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MAKING NATO A MORE LETHAL ALLIANCE: THE DETACHED ARGUMENTATIVE STYLE OF AN ADDRESS BY NATO'S SECRETARY GENERAL

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Abstract. The current study is an introduction to the analysis of a series of discourses and addresses made on various NATO events taking place in 2025, the purpose of which is/was recalibrating and reconfiguring the Alliance based on the evolution of the international context. The focus and object of the analysis is NATO's Secretary General Mark Rutte's argumentative style. Mark Rutte addressed NATO's Parliamentary Assembly on May 26th, 2025, to present to them the need for increased spending on the part of all Allies. This address is approached in the study from the pragma-dialectical perspective on argumentation by making use of the recently developed notion of *argumentative style* in this theoretical and analytical framework, to distinguish the elements which are instrumental in Rutte's deploying a *detached argumentative style* (as opposed to an engaged argumentative style). The previous theoretical developments around this pragma-dialectical notion (van Eemeren 2019, 2021a, 2021b, 2025; van Eemeren, Garssen 2023; van Eemeren, van Haaften 2024, van Eemeren 2025) appear to be extremely useful, and the analysis shows at first level that the detached argumentative style chosen by Mark Rutte is consistent with the delicate context in which the Allies must be convinced of the necessity of increased spending and of the reconfiguration of NATO's actions through changes and investments in the defence industry.

Keywords: argumentation, (detached) argumentative style, pragma-dialectical approach, stages of the critical discussion

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1. Argumentative style from a pragma-dialectical perspective

This contribution is concerned with a pragma-dialectical analysis of the argumentative style of an address by Mark Rutte, currently NATO's Secretary General (hereinafter, NSG²), to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly Plenary (hereinafter, NPA) Spring Session, which took place in Dayton, Ohio, on May 26th, 2025, in a rather tense international context (Russia's war against Ukraine, the Israel-Gaza conflict, threats of international terrorism, presumable Russia-China-North Korea-Iran alliances).

The current study is part of an analysis in progress focusing on NSG's speeches at recent NATO meetings, which are of great significance in the current political and social context.

Section 2 gives an insight into NATO's main organism, its Parliamentary Assembly, and briefly presents the office of NATO Secretary General, the main NATO position dealing with the organisation's activity, an office presently held by Mark Rutte. Section 3 summarizes the main pragma-dialectical principles of analysis and notions, such as *analytic overview*, *strategic maneuvering*, *argumentative style*. Section 4 briefly presents an analysis of NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte's Address to the latest Plenary of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, concluding that the argumentative style of the Address is detached. The analysis contributes to the study of argumentative style by nuancing and refining the already existing set of theoretical characteristics, while complementing the existing list of illustrations of this style with new instances, so that it can be more easily distinguished from its counterpart, the *engaged argumentative style* (van Eemeren 2019).

2. NATO and its structure

The North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO, is a political and military organisation whose "players" are "the member countries themselves". Committed to the "peaceful resolution of disputes", "it has the military

² In the context of my analysis, the acronym NSG refers only to Mark Rutte as current NATO Secretary General. For more about the position and responsibilities, as well as about the person, see NSG24, below in *Sources*.

power to undertake crisis-management operations”, should diplomatic efforts fail, and this under the collective defence clause of NATO's founding treaty. (see *Sources*, NATO website). The most important NATO body is the NATO Assembly, and the most important NATO office is its Secretary General, as its “top international civil servant”, its spokesperson and the Head of its international staff.

2.1. NATO's Secretary General (NSG)

The initial mandate of NATO's Secretary General is of 4 years, but it can be extended according to diplomatic decisions and negotiations.

As far as the role and responsibilities of this position are concerned:

“The Secretary General of NATO is the public face of the Alliance and the person who steers the process of consultation and decision-making among the 32 Allies. It's not an easy job, because 32 different countries with 32 different viewpoints (and a lot of different cultures and languages) need to agree on all decisions before they can be implemented.”³

This description of the office responsibilities shows that NATO's Secretary General has a prominent role in establishing consensus among the 32 Allies' representatives on all decision meetings, some of which are NATO Parliamentary Assembly Plenaries. Such consensus is expected to underlie subsequent decisions made on the occasion of the Allies' Ministers of Defence Meetings and of the NATO Summits.

By October 1st, 2024, NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, had served 10 years. After this, the position was assigned to Mark Rutte⁴,

³ “What is a NATO Secretary General?”, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_229134.htm?selectedLocale=en

⁴ He “took office as the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's 14th Secretary General on 1 October 2024. As a former Prime Minister of the Netherlands Mr Rutte has a distinguished record of domestic and international achievements including security, defence, employment and social affairs, and economics. He is a strong supporter of global and transatlantic cooperation.” (NSG official introduction on NATO website, NSG24)

former Prime Minister of the Netherlands and currently the highest representative of NATO, as NATO Secretary General (NSG). Although sometimes criticized for his positions and attitudes, he is known to have an established reputation as former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, a position he held for almost 14 years (the longest-serving Prime Minister in Dutch history), during which time he managed to deal with many difficult situations⁵:

“Analysts have long said Rutte had three key assets: first, he was a skilful, savvy operator with a talent for building and maintaining unlikely alliances – so much so that his critics felt he was always more interested in power than principles. [...] Rutte’s second major asset was his image as ‘Mr Normal’. Only rarely was he out of step with the views of his voters, seeming at times to pick up shifts in public opinion even before they occurred.” (NSGGuard)

2.2. *NATO Parliamentary Assembly’s Plenaries: Institutional characteristics and constraints*

In line with the main requirements of the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation, an overview of NATO’s main institutional characteristics is necessary, since the analysis is concerned with a discourse taking place in an institutional context.

