North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers
2019-02-12

(As delivered)

Good morning.

Defence Ministers will meet here tomorrow and the day after tomorrow to address pressing security challenges.

We will discuss Russia's violation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty.

Moscow continues to develop and deploy several battalions of the SSC-8 missile.

Despite the efforts of the United States and other NATO Allies – over many years – to encourage Russia to return to compliance.

We all know that a treaty that is only respected by one side cannot keep us safe.

That is why the United States, with the full support of all NATO Allies, has announced its intention to withdraw from the Treaty.

This will take effect within six months.

So Russia has a last opportunity to take the responsible path.

To return to compliance and save the INF Treaty.

We urge Russia to take this opportunity.

At the same time, we are planning for a world without the INF Treaty.

At this meeting of defence ministers, we will discuss what steps NATO should take to adapt to a world with more Russian missiles.

And maintain effective deterrence and defence.

I will not speculate on what those steps will be.

But let me say this:

Any steps we take will be coordinated, measured, and defensive.

And we do not intend to deploy new ground-based nuclear missiles in Europe.

At the same time, we remain committed to meaningful arms control and non-proliferation efforts.

NATO does not want a new arms race.

Because that would be in nobody's interest.

We will also discuss NATO's deterrence and defence more broadly, including work on our new Readiness Initiative.

This will add to our readiness with 30 combat ships, 30 land battalions, and 30 air squadrons, available within 30 days.

Burden sharing and defence spending will be high on our agenda.

All Allies have now submitted their annual reports on their national plans to meet the Defence Investment Pledge.

And we will review progress on all three dimensions of the pledge: cash, capabilities and contributions.

On all three measures, the trend is up.

Since 2016, European Allies and Canada have spent a cumulative 41 billion US dollars more on defence.

And based on the latest reports, this will rise to one hundred billion dollars by next year.

Allies are also investing more in modern capabilities.

And contributing more forces to our missions and operations.

We still have work to do.

But I am encouraged by the significant progress so far.

We will also discuss NATO missions and operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and Kosovo.

In Afghanistan, the situation remains difficult.

But we also see efforts for peace.

Allies have been kept closely updated by the United States.

We continue to consult on the implications of a possible peace deal and how NATO can support it.

Yesterday we met with the US envoy Ambassador Khalilzad.

This is the third time in the last few weeks we meet with him.

It is too early to say if there will be a deal.

NATO continues to help the Afghan security forces create the conditions for a peaceful solution.

What is clear is this: we went into Afghanistan together, and together we will determine our future posture.

Based on conditions we determine with the Afghans.

In Iraq, our new training mission is now up and running.

Our support will help Iraq prevent the resurgence of ISIS or other terrorist groups.

We will also address our KFOR mission, which has made an important contribution to stability in the Western Balkans region for the last 20 years.

At the same time, we will review the level of our support for the Kosovo Security Force after the change of its mandate.

We will have a session devoted to NATO-EU cooperation and the EU efforts on defence.

Done in the right way, EU efforts can strengthen the European pillar in NATO, and lead to fairer burden sharing.

But of course, EU efforts on defence cannot replace NATO.

So we must ensure our efforts complement and do not compete with one another.

To conclude, let me say that I am extremely glad that at this meeting we will welcome for the first time our colleague from Skopje, minister Radmila Sekerinska.

The future Republic of North Macedonia now has a seat at NATO's table.

With that, I'm ready to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu [Nato Spokesperson]: Okay, we'll start with Agence France-Presse over there.

Damon Wake [AFP]: Hello, good morning, Damon Wake, AFP, on the INF, do you have any plans for contact with the Russians in the near future? And what message can you give to them beyond repeating for the umpteenth time that they should come back into compliance? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]: We have and we will meet with the Russians to address the INF issue. We met with Russia recently, in the NATO-Russia Council and one of the main topics there was actually the INF, and the Russian violations of the INF Treaty. This is very serious because these missiles are hard to detect, they are mobile, they have little warning time, they can reach European cities, they are capable of carrying nuclear warheads. And by reducing the warning time they also reduce the threshold of any potential use of nuclear weapons in an armed conflict. So we have raised it, we will raise it again, both in the NATO-Russia Council, but also in direct talks with the Russians. So I, for instance, expect that this will be an issue that will be raised, for instance, at the Munich Security Conference, because all NATO Allies are concerned about the fact that we now see that this cornerstone for European security is really in jeopardy. We are both urging Russia to come back into compliance, but at the same time we are planning for a world without the INF Treaty and with more Russian missiles. We don't have to measure what Russia does, but we need to make sure that we have effective deterrence and defence.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, the gentleman over there. Third row.

