North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Remarks

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the European Parliament Committee on Foreign Affairs (AFET) and Sub-Committee on Security and Defence (SEDE)
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(As delivered)

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Thank you so much David, and also many thanks to the Chairs of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, and the Delegation for Relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. And it's really a great pleasure and honour to be back here and to meet with you all. Many new faces, but also some familiar faces from last time I met this part of the European Parliament.

I really appreciate to be here for several reasons. I feel at home among parliamentarians. I have been a parliamentarian myself for twenty years. And I appreciate the symbol of democracy, knowing that people have, or parliamentarians have different views and different positions on many issues, but at the same time we all believe in the institutions, the parliaments as the way to express the will of the people. And parliaments play an important role in our nations in the different countries, but also the European Parliament is important for shaping EU policies and that's, again, important for all NATO Allies and for the cooperation with NATO. Then I also appreciate to be here because I am a strong believer in NATO-EU cooperation. And therefore, every time you invite me, I try the best to come. I also welcome the fact that I have a very close relationship with the new leadership in the European Union. My old friend Ursula von der Leyen, she was Defence Minister for many years, so we developed a very close partnership, cooperation, and also with Charles Michel. And I just, last week, I met the EU foreign ministers in the Foreign Affairs Council, the High Representative Borrell, and in two or three weeks, Josep Borrell will come to the NATO Defence Ministerial meeting. So the fact that I am here and the fact that we meet at different levels, NATO-EU, demonstrates the close cooperation between NATO and the European Union. We are two different organisations and, of course, we have to respect our differences and the decision making processes in both EU and NATO. But I strongly welcome the fact that despite the differences, we have recognised that it is extremely important that we stand together, that we work together. And over the last years we have been able to lift NATO-EU cooperation up to unprecedented levels. We do more together now. We work more together than we have done for many, many years. And the fact that we are able to work together on issues as cyber, as hybrid threats, that we have been working together for many years in the Western Balkans, in Afghanistan, in Iraq, is of importance for EU members, but also for NATO members.

I also welcome the fact that, for instance, in the Aegean Sea, we have a NATO deployment, six ships, helping to implement the agreement between the European Union and Turkey, addressing the migrant and the refugee crisis.

And also in the Mediterranean, you have the Operation Sophia. NATO provides support to Operation Sophia. And actually, we could do more to provide support if that is requested or called for by the European Union, for instance, to help to implement the arms embargo against Libya. So . . . and we have exercises, we have many other activities where we work together. So the fact is that, yes, we are two different organisations, but we work more and more closely together. And I would like to start by commending the European Union and NATO for being able to deliver more and more activities, more and more joint activities, demonstrating the importance of our cooperation. I believe in this cooperation also because I believe in cooperation between North America and Europe. And by making the European Union and NATO working more closely together, we are also making sure that Europe and North America are working more closely together. And I believe in the transatlantic bond between North America and Europe, despite the fact that I know that people question the strength of that transatlantic bond, on both sides of the Atlantic. And I also believe in the transatlantic bond, symbolised by the NATO-EU cooperation, but also by NATO itself, because NATO is a transatlantic institution, transatlantic organisation. I believe in this transatlantic bond, also, despite the differences and the disagreements we all see today. Because there are differences and disagreements between North America and Europe on issues such as climate change, trade issues, the Iran nuclear deal and many other issues. And these are serious differences on serious issues.

But I believe in the transatlantic cooperation because, despite these differences, we have to stand together, because we are safer and more secure when we are able to stand together and address common challenges. And despite differences on issues like trade and climate change, which are important, we have, fundamentally, common interests when it comes to peace and security. And therefore, I strongly believe that we need to strengthen, not weaken the transatlantic bond.

And we are faced with a paradox, and that is that: despite the disagreements – and I guess that some of you will ask questions about those disagreements afterwards in the . . . when we have the Q&As afterwards – despite these differences, there is a paradox. And the paradox is that we have differences, but at the same time, North America and Europe are doing more together than we have done for many years. Because, for instance, I read sometimes that the US is leaving Europe. The US is not leaving Europe. The United States is actually increasing their military presence in Europe. It’s correct that after the end of the Cold War, the United States gradually, for good reasons, reduced its military presence in Europe. That’s correct. But over the last years, the United States has not decreased but increased its military presence in Europe, with more troops, more investment in infrastructure, more prepositioned equipment. And now in a few weeks, we will have the big exercise, Europe Defender 2020. And in that exercise, the United States will deploy 20,000 troops directly from

the United States to Europe, in the biggest deployment of US forces since the end of the Cold War. So again, you can like it or dislike it, or you can be in favour or whatever, but it's not . . . it's factually wrong to say that the United States is leaving Europe. There are more US troops now in Europe than have been for many years. So the US is not decreasing, they are increasing.