- The NATO Parliamentary Assembly (hereinafter, NPA) was founded in 1955 as “the consultative inter-parliamentary organisation for the North Atlantic Alliance” (see *Sources*, NPA). It
- brings together members of parliaments throughout the Atlantic Alliance,
- provides an essential link between NATO and the parliaments of its member nations,
- helps to build parliamentary and public consensus in support of Alliance policies,

⁵ “the great survivor of Dutch politics, a man whose capacity to swerve criticism and survive scandal earned him the nickname ‘Teflon Mark’, combining backroom skills with everyman appeal to become the country’s longest-serving leader.” (NSGGuard)

- facilitates parliamentary awareness and understanding of key security issues,
- contributes to a greater transparency of NATO policies,
- helps maintain and strengthen the transatlantic relationship, which underpins the Atlantic Alliance.⁶

The NPA meets in the Spring and Autumn (Annual) Plenary Sessions. It has a consultative role, bringing together representatives of all the Allies. Higher authoritative NATO bodies, which are assigned the task of making decisions are the NATO Summit and the Meeting of the Allies' Defence Ministers. It is however supposed that a basic consensus is reached before the authoritative meetings, by due information, together with questions and answers during the NPA Plenary sessions.

Given the 2025 international context, and in preparation of the NATO Summit, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly had a second, as it were, exceptional, Plenary Spring Session (Brussels, June 20th), not open to the press and broadcast media, subsequent to the one of interest for the current analysis, held in Dayton. This could be an indication of the fact that the regular spring session had not had the expected consequences or impact on the Allies' parliamentary representatives, and the path to the next decision-making events needed to be further smoothed.

3. Monologic discourse as argumentative discourse

Within the pragma-dialectic approach, argumentation is seen as a *complex speech act*. Although the discourse taken into consideration for this study is not part of a dialogue or a conversation proper, its argumentative character is obvious, as is that of most speeches in Parliaments or deliberations at

⁶ "The Role of the Assembly" (NPAL25/06). The Assembly's leaflet had already been updated in April 2025; however, a new update appears to have been judged necessary two months later, presumably in view of the global context and the June 2025 NATO Summit. (see NPAL250604 in *Sources*). On the eve of the NATO Summit and two weeks after the meeting in Brussels of NATO's Ministers of Defence, on June 23rd, BBC Europe Editor, Katya Adler offered her comments under the headline "Could this be the most significant Nato summit since the Cold War?", showing the importance of the general context in which the analysed discourse was made. (NSBBC)

official meetings. In what is called a *strategy of maximally argumentative analysis/interpretation* (van Eemeren, Grootendorst 1992: 49, 105, 137), the pragma-dialectical approach to argumentation suggests that, for the analyst not to miss central points of a discourse (fragment), this is to be considered as (inherently) argumentative and oriented towards the reasonable resolution of a dispute by means of a (virtual) critical discussion (van Eemeren, Grootendorst, 1992, 2010).

3.1. A short overview of pragma-dialectical analytical notions

An *analytic overview* allows the reconstruction of a discourse as argumentative, as a *critical discussion* consisting of four stages (the opening stage, the confrontation stage, the argumentation stage, the concluding stage), in which the parties involved attempt to resolve a dispute starting from a difference of opinion.

In pragma-dialectical analysis, the proponent is the one who makes a claim and attempts to justify it, thus becoming the main arguer, the party advancing a standpoint / thesis and committed to defending it against doubt or criticism.

Within this approach the analytical notion of *argumentative move*, has been developed, which allows, for instance, a speech act to be taken as part of an argumentative tactic similar to moves in a chess game:

“Due to their potentially constructive role in the resolution process, these argumentative moves are at a particular point in the discourse considered to be ‘analytically relevant’ (van Eemeren 2018: 74, 92). Which options for making such argumentative moves are available to each of the parties in the difference of opinion is portrayed in full detail in ‘dialectical profiles’ (van Eemeren 2018: 42-49). In argumentative discourse particular argumentative moves are made at every point in the discourse. In all these cases the argumentative moves concerned involve certain choices regarding the way in which the argumentative discourse is conducted on the part of the arguer. This goes in principle for every argumentative move that is made in the discourse in any of the real-life counterparts of the four

stages of a critical discussion: the confrontation stage, the opening stage, the argumentation stage, and the concluding stage. In the pragma-dialectical approach, based on a systematic reconstruction of the discourse, in an 'analytic overview' a survey is provided of all analytically relevant argumentative moves that are made in an argumentative discourse (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992: 93–94)." (van Eemeren 2019: 155)

The notion of *strategic maneuvering*⁷ accounts for the fact that, in view of the resolution of a dispute, throughout a critical discussion, an arguer attempts to obtain, in the most felicitous way, (rhetorical) effectiveness while maintaining (dialectical) reasonableness:

"In extended pragma-dialectics, 'strategic maneuvering' aimed at reconciling achieving effectiveness with being reasonable is the pivotal notion in tracking down the 'strategic scenario' that is implemented in the argumentative discourse (van Eemeren 2010), [and which] [...] manifests itself in every argumentative move made in the discourse in three different aspects: (1) the selection from the 'topical potential' of possible argumentative moves available at a particular point in the discourse; (2) the adaptation to the 'audience demand' ensuing from the views and preferences ascribed to the intended listeners or readers; (3) the exploitation of 'presentational devices' of linguistic or other means of communication (pp. 93-96). The distinction between these three aspects, important to an in-depth analysis of argumentative discourse, is an analytic distinction that does not necessarily reflect a division that can be observed empirically: in strategic maneuvers carried out in actual argumentative discourse the three aspects are realized simultaneously." (van Eemeren, van Haaften 2024: 1232),

as represented below (my own summary, AG):

⁷ Throughout pragma-dialectical studies and analyses (van Eemeren, Houtlosser 1999, 2002 and up to present), theorists and analysts have used both spellings, *manoeuvring* and *maneuvering*, of which I am using the latter, as finally preferred by the pragma-dialecticians (see the spelling in van Eemeren 2010, 2025; van Eemeren, van Haaften 2024).

Table 0

Dimensions of Strategic Maneuvering in Argumentation

Strategic maneuvering (SM)		
	Dialectical aims	Rhetorical goals
Three aspects / dimensions of SM ↓	resolving a difference of opinion reasonably/on merits	being persuasive and effective
Selecting topics ⇒	Choosing issues to emphasize or to downplay	
Adapting to audience demands ⇒	Making argumentative moves in compliance with audience status, characteristics, preferences	
Framing argumentation in the most favourable way ⇒	Expressing argumentative moves in the most appropriate way	

Throughout a given argumentative activity, strategic maneuvering achieved by an arguer results in a balance between being reasonable, and persuasive, respectively, in the framework of a critical discussion, whether actual or virtual⁸.