Rexha Xhemajl [KTV Kosovo]: Mr Secretary General, can you please elaborate on how will this future cooperation of NATO with the engagement with Kosovo security forces will look like? And will the ongoing dispute with Serbia about the tariffs will affect your decision? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: I think it is important to distinguish between two types of NATO presence in Kosovo. We have the KFOR operation – that will not be affected at all. Because the KFOR operation, with three or four thousand troops has been there for many years, for 20 years, and is based on a UN Security Council Resolution. That will continue because it contributes to stability, it protects all people in Kosovo, and it contributes to stability in the wider region. So that will continue unchanged.

What we will assess is the activities we have outside the KFOR mission, which is different kinds of capacity-building. We have not made any decisions, but we have made clear that we will assess the level of NATO engagement, because several Allies have expressed that they think it's ill-timed, the decision to transform the Kosovo security force into an army, and several Allies have also expressed their disappointment with the new tariffs. And they have also clearly stated that the security forces in Kosovo must respect all their international obligations, including the agreement, the Brussels Agreement that they will not move to Northern Kosovo without concurrence, or the support of the NATO Commander of KFOR.

So all these issues will, of course, be on the table, and then it's too early to say exactly what kind of adjustments that will take place, but this is now something we are addressing.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, VG. Gentleman in the third row please. In the third row, there on the third row.

Alf Johnsen [VG]: Alf Johnsen, VG, Norwegian daily. We have . . . there are reports after the Trident Juncture in Norway last fall about Russian activities in all domains and there was specifically GPS disturbances every day during the exercise, both in northern Norway and in Finland, that could pose danger to civilian air traffic for instance. So my question is whether NATO have addressed the incidents and what response you got? And also if other Allies have experienced the same kind of disturbances on the satellite GPS. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: So we have addressed air safety with Russia several times and this has been an issue, especially related to the Baltic Sea, but also an issue which is of more general concern. And taking into account the importance of GPS signals for both civil aviation, but not least for search and rescue, for emergency services, it is very serious when GPS signals are jammed – as we have seen in Norway and also in Finland.

To jam GPS signals is dangerous and irresponsible behaviour. And that's also a reason why Norway and other NATO Allies have expressed such great concern about this. And also why NATO will continue to raise all issues related to air safety with Russia, because this is something which is undermining actually the cooperation we have with Russia - some NATO Allies, including Norway, have with Russia - up in the High North related to search and rescue. So this will benefit . . . any jamming of GPS signals will undermine search and rescue for, of course, the Norwegians but also for Russians who may need help in the High North.

Oana Lungescu: OK gentleman over here.

Nizamuddin Hameedi [Pajhwok Afghan News]: Thank you. This is Nizamuddin Hameedi from Pajhwok Afghan News. My question refers to recent peace efforts in Afghanistan. So, given your recent meetings with Ambassador Khalilzad, what step can facilitate direct Afghan government and Taliban talks, as it is not happening?

Jens Stoltenberg: We strongly support Afghan reconciliation and of course that has to include the Afghan government. And I know that that's part of the discussions which are ongoing now: how to facilitate Afghan reconciliation. I would also like to commend President Ghani for taking the initiative and his courage and his leadership initiating the peace process, when he, last summer, announced a ceasefire and also initiated talks to address how to move forward on the peace process.

It is, of course, no way can we have a lasting peace in Afghanistan without Afghan reconciliation, including of course the Afghan government – a legitimate elected government – which has to play a key role in any peace settlement.

NATO's role is partly to provide political support to the peace process, where also, of course, the government has a key role to play. But also to provide military support, to train, assist and advise, we provide through our Resolute Support Mission to create the conditions for a peace deal, sending a message to Taliban that they will not win on the battlefield, so they have to sit down at the negotiating table. We will continue to provide that support. The purpose of

military presence is to create conditions for peace and that's exactly what we now, at least, see some signals which are encouraging.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, lady in the first row please.