European Allies are also stepping up. Higher readiness of their forces. New battlegroups in the eastern part of the Alliance, in the Baltic countries and Poland. Stepping up in the efforts to fight terrorism. And also, after years of reducing defence spending – all NATO Allies cut defence spending after the Cold War – but now, actually, all Allies, including all European Allies, have started to increase defence spending. I'm not saying that they invest as much as they should. But I'm saying that it's a big difference from reducing, compared to increasing.

And the fact is that all Allies, all the European Allies, Canada, are now investing more in defence. Just over . . . just since 2016, European Allies and Canada have added 130 billion, 130 billion US dollars more for defence. That's significant. And if you followed the NATO summit in London in December, you saw that the message also from the United States, actually, was that they recognise the progress. And therefore, I also highlight that we have to remember that we invest in European defence, or European Allies are investing more, not to please the United States or President Trump. They invest in defence because it is in their security interest to do so. And actually, European Allies decided at the Wales Summit of the NATO Allies, decided at the Wales Summit in London in 2014 . . . or in Wales in 2014, to increase defence spending and now they are delivering on that. So the paradox is that despite the questions being asked about whether NATO, the transatlantic bond, is strong, the reality is that it has been strengthened over the last years. We are doing more together than we have done for many years. And I welcome that because we will need North America and Europe, NATO bringing North America and Europe together, the transatlantic bond, also in the future, to address old challenges and new challenges.

And let me just briefly mention three of them.

One is the fight against terrorism. There are many problems and many reasons to be concerned about the fight against terrorism. But we have to recognise that together North America and Europe have made enormous progress. Not so many months ago, ISIS controlled a territory as big as the United Kingdom. Millions of people. And we saw the brutality of that organisation: beheading people, using rape as a military tool, slavery, a brutality which is hard to imagine. Now, all that territory is liberated and ISIS has lost control over the territory and the people they controlled just a few months ago. This is a joint effort by North America and Europe, with some partners. And it's not a small thing, it's a big thing. It required an enormous effort, but we managed. I just would tell you that I'm afraid that we forget the danger that this can come back, so therefore we need to continue to provide support to Iraq, the fight against Daesh is not over, they are still there. And therefore, also, of course, I regret that both the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, where all Allies, NATO Allies,

are a member and also NATO is a member, has been forced to suspend the training activities we provide to Iraq. I regret that, but I really hope that we can resume those activities as soon as possible, because Iraq needs support. If not, we risk that Iraq would slide into conflict, and ISIS may return. And therefore, also, we are now looking into what more we can do. And I will . . . there are many things to say, but I will only share with you one important reflection or message. And that is that when I look into what more NATO, the West, the Global Coalition, we can do to fight terrorism, then I don't look into whether we can do more combat operations. Because I, of course, I believe that NATO has to be able to conduct combat operations, as we have done many times before in the Balkans, in Afghanistan and elsewhere if needed. But in the long run, it's much better if we can enable local forces to fight terrorism themselves, to stabilise their own countries themselves, because we will always be, regardless, foreigners as potential occupants. So the thinking in NATO now is not about conducting big combat operations, but the thinking is how can we train and build local capacity? As we do in Afghanistan, as we do in Iraq, and as we are also working, for instance, with other partners in the region, Jordan and Tunisia, to help them build special operation capacity, intelligence, enabling them to fight terrorism.

So prevention is better than intervention. Building local capacity is better than big combat operations. And again, we need to work together. EU has a role to play. EU is present, I just strongly believe that we need . . . but, but Europe cannot do this alone, we need to do it, North America, Europe together and NATO provides a platform for bringing us together.

The second item is . . . or challenge we also need to address together is Russia. We have, as you know, in NATO developed what we called a dual-track approach to Russia: deterrence, defence and dialogue. And there is no contradiction between deterrence, defence and dialogue. Actually, as long as we are strong, as long as we are united, as long as we are firm, we can also talk to Russia. Russia is our neighbour. Russia is there to stay. We need to strive for a better relationship with Russia. And dialogue with Russia is not a sign of weakness. Dialogue with Russia is a sign of strength. And of course, we need the United States, Canada, North America to provide the necessary capabilities to have credible deterrence and defence. But we also need North America to have meaningful dialogue with Russia. Because an important part of that dialogue is about arms control, and arms control has to involve the United States, at least in many aspects.