Strategic maneuvering also means that there is a coordination among the various argumentative moves, which means that all choices should be coherent among them, both at the level of sequence and of succession. This turns them into an “argumentative strategy” apt to be distinguished as strategic maneuvering. (van Eemeren and Garssen 2023: 527, note 3)

3.2. The pragma-dialectical notion of argumentative style

The term *argumentative style* corresponds, in pragma-dialectics, to a notion which has recently been brought into focus and developed. Research on it is still largely in progress. The argumentative style adopted by a speaker is “instrumental in trying to convince the intended audience of the acceptability of the standpoint at issue” (van Eemeren, Garssen 2023: 511): it is “a particular way in which an argumentative discourse is conducted to make it contribute to achieving the resolution of the difference of opinion aimed for by the arguer” (van Eemeren *et al.* 2022: 4). The three aspects of

⁸ In discourse of a monological type, the critical discussion is virtual, but it is nevertheless reconstructed to serve as an analytical tool.

strategic maneuvering (see above, section 3) are the constitutive dimensions of argumentative style (van Eemeren 2015), an embodiment of the way in which an arguer maneuvers strategically in trying to resolve a difference of opinion reasonably and effectively, *i.e.*, the specific manner of giving shape to one's strategic maneuvering in argumentative discourse by

“making a particular selection from the topical potential of available argumentative means, and adapting in a specific way to the audience demand of the intended addressees” (Eemeren, van 2010: 93-127).

While introducing the notion of argumentative style, van Eemeren attempts a first dichotomy, contrasting the *engaged* and the *detached, argumentative styles*. An attempt at defining more precisely each of these styles (see end of the next section) is only possible if their characteristics are first considered.

According to this theoretical view, the features of the two varieties of argumentative style are given in the tables at the beginning of each subdiscussion in the analysis below (My tables, A.G., summarize argumentative style features / instances by quoting van Eemeren 2019: 166-167). Each stage of the critical discussion is then discussed individually.

4. NSG Rutte's argumentative style. Analysis and discussion

The Address made by NSG Mark Rutte to the audience of the NATO Plenary Parliamentary Assembly in Dayton, Ohio on May 26th 2025 is part of a series culminating with the NATO Summit in the Hague, June 24th-25th, 2025, where, according to preliminary discussions already held, the Allies were expected to agree on a defence spending increase of up to 5% of GDP, thus complying with the request of US President Donald Trump for more significant financial involvement from the Allies.

4.1. NATO Secretary General's May Address at Dayton

Mark Rutte's Address to the NATO Plenary (see NPAR250526 in *Sources* and *Appendix*) is significant as the first official Address to stakeholders

through their NATO representatives, intended – as can be seen at a first reading – to smooth the path for and prepare the NATO Summit’s delicate decisions on increasing defence and deterrence spending. It can be also seen as the preamble to a series of other speeches to be made during the coming top-level events in the months of June and July 2025. In deciding whether an argumentative style could be qualified as *detached* or *engaged*, one needs to take into consideration their characteristics theoretically determined so far, and this with respect to each stage of the critical discussion.

According to the current theoretical developments in pragma-dialectics, an analyst may speak about a particular argumentative style if and only if coherence among all means of expression is (“systematically and consistently”) achieved, as is obvious from the remarks below:

Only if the amalgamation of radiating objectivity, conveying reliability, and expressing openness to an independent judgment [...] happens to manifest itself in the case concerned systematically and consistently in all three dimensions of argumentative style in argumentative moves throughout the argumentative pattern that constitutes the dialectical route taken in defence of the standpoint at issue and is fully in agreement with the strategic considerations determining the strategic design of the discourse, can it be concluded that the general argumentative style utilised in the discourse is indeed an argumentative style belonging to the category of detached argumentative styles. (van Eemeren *et al.* 2022: 27)

On the other hand:

“Only if the amalgamation of radiating commitment, conveying communality, and expressing inclusiveness [...] manifests itself systematically and consistently in all three dimensions of argumentative style throughout the argumentative pattern of argumentative moves made in the discourse constituting the dialectical route that is taken, and this amalgamation is in full agreement with the strategic considerations determining the strategic design of the discourse, can it be concluded that the general argumentative style that is utilised in the argumentative discourse concerned does indeed belong to the category of engaged argumentative styles. (van Eemeren *et al.* 2022: 29)

In each of the following four subsections and corresponding tables, the relevant characteristics of each of the stages of the critical discussion are recalled and summarized in view of the analysis.

4.2. *Rutte's argumentative style in the confrontation stage: the difference of opinion*

In the confrontation stage one of the parties involved in communication, *i.e.*, in what is to become the argumentative exchange, advances a standpoint which is not shared by the other party. When a standpoint is advanced, a difference of opinion is presumably generated, with the proponent also contracting the obligation of supporting the standpoint by means of a critical discussion, ensuring a departing point (providing premises) for it (the opening stage) and supporting the claim with arguments (the argumentation stage). The theoretically distinguished differences between a *confrontational detached argumentative style* and a *confrontational engaged argumentative style*⁹ are summarized below:

Table 1

Argumentative Style in the Confrontation Stage (van Eemeren 2019: 166)

Stage of critical discussion	Aspects of strategic maneuvering	Argumentative Style	
		Engaged	Detached
Confrontation = advancing standpoint(s) to be defended throughout the critical discussion	Choice from topical potential	selection of issues that shows the arguer's close involvement.	business-like statement of what is to be discussed
	Adaptation to audience demand	connecting emphatically with the interests of the audience	quasi-neutral preservation of objectivity
	Presentational devices	charged phrasings	unadorned matter-of-fact formulations

⁹ The meaning of *confrontational* here is only with respect to the critical discussion stage, and does not mean that this would be illustrative of an unfriendly or angry attitude or behaviour.

Since the discourse taken into consideration in this study is not part of a dialogue or a conversation proper, there is no explicit difference of opinion. However, there is an obvious argumentative component to the discourse.

