North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs
2019-11-19

(As delivered)

Good morning.

Two weeks from now, NATO leaders will meet in London. Together, we will mark our Alliance's seventieth anniversary. And look to the future.

Tomorrow, Foreign Ministers will finalize our preparations for the London meeting. This leaders' meeting is timely. Not least because questions are being asked about the strength of the transatlantic relationship. There are indeed differences among Allies on a range of different issues. Such as trade, climate, the Iran nuclear deal. And more recently, the situation in North East Syria. But differences and doubts among Allies are not new. Despite them, NATO has only grown stronger over the last seventy years. And we continue to provide security for almost 1 billion people.

In fact, Europe and North America are doing more together in NATO today than we have for decades. We are strengthening our deterrence and defence, with more forces at higher readiness. Stepping up our response against cyber attacks and hybrid threats. And playing a key role in the fight against international terrorism, including with training missions in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Because ultimately, being part of a strong transatlantic Alliance is in the national interest of each and every one of our countries. Everything we do must be underpinned by fair burden sharing. We are now in the fifth consecutive year of rising defence spending across European Allies and Canada. With more than $100 billion extra invested in defence. This is unprecedented progress. And we are determined to keep up the momentum.

In a fast-changing world, NATO continues to adapt to face strategic challenges. And tomorrow, we will take another important step. I expect ministers will agree to recognize space as an operational domain, alongside air, land, sea, and cyber. Space is essential to the Alliance's defence and deterrence. For early warning, communication and navigation.

Around 2,000 satellites currently orbit the Earth. Around half are owned by NATO countries. So recognising space as an operational domain will be a clear sign that we continue to strengthen our deterrence and defence in all areas. Our approach will remain defensive and

fully in line with international law. NATO has no intention to put weapons in space. But we need to ensure our missions and operations have the right support.

We will also address a range of other issues. Including NATO's role in the fight against terrorism. Our training missions in Afghanistan and Iraq continue to play an important role in preventing the resurgence of ISIS and other terrorist groups.

Our work to counter hybrid threats will also be on the agenda. Allies are stepping up, including with new baseline requirements for resilient telecommunications, including 5G. And our first counter-hybrid support team is in Montenegro this week. We will also discuss other strategic issues, including Russia the implications of the rise of China, the future of arms control, and energy security.

NATO is the only forum that brings nations from Europe and North America together, to address strategic security challenges NATO remains the only guarantor of European and transatlantic security. And it is the responsibility of each of us to maintain and strengthen our unity. In order to ensure credible deterrence and defence for all of us.

And with that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO spokesperson]: And we'll start with Reuters.

QUESTION [Reuters]: Thank you. Secretary General, two questions if I may. On defence spending, we've heard this $100 billion figure for a while now, can you give us an update on where you think, what sort of numbers you'll be presenting to President Trump? And secondly, on space as a domain, how can you avoid giving the impression that NATO is some way is trying to take ownership of space? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: We will publish new, updated figures on defence spending before the Leaders Meeting in London in the beginning of December. And these new, updated figures will be based on the national plans that all Allies have provided. They have provided updated national plans before the meeting and, of course, also on the budgets which have been agreed in different parliaments.

So I will not pre-announce what we will publish then, but we will have updated and new figures for you in a few days before the NATO Leaders Meeting in London.

What I can say is that it is unprecedented, the increase we have seen over the last years. And Allies continue to increase. And after years of cutting defence spending, all Allies have started to increase. And I expect that also to continue in the years to come.

On space, well, space is of great importance for our civilian societies and of . . . for any military operation. It's about communications, it's about navigation, it's about data, data imagery. Space is essential for almost everything we do. And therefore, to make sure that we have the right capabilities, that our missions and operations have the support they need is, of

course, important. And to coordinate those efforts among NATO Allies is important for the Alliance and also shows that NATO is responding and adapting to evolving security challenges.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have Wall Street Journal here, also on the second row.

