



AmericanRhetoric.com

James Mattis

Post NATO Briefing to Reporters

delivered 13 July 2018, En Route to Oslo, Norway



[AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio]

So, we're coming out of Croatia -- yeah, out of Zagreb. I would just tell you that if you want to see the success of the summit manifesting, I think you sensed it there because what -- the reason I wanted to come here was I'd be able to talk to a number of NATO nations and NATO-aspiring nations. You know that Macedonia was just opened to begin its accession program. And so when you get a number together like that you also hear the exchanges between nations and it's much less scripted than when we have 29 nations where everyone's got to be given a chance.

So we're down to these nations that were there today, that you saw in front of you, plus my contact with the -- both the Croatians and the -- and the Montenegrins, because they were the co-hosts. One was physically hosting because it was the national day, like our July 4th day, in Montenegro.

In the bilaterals themselves, these are two nations that know what it's like to be small and vulnerable, to have to fight for your freedom, to try and be part of something larger where they gain strength. And it's a -- it's a classic case of we're stronger together in defense of -- of democracy, of human rights, of international law. The commitment to 2% spending is a given.



AmericanRhetoric.com

I think the very hearty discussion yesterday at Brussels was very helpful, and you hear from a number of nations how they respond[ed].

But it was interesting to hear it there in terms of what they see it doing for the protection of their values. It was the A5, the US-Adriatic Charter, the A5 started out as, you know, 15 years ago as the A3. Two of the three nations are now in NATO. The other one was granted a path forward into NATO. So what you see, too, is something that actually has an output. It's not just getting together for meetings. You see it resulting in something that brings nations in to an international organization that's considered the strongest in the world when it comes to a - to defense security. We're now at A5.

It was interesting, I found there that there was so much -- they all have little issues between them, as neighbors, do. Hey, we have issues between us and Canada, or us and Mexico. But the issues they had between them did not stop them from saying we ought to expand this more widely in the western -- western, southeastern Europe, Western Balkans. So I think it's, as Vice President Pence said last time,¹ again, this is a continuity of effort. Vice President Pence said it's a "testament to the [United States'] commitment to Western Balkans."²

It's got a very unique role, though, I think, in fostering stability in what has historically been an unstable area. And right now the U.S. supports each of these countries' chosen path, wherever they want to go. If they think it's NATO, if they think it's EU -- some -- most of them think it's both, by the way.

And so good track record out of there. I would just tell you that Montenegro took over in February, I think, as the chair of the -- of the A5, and bottom line is -- you need some water there, partner?

Oh, okay, there we go. Yeah, no problem.

Bottom line is, it was very, very successful all the way through the lunch, and to gain over the lunch, to gain a lot of different perspectives. We had hour and a half there just to talk. So it was productive.



AmericanRhetoric.com

I met with the president. I think you all -- Were you all there when we met with the president? You at least got the pictures? Was very good discussion. I'll just leave it at very productive. It was more summing up of what is already in motion and clarifying and confirming, clarifying the issues, confirming the way ahead between us and -- and Croatia.

So I also just heard about this story that the Pentagon's in damage control. That was fascinating. I love reading fiction. So it was -- it was stimulating to read it and find out -- while I've been with you with full transparency on the airplane, you watching what's going on -- that I've been in damage control. I must tell you it must have been the most pleasant damage control in the A5 I ever could have imagined with the level of unity of purpose that we experienced there. So anyway, people are entitled to their own opinion -- even if it's not facts-based.

Let's shift over quickly to some questions. I want to make sure we give you some time for a couple questions [on the record]. Then we'll go quickly off the record, and it's going be quick, okay? Go ahead, Phil.

Question: One thing, when you were at the -- when you were at the meeting with the Croatian president, I think we overheard someone asking you about the summit, and you said that it was a very honest summit.

SecDef Mattis: Yeah.

Question: So I'm wondering how the -- how NATO, the summit itself, factored in to the A5 discussions. What were the main concerns that were expressed there about Russia? And then how was your trip to Norway? And, you know, obviously... --

SecDef Mattis: Slow down, now. I can only keep track of so many things. You ask me that one in a minute. First of all, on the summit itself, I think the very fact that people stopped going just through a set timeline and stopped to actually talk about fundamental issues, levels of commitment of national treasury, of commitments of forces. What happens, it has -- it's almost like it washes away all the veneer and -- and people really talk about where they stand. So in there today was a sense of -- of -- a clear sense of purpose why joining NATO has been good for Croatia. Why it was been good. Number 29. When we say NATO at 29, you're talking about Montenegro.



AmericanRhetoric.com

That's NATO at 29. It's the 29th nation; and to see the confidence that they have from a NATO that is that open in discussion, and honest in discussion. So I'd say the summit was purposeful in what it gave NATO. It gave a sense of shared purpose that needed to be -- that needs to be refreshed in any organization.

What was the next question about?

Question: It was about Russia. It was about --

SecDef Mattis: Okay.

Question: -- I asked about Montenegrin -- the Macedonian defense minister what she thought of Russia -- whether they were trying to interfere with their accession.

SecDef Mattis: Yes.

Question: She obviously raised her -- her concerns. You know, so how does Russia factor in your discussions? I know in an open conference you didn't talk about it.

SecDef Mattis: Yeah. Yeah. Russia factors in in the southeastern Europe area as a destabilizing element. They have chosen to come in and to undermine the democratic fabric of nations that are young in their democratic processes, that have been freed as nations in recent times, and whether through false news reporting, economic strictures and interventions, they are not seen as helpful, would be probably the most polite way to describe it. Anything else?

Question: Did -- Did any of the...attendees today at the meeting -- did they ask you for any assistance in dealing with Russia?

SecDef Mattis: What we discussed today was where we clarified where everyone wanted to go. It was, again, a great deal of shared purpose, I think buoyed up by the summit and the sense of purpose coming out of there. And then where we can work together on a number of NATO initiatives that are ongoing; and bilateral initiatives, from re-armaments and national commitments that -- this is the 2%, of course -- coming out where they're building up their defenses to make them fit for a time when they have, for example, both a threat from the



AmericanRhetoric.com

south and a threat from the east -- most of the threat from the east being hybrid, not -- not being a direct military threat, of course. So it was along those lines.

Question: Did you learn anything about the threat you didn't know?

SecDef Mattis: It was more clarifying to hear it from their perspective, and clarifying that what we've all been sharing in NATO is keenly felt in southeastern Europe.

¹ Quotations from VP Pence's Balkans Address: "And the Adriatic Charter has played a leading role in bringing the Western Balkans into unity with Europe and alliance with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. And under President Trump, the United States of America **will continue** to support each of you as you pursue this future together." "Under President Trump, be assured, the United States **will continue** to support the Western Balkans as you take these important steps toward good government, democratic reform, and the rule of law." [Source: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2437/>] [emphasis added]

² Pence, M. (2 August 2017). *Remarks by the Vice President at the Adriatic Charter Summit*. Retrieved 16 July 2017. At: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/2437/>