NSG puts forward in his Address a delicate standpoint. The standpoint S_1 , though advanced in an elegant, polite presentation, is prescriptive/directive, and may be reconstructed as

S_1 : NATO needs/NATO requests support from NATO parliamentarians – in front of both national public and authorities – that these should accept to increase national contributions to NATO's defence spending.

This is stated in the form of an appeal for support to the NATO parliamentarians (lines 63-70)¹⁰:

(63-70) As parliamentarians, I need your help to make the case for higher defence spending with the public. And to encourage your governments to keep up with their commitments. And each of you will have an important role in building support to get budgets approved. So I need – and NATO needs – your support.

Advancing this request for support provides grounds for a simple difference of opinion, meaning that the participants in the “critical discussion” (*i.e.*, the members of the Assembly, individually or as groups) may become virtual opponents, in disagreement with the proponent of the standpoint, by identifying a presumed conflict (between their own opinion and that of the proponent), this resulting in an issue which needs to be resolved through argumentation.

NSG, holding the proponent position, must assume the need of resolving the virtual difference of opinion by argumentation, which is explicitly unfolding throughout his speech. The need for higher defence spending is expressed implicitly in the directive speech act in (63-70) whose propositional and prescriptive/directive content is to be communicated by parliamentarians to their national public and authorities as a standpoint S_0 , which can be reconstructed as

¹⁰ For ease of identification in the Appendix, the text excerpts discussed in the study are not numbered from (1) to (n) but indexed with a reference to the corresponding lines.

So: Allies/Each Ally must raise their contribution to NATO by at least 2%

In fact, as the continuation of NSG's position in the subsequent Q&A session shows, the underlying standpoint is:

*So': Allies must raise their contribution to NATO by up to 5%¹¹,
or else,
NATO should commit to a 5% GDP defence spending target,*

implying that supporting argumentation should also be provided.¹²

This is stated in several different ways: (lines 46-47, 52-57):

(46-47) To make NATO stronger, we must increase defence spending – that underpins everything.

(52-57) Most Allies, if not all, are due to reach the initial aim of spending 2% of GDP on defence this year. And many have already announced plans to go much further. We know that the 2% pledge – agreed way back in 2014 – just doesn't cut it any more. So in 2025, we are finalising a plan to dramatically increase defence spending across the Alliance.

In the NPA Plenary Address the contribution of 5% of GDP is never explicitly mentioned.¹³ From an analytical perspective, this can be seen as an *attenuation strategy*: NSG's topical choice is to speak generally about the necessity of increasing national contributions to NATO, and thus prepare for the more important meetings to follow, mainly the Hague Summit, June, 24th-25th, 2025,¹⁴ in which it is expected that the 5% contribution will be discussed and agreed upon.

¹¹ *Politico* announced that on May 26th, in a *Question and Answer* Session, Mark Rutte said: "I assume that in The Hague we will agree on a higher defence spending target of in total 5 percent." (Politico25/05)

¹² On June 22nd, 2025, the press agency Reuters announced that a preliminary agreement was reached with respect to all Allies, except for Spain, complying with the 5% spending: "NATO members agreed on Sunday to a big increase in their defence spending target to 5% of gross domestic product, as demanded by U.S. President Donald Trump, but Spain said it did not need to comply just days before a summit in The Hague meant to be a show of unity." (REUT25/06)

¹³ It becomes explicit, however, in the Q&A session following the Address.

¹⁴ As the NATO website announces: "NATO Allies will take decisions in The Hague [...], to make NATO a stronger, fairer and more lethal Alliance. We live in a more dangerous

Other possible / virtual standpoints to be reconstructed from line 23:

(23) *Today, I want to share with you how we are going to build a better NATO.*

are:

S': NATO will be better / stronger / more effective.

In the above formulation, several presentational devices are at work:

I. creating presence for the unique context that NPA members are part of by means of the adverb *today*, as it were, to make a distinction between the particular day on which the plenary takes place and other ordinary instances of the NPA meetings, and concomitantly to show that this moment / time of the Alliance is strategically far more significant than others – this may be reconstructed as a secondary virtual standpoint

Si: The present context is exceptional / strategically significant as no other since NATO's creation.

II. creating communion with the audience in order to appeal directly to them by the term *share* – implying “I, as NSG, know it, and you, as NPA members, are entitled to know this too, since we are a whole”; this strategic move also corresponds to the audience’s demands, as they expect to be treated as partners and decision-makers: “*we are going to build*” – although NPA members only have a consultative role, but are supposed to play as mediators and NATO “ambassadors” with their national governments and communities. The choice of the location at Dayton is also significant, since the NPA is also intended to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Dayton Agreement / Accords in December 1995, stipulating the Peace among

world, and this is a critical moment for our security. Allies are coming together to reinforce their cooperation and their commitment to NATO.” Who? “NATO Heads of State and Government and key partners” Why? “To address the challenges facing the Alliance and further strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defence” (NS25). NATO Summits are high-level meetings of heads of state/government, making important decisions, such as agreeing to admit a new member or to revise the Strategic Concept.

Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. The main role of this Spring Session NPA is to communicate widely and officially that NATO intends to make fundamental changes to its structure and way of acting in order to ensure increased defence capabilities. This could be interpreted as an argumentative move meant to advance a secondary virtual standpoint to be reconstructed as:

Sⁱⁱ: We stand / are together, a single body, in all this.

III. advancing another secondary standpoint to be reconstructed as

Sⁱⁱⁱ: NATO will be stronger / better in the future

implying “from now on” and “with your participation”.

The confrontational argumentative style appears to be detached, since the matters to be discussed are presented prescriptively in a business-like way (*we must increase spending*), meeting audience expectations is achieved by keeping objectivity to a maximum, and linguistic adornment and rhetorical devices are kept to a minimum.

There are some linguistic devices which could be considered to illustrate engagement in argumentation, such as the proponent’s identifying himself with NATO, and the direct appeal to NPA members, by using the first and second persons (*I need your help, your governments, each of you, your support* etc.). However, these are not essential, since NATO Plenaries are also occasions for personal exchanges and contacts, whereas each member is a representative of their own State, with roles rather similar to those of ambassadors, which justifies an exchange on a more personal level.