JAMES MARSON [Wall Street Journal]: James Marson from The Wall Street Journal. Secretary General, you've probably got used to dealing with the US President bashing NATO, now we also have the French President bashing NATO. What's your reading of what President Macron said in this Economist interview? Have you reached out to Paris at all? Do you intend to . . . to try and find out more details, of clarifications? And do you expect what he said to become part of the discussions in London?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I am planning to go to Paris next week to meet with President Macron and my message is that NATO is adapting, NATO is agile, NATO is responding. The reality is that Europe and North America, we are doing more together than we have done for decades. And that the US is not leaving Europe, the US is actually increasing their military presence in Europe with more troops, with more exercises, with more US investments in military infrastructure in Europe. And, at the same time, European Allies are stepping up.

My other message is that there is no contradiction between European unity and transatlantic unity. Actually, we need more European efforts on defence, but not as an alternative, not as something that is replacing NATO, but something which is strengthening the European pillar within NATO. This was also the very clear message, for instance, in Berlin, when I visited Germany recently. They strongly support the idea of strengthening EU efforts, European efforts on defence, but within the framework of NATO. And there is no way European unity cannot replace transatlantic unity. We need both. And we have also to understand that, especially after Brexit, EU cannot defend Europe. 80 Per cent of NATO's defence expenditure will come from non-EU Allies and the transatlantic bond remains vital for the security of Europe. And the ultimate guarantee for our security is the NATO nuclear deterrent. It's something we have together. It's part of the NATO Alliance. It's something we plan, exercise and deliver together as a transatlantic alliance. So that is my message. That will also, of course, be my message in Paris.

The other message I also have is actually that, well, we are 29 democracies from both sides of the Atlantic and there are differences. We have seen that all the way back to the Suez Crisis in 1956. The strength of NATO is that despite these differences, we have always been able to unite around our core task: to protect and defend each other. And it is the responsibility of all Allies to make sure that we do this also today, because we live in a more unpredictable and uncertain world. And in uncertain times, we need strong multilateral institutions like NATO. And therefore, the answer is stronger and more NATO, not to weaken the transatlantic bond.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have Frankfurter Allgemeine. Yeah, fifth row up there, thanks.

QUESTION [Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung]: Thank you very much. Secretary General, in this now-famous interview with The Economist, President Macron has hinted to the fact that after Brexit, France will remain the only power in the European Union which holds nuclear weapons. And he said it's essential to think what that means for us in relations to others. So my question now to you: what do you think is the strategic value of these French nuclear weapons for the security in Europe?

JENS STOLTENBERG: It's not for me to comment on the EU, but what I can say is that our nuclear deterrent is, of course, fundamental for our security, and we have three nuclear powers in the Alliance – the United States and United Kingdom and France. The United States is also providing nuclear capabilities or nuclear weapons to our NATO nuclear deterrent, to our nuclear-sharing arrangements, where the US has nuclear weapons in Europe, but deployed in different European Allied countries. And then we have what we call dual-capable aircrafts, operating them from different . . . or able to operate them from different European countries. And, of course, this is the ultimate guarantee for our security. France is not part of that nuclear arrangement of sharing capability in NATO, that's a decision by France. But at the same time, of course, the French nuclear weapons support NATO and I cannot see that that would change or . . . that will not change with Brexit. European Allies have strongly expressed that they will continue to . . . Brexit will not change anything when it comes to NATO. Brexit will change UK's relationship to the European Union, but not UK's relationship to NATO. And we have to also, again, to remember that any attempt to distance Europe from North America will weaken the transatlantic bond, but it will also divide Europe. There is no interest in Europe to do that. So that will weaken both Europe and North America and the transatlantic unity. So again, we need to keep the Alliance together and we need to keep Europe together. We should not make that as two things which are competing with each other.

OANA LUNGESCU: Financial Times at the top, there. Higher up. Thank you.

MICHAEL PEEL [Financial Times]: Michael Peel, Financial Times. A couple of questions, please, Sec Gen. Are you concerned at all that the action that NATO is taking on China could be perceived as, or portrayed as, threatening by Beijing, given that NATO is a military alliance? And secondly, does the establishment of outer space as a domain mean that it could . . . an attack on a satellite or some other vessel in space, could trigger Article 5 collective defence provisions? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO is a defensive alliance. And there's nothing we are doing which is threatening towards any other country anywhere in the world. What . . . and there is no plans, no proposal no intention to move NATO into, for instance, the South China Sea.

