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)

Thank you so much Minister Çavuşoğlu, my dear friend Mevlüt,

It is really great to be back here in Ankara and you said this is my seventh visit to Ankara and there's hardly any other country I've visited so many times as Turkey.

Thank you for hospitality and your warm welcome to me and my delegation.

We just has a very good meeting and an excellent lunch where we addressed a wide range of different issues.

My many visits to Ankara reflect the deeply valued role your country plays in the NATO Alliance. And Turkey contributes to our shared security in many different ways.

You are an Ally which plays a key role in the Alliance and I thank you for your many contributions.

You make essential contributions to NATO operations and to the fight against Daesh.

Our AWACS surveillance aircraft fly from Konya in support of the Global Coalition to defeat Daesh.

Turkey also helps to build stability abroad:

By playing a lead role in Afghanistan with hundreds of troops in our Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, and Turkey also helps with funding for the Afghan national army and security forces;

Turkey is contributing to NATO's mission in Kosovo;

And you actively support our training activities in Iraq.

So Turkey really does a lot for our Alliance, despite facing serious security challenges.

No other Ally has suffered as many terrorist attacks as Turkey.

And you are the Ally most exposed to the instability in this region.

Turkey generously hosts more than 3 and a half million refugees.

But you do not stand alone.

NATO stands with you in solidarity.

Our Article 5 security guarantee is at the core of the Alliance – one for all, and all for one.

We support Turkey with assurance measures, including AWACS surveillance aircraft, naval patrols and exercises.

We have deployed air and missile defence systems since 2013, helping to protect Turkey's border against threats from Syria.

This deployment has been extended again this year, at Turkey's request.

You are also part of NATO's Missile Defence system, with an essential radar based here in Turkey.

Our Land Command in Izmir is also part of NATO's presence in Turkey.

And over many years, NATO has provided billions in funding for military infrastructure to Turkey.

So NATO is important for Turkey and Turkey is important for NATO and that's the strength of the Alliance: 29 Allies standing together, protecting each other.

Today we had a good discussion on our preparations for the Brussels Summit of NATO leaders in July.

For seven decades NATO has been able to protect our citizens, based on our values: democracy, the rule of law, and individual liberty.

Since 2014, NATO has implemented the greatest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War.

With more forces at higher readiness.

Stronger cyber and missile defences.

And increasing defence spending.

We have also redoubled our efforts to fight terrorism.

Including by bolstering our mission in Afghanistan, with strong support from Turkey.

And we are stepping up our support for other partners as well.

At the Summit in July, we plan to launch a NATO training mission in Iraq.

Helping local forces to stabilize their own country and prevent international terrorist threats like Daesh from coming back.

I count on Turkey's support to launch the mission and on Turkey's future contributions to the mission.

We also discussed the situation in Syria. Minister Çavuşoğlu briefed me on Operation Olive Branch.

And I am grateful for Turkey's continued transparency on this.

We addressed the horrendous attack with chemical weapons in Douma.

The North Atlantic Council met at the weekend to be updated on the joint military action by NATO Allies France, the UK and the US.

To degrade the chemical weapons capabilities of the Syrian regime and to deter further such attacks.

NATO strongly condemns the repeated use of chemical weapons by the Syrian regime as a threat to international peace and security.

Those responsible must be held accountable.

And we must do all we can to protect the international ban on the use of chemical weapons.

There is no military solution to this conflict.

Therefore NATO fully supports the efforts led by the United Nations to achieve a lasting political solution to the conflict in Syria.

So Mevlüt, once again thank you again for excellent discussions, thank you for receiving me and I'm looking forward to continue to work with you.

QUESTION: [Interpreted]: Mr Minister, I have a question for you. In your discussions you have discussed Syria, and after the airstrikes to Syria French President Macron had made some interesting remarks. He said that Turkey and Russia are now on a different front after this airstrike. How do you see these remarks? And secondly, he said if there were no increased chemical attacks in Eastern Ghouta: 'I was planning to come to Turkey to meet President Erdoğan, Putin and President of Iran.' Was there such a plan?

