

Dear Friedrich Merz,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Today, it is my great pleasure and honor to introduce to you a dear friend of mine: Ashton Carter, the twenty-fifth Secretary of Defense of the United States of America. It is quite a challenge to sum up an outstanding career like his in a five minute nutshell. But I'll do my best...

Over the past three decades, Secretary Carter has built up magnificent expertise on security and defense policy. He served in several positions in the U.S. Department of Defense, for example as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Policy. He was responsible – among other things – for strategic affairs and nuclear weapons policy. He was involved in the Nunn-Lugar program which successfully eliminated nuclear weapons from Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine.

Later, as Under Secretary of Defense, he was in charge of Acquisition, Technology and Logistics. From 2011 to 2013 he served as Deputy Secretary of Defense. He was in charge of the Department's annual budget and was responsible for over three million civilian and military personnel. What a task!

Beyond his government service, Secretary Carter is also a man of science. He taught International Studies at Stanford, and before that at Harvard. Ashton Carter is author or co-author of eleven books and more than 100 articles. The topics vary from physics to technology, national security, and management. At the beginning of this stunning career he studied medieval history and physics – quite an unusual combination of subjects. Today, this is Secretary Carter's first official visit to Berlin.

Ash, I am convinced that you - being a historian by training – did not choose this particular date for your first official visit to Germany by chance. Exactly 25 years ago, on 22 June 1990, Checkpoint Charlie – for decades the best-known symbol of the division of Berlin and Germany – was officially dismantled. Six foreign ministers witnessed the event. Afterwards, they started the second round of the Two-plus-Four Talks which finally led to the reunification of Germany.

We will never forget that after World War II the United States lent us a helping hand. And without the assistance of our Atlantic partners a peaceful unification would have never taken place. We understand the continued presence of U.S. troops here in Germany also as a visible sign of our friendship and our common security interests.

Today we are strong partners. And so I am very grateful that you have chosen the Atlantik-Brücke and this venue, close to the Brandenburg Gate, for your speech. We all know, for Americans and Europeans, there are no better partners. We share the fundamental principles of freedom and democracy, the rule of law and tolerance.

Secretary Carter, dear Ash, your visit is a clear sign of our close friendship. So, thank you very much for being here with us today. And now – the floor is yours.