But what we see is the rise of China. We see that China soon will have the largest economy in the world. They have the second largest defence budget. China is investing heavily in modern military capabilities, including new advanced intercontinental ballistic missile,

hypersonic weapons, gliders and so on. So these are, of course, significant military capabilities which affect our security.

Second, China's coming closer to us. We see them in Africa, in the Arctic, investing in infrastructure in Europe and also in cyberspace.

So we need to assess the consequences for our security of the rise of China. There are opportunities, but there are also some challenges. And I welcome the fact that NATO Allies have agreed that we have to address this together.

My message is also that sometimes, for instance, the United State, I was there last week, I met some . . . it was expressed from some of my interlocutors in the United States that they are concerned about the size of China. Well, if the United States is concerned about the size of China, then it's even more important to keep your friends and Allies close, because together we represent 50 per cent of world GDP and 50 per cent of the world military might. So, yes, China is growing, but that makes actually NATO just even more important also for the United States.

On space, any Ally may request consultations on any threat or attack. That was the case before we declared space as an operational domain, and it will be the case also after the ministers, as I expect, will declare space as an operational domain during their meeting tomorrow.

We will always consider, on a case-by-case basis, whether to trigger Article 5, and we will not give the advantage to any potential adversary that will specify exactly what is the threshold for triggering Article 5.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have Jane's. Yeah, blue shirt, yeah. Thank you.

BROOKS TIGNER [Jane's Defence Weekly]: Yes, Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence. Coming back to space again. Yes, NATO's new space domain will be defensive only. However, NATO's largest Ally, the United States, is setting up a Space Command and does intend to offensively weaponise space. Question to you: will there be any communication links between NATO's future early-warning space picture and the future US Space Command? And would that, by implication, still be only defensive for NATO's operational space domain? Or will there categorically be no links between the two? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: What I can say is that what . . . we, we will not weaponise space. We will not deploy weapons in space. But we have to take into account, we have to relate to the fact that space is becoming more and more important for our military operations and missions. And it also has to do with the vulnerability, the resilience of our civilian societies, because space is so important for navigation, for communications and for many other things.

I will not go into the specifics of how we are going to communicate with national space commands and national space capabilities. But that's for . . . that's national capabilities. What

NATO will do will be defensive and we will not deploy weapons in space.

OANA LUNGESCU: We'll take a couple of questions in front, so I have Belsat from Belarus?

QUESTION [Belsat]: Secretary General, how do you consider Belarus now, five years after the beginning of hybrid aggression of Russia against Ukraine? Do you feel that Belarus, as a Russian ally, is a potential threat to NATO or not? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So, Belarus has been a partner of NATO since 1995, and our relations with the Belarus is based on common interests and open channels of dialogue.

We are, for instance, working with Belarus on issues related to transparency, risk reduction, because we believe that in a security environment where we have seen increased tensions, we see more military exercises, then it's even more important to have as much transparency and predictability as possible.

And my Assistant Secretary General for Emerging Security Challenges was part of a delegation that visited Belarus recently. And he took part in the dialogue to try to, to strengthen our partnership with Belarus. We don't see any threat against any NATO-allied country. We, we welcome the partnership and the work we do with Belarus.

OANA LUNGESCU: And we'll go to our Ukrainian colleague, third row. Thanks.

QUESTION [National News Agency of Ukraine]: Yesterday Russia returned to Ukraine remains of the ships seized next . . . the previous year in November. Will ministers discuss that situ— . . . while continue to ignoring the ruling of the International Sea Court in Hague? Will the ministers discuss the situation tomorrow in the context of the preserving naval presence in the Black Sea and a continuation of insisting naval . . . of freedom of navigation there? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So first of all, I welcome the return of the seized Ukrainian ships. This is something Russia should have done a long time ago and they didn't have the right to seize those ships when they did so. So I welcome that they are now being returned. And this is also in line with Russia's international obligations.

I think it is a good thing, also, because hopefully it can help to make some progress in implementing the Minsk agreements and help also the efforts of the Normandy Format to make progress, to find a sustainable political solution to the crisis in Ukraine.

I expect that ministers will address this during our meeting tomorrow. The North Atlantic Council and I, we visited Ukraine recently. We went to Kyiv, we met President Zelenskyy, but we also went to Odessa, where NATO is now helping to build the Naval Academy to strengthen military education, naval education.

