North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press Conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the morning meeting of the North Atlantic Council (NAC) in Foreign Ministers' session
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(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

We have just finished a productive meeting of the NATO Foreign Ministers.

We began with a wide-ranging discussion about Russia.

And the long-term security implications of its foreign and defence policies.

We agreed that our dual-track policy of strong deterrence and defence combined with meaningful dialogue is the right one.

For seventy years, NATO has protected Allies.

But at the same time, we see more attempts to intimidate and destabilise.

Including cyber attacks.

Efforts to undermine our democratic institutions.

Disinformation and propaganda.

And even the use of chemical weapons in Salisbury. So we must continue to show solidarity and resolve.

We need to further strengthen our resilience.

And we need to develop stronger tools to deal with these hybrid threats.

At the same time, NATO remains committed to dialogue with Russia.

Our Supreme Commander for Europe General Scaparrotti, met with the Russian Chief of Defence General Gerasimov last week.

To discuss military posture and exercises.

And increase predictability and transparency.

And we continue to work toward the next meeting of the NATO-Russia Council.

When tensions are high, our dialogue is more important than ever.

Today, NATO ministers also addressed developments across the Middle East and North Africa.

We discussed the situation in Syria.

All Allies strongly condemn the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Assad regime.

And we support the efforts led by the United Nations to achieve a lasting political solution to the conflict in Syria.

We also made progress in our preparations to launch a new training mission in Iraq at the Summit in July.

To help Iraqi forces fight terrorism, stabilise their country, and prevent the re-emergence of ISIS.

Today we agreed on the concept of operations for our mission.

This will include several hundred personnel.

They will train Iraqi instructors, and develop Iraqi military schools.

So that our expertise can reach thousands of others.

We also discussed a new capacity building package for Tunisia.

And the implementation of a new package of support for Jordan.

We already support them with training in areas such as special forces, intelligence and countering improvised explosive devices.

We are now looking into working with them in new areas: border security, demining and security sector reform.

Our aim is to help manage crises in the region.

To build the resilience of our partners, so we can help prevent crises from occurring.

And to increase our own deterrence and defence when dealing with challenges from our southern neighbourhood.

This afternoon, we will address Afghanistan, our biggest training mission.

An important part of NATO’s contribution to fighting terrorism and projecting stability.

Today also marks a historic meeting on the Korean Peninsula.

NATO fully supports a political solution to the tensions in the region.

And I saw for myself how deep those tensions are when I recently visited South Korea and the demilitarized zone.

So I welcome the meeting today between the two leaders.

The progress they have made.

And the commitment they have shown to resolving their differences peacefully.

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

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, we'll start with Washington Post, just behind you. No, behind you. Behind you. Thank you.

QUESTION [Washington Post]: Hi, thanks. Michael Birnbaum from the Washington Post. This is of course, Secretary Mike Pompeo's… Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's first trip to NATO as Secretary of State. Within the United States, he's seen as much better aligned with President Trump's foreign policy agenda than Rex Tillerson was, and I think the State Department is quite excited to be more back in the game. I'm wondering… I just wanted to ask your sense, whether you feel as though there is more business to be done with the State Department with US diplomats, with Mike Pompeo's arrival as the new Secretary? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: First of all, it was a great pleasure to welcome Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Brussels this morning. He actually jumped on a plane just after he was sworn in and he was able to address the North Atlantic Council, the Foreign Ministers of NATO, just 12 hours and 34 minutes after his confirmation. And I think that’s actually a new record. And it also shows his strong personal commitment to the Alliance and it reconfirms the commitment of the United States and President Trump to the transatlantic bond.

We had time for a short bilateral meeting this morning. That was very good and very useful. And we addressed both the preparations for the upcoming Summit in July. We addressed Russia, deterrence and defence and how we can strengthen NATO presence in Iraq with a new training mission. So, I really look forward to working with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. His long and varied experienced, including serving as a soldier in Germany during the Cold War, provides him a perfect background for being the top diplomat of the United States, and I look very much forward to working with him.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Wall Street Journal.