Olga Chaiko [ICTV]: This is ICTV Ukraine, concerning the vote of Ukrainian deputies to introduce the chapter on NATO integration into the Constitution, will it help to speed up the process somehow, the integration of Ukraine into the NATO. Thanks.

Jens Stoltenberg: We work with Ukraine. Ukraine is a highly-valued partner. We provide support to Ukraine in many different ways. We have different trust funds. We have different programmes. We help them to modernise their defence institutions, their security institutions. We help them with some training, with some capacity-building when it comes to the naval forces. So we do a lot with Ukraine and I urge Allies to step up, because partly we do this in the NATO framework and partly some NATO Allies also provide bilateral support. So we do this to help Ukraine move towards Euro-Atlantic integration and to modernise their armed forces and reform – including fighting corruption.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, we have Deutsche Welle, NPR, lady in the second row.

Teri Schultz [Deutsche Welle, NPR]: Yeah. Hi, Teri Schultz. Thank, thank you very much. New poll results released by the Munich Security Conference ahead of this weekend's meeting shows that when asked who citizens trust to do the right thing in world affairs, both Germans and French trust President Putin a lot more than they trust President Trump, by, in the German case, more than three times the figure. Does that cause you any alarm when you think about solidarity inside NATO and the feeling of security that Allies are getting from the United States?

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO is an alliance of 29 democracies and there are different views and sometimes there are also differences between Allies, and there are different views within Allies on issues related to defence security under NATO. But the strength of NATO is that despite these differences, we have shown again and again and again that we are united around our core task and that is to protect and defend each other, because that is in our national interests to do so. And what we see now is that actually the United States is stepping up their presence in Europe. The United States is committed to NATO, not only in words but also in deeds. And the US is increasing their presence with more troops, more exercises, and more investments in infrastructure in Europe. At the same time as European Allies are stepping up.

So it's not for me to go into the details of that opinion poll, but what really matters for me is what I see, the actions on the ground, and that is that European Allies, Canada, are stepping up at the same time as the United States are stepping up and that we are doing more together in NATO than we have done for many, many years.

Oana Lungescu: Radio Free Europe, up there. The gentleman up there, thanks.

[Radio Free Europe]: Secretary General, I wonder if you have any comments about the comments made by the UK Defence Minister yesterday that Brexit in fact is a … [inaudible] for the UK armed forces. He especially mentioned the term, 'enhanced lethality.' Is that an assessment you share?

Jens Stoltenberg: Brexit will change the UK's relationship with the European Union, but Brexit will not change the UK's relationship with NATO. If anything, it will strengthen the importance of NATO, because NATO is a platform where we bring together European Allies, some, many of them EU members. But some of them not EU members, and also together with the US and Canada. So, NATO as a platform for political cooperation, becomes, if anything, even more important.

I welcome the clear message in the speech by Defence Secretary Williamson, the clear message about the UK leadership and the UK commitment to NATO. And UK is leading by example, by investing more than 2 percent of GDP on defence. UK have done that for many years. UK is providing high-end capabilities to our collective defence, and UK is present in many of our missions and operations, and leading one of the battle groups in the Baltics, in Estonia. So, I really welcome this strong message from UK from the Defence Secretary and I look forward to seeing him at the Defence Ministerial meeting here in Brussels tomorrow.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, we have the German news agency DPA, I think, just behind the cameras.

Ansgar Haase [DPA:] Secretary General, a quick question on defence spending. Can you tell us how many Allies will reach the 2 percent target in 2024, according to the new national plans?

Jens Stoltenberg: The majority of Allies have put forward plans to reach 2 percent by 2024. I hope, of course, that as we get new and revised plans that we will be able to increase that number. I also welcome the fact that even those Allies who not yet have submitted plans to reach 2 percent, they have started to increase. So they are very much moving in the right direction and that includes Germany. We see a significant increase in German defence expenditure. The current plan, outlay describes an 80 percent increase in defence investments by 2024 – this is significant. It matters because Germany is such a big economy. So, what Germany does matters when it comes to total defence spending among European NATO Allies.

The good thing is that all Allies have stopped the cuts after years of cutting defence budgets. All Allies have stopped the cuts and all our Allies are now increasing investments in defence.