And it just shows that NATO Allies provide strong political support to Ukraine, but also practical support on cyber, on logistics, on command and control, and different NATO Allies also provide different kinds of training. So we will continue to do that. And we also convey a very clear message that Russia must allow freedom of navigation in the Sea of Azov, and also, of course, in the Kerch Straits.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we go to NPR/Deutsche Welle.

TERI SCHULTZ [NPR/Deutsche Welle]: Hi, Teri Schultz, over here. Secretary General, in northern Syria things have calmed down a bit since the Defence Ministers Meeting, but now you have Russia patrolling right next to the border and in fact, taking over an airbase used by the United States within 24 hours of the Americans departing. Are you uncomfortable with this situation, even if things are relatively calm on the ground?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I welcome the fact that we, at least we have seen some reduction in violence. The situation in northern Syria and northeast Syria is still fragile and difficult and extremely complex, but at least it is a step forward that we have seen, at least up to now, a reduction in violence. And we have to build on that to try to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria.

There are different views among NATO Allies on the situation in northeast Syria. But I think it is important, and NATO, at least, is a platform for Allies to sit together and to address the situation in Syria. They did so at the Defence Ministerial Meeting recently, and I expect also the situation will be discussed when ministers meet tomorrow.

What we all agree on is that we must not jeopardise the progress, the gains we have made in the fight against Daesh. We need to look into what more we can do to strengthen the efforts in the fight . . . in fighting ISIS or Daesh. And we also agree that . . . that Turkey is the Ally which has . . . which is hosting most refugees. And Turkey has suffered many terrorist attacks and therefore Turkey has some legitimate security concerns.

And I think it is important just that NATO is a place where Allies meet and discuss also issues like the situation in Syria.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, North Macedonia TV? Lady in purple.

QUESTION [North Macedonia TV]: Secretary General, how in your opinion, the ratification of the protocol for North Macedonia going on, 27 Allies have finished the ratification, two Allies still remain to do so. So, the NATO summit in London will celebrate the 70th Anniversary of the Alliance, but not with 30 Allies.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So, North Macedonia is very close to becoming a full member of the Alliance. We signed the accession protocol this spring. Then most of the parliaments in our 29 Allied countries have ratified the protocol. I visited the US last week and they have passed the ratification through the Senate and so has most of the other NATO Allies done.

I don’t expect all Allies to finish this process by the beginning of December, but I expect that to be finished early next year, and then North Macedonia will be a full member.

They will be at the table. They will be attending, North Macedonia will attend the meeting at the heads of state and government level in London, as an invitee. So I think that shows that North Macedonia is very close to becoming a full member, and they are already participating in NATO meetings, including the Leaders Meeting in London in December.

OANA LUNGESCU: Tass?

QUESTION [Tass]: Thank you very much, Denis Dubrovin, Tass News Agency. Secretary General, a question about the burden-sharing. As we can see, the figures of 2018, the budget . . . military budget of NATO is 20 times larger than military budget of Russia. So the question is: who needs to be deterred? And the second question: how comes that NATO feels the need to deter Russia with their military budget 20 times larger than Russian military budget and still wants more money for defence? Does it mean that NATO army is 20 times less efficient than Russian? Thank you?

JENS STOLTENBERG: We invest in our armies, in our defence and deterrence. But that’s not directed against any other country. We are a defensive alliance and we do so to provide a credible deterrence and defence. And the purpose of providing that is not to provoke a conflict, but it is to prevent a conflict. And as long as there is no doubt that if any Ally is attacked, the whole Alliance will respond, then we prevent conflict. That’s the reason why NATO exists, is to preserve peace, is to prevent a military conflict. And we have successfully done that for 70 years.

And it is right that the aggressive actions of Russia against Ukraine triggered a military adaptation, a military response from NATO with high readiness of our forces, with forward deployment of combat-ready troops in the eastern part of the Alliance, to send the absolutely clear message that what happened in Crimea cannot happen against a NATO Ally. And there has to be no room for misunderstanding, miscalculation, because if there is no room for misunderstanding, miscalculation, then we prevent such a situation from happening. And that’s the best way to preserve peace. And that’s the reason why we have invested more and also why we have increased the readiness of our forces and deployed forces to the eastern part of the Alliance.

