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Opening Remarks at the 26th Ukraine Defense Contact Group Meeting

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Friends,

Thank you, Secretary Healy, for your leadership, both in hosting and now leading the UDCG [Ukraine Defense Contact Group]. This is my first Ukraine Defense Contact Group. And I'm honored to join all of you today. And I appreciate the opportunity to share President Trump's approach to the war in Ukraine.

We are at, as you said Mr. Secretary, a "critical" moment.¹ As the war approaches its third anniversary, our message is clear: The bloodshed must stop; and this war must end.

President Trump has been clear with the American people -- and with many of your leaders -- that stopping the fighting and reaching an enduring peace is a top priority. He intends to end this war by diplomacy and bringing both Russia and Ukraine to the table. And the U.S. Department of Defense will help achieve this goal.



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We will only end this devastating war and establish a durable peace by coupling allied strength with a *realistic* assessment of the battlefield. We want, like you, a sovereign and prosperous Ukraine. But we must start by recognizing that returning to Ukraine's pre-2014 borders is an unrealistic objective. Chasing this illusionary goal will only prolong the war and cause more suffering. A durable peace for Ukraine must include robust security guarantees to ensure that the war will not begin again.

This must not be Minsk 3.0.

That said, the United States does not believe that NATO membership for Ukraine is a realistic outcome of a negotiated settlement. Instead, any security guarantee must be backed by capable European and non-European troops. If these troops are deployed as peacekeepers to Ukraine at any point, they should be deployed as part of a non-NATO mission. And they should not be covered under Article 5. There also must be robust international oversight of the line of contact.

To be clear, as part of any security guarantee, there will not be U.S. troops deployed to Ukraine.

To further enable effective diplomacy and drive down energy prices that fund the Russian war machine, President Trump is unleashing American energy production and encouraging other nations to do the same. Lower energy prices coupled with more effective enforcement of energy sanctions will help bring Russia to the table.

Safeguarding European security must be an imperative for European members of NATO. As part of this, Europe must provide the overwhelming share of future lethal and non-lethal aid to Ukraine. Members of this Contact Group must meet the moment. This means: donating more ammunition and equipment; leveraging comparative advantages; expanding your defense industrial base; and importantly, leveling with your citizens about the threat facing Europe.

Part of this is speaking frankly with your people about how this threat can only be met by spending more on defense. Two percent is not enough; President Trump has called for 5%, and I agree. Increasing your commitment to your own security is a down payment for the future, a down payment, as you said Mr. Secretary, of "peace through strength."



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We're also here today to directly and unambiguously express that stark strategic realities prevent the United States of America from being primarily focused on the security of Europe. The United States faces consequential threats to our homeland. We must -- and we are -- focusing on security of our own borders.

We also face a peer competitor in the Communist Chinese with the capability and intent to threaten our homeland and core national interests in the Indo-Pacific. The U.S. is prioritizing deterring war with China in the Pacific, recognizing the reality of scarcity, and making the resourcing tradeoffs to ensure deterrence does not fail. Deterrence cannot fail -- for all of our sakes.

As the United States prioritizes its attention to these threats, European allies must lead from the front. Together, we can establish a division of labor that maximizes our comparative advantages in Europe and Pacific respectively.

In my first weeks as Secretary of Defense, under President Trump's leadership, we've seen promising signs that Europe sees this threat, understands what needs to be done, and is stepping up to the task. For example, Sweden recently announced its largest ever assistance package. We applaud them for committing [\$]1.2 billion in ammunition and other needed materiel. Poland is spending 5% of GDP on defense already, which is a model for the continent. And 14 other countries are co-leading Capability Coalitions. These groups are doing great work to coordinate Europe's contributions of legal [lethal]³ assistance across eight key capability areas.

These are first steps. More must still be done. We ask each of your countries to step up on fulfilling the commitments that you have made. And we challenge your countries, and your citizens, to double down and re-commit yourselves not only to Ukraine's immediate security needs, but to Europe's long-term defense and deterrence goals.

Our transatlantic alliance has endured for decades. And we fully expect that it will be sustained for generations to come. But this won't just happen. It will require our European allies to step into the arena and take ownership of conventional security on the continent. The United States remains committed to the NATO alliance and to the defense partnership with Europe.



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Full stop.

But the United States will no longer tolerate an imbalanced relationship which -- which encourages dependency. Rather, our relationship will prioritize empowering Europe to own responsibility for its own security. Honesty will be our policy going forward -- but only in the spirit of solidarity.

President Trump looks forward to working together, to continuing this frank discussion amongst friends, and to achieve peace through strength -- together.

Thank you.

¹ Relevant quotation: "Friends, we meet at a moment of great consequence. 2025 is the critical year for the war in Ukraine. Ukrainians continue to fight with huge courage -- military and civilians alike. Their bravery, fused with our support, has proved a lethal combination." [Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq_iPCrKTA8]

² Relevant quotation: "Ukrainians continue to fight with huge courage, military and civilians alike. Their bravery fused with our support has proved a lethal combination Putin believed he would win this war in three days, but now nearly three years on 850,000 Russians have been killed or wounded. But while Russia is weakened, it remains undeniably dangerous and is slowly taking ground. President Trump and President Zelenskyy have both spoken of their desire to achieve **peace through strength**; and it's the commitments here, through this Contact Group, that provide the strength to achieve that peace." [emphasis added; Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yq_iPCrKTA8&t=256s]

³ Official DOD transcript reads "lethal assistance"