

NATO Must Be Strong to Deal With Russia, Says Chief

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NATO's Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

BRUSSELS — Only a strong Western security alliance can negotiate better ties with Russia, NATO's new secretary-general said Tuesday.

Jens Stoltenberg said his experience as Norway's prime minister was that robust defense capabilities and a solid trans-Atlantic bond were fundamental requirements in order to bring about constructive relations with Russia.

In his first policy speech since taking office Oct. 1, Stoltenberg said there was no contradiction between wanting to keep NATO strong and continuing efforts to engage with the government of Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"NATO is here to stay. Russia is here to stay. So we're going to have some kind of relationship," Stoltenberg said. "[The question is] what kind?"

Norway's status as a member of the U.S.-led defense alliance, Stoltenberg said, meant that his

small nation has been able to deal confidently with the Kremlin on a whole range of issues, from military matters and fisheries to energy, the environment and maritime border disputes.

"I believe there is a lesson here for us now," the former two-time Norwegian prime minister said. "That only a strong NATO can build a truly constructive and cooperative relationship with Russia."

"But to get there," he added, "Russia would need to want it, and to take clear steps to make it possible."

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