For instance, the demise of the INF Treaty, the treaty that banned all intermediate range missiles in Europe, it's a US-Russia agreement. And NATO was a platform to address that. The New START, of course, is a bilateral arrangement between Russia and the United States, but has a lot to say for European security. So I believe in arms control. But to have meaningful arms control, we need also to have, also, the United States around the table, to also address arms control with Russia.

I move on, because I see that I need have some time for the Q&As.

So the third challenge I will briefly mention is new and emerging challenges. Technology, artificial intelligence, autonomous weapon platforms, big data. All these emerging technologies will change the nature of warfare as much as the industrial revolution. And we need all the ingenuity, all the capacity of both North America and Europe together to be at the forefront of that development to keep our technological edge. And this is also linked to the rise of China. Because China . . . normally, we have always had the technological edge. But the reality is that when you speak about, for instance, artificial intelligence, we see also that China is actually now investing a lot. And therefore, we need to work together also when it comes to technology and addressing the consequences of the rise of China. There are opportunities, but there are also some serious challenges. China now has the second largest defence budget in the world. Just over the last five years, they deployed 80 new battleships, naval ships. That's as much as the total UK Navy, just addition for the Chinese Navy, over the last five years. Some . . . I meet, people, both in Europe and North America expressing concern about the size of China. Well, if you're concerned about the size of China, then Europe and North America have to stand together, because together we have 50 per cent of world GDP or 50 per cent of the world military might.

So Europe and North America, we are two sides of the same coin. There are differences. There are disagreements. But again, as long as we stand together, as long as we address our common security challenges together, then we are all safe and secure. Therefore, I believe in the strong transatlantic bond, demonstrated through a strong NATO, but also demonstrated through active and strong cooperation, NATO and the European Union.

Thank you so much.

DAVID McALLISTER: Excellent. Thank you, Secretary General. Colleagues, we now have roughly 35 minutes time for an exchange of views. I have a record list of requests to speak. More than 30 colleagues will take the floor. Unfortunately, not everyone will be able to speak. I will give the coordinators in AFET and SEDE priority. I ask for your understanding. But first, I give the floor to the Chairman of our Delegation for the relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, our colleague Kris Peeters. A warm welcome.

KRIS PEETERS [Chairman of the Delegation for relations with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly]: Thank you, Mr Chair, it's very friendly of you to give me the floor. First of all, thank you, Mr Stoltenberg, to be here, to be present and to give all this information. I have two short questions. First question is that I've read that President Trump proposes NATO expansion into the Middle East. My question is: what is your opinion about that proposal? And secondly, as Chair of the European Parliament Delegation to NATO, you know, that we have a special position. That means that we have no voting right, like other representatives of national parliaments. Is it not the time to upgrade the European Parliament and its delegation. That's without the Chair, of course, but it's, I think, the moment to upgrade to the representatives of the European Parliament. Thank you.

DAVID McALLISTER: Wow, good questions, Kris, thank you. And also, you set a good timeframe for other colleagues. Is it okay that we have a round of coordinators, the group, so we start with AFET, EPP, Michael Gahler.

MICHAEL GAHLER [AFET, EPP]: Thank you very much. As EPP, we would roughly share your assessment on where we stand. In one of your previous appearances here, you said we have three areas of closer cooperation between EU and NATO: building resilience together, building resilience with our neighbours, and cooperate more on defence investment. On the latter, how would you secure that we are, as between EU and NATO, are not played one against the other, when it is about the setting up of our European Defence Fund. So how is there the cooperation, the coordination, in your view done? Then, you are aware that strategic autonomy is a word that, in NATO sources, circles, causes sometimes some hiccups. Wouldn't you agree that we need to be able to decide on our own, especially you referred to Libya, where Turkey is perhaps not 100 per cent on our line. So what shall we do? Having no recourse to NATO resources if Turkey says no. Wouldn't you think that that alone would require a strategic autonomy, so that we can do in Libya what we need to do? Thank you.

DAVID McALLISTER: Thank you. AFET coordinator, S&D, Tonino Picula.

TONINO PICULA [AFET, S&D]: Thank you, President. Mr Secretary General, you may feel very welcome in this house, like always. In these challenging geopolitical times, it's of crucial importance to maintain NATO unity and the political cohesion of its member states. Having in mind the recent EU reactions of Turkish actions in northern Syria, the Turkish drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as the overall increased Turkish autonomous activity in the region, which is not seen in line with the NATO political cohesion, how do you view the current state of play with a significant NATO member, Turkey? How do you view the closer relationship between Turkey and Russia, especially seeing them exerting influence in the region and having in mind that Turkey recently bought Russian missile defence system? Thank you.

