North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press conference

with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu
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(As delivered)

Minister Çavuşoğlu,

my friend Mevlut,

Thank you so much for welcoming me once again here in Istanbul, in Turkey. It's great to be back, great to meet you. And I'm also looking forward as you mentioned to meet the President later on today.

Turkey is a strong member of our Alliance.

We have deep relations as NATO Allies, built over decades. You play a key part in what NATO does – from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean.

You are an important contributor to NATO's training missions in Afghanistan and in Iraq. And you are part of our mission in Kosovo, which helps maintain stability in the Western Balkans.

NATO supports Turkey with defensive missile systems.

Helping to protect Turkey's southern border.

We also support Turkey with increased air and naval presence.

Over the years, NATO has invested more than 5 billion dollars in military facilities in Turkey, including important infrastructure such as naval bases and radar sites.

All of this clearly demonstrates NATO's strong commitment to Turkey's security.

Today, we have discussed the fight against terrorism. Turkey is at the forefront of a very volatile region. No other Ally has suffered more terrorist attacks. No other Ally is more exposed to the instability, violence and turmoil from the Middle East. And no other NATO Ally hosts so many refugees as Turkey does, many of them from Syria.

Minister Cavusoglu and I also discussed Turkey´s ongoing operation in Northern Syria.

I shared with him my serious concerns about the risk of further destabilising the region, escalating tensions, and even more human suffering.

While Turkey has legitimate security concerns, I expect Turkey to act with restraint. We have a common enemy – Da'esh. A few years ago, they controlled significant territory in Iraq and in Syria. Working together in the Global Coalition, we have liberated all this territory and millions of people.

These gains must not be jeopardised. An imminent concern is that captured Da'esh terrorists must not be allowed to escape.

In the longer term, the international community must find a coordinated and sustainable solution to deal with the foreign fighters held in Syria.

We also discussed the Turkish purchase of the Russian S400 missile system. I have repeatedly expressed my concerns about the impact of this decision. While it is for Turkey to decide which system to purchase, there are real issues related to the lack of interoperability with NATO systems and the potential risk for Allied aircrafts.

Minister Çavuşoğlu, Mevlut,

Turkey is a great power in this great region. And with great power comes great responsibility.

It's 70 years since NATO was founded. Turkey is an important part of this Alliance. And we appreciate your contributions to our collective security, to our missions and operations. You are making NATO stronger. And together, Turkey and the other NATO Allies, we continue to adapt to keep our people safe.

Strengthening collective defence. Stepping up the fight against terrorism. And responding to new challenges. Because, together we are stronger.

Thank you so much.

QUESTION: My question is to Secretary General Stoltenberg. I would like to ask have . . . how does NATO think about the PYD and YPG and its affiliation with the PKK in the NATO assessment documents. And I would like to ask whether the NATO has ever assessed the PYD and YPG as a terrorist threat to NATO or any of its members? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: NATO does not have a public list where we list different organisations as terrorist organisations. Some other national organisations have that kind of list, for instance the UN or . . . and EU, but NATO does not have that kind of public list, where we list terrorist organisations.

We fight terrorism in all its forms and all its manifestations and we do that together in NATO. We do it in the Global Coalition to Defeat the Daesh. NATO, all NATO Allies have been part of the Global Coalition all the way and we have made enormous progress in the fight against Daesh. Daesh is still a threat, Daesh is a common enemy, and therefore we need to make sure that the gains we have made are not jeopardised.

We also have to remember that NATO's presence in countries like Afghanistan or Iraq is also about fighting terrorism. We strongly believe that the best way of fighting terrorism is to train local forces and that is what we do in Afghanistan and in Iraq. And, again, Turkey is an important part of that. Turkey is one of the lead nations in Afghanistan and we highly appreciate the contributions from Turkey to NATO's efforts in the fight against terrorism.

When it comes to the situation northern Syria, and also YPG, there is a known fact that there are different views among NATO Allies. NATO is not present on the ground in northern Syria, but we are part of the Global Coalition and we continue to fight terrorism. But we are not on the ground in northern Syria.