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TURKEY]: [Interpreted]: Unfortunately, many of our European friends prefer populism, and they're farther away from the seriousness … [inaudible] different countries actually have not confirmed the remarks of the French President. We're expecting him to make remarks that are worthy or that are

becoming to a President. Macron said that he wanted to come to Ankara and join the trilateral summit. He talked to our President, and our President called Iranian President Rouhani and Russian President Putin, and Russia said, 'It's okay, he can come and join.' And Iran said, 'Let's have our trilateral meeting, and then we can have another meeting, a "trilateral plus one" meeting with France.' But this happened before the years of chemical attacks in Syria, in Ghouta, so it has nothing to do with this issue. He wanted to come and attend the trilateral meeting, but when he was not included in this trilateral meeting he decided not to come. He should not put this in a different way. I have to tell the truth so everyone can know. We shouldn't have – we shouldn't be obliged to explain all this, but if a President does not tell the truth we have to tell the truth.

And secondly, from the very beginning we have always been against chemical weapons and nuclear weapons. We have been against the use of chemical weapons by the regime since the very beginning, and we've asked the most severe and serious punishment for the regime. And each time collecting evidence on the ground and transporting such evidence to OPCW. We have supported all these efforts and we have cooperated with all our allies on the ground, including France. We did not think differently from Iran or France just because of this airstrike. I mean, we were against the use of chemical weapons when the regime used it previously and the US had an intervention. We have cooperation starting with Astana and … [inaudible] with Iran and Russia, and the only purpose of this cooperation is a ceasefire and also to prevent the use of chemical weapons to make sure that confidence-building steps are taken so that we can contribute to the political process.

And we have had significant attainments from this process. But this process should be crowned by the political process in Geneva. But we always thought differently from the other two countries as regards the regime and the regime's attacks on the ground. We can have differences of opinion, but we would not end our cooperation in other areas. I mean, we are aware of the differences of opinion, but we cooperate in other areas, but … or we're not going to give up on being against the use of chemical weapons because we're cooperating in other areas. So you have to see the essence of this issue.

Turkey and Russia have been separated, the French President said, because of France's airstrike to Syria. This is not true. We may have differences of opinion, but our relations with Russia are not as weak as can be severed by the French President. We have strong relations with Russia. But our strong relations with Russia are not an alternative to our relations with NATO or France or USA, and they should not be detrimental to these relations. But we have to have strong relations with all countries; therefore such remarks and statements are not actually correct. So I would like to invite him to be more serious.

QUESTION: [Interpreted]: …The international community can't stand by and sit – and tolerate the usage of chemical weapons by Assad regime. Don't you believe there's a green light for Assad to use aerial bombs, heavy shells, bomb and killing more than 500,000 of his people? Thank you so much.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Chemical weapons are illegal. Chemical weapons are banned. And I live in Brussels, not far from where chemical weapons were used during the First World War. So 100 years ago, during the First World War in Europe, we saw the barbaric and horrendous effects of the use of chemical weapons. And that's the reason why a few years after the First World War we had the first international convention banning the use of chemical weapons. And therefore I strongly believe that it is the responsibility of the whole international community to uphold that ban, to uphold the prohibition of chemical weapons. And therefore we cannot be silent when chemical weapons are used; we need to react. We need to make sure that those responsible are held to account. And that's exactly what NATO Allies have done: first, by raising this issue in the UN Security Council. US, United Kingdom, France and other countries have pushed again and again for an independent investigation by the UN into what happened in Douma. That has been blocked again and again by Russia. Also, knowing that previously we have had independent investigations proving that the Assad regime has been behind the use of chemical weapons.