Oana Lungescu: Politico over there. Gentleman with glasses just there.

David Herszenhorn [Politico]: Thank you Secretary General, David Herszenhorn from Politico. You're also meeting with High Representative Mogherini and because of some of the doubts that have been created about the US commitment to NATO, to European security, I wonder if you could address a perception among some European Allies that NATO is in fact an obstacle to enhanced European defence cooperation. That NATO really doesn't like the concept of an EU Army proposed by President Macron and Chancellor Merkel. That PESCO, it's not . . . in the guise of criticising certain things as potentially duplicative. In fact what . . . what NATO is trying to do is sort of protect American dominance of this Alliance?

Jens Stoltenberg: For me there is no contradiction between EU efforts on defence and a strong NATO. Actually that works perfectly hand-in-hand, as long as the EU efforts are done in the right way, meaning: not competing, not duplicating with the NATO efforts, but complementing. Then these EU efforts will strengthen the European pillar in NATO. Because I strongly believe that PESCO, the European Defence Fund, will help to develop new capabilities, they will help to increase defence investments, they will help to address the fragmentation of the European defence industry. All of that will strengthen European NATO Allies. And since we only have one single set of forces, and they are available for NATO operations, this will be good for NATO as it is good for Europe. That's two sides of the same coin. So the only thing we have to be focused or . . . aware is the risk for any duplication or any misperception that this is something that will replace NATO. Because, of course, EU can never replace NATO when it comes to collective defence and protecting Europe.

We see a lot of cooperation between European Allies in NATO: exercises, capability developments. We work very closely even with non-NATO EU members like Sweden and Finland. They participated, for instance, in the Trident Juncture. The Trident Juncture is a big NATO exercise, but bringing European Allies together, most of them EU members, so they exercise together, European Allies, in the NATO exercise. So, I think actually NATO promotes a lot of European cooperation and PESCO and other EU efforts on defence can actually just strengthen the European pillar of NATO. Let me also add that . . . well, what I think is important is that we need to avoid any perception that Europe can manage without NATO, because two World Wars and the Cold War taught us that we need a strong transatlantic bond to preserve peace and stability in Europe. And, especially after Brexit, it's obvious that EU efforts cannot replace NATO, because after Brexit, 80 percent of NATO's defence expenditure will come from non-EU members. This is partly about money, but also partly about geography. Norway in the north - not a very big Ally but important when it comes to the High North. Turkey in the south, very important in the fight against terrorism. And then in the west you will have major Allies as Canada, United States and United Kingdom. So this is both about geography and money which highlights that European unity cannot substitute for transatlantic unity. I welcome European unity and I welcome transatlantic unity as something that we need together, not apart.

And the last thing I'll say is that three of the four battle groups in the eastern part of the Alliance in Europe will be led by non-EU Allies.

So, Europeans and North Americans are doing more together now than we have done for many years. And this shows that actually Europe and North America are working together.

Oana Lungescu: We have the lady in the centre please. Just wait for the microphone. Thanks.

Ekaterina Mareeva [Kommersant]: Ekaterina Mareeva, Kommersant daily newspaper, Russia. Moscow charges Washington with three violations of the INF Treaty. A former US Ambassador to Ukraine, Steven Pifer says the charge regarding the MK-41 launcher for missile interceptors at the Aegis Ashore facility in Romania has some basis, because MK-41 launchers on US warships can hold a variety of missiles including cruise missiles. Do you admit to Washington's violations of the INF Treaty, and if no, why didn't they demonstrate it to Russia?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The Russian efforts to try to focus on the NATO Missile Defence System is the only way to try to distract attention from the real issue. And the real issue is that Russia is deploying new nuclear-capable missiles in Europe. They have done that for several years in blatant violation of the INF Treaty. So when

Russia starts to speak about something else, it's only a way to try to avoid attention on what's the problem. There are no new US missiles in Europe; but there are more and more new Russian missiles in Europe – nuclear-capable. And that's the reason why the INF treaty now is in real danger, and also the reason why we continue to call on Russia to come back into compliance in this six-month period when they still can do so, saving the Treaty which will be of great importance for all of us.

The ballistic missile defence system is a defensive system; there are no missiles there. We have interceptors, they're not armed. And, it's part of the agreement with Romania and Poland that, of course, there will be no offensive missiles at that site.