4.2. Rutte’s argumentative style in the opening stage: premises / departure points

The main starting point of the critical discussion may be summarized as

Premise: This is a critical moment for our security, with multiple threats and challenges.

with lines 26-36 serving as an explicit mention of the *threats*:

(26-36) Because we live in a more dangerous world. And this is a critical moment for our security. With multiple threats and challenges. There is Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, the threat of terrorism, intense global competition, and flashpoints around the world, from the Middle East to Asia. Russia has teamed up with China, North Korea and Iran. They are expanding their militaries and their capabilities. They are preparing for long-term confrontation.

Characteristics of the opening argumentative styles varieties are:

Table 2

Argumentative style in the opening stage (van Eemeren 2019: 167)

Stage of critical discussion	Aspects of strategic maneuvering	Argumentative Style	
		Engaged	Detached
Opening = making clear starting points / premises of the critical discussion	Topical potential	evaluative starting points demonstrating the arguer's involvement in the cause concerned	factual starting points that are easily verifiable
	Audience adaptation	the arguer's identification with premises close to the heart of the audience	non-conspicuous choice of starting points likely to be considered indisputable by the audience
	Presentational devices	starting points may be introduced by means of rhetorical questions or other linguistic tools for displaying personal involvement	straightforward factual overviews and enumerations of relevant statistics

In the excerpt above some elements of linguistic presentation reinforce the evaluative stand: *critical, multiple, brutal, intense, flashpoints, global competition, from the Middle East to Asia*, with emotionally loaded linguistic devices (*more dangerous, security, brutal war, threat*).

These formulations, providing a negative evaluation of the current socio-historical context appear to show the personal involvement of the speaker, as well as echoing the genuine interest of the audience in matters of such great importance. However, the speaker does not speak for himself personally but as the representative of an international body. Thus, the negative evaluation does not come from himself but from a non-personal objective estimate of the global situation as reflected by daily events, the media, etc.

Since attention should be focused on responding to these threats, the virtual starting point of the virtual dispute can be reconstructed (see van Eemeren *et al.* 1993) as

Premise 0: Spending boosts capability

with two other (semi-)explicit premises:

Premise 1: Emerging global threats require greater military readiness and deterrence

Premise 2a: Current spending averages around 2%

Premise 2b: Spending from Allies is currently too low to ensure solid and consistent response to all threats

Premise 2c: 2% is insufficient in the current context for deterrence and collective defence

The argumentative moves characteristic of a detached argumentative style in the opening stage consist in making explicit (at least) one starting point. *Premise 1* above is about the emerging global threats. Since such a mention needs backing, a second starting point is also made explicit by the rhetorical technique of *creating presence* for Russia's war against Ukraine, and for the terrorism threat. This ensures that this shared knowledge (of NPA members and NSG) also becomes a starting point of the critical discussion. Reiterating the 2 percent contribution as an initial target and leaving as presupposed a possible / probable need for an increase are assertive speech acts meant to recall previous commitments to serve also as secondary starting points.

The starting points selected are easily verifiable, but they do not even need verification, since they are not only part of the knowledge shared among NPA members and the NSG, but belong to common public knowledge. The formulations are matter of fact, simple, and precise, and they display a minimum of linguistic means, as indeed the Address as a whole does.

Rhetorically speaking, some more premises for the discussion could be identified in the first / introductory part of the Address, which may be deemed to play the role of a *captatio benevolentiae* and of creating communion with the audience (see lines 13-17 below). Rutte's argumentative style appears to be purposely fluctuating, at least at the level of the premises chosen, between *engagement* and *detachment*. The passage from the third-person reference to NPA to the more personal first person *our*, assigning reference to NATO and himself, and respectively, second person *you*, pointing more directly to the NPA members as individuals or state representatives, is also illustrative of this kind of playing between an engaged, and a detached argumentative style. The emotional term *bond*, and the appreciation shown in wordings such as *my admiration and deepest thanks* in the speech of a politician known as rational and unemotional, is also illustrative of the same play between engagement and detachment¹⁵:

(13-17) The NPA promotes peace, security and democracy. Strengthens transatlantic cooperation. And builds understanding about our great Alliance. *You reinforce the bond* between NATO and *our democratic societies*. You have *my admiration and deepest thanks*.

(126-128) NATO *has stood* with Ukraine from the beginning. We *stand* with Ukraine today. And we *will stand* with Ukraine throughout the challenges ahead.

¹⁵ Regarding this apparent mix of argumentative styles, it is also worth noting that *expressive speech acts* such as the thanks and admiration mentioned, do not play an instrumental role in the critical discussion and should be deleted in the reconstruction of argumentative discourse in the overview of the critical discussion.

The rhetorical device *polyptoton*¹⁶ is at work in lines 126-128 with the repetition of the term *stand* in various ways, but the aim of this is not to play upon its persuasive force but simply to mention, towards the end of the Address a significant premise of NATO's activity as a defensive organisation respectful of human rights.¹⁷

However, despite these apparent characteristics of engagement, the analysis reveals a detached opening argumentative style. The final remarks of this study admit to a possible "contamination" with engagement given the political context (expected NATO events to come with greater authority and decision-making power, as well as possible preliminary talks among NATO nationals and representatives).

4.3. Rutte's argumentative style in the argumentation stage

From a dialectical perspective, in points of relevance, the premises mentioned above directly support the standpoint, by orienting it towards a slight modification under the form of an inference:

Raising spending (to 5%) will strengthen NATO's global posture.

Characteristics of the argumentative styles varieties in the argumentation stage are:

¹⁶ I express my thanks here to the anonymous reviewer who pointed this out.