This time it was not possible to get any agreement, and therefore they left NATO Allies with no other alternative than to act the way they acted the night between Friday and Saturday. This has been strongly supported by all NATO Allies. I also welcome the strong support from Turkey, both from Ankara immediately after the airstrikes took place, but also by being part of the consensus, the current statement on behalf of all NATO Allies we agreed on Saturday, where we strongly condemn the use of chemical weapons, where those responsible have to be held to account, and also where we highlight that the effect of the strikes has helped to degrade the chemical capabilities of the Syrian regime. It sends a clear message of deterrence, meaning that it shows that the international community reacts when chemical weapons are used, and it helps to protect the ban on chemical weapons.

Let me also add that the use of chemical weapons in Douma happened in the area where the Assad regime operates with support of its backers Russia and Iran. We have seen both intelligence which has been shared with NATO Allies, but we've also seen a lot of open sources, open media reports about the use of chemical weapons in Douma. And we also had the World Health Organisation reporting about civilians with symptoms consistent with the use of chemical weapons. So there was more than enough reason to act, and to not act would actually be to erode the ban on chemical weapons. We had to do the opposite: we had to uphold the ban on chemical weapons, and that's exactly the reason why NATO Allies acted as they did a couple of days ago.

QUESTION: [Interpreted]: I have a question to Secretary General. You said that NATO [Turkey] is one of the key Allies of NATO, supports all operations. But some NATO Allies have stated that Turkey should be excluded from NATO. What do you think about it? My second question is for both the Secretary General and the Minister. There are certain statements from Greece, as you know, and today Prime Minister Binali Yildirim said that a Greek flag was flown on one island which is not known to – belonging to which country. And what do you

think about the tension between Greece and Turkey? And Mr Minister, are there going to be some additional measures after this tension between Greece and Turkey?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Turkey is a highly valued NATO Ally, and Turkey contributes to our shared security, our collective defence, in many different ways. Turkey's important partly because of its geographic location: close to all the turmoil, the violence, Iraq and Syria. And therefore Turkey is in particular important when it comes to fighting terrorism. No other Ally has suffered more terrorist attacks than Turkey. And NATO is present in Turkey to support and help this country.

We are present with different kinds of military capabilities. We have what we call 'assurance measures': meaning we have more naval presence, we have more air presence, we have our AWACS planes, we have intelligence, awareness and reconnaissance, we have more exercises. And then we have augmented Turkish air defences and ballistic missile defences, with Spanish and Italian batteries along the borders towards Syria. And we are also working with Turkey in many different ways, including by having the AWACS plane in Konya, which is part of the Coalition efforts to defeat Daesh.

Let me also add that we are investing a significant amount of money in Turkish military infrastructure: billions of US dollars over many years. So we will continue to work with Turkey. And I thank Turkey for the many contributions also Turkey made, for instance, to our efforts to fight terrorism not only to fight Daesh but also, for instance, the presence in Afghanistan and also the strong support that Turkey has expressed when it comes to scaling-up NATO training activities in a country like Iraq, where we will launch a training mission in the near future.

And I would like to underline that all NATO Allies welcome Turkey as a highly valued Ally. We understand the importance of having Turkey in the Alliance. Turkey has been a committed Ally for decades, and we would like to continue to work with Turkey, especially in the more demanding and challenging security environment as we see today.

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TURKEY]: [Interpreted]: Thank you very much, Jens. In some countries, some politicians or media make such remarks or statements – I mean, all those countries – you should not think that all those countries and all those people are against Turkey's NATO membership. And there are 730 or 740 MEPs in the European Parliament. When the European Parliament makes a statement, you think that it is the opinion of the entire European Union, so you should not make a big deal of all these statements. As Secretary General said the governments of these countries are not against Turkey's NATO membership; on the contrary, they support Turkey's NATO membership.

And your second question: Greece is our neighbour. We are working together with Greece in order to promote our relations in different areas. And after so many years our President visited Athens and Western Thrace, and this was a very meaningful and symbolic visit, and it's been really useful. We have discussed the current issues and problems as well, but we also have discussed how we can work with a positive agenda.