QUESTION: My question is to Mr Çavuşoğlu. The Operation Peace Spring is being conducted by Turkey and there is also a lot of criticism and libelling in the social media against that. So how would you interpret it?

MEVLÜT ÇAVUŞOĞLU [Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey]: Thank you very much for the question. We've seen all forms of misinformation on the media during the Olive Branch Operation. They have also initiated this misinformation in social media by the YPG and PYD, and while we were conducting Euphrates Shield the same was done by members of Daesh. Turkey . . . they claim that Turkey is targeting the civilians, this will never happen and has never happened. Turkey has always been very sensitive about the civilians and Turkey is hosting so many migrants and refugees that it's unthinkable. We have seen that on social media. We've seen cases in which the YPG has themselves . . . themselves attacked the Christians in Syria and tried to mis-portray it as if Turks were attacking the Christians – we proved otherwise. And they're also burning tyres in order to oblique the vision of our aircraft and then blaming Turkey for bombing and burning places where civilians live. This misinformation will never make us give up on this important fight. We are fighting, yes, a terrorist organisation and it is our duty to give the right information to the people. And our official agencies and all the agencies and the Ministry will continue to share information with the pub— . . . with the world.

QUESTION: My question is to Mr Stoltenberg. If there is any sanction decision by the US Congress against Turkey, what will NATO do? Do you have any plans, and do you also have any plans for Turkey?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I think it's wrong if I start to speculate about hypothetical situations. What I can say is that Turkey is an important and strong NATO Ally and it is important for our collective defence, for our different missions and operations, including in the fight against terrorism. And for us it is important to have Turkey as a strong and committed Ally, because we are all safer when we stand together. And we have to remember that the progress, for instance, we have made in the fight against Daesh has been very much supported, and very much dependent on, the contributions of Turkey: Turkish forces, Turkish infrastructure,

Turkish bases have been critical in the progress we have made together in fighting terrorism, especially the fight against Daesh.

So, what is also reflected by the fact that this is my second visit to Turkey this year and I visited Turkey many times as Secretary General, highlights also the importance of Turkey as an Alliance . . . as an Ally in the . . . in the NATO Alliance. And therefore, I appreciate the many ways Turkey can contribute to our collective defence and our Alliance in NATO.

QUESTION: I'd like to ask a question to Mr Çavuşoğlu. Turkey is all watching the news from northern Syria very diligently. We are losing people. Germany, Belgium, UK and Poland have made a joint declaration after this meeting in NATO and they have completely disregarded NATO's principle of an attack against an Ally is an attack against the Alliance, and they said that this operation is Turkey's unilateral attack. How do you feel about this?

MEVLÜT ÇAVUŞOĞLU: Well, these statements did not only come from the EU members, the six members of the EU, they had to make that statement because they couldn't make the NATO take the decision they wanted it to take. And we have also seen very similar statements from other EU members. They all know that the PKK and YPG are one and the same. And they always start their statements by saying that Turkey's security concerns are justified and legitimate. If Turkey's concerns are legitimate, then Turkey has the legitimate right to fight against a terrorist organisation which causes these concerns. And although we don't have such an obligation, we made an announcement and gave notice to all the members of the international community, including the NATO, and we have also very clearly indicated the relevant articles that justify our operation in the international law.

You are acknowledging that this is a legitimate fight, but on the other hand you have a terrorist organisation. You may have had relations with that terrorist organisation, you may have had given them arms and equipped them, but it's not my problem, it's your hypocrisy. On one hand you are calling them terrorists and acknowledging our concerns and on the other hand you are not approving this operation. Turkey has tried its best to resolve this problem in the international community. And it had to do this because there was no resolution.

Now, vis à vis the Secretary General, I'd like to say something. There are plans that are adopted and there is also a plan to protect Turkey, and the NATO Council approved a plan to protect Turkey against the YPG and PKK. However, later on, eight countries, including the EU members, have blocked this decision from getting ratified unjustifiably and unfairly. Now YPG and PKK are named on NATO documents. YPG and PYD are on those documents that we all know that YPG/PYD and the PKK are synonymous.