¹⁷ NATO has reinforced its relations with Ukraine, although the state is not a NATO member. (See NSG meeting with President Zelenskyy, October 2024, and current political and practical support provided to Ukraine, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37750.htm)

Table 3

Argumentative style in the argumentation stage (van Eemeren 2019: 167)

Stage of critical discussion	Aspects of strategic maneuvering	Argumentative Style	
		Engaged	Detached
Argumentation = advancing arguments in support of the standpoint	Topical potential	use of analogy argumentation in which the still to be accepted state of affairs referred to in the standpoint is compared with an already familiar or easily recognizable state of affairs	pragmatic argumentation indicating certain concrete advantages that ensue automatically from a recommended measure
	Audience adaptation	comparing the situation mentioned in the standpoint with a situation that is fully acceptable to the audience	arguing quasi-neutrally for a measure that has for the audience an indisputably positive effect
	Presentational devices	display of the arguer's commitment through the use of personal language	formalistic expert language

Throughout the Address, explicit pragmatic argumentation is used, starting with lines 24-26:

(24-26) At the Summit in The Hague next month, Allied leaders will take decisions to make NATO a stronger, fairer and *more lethal* Alliance. Because we live in a more dangerous world.

A pragmatic argument provides a link between a cause and a foreseen consequence. If the consequence is negative, harmful, the cause should be, in the arguer's view, avoided or eradicated in order to avoid the unwished effect. The pragmatic argument, which in this case does not play upon the emotional value of the purely denotative term *dangerous*, is *Because we live in a more dangerous world* implying that consequences may be harmful on a large scale. This explicit cause justifies the consequence to be pursued by NATO: strengthening the Alliance to make it *more lethal*. The strong term *lethal*, which can be deemed to be always emotionally

loaded, has, on top of its common, usual meaning, “mortal”, “fatal”, also the meaning of “effective”¹⁸ and should be read as such, inasmuch as NATO’s purpose is to acquire capabilities for defence and deterrence. NSG Rutte also deems it necessary to redefine the term as to provide it with a clearer interpretation in the given context (lines 92-94):

(92-94) Becoming *more lethal* means strengthening our deterrence and defence posture and providing our militaries with what they need to keep us safe. So that no potential aggressor has any doubt about our resolve.

This contextual clarification under the form of a redefinition is a rhetorical device very close to a persuasive definition. A *persuasive definition*, as defined by Stevenson (1938: 331):

“gives a new conceptual meaning to a familiar word without substantially changing its emotive meaning, and [...] is used with the conscious or unconscious purpose of changing, by this means, the direction of people’s interests.”

The meaning clarification or redefinition of the term *lethal* contributes to discourse persuasiveness, and plays upon the positive consequences this increased spending would have: *strengthening our deterrence and defence posture, providing our militaries with what they need to keep us safe*. The redefinition or meaning clarification of the term may have been chosen for its potential to create presence both for the *defence* attitude of the Alliance, and for the *militaries’* contribution to *keeping us safe*.

The empirical counterpart of the argumentation stage can be said to start in the Address mainly with lines 41-47, with the standpoint *we must increase spending* explicitly mentioned and pragmatic argumentation making explicit possible (risky) negative consequences and positive consequences:

¹⁸ The *Oxford Dictionary* also mentions a ‘weakened’ meaning of the term, as “highly damaging or injurious”.

(41-47) Peace fails when there's complacency, when threats go unanswered, and when preparations are put off. We must take action now and build up our defences. To delay is dangerous. To make NATO stronger, we must increase defence spending – that underpins everything.

The negative consequences of an alternative immediate lack of action are semi-explicitly evoked. The positive consequence of the defence spending increase is clearly made explicit:

<i>consequences</i>			<i>causes</i>	
negative consequence	<i>Peace fails</i>	⇐	not answering threats	putting off preparations
positive consequence	making NATO stronger	⇐	<i>take action now</i>	build up our defences
				<i>complacency</i> <i>increase defence spending</i>

It is also worth noting that in Stevenson's sense, the newly proposed meaning for *lethal* is *relevant* to the larger (international) and the narrower (NPA) contexts:

"Those who have understood the definition must be able to say all that they then want to say by using the term in the defined way. They must never have occasion to use the term in the old, unclear sense." (1937: 15)

In another way, NSG's argumentation can be also seen as *problem solving argumentation*, the problem being the very decision of the Allies to raise their contributions to the NATO effort. Another analysis in the literature on the argumentative style in such a particular case should be mentioned, with the remark that this may also apply to the current analysis, and the conclusion that the immediate action of raising contributions to be taken need not be further argued for and may be simply replaced by an appeal to communion and mutual understanding, which somehow explains the use of personal pronouns of first and second person and of some emotional terms in a different way than in the engaged argumentative style:

“The audience needs to see that immediate action is necessary. From the realisation that this is the case, they should deduce that the proposed measure is the logical solution; no alternatives are to be considered, because they are not regarded worth mentioning. After understanding the necessity of the interventions, further debate about these interventions should not be necessary.” (Garssen 2022: 57)

It appears that the use of pragmatic argumentation in conjunction with the search for appropriate language and context-relevant word meaning clarification, helps NSG to shape a balanced speech by strategically maneuvering between reasonableness and persuasion, and Rutte makes use of a detached argumentative style in the argumentation stage as well.

4.3. Rutte’s argumentative style in the concluding stage

In the case of this Address (as well as in many other instances of argumentative discourse) it is not easy to decide which the empirical counterpart of the concluding stage is. Moreover, towards the end of this discourse another standpoint is brought to our attention, which virtually becomes the standpoint of another difference of opinion:

More defence production is needed

signalling that by means of this address NSG intends to raise all delicate, presumably debatable points to the attention of the state representatives. Characteristics of the concluding argumentative styles varieties are:

Table 4

Argumentative style in the concluding stage (van Eemeren 2019: 167)

Stage of critical discussion	Aspects of strategic maneuvering	Argumentative Style	
		Engaged	Detached
Concluding = establishing the outcome of the resolution process	Topical potential	drawing a formally-reached nonsubjective conclusion OR leaving it to the listeners or readers to reach the inescapable conclusion themselves	embracing the conclusion that is reached emphatically as the favoured outcome of the discussion
	Audience adaptation	making in a non-obtrusive restrained way clear that the conclusion is a logical consequence of the starting points	making them realize that the conclusion is based on an argumentative procedure that the two parties have carried out together
	Presentational devices	using a captivating metaphor that makes the conclusion that is reached sound appealing	phrasing the conclusion that is reached in a reporting non-confrontational way

Presenting this new standpoint in what appears to be the end of his address NSG also introduces it as not necessarily debatable at this point. Lines 71-81 are illustrative in this respect:

(71-81) As well as more defence spending, we need more defence production. NATO's aim is to enhance and expand the industrial base right across the Alliance. We are committed to increasing defence production, fostering innovation, and removing barriers to cooperation. The Summit in The Hague will send a clear demand signal to industry. And we need industry to meet our ambition. Increased defence production is not just good for our security, it is good for our economies too. And I also expect Allies will spend more and better together on critical capabilities for our armed forces. NATO must become stronger, fairer, and more lethal.