When the Greek plane crashed, Prime – our Prime Minister called the Prime Minister of Greece, Mr Tsipras, and extended his condolences on behalf of the Turkish people. We're two neighbours and we have to stand together in good and bad times. Yes, we have problems. We have some disputed issues, and for a long time we have been having consultative meetings to find solutions. And these meetings, which have been initiated by previous governments, have been useful. We have to overcome the problems without escalating them.

Yes, there are previous treaties, including Lausanne. And these treaties do not identify each reef or island belonging to which country. Greece claims that these reefs and islands are theirs, and we say they're ours. However, their proprietorship is not known. We do not know to which country these reefs or islands belong. But what we need to do: is to avoid taking any steps which will escalate the situation. For instance, this summer Greece escalated the situation: a boat came and crashed into our boat in the Aegean. And we've always been telling them to be careful about what they do. I mean, we're telling them, 'Don't take dangerous steps, because there might be accidents.' Unfortunately there is a Minister of Defence – some Greeks think that he's a good boy, some think he's a bad boy, and he likes populism because he's the leader of the Far Right party. But because he's a spoilt person the relations between two countries should not be damaged.

I think yesterday it was three civilians and our soldiers went and took them. We can do it again, but what's the use? The other party should refrain from such actions and should not do anything that would escalate the situation or create tension. They shouldn't act that way in the Aegean. When they act that way, we have to respond. And none of these two countries need this. As NATO Allies we have to focus on a more positive agenda. We have to work on concrete projects, such as railroad projects: the transportation between Izmir and Athens, etc. And we have to prefer to work on issues that would reinforce our cooperation.

QUESTION: It's for Foreign Minister, to you. Turkey has previously also from the President Mr Erdoğan asked for a stronger support from NATO for your operation Olive Branch in Afrin and beyond, which could lead you into a complicated situation with the US. Do you believe and do you feel that you have gotten today from Mr Stoltenberg strong support, the kind that you were asking for?

Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu [MINISTER OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF TURKEY]: [Interpreted]: Thank you very much. First of all, we called upon the Allies and NATO to give more support to us in our counterterrorism efforts. In the beginning of my words I said that the biggest threat against the Allies is terrorism and terrorist organisations. That's why it's not the task or duty of one Ally to fight against terrorist organisations, and we have to refrain from double standards in fighting against terrorism. But unfortunately this double standard is so obvious. While we were doing the Afrin operation we did not ask for any support from NATO in this region. As Secretary General said we have carried out a successful and transparent operation. Civilians did not die. Look at the conflict in other areas: look at US operations with YPG in Raqqa, or

look at the operation in Mosul or regime’s attacks in other cities: hundreds, thousands of civilians died. And we ended and completed the operation in a short period of time, to make sure that humanitarian aid is transported to those areas, to make sure that the quality of living is improved. We have to cooperate. We have to cooperate with all NATO Allies in humanitarian assistance, repatriation, etc. Everything must be handled in a transparent manner.

And so our fight is against terrorists. The objective of this operation was the terrorists. As regards Membish and other areas, we have reached an understanding with the US. We said this previously.. And now we have a draft roadmap. When the Secretary of State took the office – takes the office, and when the Minist-, Min-, the Sec-, Foreign Ministers approve this, then we will start implementation. We will decide together with USA who will be responsible of security in Membish according to this roadmap. And when this model becomes successful, this will set an example to other areas as well. This is briefly what this process will be like. Of course, there are details, but I can share the details after this roadmap is approved. So if this roadmap is implemented, there is no problem.

By playing a lead role in Afghanistan with hundreds of troops in our Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan, and Turkey also helps with funding for the Afghan national army and security forces;
Turkey is contributing to NATO’s mission in Kosovo;
And you actively support our training activities in Iraq.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2018/04/16/joint-press-conference