DAVID McALLISTER: Thank you, Tonino. For the Renew Group, Petras Austrevicius.

PETRAS AUŠTREVIČIUS [Renew Group]: Thank you, David. Thank you General Secretary, on your statements and I assure you that we, Renew Europe is looking forward very much, I mean, to work along many lines you have mentioned. We are very much in favour of further development of European Defence Union. And will do whatever it takes to make sure and guarantee, bring guarantee that 22 members we share between EU and NATO will stand together at any timing of further challenges we might face. General Secretary, I have a request to you to comment next week's very sad event, which is coming on our agenda, it's UK departure. United Kingdom is about to leave and what is your take on it? What could be done? I mean, and what could be guaranteed in order to keep UK as close partner of European Union? I mean, definitely as a fully-fledged member of NATO. I mean, from my

point of view, now we're facing a challenge not just developing transatlantic relations, but trans-Channel relations as well. I mean, it's coming up on agenda. And my second point would be a request for your comments on like-minded partners, which we might involve in all our activities, which are so needed worldwide, bringing peace and stability. I mean, what is your take on the list of like-minded? Is it . . . I hope it's long enough.

DAVID McALLISTER: Thank you Petras. For the Greens, Reinhard Bütikofer.

REINHARD BÜTIKOFER: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, Secretary General, for being with us. I would like to ask three fast questions. Number one: NATO just recently, for the first time, dealt with China. And you reiterated – over here, Sir – and you reiterated that by highlighting challenges and opportunities. I would like you to focus on the challenges. What are the most important challenges in that regard? And would it be good if NATO would provide a stronger presence in the South China Sea? My second question is: what is, in your opinion, NATO's role on dealing with the Libyan mess? And my third question: the buzzword, 'strategic autonomy' has already been mentioned by Mr Gahler. Sometimes I feel this buzzword comes with anti-NATO undertones. So I would be interested in hearing your favourite definition of 'strategic autonomy.'

DAVID McALLISTER: Thank you, for the ID group, Jérôme Rivière.

JÉRÔME RIVIÈRE [ID Group]: Thank you, Chairman. Secretary General, there's a lot to be said about NATO. Yes, good afternoon. There is a lot to say about NATO and its transformation since the end of the Cold War. Listening to you, I get the impression that I'm listening to a US representative, but it's not really surprising as the United States are the biggest contributor and you are defending your budget. But when I hear you, what you recently said about Turkey, in a very calm way, that gives me cause for concern. Turkey is an active participant in the Syrian and Libyan crises. And at any stage, the behaviour of this kind could draw us into problems. They're violating the rights of Cyprus. Erdoğan is interfering in the internal affairs of France and Germany, is financing communitarist groups. Instrumentalising migrants to extort money from the EU who, in their great weakness, are still providing funds. And I think this shows the obsolescence of the Alliance. I would like to understand why you are so gentle towards Turkey. What is your strategy? Quite honestly, I don't see that there's any interest in this for France anymore.

DAVID McALLISTER: Thank you. We have both coordinators from the ECR present, I wanted to ask Anna Fotyga, is it okay if I give the floor to Geoffrey Van Orden, because I, presumably . . . I think it might be his last time he takes the floor as a member of AFET?

DAVID McALLISTER: Okay, for good trans-Channel relations, Geoffrey Van Orden, the floor is yours.

GEOFFREY VAN ORDEN [Conservatives, AFET]: How very kind, Chairman. And Secretary General, you are most welcome, and I speak as a former Secretary of the International

Military Staff of NATO. So, naturally, you are highly welcome here. I just want to pick up on two points quickly, which have already been raised by colleagues. But perhaps my . . . my approach is slightly different to theirs. I fear there are two developments that could lead to or could threaten the unity of the Alliance. The first of these is the European Union's pursuit of so-called strategic autonomy, and its rather exclusive approach to defence industrial developments, in spite of lip service to NATO, I have to say. I feel that this could lead to a divide between continental Europeans and North American Allies. My second concern well, actually, it's . . . it is the lack of concern for Turkey's interests, and the EU's cold shoulder, which may tempt Turkey, increasingly, to seek allies elsewhere. We need to keep Turkey onside. And it worries me, this tendency. I welcome your comments. Thank you.

DAVID McALLISTER: Thank you, Geoffrey. Would somebody like to take the floor from the GUE group?