QUESTION [Wall Street Journal]: I wonder if there was any… from Secretary Pompeo, you heard any different shift in the US stance on dialogue with Russia. And I wonder if there were

any concrete ideas from this meeting to the point you made about addressing Russia's hybrid activities, those activities that fall short of invoking Article 5, but are disrupting countries within the Alliance.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: So, we had a discussion now on Russia and the challenges we see related to the pattern of behaviour of Russia over years. And part of that, or an important part of that, is also how to address hybrid threats. And we all agreed that we need to continue to pursue the dual-track approach: strong deterrence, strong defence, combined with dialogue. But we also focus very much on the need to strengthen our efforts when it comes to hybrid activities. Much of what we have already done is to increase our deterrence and defence is also highly relevant for hybrid threats. For instance, meaning the presence in the eastern part of the Alliance, high readiness of our forces, better intelligence, improved situational awareness, but also for instance strengthening our cyber-defences, all of that is relevant for meeting and responding to hybrid threats. But we will do more, building on what we have already done. We will, as we prepare for the Summit, look into how we can further strengthen our abilities to respond to those threats which don't trigger Article 5, but at the same time is a challenge to NATO Allies, and we have seen many examples of that with cyber-attacks, with interference, meddling in our domestic political processes, and also for instance the use of chemical weapons… sorry, a nerve agent in Salisbury.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: BBC.

QUESTION [BBC]: Thank you very much, Secretary General. Jonathan Marcus from the BBC. There are two quick points: I mean firstly, you talk about Russia's pattern of destabilisation and intimidation. One of the most significant things they've been doing is attempted intrusions into election campaigns. How much of a problem is it that, in the United States where they've had perhaps one of their most significant efforts to intrude into the electoral process, the President of the United States doesn't actually appear to acknowledge that that is a serious problem at all? And then the second question, some have suggested that in a… in some strange way, or in some new way, Russia is already at war with the Alliance, in one sense or another. How would you characterise the policy of Russia towards NATO countries? Is there any sense, below that Article 5 threshold that Russia is, in any sense, at war with NATO?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: First about meddling in domestic political processes; we have seen a pattern in many countries and in many different NATO Allied countries that there has been attempts to meddle, to interfere, in democratic political processes, including into election campaigns. US authorities are now looking into the question of meddling into the US election campaign in 2016. And it's not for me to comment on the specific issues which are now addressed by the US authorities, but I think it's important that all Allies look into different attempts to try to meddle with election campaigns with democratic processes.

We work with Russia to try to improve our relationship and we are in the situation where we have not been before, because we are not in the old Cold War, but we are neither in the strategic partnership we tried to build after the Cold War. So, this is something new. And therefore it is even more important that we are able to combine, both to be firm, to be strong and to have a clear message and convey unity in our approach with Russia, but at the same time keep the channels for dialogue open. And over just the last few weeks we have seen how the NATO Alliance is able to respond. We responded quickly after the Salisbury incident, issued a very clear statement and also all NATO Allies supported the expulsion of Russian officials after the Salisbury incident. And we also agreed and issued a very clear statement after the use of chemical weapons in Syria. So, I think we have shown both the ability to act and to stand united, but also to continue to strengthen our deterrence and defence.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, we have Arabiya.

QUESTION [Al Arabiya]: Secretary General, I have a question about the Iran nuclear deal. In itself this agreement is a big deal and a big diplomatic achievement, but there are serious concerns in the region and also outside about what comes after 2025 and 2030, when the restriction will be lifted. Plus the problem of the ballistic missiles and the Iran involvement in many conflicts in the Middle East. How to address the current concerns regarding the involvement of Iran in the Middle East plus its ballistic missile issue? And also, if you can say a few words, how do you see the future of this nuclear deal after 2030 when the restriction will be lifted? Should this agreement be completed by another one? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: NATO welcomed the Iran nuclear deal when it was agreed back in 2015 and, at the same time, we called on Iran to fully implement the deal. The deal imposes a number of measures which leads to that Iran is moving further away from developing nuclear weapons. But at the same time, we have highlighted again and again that no deal can be good if it's not fully implemented. And we have also expressed concerns about other activities of Iran, including their destabilising activities in the region, support for extremist groups and threats to freedom of maritime navigation. And especially NATO Allies have expressed their concerns about Iran's ballistic missile programme. This is not covered by the Iran nuclear deal, so these are concerns which have to be addressed outside the deal, because they are not covered by the deal as it is today.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK. The lady in the second row?

QUESTION [Antena M, Montenegro]: I have a question that combine Western Balkan and Russia. With the possible accession of Macedonia to NATO, do you anticipate… do you expect the same destabilisation efforts that we saw in Montenegro, of course made by Russia?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Sorry?

QUESTION [Antena M]: Do you expect the same destabilisation efforts now in Macedonia when they are new to NATO, by Russia? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: So, first of all, I think what we have seen is that even though Russia has been against the enlargement of NATO for many, many years and always, or almost always, protested when NATO has become bigger with new members, the fact is that we have proven again and again that NATO's door is open. And as I've stated many times, whether NATO will have new members, it's for the aspirant country to decide and the 29 Allies. No-one else has a say, no-one else has any right to try to intervene or to veto such a process.