It is likely another standpoint is advanced when the argument seems already concluded:

Substandpoint: Part of the increased spending is meant for defence production by enhancing industry capabilities.

The concluding stage may be said to correspond to lines 100-106 in which the main elements of NATO's soon-to-come actions are summarized, as well as content elements that have emerged throughout the other stages of the discussion; they are given in italics below:

(100-106) Rest assured – we will always be *a defensive alliance*. But to *protect our way of life*, we will always do *whatever it takes to prevent any aggression against us*. And if anyone *dares to attack us*, our *resolve will be absolute*. To *preserve peace*, we must *prepare for war*. Let us not ignore the *lessons of history*. Dayton knows that peace can prevail.¹⁹

5. Final remarks

Rutte's speech at Dayton appears to deliberately or intuitively embrace a *detached argumentative style* starting from the premise that the international situation is too tense and perfectly transparent for all representatives of the Allies, whereas requesting more money is in itself delicate and essential at the same time. NSG's decision to make a "non-rhetorical" and non-engaged speech, by adopting a poised attitude and a rather determined business-like argumentative style was meant to focus attention on the problem and not on the speaker, in spite of his prominent past and present political role (in comparison, for instance, to President Donald Trump's argumentative style always inclining towards the engaged variety with full focus on his own persona and hubris).

According to the remarks made in section 4.1 and to the characterizations of the detached and the engaged argumentative styles, an intermediate conclusion may also be drawn: when the analysis reveals a rather high degree of consistency and systematicity in the characteristics of a particular argumentative style and, at the same time, the discourse appears at times to be "contaminated" by some characteristics of another

¹⁹ The last sentence refers to the anniversary of the Dayton Accords and the peace on the territory of former Yugoslavia.

argumentative style, it may be the case that the speaker purposely signals some change of "direction" in her discourse, as for instance, in this particular case, the fact that irrespective of the NPA's members' efforts to convince their nationals of the necessity of increasing contributions, the decision will be somehow taken or imposed by the existing situation in order to achieve more *lethal* objectives. The elements which might illustrate characteristics of the engaged argumentative style in the Dayton address, namely some rhetorical repetitions (see the polyptoton) and antitheses resulting in paradox, the use of some emotional terms, and the use of the first and second person. I would however contend that this interference of characteristics of the engaged argumentative style in what appears to be systematically a detached argumentative style may be explained by the arguer's purpose of indicating that another critical discussion may be brought about in the future (NATO meetings), which would indeed require an engaged argumentative style, given the actual difficulties of all kinds that the Allies need to face individually and as a whole. This allows to say that these interferences might look prospectively towards and be virtually "quoted" in advance from the possible critical discussions to come, and which they announce in a "detached" way. Or else, they could be "traces", or "virtual quotes" of previous discussions, talks, and agreements on a smaller scale, at individual or national level.

A further step in a more extensive study is to deal distinctly with the various argumentative moves already mentioned by sketching the dialectical profile of this address adopting a detached argumentative style, and to see how they are tightly linked to the linguistic means proper, as was the case of the ethical term *lethal* in the current analysis.

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SOURCES

Important information not given in detail throughout this study is available on NATO's website, NATOweb = NATO main website pages. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/index.htm> as well as on NATO Youtube channels, NATO, NATO History, NATO News.

Information and text excerpts used throughout the study may be found extensively on the webpages below:

NPA = NATO Parliamentary Assembly. <https://www.nato-pa.int/content/nato-pa-explained>

NPAR250526 = Address by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, followed by a moderated conversation, Dayton, Ohio, May 26th, 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235647.htm

NS25 = NATO Summit, The Hague, June 24th-25th. <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/235800.htm>

NSBBC = Katya Adler, BBC Europe Editor, June 23rd 2025, “Could this be the most significant Nato summit since the Cold War?”. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cqjqvr75v1jo>

NPAL250604 = NATO's Parliamentary Assembly Leaflet *Dialogue – Transparency – Partnership*, updated June 4th, 2025. <https://www.nato-pa.int/document/2025-assembly-leaflet>

NMDB250605 = Speeches and Remarks by NSG, Meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence, Brussels, June 4th-5th, 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events_235715.htm

NSG24 = Mark Rutte, NATO Secretary General since October 1st, 2024. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/who_is_who_229125.htm; https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50094.htm

NSGGuard = Jon Henley, Europe correspondent, *The Guardian*, July 10, 2023, “Mark Rutte: the everyman Dutch PM whose ‘Teflon’ powers finally waned”. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/jul/10/mark-rutte-everyman-dutch-pm-whose-teflon-powers-finally-waned-netherlands>

NSGCH = NSG's Chatham House Speech, Chatham House in London, UK. “Building A Better NATO”, June 9th, 2025. https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_236119.htm?selectedLocale=en

NSG-NMDB = Speeches and Remarks by NSG at the Meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence, Brussels, June 4th-5th, 2025, Remarks to the Ukraine Minister of Defence.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events_235715.htm; https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235858.htm?selectedLocale=en
 Press conference: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_235900.htm?selectedLocale=en;
https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_235894.htm?selectedLocale=en
 Politico25/05 = Article on Rutte's declarations. <https://www.politico.eu/article/mark-rutte-embrace-5-percent-defense-goal-nato-summit/>
 REUT25/06 = Reuters update: *NATO agrees to higher defence spending goal, Spain says it is opting out*, June 22nd, 2025. <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/nato-countries-approve-hague-summit-statement-with-5-defence-spending-goal-2025-06-22/>

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Appendix

Mark Rutte's address at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Dayton (May 26, 2025)

Thank you Marcos, and thank you Andrii for your incredible leadership in Ukraine. And I think it was very important to have that address today to this important gathering.

