



Has Diplomacy Had Its Day?

Jens Stoltenberg

In this age of renewed authoritarianism, identity politics, and wolf warrior tactics, you may be forgiven for thinking that the golden age of quiet diplomacy and dedicated multilateralism is a relic of the past. However, in today's multipolar world, the need to work with allies and partners to defend is more important than ever.

I was baptized into the world of diplomacy at an early age. My father was a diplomat and later defense and foreign minister of Norway. He developed his own unique brand of "kitchen table" diplomacy. Growing up as a boy in the 1960s and 1970s, I regularly encountered political leaders and freedom fighters from all over the world who my father brought home for breakfast. This is where I first met Nelson Mandela, over Norwegian mackerel, brown cheese, and coffee.

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Admittedly, the breakfast may not sound the most appealing, but the experience of welcoming people into our

home and breaking bread together as a way to break down barriers and solve collective challenges is something that has stuck with me ever since. It was then that I learned to listen, to be patient, and to embrace others' points of view. Above all, I learned the importance of compromise. These are all valuable lessons in the art of diplomacy.

Throughout my career, I have had the privilege to work with some of the world's finest diplomats, and diplomacy has always been central to my roles. Before joining NATO, I was the UN Special Envoy for Climate Change. Determined diplomacy has led global leaders to agree to ambitious reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, our best chance to combat climate change. As an environment minister and later prime minister of Norway, I was able to negotiate agreements with Russia on maritime, fisheries, and environmental issues. Even when we disagree with our neighbors, it is important to understand their position and seek common ground. It is always good to talk, and I remain convinced that diplomacy and dialogue are particularly important in difficult times. We have to keep trying.

It was creative and determined diplomacy that led to the creation of NATO from the spoils of war. It made

allies of former adversaries and brought them together to solve their differences around a table rather than in the trenches.

In my current role at NATO, I see diplomacy in action every day. From high-level summits of allied leaders to the daily interactions of national representatives, NATO is the only platform where North America and Europe come together every day to consult, coordinate, and, when needed, act on matters that affect their defense and security. Building consensus among so many different democracies can be noisy, difficult, and slow. However, when we reach agreement through dialogue, our voice is thirty nations' strong, our decisions are better, and our actions more effective.

It is the unseen work of diplomacy that makes breakthroughs and keeps us from the path to war. But in the words of Theodore Roosevelt: "To go far, we must speak softly and carry a big stick." Indeed, sometimes, diplomacy alone is not enough. At NATO our military strength provides the conditions for our diplomatic achievements. With Russia we combine credible deterrence and defense with dialogue. To fight terrorism, we use political tools alongside military ones. When dealing with China, we seek to respond to Beijing's coercive policies and pushback on the rules-based order, while at the same time, maximizing opportunities for dialogue on issues such as arms control and climate change. A mix of credible defense and relentless diplomacy is how we keep our nations safe.

As we look to a more uncertain and competitive world, we will need even more creativity, even greater unity, and even stronger determination in the years ahead. Working even closer together, as a transatlantic community and with likeminded partners across the world, is the best—if not the only—way forward.

If war is the failure of diplomacy, then the absence of war is diplomacy's success. Nothing symbolizes this more than NATO, which has guaranteed the defense and security of the Alliance for over seventy years.

Jens Stoltenberg is Secretary General of NATO. He previously served as Prime Minister of Norway from 2000 to 2001 and from 2005 until 2013.