the parties concerned and other member countries to devote their sincere attention to these considerations.

My own country occupies a strategic position on the Northern Flank of the Alliance. We know from experience that we cannot run away, or dream ourselves away, from that position. For us a relaxation of tensions and reduced competition in armaments is a basic necessity. We also know from experience that our endeavour to solve the security problems has to be a collective effort. Developments are likely to make the areas in the far north even more important, both from the point of view of the central balance and with respect to the future pattern for exploitation of ocean resources. In both instances we have to stem the forces of competition and promote co-operative arrangements. Norway will play an important role in this effort due to her geographic position and the emerging law of the sea. My Government is determined to act responsibly so as to avoid creating another area for competition and conflict. We are convinced that a firm and clear exercise of sovereignty will constitute a necessary condition for continued low tension in the sensitive areas in the North.

Today and tomorrow the NATO Foreign Ministers will hold consultations on issues crucial to the Alliance. I wish you every success in your deliberations and I am convinced that they will contribute to strengthening the security of our countries and further a peaceful development in world affairs.