And thank you to Mike Turner and the whole US team for the warm welcome to Dayton.

First, I want to pay tribute to Gerry Connolly. He was a powerful advocate for our great Alliance, a champion of the transatlantic bond and a fearless defender of the democratic values we hold dear. We met a couple of times. First when I was Prime Minister of the Netherlands, and then twice in my present role. And I have the best of memories of these encounters. And I can tell you also in private, he could be very forceful. Let us honour his memory by continuing to stand strong and united in NATO.

Despite these sad circumstances, it is a pleasure to join you this session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

And to celebrate your 70th anniversary year.

The NPA promotes peace, security and democracy. Strengthens transatlantic cooperation.

And builds understanding about our great Alliance.

You reinforce the bond between NATO and our democratic societies.

You have my admiration and deepest thanks.

I'm so pleased we are meeting in Dayton, a great city in the great state of Ohio.

And I was delighted to hear about the Dayton Dutch Lions, a local football team – or I suppose you in the United States would say “soccer”.

The Dutch philosophy for the “beautiful game” is all about strategic thinking, adaptability, and strong teamwork.

Today, I want to share with you how we are going to build a better NATO. At the Summit in The Hague next month, Allied leaders will take decisions to make NATO a stronger, fairer and more lethal Alliance.

Because we live in a more dangerous world.

And this is a critical moment for our security.

With multiple threats and challenges.

There is Russia's brutal war against Ukraine, the threat of terrorism, intense global competition, and flashpoints points around the world, from the Middle East to Asia.

Russia has teamed up with China, North Korea and Iran.

They are expanding their militaries and their capabilities. They are preparing for long-term confrontation.

I am struck by the speech Winston Churchill made in the House of Commons in 1936, when he asked the question: “Will there be time to put our defences in order? ... Will there be time to make these necessary efforts, or will the awful words “too late” be recorded?”

Peace fails when there's complacency, when threats go unanswered, and when preparations are put off.

We must take action now and build up our defences.

To delay is dangerous.

To make NATO stronger, we must increase defence spending – that underpins everything.

Allies will have to invest much more to meet new capability targets, which NATO Defence Ministers will agree in Brussels next week.

We need more resources, forces and capabilities so that we are prepared to face any threat, and to implement our collective defence plans in full.

Most Allies, if not all, are due to reach the initial aim of spending 2% of GDP on defence this year.

And many have already announced plans to go much further.

We know that the 2% pledge – agreed way back in 2014 – just doesn't cut it any more.

So in 2025, we are finalising a plan to dramatically increase defence spending across the Alliance.

This plan will mean more money for our core military requirements – hard defence.

And more money for defence-related investments, including infrastructure and resilience.

I am working closely with Allied leaders as we prepare for the formal decisions at the Summit in The Hague.

As parliamentarians, I need your help to make the case for higher defence spending with the public.

And to encourage your governments to keep up with their commitments.

And I know the debates about investing more in defence will be difficult in some parliaments.

And each of you will have an important role in building support to get budgets approved.

So I need – and NATO needs – your support.

As well as more defence spending, we need more defence production.

NATO's aim is to enhance and expand the industrial base right across the Alliance.

We are committed to increasing defence production, fostering innovation, and removing barriers to cooperation.

The Summit in The Hague will send a clear demand signal to industry.

And we need industry to meet our ambition.

Increased defence production is not just good for our security, it is good for our economies too.

And I also expect Allies will spend more and better together on critical capabilities for our armed forces.

NATO must become stronger, fairer, and more lethal.

To make NATO fairer, we will rebalance the burden of our security, with all Allies contributing their fair share.

We all benefit enormously from the protection our transatlantic Alliance provides.

But it is vital that every member of this Alliance is pulling their weight.

And I am encouraged to see Europe and Canada stepping up with more defence spending.

A strong transatlantic Alliance is good for Europe, and good for the United States.
Becoming more lethal means strengthening our deterrence and defence posture,
and providing our militaries with what they need to keep us safe.
So that no potential aggressor has any doubt about our resolve.
Rest assured – we will always be a defensive alliance.
But to protect our way of life, we will always do whatever it takes to prevent any
aggression against us.
And if anyone dares to attack us, our resolve will be absolute.
To preserve peace, we must prepare for war.
Let us not ignore the lessons of history.
Dayton knows that peace can prevail.
It was here in 1995 that the brutal Bosnian War was brought to an end.
The Dayton Agreement laid the foundation for peace in Bosnia and Herzegovina.
NATO has supported peace and stability there, and right across the Western Balkans,
for thirty years.
Our commitment remains just as strong today.
But above all, it is the people and politicians of Bosnia and Herzegovina – and
throughout the region – that must deliver progress.
The Western Balkans has shown that peace is possible.
But today, Europe is not at peace.
Russia has brought war back to Europe.
Its aggression against Ukraine must stop – and it must stop now.
I completely condemn Russia's indiscriminate attacks against innocent civilians over
the last 48 hours.
We fully support President Trump's urgent efforts to stop the fighting.
We need a just and lasting peace.
This is a priority that we all share.
NATO will continue our long-term support to Ukraine.
And this is not about prolonging the war, it is about ensuring Ukraine can defend
itself now, and prevent any future aggression.
NATO's command in Germany is leading the coordination of security assistance
and training for Ukraine, delivering critical aid daily, and helping build its future force.
And our new centre in Poland is helping us all learn the lessons from the war.
So far, Allies pledged more than 20 billion euros in additional security assistance for
Ukraine this year.
And through the Coalition of the willing, led by the United Kingdom and France,
NATO Allies have shown they are ready, willing and able to take more responsibility to
help secure peace, when the time comes.
NATO has stood with Ukraine from the beginning.
We stand with Ukraine today.
And we will stand with Ukraine throughout the challenges ahead.
We know that even when the war against Ukraine ends, the threats we face will persist.
Our adversaries will still try to dominate and divide us.
They will fail.

Because of the unbreakable transatlantic bond – North America and Europe standing together to secure peace through strength.

A stronger, fairer and more lethal Alliance is how we stay safe in a more dangerous world.

One billion people on both sides of the Atlantic are counting on us.

Let us rise to the challenge.

And stand strong together in NATO!

Thank you.