When it comes to these figures and numbers, we are an effective alliance and we have effective armies, but the cost level is much higher, reflecting just a higher standard of living. So if you compare salaries and costs across NATO Allies and Russia, of course their cost levels are higher. And therefore, when you compare these budgets at market prices, and common currencies, then you get those conclusions you are referring to, but that doesn’t reflect less efficiency. But it reflects, to a large extent, differences in cost levels. If you do this at purchasing power, you get totally different figures. The thing is that we will defend . . . we will invest as much as needed to make sure that we have a credible deterrence and defence.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, Agence France-Presse.

DAMON WAKE [Agence France-Presse]: Hi, Damon Wake from Agence France-Presse. Continuing with the Russian theme. Are you at all concerned by President Macron's calls for and moves towards rapprochement with Moscow? Do . . . is it, is this moving, is he moving too quickly? Has Russia done enough to merit this? And secondly, what do you make of Russian suggestions of a moratorium on the deployment of intermediate-range missiles in Europe? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO and NATO Allies have stated again and again that we need a dual-track approach to Russia. And I expect that Allies will reiterate that approach when they meet also in London. Meaning that we need strong deterrence and defence. But at the same time, we will always strive for a better relationship with Russia, because Russia is our neighbour. Russia is there to stay. And we will try to strive for a better relationship. And even without a better relationship with Russia, we have to work for dialogue, predictability, transparency in our relationship with Russia. Meaning we need to even . . . we need to manage a difficult relationship, because with more military presence, with higher tensions and more exercises, we have to make sure that we don't see incidents, accidents that can spiral and come out of control. So all Allies agree on this dual-track approach.

We all regret the . . . also to address issues related to arms control, we all regret the demise of the INF Treaty. It has been clearly stated from, again, all NATO Allies, several times, that the responsibility for the demise of the INF Treaty is on Russia, or it's Russia's responsibility, because they violated the treaty. And by violating the INF Treaty, they destroyed the treaty.

What we are discussing now in NATO, or addressing now in NATO is our response. And that includes also initiatives on arms control, because we believe in arms control. But of course, for any arms control to be effective, it has to be balanced, it has to be credible and it has to be respected. So exactly how we will include intermediate-range weapons in the new arms control regime, it's a bit too early to say. But we agree that the reason for the demise of the treaty was the Russian violations.

OANA LUNGESCU: Europa Press?

ANA PISONERO [Europa Press]: Thank you. Ana Pisonero, from the Spanish News Agency, Europa Press. Secretary General, going forward in the adaptation that NATO will need to continue doing to face space . . . threats in space, also Artificial Intelligence or the new technological developments, do you still see space for NATO to have a reflection on how politically it consults strategic decisions that have a big impact on the Alliance? For example, like the offensive in Turkey and the previous decision of the US to pull out their troops. Do you see a fair point here in the criticisms of President Macron and his . . . his evaluation that NATO is working very well as a military Alliance and in terms of interoperability and on the military front, but maybe there is a bit space to improve on the political, strategic

consultations? And in relation to this, going forward as well, and looking for the next years of NATO, do you see the main threats are coming from inside or outside? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO is constantly discussing, addressing issues of strategic importance for all Allies. That's exactly what we do at every meeting. And that's the reason why, for instance, we have agreed on a dual-track approach to Russia: deterrence, defence combined with dialogue. That's the reason why we were able to agree on how to handle the demise of the INF Treaty, a big strategic challenge where, of course, we regret that Russia violated the treaty, but I welcome the unity the Alliance was able to demonstrate in dealing with the Russian violations of the INF Treaty – huge strategic issues, where we have a common approach.

On arms control in general, something which we address and discuss in NATO on a regular basis.