ÖZLEM DEMIREL [GUE Group]: Thank you very much, Chairman. Thank you, Secretary General Stoltenberg. You have just said that investments are growing, that all NATO members have to invest more money in defence, and that is a positive . . . and you said that was a positive development, but I would cast doubt on it being a positive thing for more money to go into armaments. I've got questions about the US soldiers being deployed for exercises in Eastern Europe against a peer adversaryWell, who is this peer on the European continent? Do you have an answer for who that might be? And then, the link to PESCO and military mobility. So the dovetailing of these Defender 2020 exercises. We've also heard about the enormous budget being invested by the US in these exercises. What about other NATO members? And finally, I have a question. Before the last NATO assembly, Mr Macron said that NATO was brain-dead. We know that there are contradictions between NATO members and they are increasingly coming to the fore. The EU is now wanting to build up its own defence industries. So how do you view the future of NATO in this context?

DAVID McALLISTER: Secretary General, first round.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah.

DAVID McALLISTER: I felt a bit like during the hearing of Mr Borrell, I think you got less questions than you did, so feel free to answer as many as possible. Starting with Kris Peeters's question, until Miss Demirel's comments.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. I will really try to answer all the questions, at least address all the issues that were raised. First, Mr Peeters asked me about when the US, or President Trump, asked for more NATO in the Middle East, what does that mean?

So, first of all, that's . . . I'm not able to tell you, simply because we are now discussing what does that mean? So there is now a process inside NATO, but also with our partners and not least with partners in the region, with Iraq, Jordan and other partners in the region, about if NATO's going to do more, what more could we do? So I cannot give you conclusions. I can

just describe the process which is going on. I believe there is a potential for NATO to do more. But, as I stated, not mainly in combat. The issue we are looking into is not whether we can launch new combat operations. The issue is whether we can do something that prevents us from being forced into new combat. Prevention is better than intervention. And if we look at Iraq, I just strongly believe that if we don't act now, we may be forced back in combat. Because back, when . . . was it? I was against the Iraq War in 2003. I was a Norwegian politician. We didn't support it at all. But, but to be honest, I think perhaps we . . . the West left a bit too early when we left, because then suddenly ISIS came back. And then we all agreed, at least from left to right in Europe, that we had to support the military intervention in 2014 to combat ISIS. I cannot speak on behalf of all of you, but at least the countries I know, from the left to the right, we all agreed that we could not just stand idly by and see ISIS grow and kill people, rape women and not only threaten to control a big territory, but actually threaten Baghdad and the whole of Iraq.

So therefore, there was a broad agreement, despite what we thought about the Iraq War in 2003. And again, I was against. But it was a very broad agreement that we needed to go back into combat. And we launched a big military operation with thousands of airstrikes, some forces on the ground, special operation forces and we paid, the Coalition paid, but not least the people in Iraqi, the security forces in Iraq, they paid a very high price. And the civilians paid a high price. The liberation of Iraq was a very . . . it was a very hard effort and many people paid a high price for that liberation. And also more so civilians.

We must prevent that from happening again. And therefore, we need to build some local capacity, so they prevent ISIS from coming back. And therefore, I think that what NATO can do in Iraq is to build more capacity, train more forces, help them. That will not solve all problems. But what I can tell you, if you don't do that, we will have a big problem for certain. And then we may end up, two or three years down the road, back in the big combat operation.

So I just really believe that to avoid a new combat operation in Iraq, Syria and that part of the region, we need to go heavy in and train, build local . . . so, build everything from Ministry of Defence, institutions, command and control, to train forces. NATO can do that, we already do it, but we can scale up. We have a US-led coalition, which provides a lot of training, NATO provides training, we can perhaps look at how we do that together. I have an open mind. We are discussing this with . . . I had a discussion with the Iraqi Prime Minister last week. I meet the Iraqi President later on this week. We will not do anything without, you know . . . we are there by invitation from Iraq, but they actually ask us to do training. Because they understand that they need stronger local capacity to be sure that ISIS does not return. So . . . so if you are . . . so my answer is that, first of all, I cannot give you a precise answer because we are not concluded, but what we are looking into is what can we do to . . . in the region, but in Iraq, in particular, to build local capacity. I mentioned also Jordan and other countries where we can do more. Then, you asked me about the European Parliament and I, I . . . so . . . that's not for me to decide. If I, as Secretary General, what should I say, started to try to dictate the

European Parliament . . . no, sorry, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, then I would have been in deep trouble. So this is for the NATO Parliamentary Assembly to decide the relationship they have with the European Parliament.