Yes, Daesh is our common enemy, we acknowledge that, and it's only our soldiers that fought a one-to-one fight against Daesh in Iraq, as well. Isn't PKK our common enemy? Daesh is our common enemy, we should fight against that. PKK is also our common enemy, but we shouldn't fight against them, and so Turkey shouldn't fight against them either? We're against

this kind of interpretation and we also see that on the documents there are two paragraphs that are completely identical and all of our Allies are reading the same paragraph and it is very evident that those paragraphs that have been written by some other authority or some other place. We are very sensitive against this. Our President is very sensitive against any harm to the civilians, so we are doing our best and everybody should hear the … [inaudible] suffering there, including the suffering of the Christians. Everybody should hear that they need us to protect them. We are determined, our target is the terrorists and we will do our best to eliminate terrorism from that region. We are very determined and if the Daesh terrorists are in the safe zone where we are conducting the operation, they will never be released.

There are also some Daesh elements in Turkey's prisons. We want to extradite them, but they . . . the countries where they will be extradited don't accept them. We are very determined, more determined than anybody else, because we are living next door to Daesh, and Daesh took Turkey as a target more than any other country. And Baghdadi, in all his statements, targets our President Erdoğan, because we are very effective in also killing their ideology. So we will continue to fight against Daesh as well.

QUESTION: Secretary General and the Minister, yesterday the Spanish government said that its thinking on not renewing the mission with the Patriot defence missile system in Adana, because . . . because of the things going on in northern Syria. So if the situation escalates, they will not renew in December this mission they have. What's your opinion of . . . both the Minister, the Turkish government, and NATO Secretary General? Thank you.

MEVLÜT ÇAVUŞOĞLU: Today we discussed this topic with the Secretary General and the Secretary General and NATO have taken a role that we do appreciate very much for many years and for this I wholeheartedly thank the Secretary General Stoltenberg and the . . . and his colleagues. Turkey did not to have any air defence system so far, NATO was giving us support and they, the US, withdrew all the Patriots and we are thankful to Spain and Italy for keeping their Patriots on our borders so far. And Spain has given us notice that they will not renew their contracts. There is a rotation here and we will continue this process with NATO. We thank Italy and Spain for their support so far.

But there is something that's very telling here, the thing that's telling is that Turkey has to own its own air defence system. We shouldn't try to convince this and that Ally. And we've also heard that Macron himself is also thinking about buying . . . is thinking about a contract for a Patriot system to be lended [sic] to Turkey. However, this is a clear indication that we need our own air defence system, because otherwise all solutions are transitory, they are not permanent. I wish we could have both our air defence system from our Allies, but we couldn't, so we had to buy the S-400s. And it's a clear indication that we will need more air defence systems for the future.

JENS STOLTENBERG: [break in transmission] … to support Turkey in many different ways. And NATO has increased its military presence in Turkey over the last years, with different air defence batteries to help to protect Turkey's southern border, with more naval presence and also with more presence in the air.

On top of that, we have also, over the years, last years, invested five billion US dollars in different kinds of military infrastructure, to help to strengthen the defences of Turkey, including different radar sites. So this shows that NATO is present in Turkey, helping to protect Turkey. And we have actually increased that presence over the last years.

And of course, I expect that NATO Allies will continue to provide support to Turkey, because this is something we have agreed. And Turkey is on the forefront of a fight which is important for all of us. It's not only Turkey that is affected by the instability, the violence in the Middle East, it affects all NATO Allies. So when NATO Allies are in Turkey, we are there to protect Turkey, but we're also here to protect ourselves. And the fight against Daesh is perhaps the best example of that.

Of course, no NATO Ally has suffered more than Turkey. And Turkey has legitimate security concerns, and they have been on the frontline. But it matters also for all the NATO Allies, and that's the reason why we have increased our presence, and why we should continue to provide support to Turkey.

We have deployed air defence batteries over several years, but I also welcome the fact that Turkey is now looking into the possibility of buying additional air defence batteries from other NATO Allies. As Minister Çavuşoğlu mentioned, there is a dialogue going on with France and Italy and I also know there has been contacts and dialogue with the United States, about the question of acquiring Patriot batteries, and there are also other options coming from other NATO Allied countries. So I welcome this, and together, this is important again, for Turkey and for the whole NATO Alliance.

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