So that's totally mixing two totally different things, in just an attempt to try to distract attention from the real problem. The real problem is the new Russian missiles.

Oana Lungescu: Okay. Gentleman in the front row here. With glasses. Thank you.

Khushnood Nabizada [Khaama Press:] I have one question about Afghan peace which has two parts. You mentioned about meeting Ambassador Khalilzad on Afghanistan peace. As we all know that foreign military pull-out is one of the key conditions of Taliban for the Afghan peace deals. Was this discussed during your meeting yesterday? And is there any troop's pull-out schedule plan which is in line with the Afghan peace process. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: First of all I would like to commend Ambassador Khalilzad for his efforts and the hard work and his commitment to really find a solution. And, we all want a peaceful, negotiated, political solution to the crisis in Afghanistan. He has been very clear, and I totally agree with him, that this is not about negotiating a leave deal. This is about negotiating a

peace deal. Then, of course, a peace deal may have implications for the presence of NATO and US troops in Afghanistan. But then it's part of an agreed deal. That's the reason why we so clearly also agree with Khalizad, Ambassador Khalizad, when he stated yesterday that we went into Afghanistan together, we are making the decisions on our future posture in Afghanistan together, and we'll do that on conditions determined together with the Afghans.

The aim is, of course, not for us, for NATO to stay forever in Afghanistan. The aim for NATO in Afghanistan is to fight terrorism and to create the conditions for a peaceful solution, by helping and training and supporting the Afghan security forces. That's exactly what we do. And, one of the reasons why we now see some increased possibilities for a peace deal - we still have a long way to go - is actually that NATO has been present, supported all that support and sent a very clear message to Taliban.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, we have the gentleman in the centre there. Third row.

Igor Subbotin [Nezavisimaya Gazeta]: Thank you. Igor Subbotin, Nezavisimaya Gazeta, a Moscow-based daily. I have one more question on Russia-Norway relations. Just a week ago, the Russian Foreign Ministry spokes— Maria Zakharova expressed concerns on increasing number of NATO's submarines in Arctic waters. So I'm just wondering, how can you explain these movements near border between Russia and Norway, how can you comment?

Jens Stoltenberg: Well, Norway is a sovereign nation with its own military capabilities and they're, of course, free to operate both in Norwegian territorial waters and in international waters: in the Barents Sea, in the Polar Sea, in the Norwegian Sea, in the North Sea, and many other places.

And NATO and Norway, we are very transparent and yes, there has been some new investments over the last years in the Norwegian maritime capabilities and also in maritime capabilities of other NATO Allies including, for instance, the United Kingdom, or Denmark, which are operating in the High North. But, we do that, of course, in line with all our international obligations. And, what we have seen is a significant Russian military build-up in the High North. And, as you well know, there is a big naval base at the Kola Peninsula, with a lot of Russian submarines, including Russian submarines with nuclear-capable missiles. So . . . well, NATO is present in the High North. Norway is part of that. And that's one of the ways we make sure that we maintain credible deterrence and defence.

At the same time I think we all continue to try to work for a situation where we have as low tensions as possible in the High North. Also because there is some cooperation, partly part of the Barents Council, and also partly part of the Arctic Council, to address, for instance, issues related to search and rescue, where many different countries and non-NATO countries are working together with NATO Allies in the High North.

Oana Lungescu: We have the Kuwaiti News Agency in the third row.

[Kuwait News Agency]: Thank you. Mr Secretary General. On the Middle East, besides Iraq, will you discuss at the ministerial the situation in Syria and Libya? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: What we will discuss at this ministerial is NATO missions and operations, and that includes Afghanistan, Kosovo and the training mission in Iraq.

We don't have any specific discussions on other countries, but, of course when we, for instance, address fighting terrorism, the situation in Syria is relevant for that. As you know NATO is not present on the ground in Syria, but some NATO Allies are. And, I welcome also the efforts of, for instance, Turkey and United States in northern Syria. And, very often we see that when they meet at NATO meetings, on the margins of the official meetings, they sit down and address how to better coordinate their efforts, for instance in northern Syria, and I expect that also to happen this time.

Oana Lungescu: Okay. We have our Montenegrin colleague there in the second row.