Then I had several questions, and I need to group them a bit, about European defence, the European Defence Fund, strategic autonomy. I support more EU efforts on defence. I think it's . . . why shouldn't I? NATO has called on more EU efforts on defence for years. So if you, if the European Union starts to invest more in new capabilities, to increase defence spending, to address the fragmentation of the European defence industry, we should only welcome that. No problem. The only thing I also convey at the same time is that – and that's exactly the same as, for instance, Ursula von der Leyen expressed in her speech to the European Parliament – that this is not about establishing an alternative to NATO, or competing with NATO.

More than 90 percent of the people living in the European Union, they live in a NATO country. So when you strengthen defences of the European Union, you also increase the defences of NATO Allies. And that's the only a good thing. As long as it's not undermining NATO and not duplicating NATO, but complementing NATO.

So when there is a new drone, or a new plane, or a new battle tank developed through the European Defence Fund or PESCO, it should, of course, also be available for NATO operations. And that has been clearly stated, then it's okay. But if these new systems are creating new barriers against NATO Allies and non-NATO Allies, or EU Allies, then it will be dangerous. Because, it is also stated, actually, in the EU treaties that for those EU members who are members of NATO, NATO remains the cornerstone for collective defence.

And it remains the cornerstone for collective defence also because . . . because if you look at the size, and size matters. After Brexit, 80 per cent, 80 per cent of NATO's defence expenditure will come from non-EU NATO Allies. Three of the four battlegroups we have in the eastern part of the Alliance will be led by non-EU Allies: the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom. And also, geography matters, because if you look at the north, with Norway and Iceland, not very . . . I have all the respect for Norway and Iceland, but not very big countries, but are important for the North Atlantic. In the south, I know there are some different opinions about Turkey in the European Union, but strategically important for NATO in the south. And in the west, the US, Canada and the United Kingdom, important for European security. So the European Union cannot provide collective defence for Europe. That has to be a joint effort by the whole of Europe and North America.

And then I'll try to then also address the issue of strategic autonomy. If you ask me about my favourite definition, I think it's not for me to define that, but I will only say that it is a concept which is not absolutely clear. Meaning that, 'strategic', for me, sounds like big things, and 'autonomy' sounds like something you do alone. So if that's the case, then I think it's not good, because I really believe that Europe and North America have to stand together, not go

along. And . . . but maybe there is another definition, and maybe it's fine. I don't . . . that's for you, not for me to . . . to define. I will come to that.

But then . . . because I believe that any attempt to distance Europe from North America will not only weaken the transatlantic bond, which I believe in, but it will also divide Europe. So it will weaken Europe, too. I know a lot of European countries who will not accept a weakening of the transatlantic bond. So therefore, if you're trying to divide Europe from North America, you will also divide Europe. We need to be together, Europe and North America.. And I speak on behalf of all of us, because I am a European. And I, actually, I actually strongly believe in the European Union. I have fought twice to join this club. I've failed, but that's another thing. But you can hardly find a politician in Europe which has been campaigning so much for the European Union than I have. Because I have participated in two campaigns to try to convince Norwegians to join. So I strongly believe in the European Union, but not as an alternative to the transatlantic family, but as an important part of the transatlantic family.

Then Turkey, northern Syria and those issues. Well, I went to Istanbul a few days after that military intervention and expressed in Istanbul, standing together with Minister Çavuşoğlu and also after meeting with President Erdoğan, that I was deeply concerned, about the consequences of that military intervention. And I also stated the importance of reducing tensions and stopping the fighting.

Then, some days after, we had the agreement between the United States and Turkey, and there are many problems that still remain, but at least the fighting in that part of Syria has gone significantly down.

We need to build on that to find a political solution, a peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria. I, NATO, strongly support those efforts. Then I also, of course, know that that . . . NATO is an Alliance of 29 Allies. There are differences, and there have been different opinions, views about how to deal with the situation in northern Syria. That's correct. No way to hide that. And NATO is also a platform where, actually, Allies meet and criticise each other when they disagree. That's part of why NATO is important.

The good thing is that we agree on some very important issues also related to the situation in the Middle East, Syria, the importance of fighting terrorism, the importance of providing more support to Iraq and the importance of being part of the Global Coalition to Defeat Daesh, so Daesh is not able to return.

Let me also add that Turkey is an important Ally. No Ally has suffered more terrorist attacks than Turkey. They are important in the fight against Daesh. They are the only Ally which is bordering Syria and Iraq. And the progress, the achievements we have made in that fight has not least been made possible by using Turkish bases, infrastructure to fight Daesh.