I recently visited Skopje and I once again clearly stated that NATO is still committed to what we decided back in 2008, in Bucharest, and that is that when the name issue is solved, then we are ready to invite the country to become a member of NATO. And that decision still stands. There are contacts, negotiations going on, to try to solve the name issue. I hope that those negotiations can be successfully concluded and then we will move on. And again, it's a fundamental right for every nation to decide its own path, including what kind of security arrangements they want to be a part of.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK. NRK, gentleman there in the fourth row.

QUESTION [NRK]: Thank you, NRK. Philip Lote. Secretary General, breaking news from Korea. What do you think has brought about the change that we are seeing today?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The most important thing today is to welcome the fact that they have met. And even though there's a long way to go before we see a full resolution to the crisis and the problems we see on the Korean Peninsular, I think this is a very important first step. I think it's obvious that the pressure which the international community has put on Korea, on North Korea, has been important. Because NATO strongly supports a political negotiated solution. But that’s exactly also why we have welcomed the strong international pressure. The political pressure, the diplomatic pressure, but not least the economic pressure. And what we have seen, over the last months, is that the United Nations, the Security Council, has been able to agree on tighter and tougher sanctions, and we have also seen that the sanctions has been implemented to a higher degree than before. And I am absolutely convinced that this strong international pressure has helped to create the situation where we now are. And when I visited the region and I visited South Korea and Japan, it was also a clear message from them that we need to continue the pressure, to achieve a political solution. And I also believe that we have to make sure that the sanctions remain in place until we see a real change in the behaviour of North Korea.

QUESTION [NRK]: Were you surprised by the quickness?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I welcome that we have seen progress and that we have seen that the two leaders have been able to meet. This is a first step. It's

encouraging. And then we have to realise that it's still a lot of hard work that lies ahead of us.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK. We had gentleman in the third row.

QUESTION: You talked a lot about the incident in Salisbury and it's important to understand. I'm from Russia Radio. It's important to understand, do you accuse Russia in using the chemical weapon in Salisbury? Do you have evidences, or have you seen them, that it was Russia which used this chemical weapon? Or is this just suspicions?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: We have been briefed by the United Kingdom on their findings and their assessments, and we have no reason to doubt the findings and assessments of the United Kingdom. And we welcome also that the UK is working with the OPCW, the Organisation for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, in the investigation of this horrendous attack. And the attack takes place against a background of a pattern of reckless behaviour by Russia and that's also the reason why all NATO Allies reacted the way we did, including by the expulsion of Russian officials from the NATO Mission.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK. We have one last question. Gentleman over here.

QUESTION: Thank you. This is Mehmet Solmaz from Daily Sabah. My first question is how was your trip to Turkey, in terms of tackling troubled issues? You know, the Greek soldiers issue or the S400s. And my second question is regarding the US Permanent Representative, Hutchinson, has recently, during this week, said that purchasing S400s from Russia would have serious consequences. There are also other American voices calling for sanctions on Turkey and how do you evaluate all these? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: My visit to Ankara and my meetings with the… with President Erdoğan, with Foreign Minister Çavuşoğlu and also the Defence Minister, was a very useful visit. Turkey's a highly valued Ally and Turkey contributes to our shared security in many different ways, not least in the fight against terrorism; air bases, infrastructure in Turkey, has been key for the efforts of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. And we addressed all those issues in my meetings in Ankara. Then of course we also addressed some of the issues where we have seen some differences between NATO Allies, for instance on the situation in North Syria. NATO is not present on the ground in Northern Syria, but we support the efforts of the Global Coalition, and some NATO Allies are, including Turkey, but also the United States. And it was clearly stated during my visit in Ankara that there is now close contact between the United States and Turkey on how to move forward in a way which is as coordinated as possible, to avoid any unnecessary problems in Northern Syria.

When it comes to the S400, that's a national decision. It's a national decision by any NATO Ally to decide what kind of equipment they acquire. What matters for NATO is of course the

question of whether it's going to be integrated into the integrated NATO air defence system. There has been no request for that and I think it's obvious that that will be difficult, but there has been clearly no request for that from the Turkish side. Of course, we have seen the statements from the United States on possible sanctions. We also discussed that during my visit to Ankara and again, I welcome the fact that there is now close dialogue and contacts between the United States and Turkey on this issue.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Thank you very much. This concludes this press conference. We weren’t able to take all the questions, but the Secretary General will be back later this afternoon. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Thank you so much.

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