Milos Rudovic [Daily Press Vijesti]: This year will mark 70 years of NATO, but it will also mark the 10 years of first Western Balkan countries joining the Alliance. Albania and Croatia joined in 2009, Montenegro most recently in 2017, and we are on the path of welcoming the future Republic of North Macedonia as the 30th Member. So my question is, how have these enlargements impacted security and the overall situation in the region and also how it impacted NATO? Thank you so much.

Jens Stoltenberg: The enlargement with members from the Western Balkans has strengthened NATO. And I welcome that. But it has also of course helped to stabilise the Western Balkans and help to strengthen those countries in the region that have joined NATO. For instance, Montenegro, and now also the future Republic of North Macedonia.

We have to remember that not so many years ago, in the 1990s and also even in the beginning of 2000, we saw armed conflicts, we saw atrocities, we saw wars in the Western Balkans, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, in Kosovo, Serbia. And we also saw a really dangerous situation in what we then called the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which is now going to be the Republic of North Macedonia. And NATO has played a key part in solving those conflicts, in ending the wars and helping to stabilise.

There are many challenges, many problems still, but it is extremely encouraging to see that we have members like Slovenia, like Croatia, like Albania, but also now, recently, Montenegro and the future Republic of North Macedonia. And I really look forward to welcoming Defence Minister Shekerinska at the meeting here tomorrow.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, we have the lady at the back, with Bloomberg.

[Bloomberg News]: Thank you very much. Secretary General, will there be any discussions during the meeting on cyber-security and China? Will the Alliance address the threat of

alleged state-sponsored Chinese attacks, software and hardware attacks? Thank you very much.

Jens Stoltenberg: We will have discussions about NATO readiness and our deterrence and defence. And a part of that is cyber. So, we don't have a dedicated discussion on cyber, but part of our more general discussion about our readiness and defence and deterrence, of course, cyber will be part of that.

We have significantly increased our cyber defences over the last years. We have agreed what we call a cyber-pledge, where we actually have a plan for how different Allies, or all Allies should strengthen their cyber defences. We share technology, we share best practices. We conduct the biggest cyber exercises in the world. We did that recently from Estonia. And we will continue to exercise to increase readiness, to increase awareness, to improve understanding of the cyber threats coming from many different angles, some from many different directions.

One of the challenges with cyber-attacks, and we see more and more of them, is attribution. So one of the things we are working on is how to improve methods to be able to identify and to agree on attribution. So cyber will be part of this, which has been part of NATO's increased readiness and preparedness for several years.

[Inaudible, off-mic]

Jens Stoltenberg: I guess that Allies will also mention China, and, of course, we have seen the reports from Allies about their concerns about Chinese activity related to infrastructure and cyber. And these are reports we take seriously in the Alliance, and we will continue to consult on these issues, because that's part of the broader cyber challenge we all face.

Oana Lungescu: Okay, we have the gentleman over there in the middle.

[National News Agency of Ukraine]: On INF suspension. Solving the issue of defence and deterrence does not though consider some kind of political solutions, like creation for example, a new multilateral treaty to replace INF, maybe together and in cooperation with the European Union? Thanks.

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO strongly supports arms control efforts. And, we have been on the forefront of the work to try to move forward the arms control agenda for many, many years. And we see reasons to also try to broaden the INF Treaty to include more countries, because we have seen that since the agreement was signed in 1987, then between Soviet Union and United States, more countries have invested heavily in intermediate-range forces, missiles. We have seen that, of course, in a rising power as China, but also countries like India, Pakistan and Iran are developing and deploying intermediate-range weapons.

So, there are reasons to look into how we can broaden this, how can we have a treaty which covers not only Russia and United States. But, my important message today is that these

efforts to try to strengthen or to broaden arms control regime on intermediate-range weapons is in no way an excuse for leaving or violating the existing treaty we have. That is the cornerstone. It has to be preserved and then built on that. We should look into possible ways to strengthen and to broaden that treaty.

So, I just strongly express that I totally disagree with the idea that since not all countries with intermediate-range weapons are covered by the existing INF treaty, that makes it in a way legal or okay to violate it. No, it's not okay to violate an arms control treaty – totally different issues whether we should try to build on it and to expand it, and of course, we would like to see that.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much, this concludes this press conference. We'll see you tomorrow at the ministerial, thank you.

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