The whole challenge of terrorism is something we have discussed, addressed again and again in NATO. Our mission in Afghanistan, which is our biggest military operation still, is about fighting terrorism, is about making sure that Afghanistan doesn't once again become a safe haven, for international terrorism. All NATO Allies and NATO are part of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. We all participated at the meeting of the Global Coalition in Washington last week. We discussed and addressed the situation, including in northern Syria. Again, there are differences within the Global Coalition and within NATO on the situation in northern Syria. But at least the Allies sit around the same table and discuss. And that's the only way to try to find common ground. And despite the differences we see on the current situation in northern Syria, we agree on the need to step up the efforts in fighting ISIS. We agree on the need to continue NATO missions and operations in and around Turkey, including with the assurance measures, and for instance, a NATO presence in the Aegean Sea. And we also agree on the need to make sure that we recognise the importance of standing together in avoiding that ISIS is able to get a foothold in Afghanistan, which is their declared aim.

So, NATO is the only platform where North America and Europe meet on a daily basis and where we address a wide range of issues, including the most important strategic issues we are faced with today: a more assertive Russia, terrorism, the rise of China, arms control and many other issues. Normally we agree, sometimes we don't . . . we don't agree. But also then, I think it's important at least that we meet, discuss and try to find a way to deal with all the issues where we have different views.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have Le Soir?

QUESTION [Le Soir]: In light of what you've just said about the EU, do you plan to invite the European leaders, European Union leaders to the NATO Leaders Meeting? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: This is a very . . . this is a very special meeting in the sense that it is only one session. So this is different from other NATO Leaders Meetings, because we only have one session, where we are going to discuss the future of NATO. And the only reason why we have one session is that this is not a normal summit. This is a Leaders Meeting where we are going to mark the 70th Anniversary of the Alliance.

We . . . I meet with EU leaders on a regular basis. I know that both the outgoing, but also incoming leadership of the EU, are very much aware of the importance of NATO-EU cooperation. I look forward to working with the new leadership. But this meeting is different from other NATO meetings, just because we have only one session.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, Agence France-Presse, a second question.

QUESTION [Agence France-Presse]: In French, if I may. [Interpreted]: Good morning. You didn't answer my colleague's question, when she asked you if you understood the French President's criticism of NATO. He was very harsh about NATO's ability to discuss strategic issues, he described NATO as 'brain-dead'. How are you going to react if the brain is dead? Do we need a brain transplant? So do we need some resignations, or should we downplay France's comments, as Germany has done by accusing France of wanting to sabotage NATO? Is that the right response? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I will go to Paris next week and there I intend to discuss these issues with President Macron, and I think that's the best way also to address any differences, is to sit down and discuss them and then to fully understand the messages and motivations.

What I can say today is that if we just look at what NATO has done over the last years, you see a very agile, a very strong, a very adaptable Alliance. We have implemented the largest reinforcement of our collective defence in decades. US is not leaving Europe, US is actually coming back to Europe. European Allies are investing more. We are modernising the Alliance with a totally new command structure, with addressing hybrid and cyber threats. And we are doing more together - North America and Europe - than we have done for decades.

For the first time in our history, we have combat-ready troops, battlegroups, deployed in the eastern part of the Alliance. So there is no doubt that NATO has been, is able to adapt and to respond to a more difficult world with more unpredictable threats and challenges.

Then, of course, when we are 29 Allies, there will always be differences, because we represent 29 different countries, different political parties from both sides of the Atlantic with different history, different culture. And that has been always the case. Back to the Suez Crisis in 56, all the way to the Iraq war in 2003, there have been differences, disagreements, on many issues. The strength of NATO is that we have always been able to overcome these differences and unite around our core task, and that is to protect and defend each other. And I am absolutely certain that we can do that today also. Because it is in the national security interest of each and every one of us to stand together, especially in uncertain times. Then we

need strong institutions, strong multilateral institutions like NATO, and therefore we should strengthen NATO not weaken NATO. And that is the responsibility for all of us, and I welcome the fact that that's exactly what we are doing, together, 29 Allies, including France. So that's a good thing.

Then, as I said, efforts to strengthen European defence, it's good. We have asked for that for years. We welcome it. But as also, it was clearly stated from the German Chancellor and from Germany when I visited her a couple of weeks ago, this has to be as part of the European pillar within NATO. Because EU cannot replace NATO. European security rests on transatlantic unity. And that's also the clear message from the European Allies I have spoken with. And again, if we distance Europe from North America, we weaken NATO, but we also divide Europe. And therefore we should not do that. We need strong Europe and we need strong NATO. There is no contradiction.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. This concludes this press conference and we'll see you tomorrow. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2019/11/19/press-conference