Then Brexit. So, Brexit will not change the UK's relationship . . . it will change the UK's relationship with the European Union, but not with NATO. You asked me what should we do .

. . to keep them close. Well, for me, that's yet another argument for close NATO-EU cooperation, because close NATO-EU cooperation brings all European Allies together, regardless of whether they are EU members or not EU members. And it's also an argument for having NATO as a political platform, to bring all Allies together, again, regardless of whether the EU members or non-EU members.

'Like-minded partners' – yeah, so if you mean that we should work more with like-minded countries, I strongly believe in partnerships. That's something I support.

Then, Bütikofer, China challenge. So first of all, we are not going . . . the plan, the idea is not to move NATO into the South China Sea. But the challenge is that China is coming closer to us: in cyberspace, in investing heavily in our critical infrastructure, in Africa, in the Artic. So we need to respond to the fact that China is coming closer to us. So, it's not about moving NATO out, but also the fact that China is now developing weapon systems, which more and more are able to reach all Europe . . . all NATO Allied countries, including Europe.

Libya – well, I'm strongly in favour of supporting the UN-led efforts to find a political solution. I welcome the conference in . . . that was held in Berlin. We need a ceasefire. We need to implement the arms embargo. NATO is a strong supporter of that. So that's the short answer to how to deal with the very difficult situation in Libya. There's no easy way out, but we need a political negotiated solution.

Let me add that, in one way, the Libya operation, for good or for bad, shows how NATO and EU can work together. I was Prime Minister in 2011, when the Libya operation was launched, it was launched totally without NATO. I was actually in Paris and it was Norway, Denmark there. I remember I was together with the Danish Prime Minister, we had Sarkozy and we had Cameron. And it was a European initiative to launch the military campaign against Libya. And I was part of that. So I'm not . . . I'm not ashamed. I don't . . . so I fully taking responsibility for that.

But then, after some time, we realised, as Europeans, that we were not able to conduct that operation against Libya without the support from NATO. And then the Europeans went to NATO and asked for help. And then, NATO provided that help. So the Libya campaign, was initiated as a European campaign, initiated without NATO. But after some days, we realised that we didn't have the capabilities. So we went and then we utilised the NATO command structure and so on, to fully implement that campaign and also, of course, the support from the United States.

So whether you agree or disagree with Libya campaign doesn't . . . it's not the point here. The point is that it shows that, when needed, Europe and NATO, Europe and North America can work together, as we did in the Libya campaign, after the initiative from Europe.

Defender 2020 is an exercise. And it's . . . and the exercise is important, because it will show the ability of the United States to support and to protect Europe if needed. And then I would

like to highlight that, the reason why we have NATO and the reason why we have the US security guarantees as part of that: one for all, all for one, Article 5 is, of course, to preserve peace.

The reason why we have NATO is not to fight the war, but it's to deter a war. The reason to have NATO is not to provoke a conflict, but to prevent a conflict. So that's the whole idea with NATO, is that we should never be forced to fight a war. We should be able to prevent the war by sending a clear message to any potential adversary that if one NATO Ally is attacked, then the whole Alliance will come to support. And by sending that message to any potential adversary, we are preventing a war.

But to be able to do that in any credible way, we need to show that we are able to reinforce, to get the US troops to Europe, because by doing that we also send an absolutely clear signal that there is no way a European Ally can be attacked without having the support from the whole Alliance.

So NATO's main task is to preserve peace. And we have done that successfully in Europe for 70 years by having credible deterrence and defence.

Now, Van Orden also asked about strategic autonomy. Spending, that was the last . . . and brain-dead. First of all, NATO is strong. NATO is adapting. NATO has just implemented their largest reinforcement and adaptation of our Alliance since the end of the Cold War. So it shows that NATO is agile. It doesn't mean that we always agree. But it means that we are actually able to, despite differences, to take decisions and implement, and now implement the biggest adaptation of NATO since the end of the Cold War.

And this is not only about military, but also political efforts, and it's about dialogue with Russia, and it's about supporting arms control, and it's about preventing a situation in the Middle East where we are forced back into combat operations.

Spending, well, I have to tell you that I understand that voters and parliamentarians are sometimes sceptical against spending more on defence. Because most politicians I know, they prefer to spend money on health, on education, on infrastructure, not on defence. And I have been a politician myself for many years. And, of course, it was always hard to get money for defence. And I was also Minister of Finance in Norway back in the 1990s and I reduced defence spending.

DAVID McALLISTER: And you have money.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, yeah, and we have money, that's true. So, I mean, it's obvious that, for instance, after the Cold War in the 1990s, when I was Minister of Finance, we reduced defence spending. Because tensions went down. We saw less threats.

But if we reduce defence spending when tensions are going down, we have to be able to increase defence spending when tensions are going up. And now they're going up. It doesn't

come for free to defeat ISIS. And especially if you believe that Europe should do more, then you have to spend more. That doesn't come for free.

And we see a more assertive Russia, violating the INF Treaty, deploying new nuclear-capable missiles in Europe. And, therefore, we just have to make sure that there is no misunderstanding, no room for miscalculation, that NATO is not able to provide deterrence and defence to protect all NATO Allies. As long as that is absolutely clear, there will be no war. If there is any uncertainty about that, there is a risk for conflict.

So therefore, to maintain credible deterrence, to prevent war, we, I regret to say, but we need to invest more in defence. Okay. It's not short, but you had quite demanding questions.

DAVID McALLISTER: I would like to give the floor immediately to Nathalie Loiseau.

NATHALIE LOISEAU [Chairwoman of Sub-Committee on Security and Defence]: Thank you, President. Thank you, Secretary General. I'll try to run through my comments so that we can conclude this very timely exchange of views. There are two elements that I consider essential. One is NATO's conviction that we must have strategic thinking as we face the Russian threat in various forms. Europe is also confronted with the terrorist threat from the, Sahel region and the Middle East.

Fighting against this must be a priority for Europe. At this moment, one of our members, one of the members of the Alliance, Turkey, is a challenge, as is the increase in tensions in the Middle East. We must remember that terrorism has not yet been overcome, you've reminded us of that, Secretary General, and dialogue with Russia remains necessary. I'd also like to stress the need to step up European defence. It is a necessary point for the Alliance and for NATO. NATO remains central for those who are a member of it. Europe perhaps doesn't do enough. And Europe is perhaps not listened to enough. One thing is sure: we want to be on the table rather than on the menu. Now, of course, NATO can't do everything for us. We will assume our responsibility when it comes to the defence of our continent. We won't end discussions on these issues today. That's why I remind you that the Sub-Committee on Security and Defence will continue to be in touch with NATO and on 23rd January, in two days, we will be talking about the two challenges that the Alliance is confronted with, in the presence of the Assistant Secretary General Camille Grand and we will continue be looking at the strategic priorities of Europe and the ways in which we can step up the indispensable partnership between the EU and NATO, which has progressed significantly, thanks to you, Secretary General, and we would like to thank you for that.

And we are faced with a paradox, and that is that: despite the disagreements – and I guess that some of you will ask questions about those disagreements afterwards in the . . . when we have the Q&As afterwards – despite these differences, there is a paradox. And the paradox is that we have differences, but at the same time, North America and Europe are doing more together than we have done for many years. Because, for instance, I read sometimes that the US is leaving Europe. The US is not leaving Europe. The United States is actually increasing

their military presence in Europe. It's correct that after the end of the Cold War, the United States gradually, for good reasons, reduced its military presence in Europe. That's correct. But over the last years, the United States has not decreased but increased its military presence in Europe, with more troops, more investment in infrastructure, more prepositioned equipment. And now in a few weeks, we will have the big exercise, Europe Defender 2020. And in that exercise, the United States will deploy 20,000 troops directly from the United States to Europe, in the biggest deployment of US forces since the end of the Cold War. So again, you can like it or dislike it, or you can be in favour or whatever, but it's not . . . it's factually wrong to say that the United States is leaving Europe. There are more US troops now in Europe than have been for many years. So the US is not decreasing, they are increasing.

I move on, because I see that I need have some time for the Q&As.

DAVID McALLISTER: Thank you. AFET coordinator, S&D, Tonino Picula.

TONINO PICULA [AFET, S&D]: Thank you, President. Mr Secretary General, you may feel very welcome in this house, like always. In these challenging geopolitical times, it's of crucial importance to maintain NATO unity and the political cohesion of its member states. Having in mind the recent EU reactions of Turkish actions in northern Syria, the Turkish drilling activities in the eastern Mediterranean, as well as the overall increased Turkish autonomous activity in the region, which is not seen in line with the NATO political cohesion, how do you view the current state of play with a significant NATO member, Turkey? How do you view the closer relationship between Turkey and Russia, especially seeing them exerting influence in the region and having in mind that Turkey recently bought Russian missile defence system? Thank you.

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