North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the Leaders' Meeting in London on 3 and 4 December
2019-11-29

(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

NATO leaders will meet in London next week.

Together, we will mark the seventieth anniversary of the most successful alliance in history.

And look to the future together.

NATO continues to be the bedrock of peace and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area.

And today, Europe and North America are doing more together than in decades.

We have raised the readiness of our forces, and for the first time in our history we have combat-ready troops in the east of our Alliance.

We fight international terrorism, including with training missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

And we are modernising our Alliance to deal with the challenges of the future.

When leaders meet next week, they will build on these achievements.

And they will make decisions on a range of issues, including:

further improvements to the readiness of our forces;

recognising space as an operational domain;

updating our action plan against terrorism;

and balancing the burden more fairly when it comes to investing in our defence.

Today, we are releasing new defence spending figures.

They show the fifth consecutive year of growth in defence spending across European Allies and Canada.

As you can see, for many years, Allies kept cutting billions from their defence budgets.

Now, they are adding billions.

The real increase for 2019 is 4.6 %.

By the end of next year, European Allies and Canada will have invested well over 100 billion US dollars more since 2016.

In fact, this figure now stands at 130 billion.

When leaders met in Brussels last year, they decided to develop national plans.

Now, nations have submitted their updated plans to NATO.

And we see the results.

Based on these plans, I can announce that the accumulated increase in defence spending by the end of 2024, will be 400 billion US dollars.

This is unprecedented progress and it is making NATO stronger.

All Allies are increasing defence spending.

More Allies are meeting the guideline of spending 2 % of GDP on defence.

This year, 9 Allies will meet the guideline.

Up from just 3 Allies a few years ago.

And the majority of Allies have plans in place to reach 2 % by 2024.

Allies are also investing billions more in new capabilities.

And contributing to NATO deployments around the world.

So we are on the right track.

But we cannot be complacent.

We must keep up the momentum.

This includes having more forces at higher readiness.

Last year in Brussels, leaders launched the NATO Readiness Initiative.

This means 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 combat ships ready within 30 days.

We have made substantial progress.

Allies have already designated over 90 % of these forces.

And I expect leaders will be making further announcements next week.

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NATO is continuing to modernise in all areas.

Leaders will recognise space as our fifth operational domain.

Alongside land, sea, air, and cyber.

This is a clear recognition that space is essential for the success of our operations and missions.

Whether for early warning, communication or navigation.

Last week, the first of NATO's new surveillance drones arrived in Sicily from the United States.

And we have just signed a contract worth 1 billion US dollars to modernize our AWACS surveillance planes, which are essential for our missions and operations.

All of this is part of NATO's increasing ability to monitor and respond to crises.

Leaders will take stock of NATO's role in the fight against terrorism when they meet next week.

Including our training missions in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Which continue to play a key role in preventing the resurgence of ISIS and other terrorist groups.

We welcome peace talks in Afghanistan.

The Taliban needs to make real compromises to achieve a credible deal.

And NATO continues to support Afghan security forces to create the conditions for peace.

We will also discuss Russia, and the future of arms control.

NATO Allies have been united in their response to Russia's aggressive actions.

Our dual-track approach of defence and dialogue remains valid.

And we continue to coordinate closely.

We have agreed that our response to Russia's breach of the INF Treaty will be defensive, measured and coordinated.

And this will be an important part of our work for the months to come.

Leaders will also address the implications of the rise of China.

This presents opportunities.

But Allies also need to take into account China's significant military modernisation; its increased presence from the Arctic to the Balkans and in cyber space;

and its major investments in our infrastructure.

To increase our resilience against a range of challenges, we have agreed updated baseline requirements on telecommunications, including 5G.

And we will continue to focus on the security of our critical infrastructure.

Which is vital for our military operations, and our day-to-day life.

NATO is the only forum that brings Europe and North America together every day to address the key issues for our shared security.

We are 29 Allies.

Each with its own history, culture, and political parties.

So we should not be surprised that sometimes we disagree.

But the strength of NATO is that we have always been able to overcome our disagreements.

And unite around our core task:

to protect and defend each other.

In our seventieth anniversary year, I am proud of our record.

· NATO helped to end the Cold War without a shot being fired on European soil.

· We made possible the peaceful reunification of Germany and Europe.

· We stopped bloodshed in the Western Balkans.

· And we took a lead role in Afghanistan after 9/11.

Today, NATO protects almost 1 billion people.

We continue to fight international terrorism.

And we stand united against Russia's aggressive actions.

Every day, NATO planes patrol our skies.

NATO ships secure our seas.

NATO troops protect our borders.

And NATO's nuclear deterrent remains the ultimate guarantee for Europe.

Our Alliance is active, agile and adapting for the future.

Standing together, North America and Europe represent half of the world's economic might and half of the world's military might.

In uncertain times, we need strong multilateral institutions like NATO.

So we must continue to strengthen them every day.

To keep all our citizens safe.

And that is what we are going to do when leaders meet next week.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Okay, we'll start with Washington Post.

MICHAEL BIRNBAUM [Washington Post]: Thank you, Michael Birnbaum from the Washington Post. I have a question about the spending figures. You said that nine countries are now meeting the spending guidelines. Bulgaria is the new country, if that's right. They've just bought a whole bunch of F-16s, and the Bulgarian press suggests they're spending figures will actually drop again next year. So are you expecting that that increase is going to drop again? And if so, how are you going to explain that to President Trump.

And I have a second question, just about the general sort of structure of the meeting, I mean, the . . . the way you're presenting the defence increases, focusing on how much it's increased since 2016 when, in fact, they started . . . spending started increasing in 2015, the focus on space, the announcement of the contract with Boeing for the update of the AWACS. These are all things that seem very directed towards one man, President Trump. What's the consequence of focusing so much NATO effort on pleasing a single NATO leader? And does it have an adverse consequence on the broader readiness and strategy of the Alliance? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: President Trump is right about the importance of European Allies and Canada spending more. And he has conveyed that message very clearly to Allies several times. But European Allies and Canada should not invest in defence to please President Trump. They should invest in defence because we are faced with new threats and new challenges. Our security environment has become more

dangerous. We have seen the rise of terrorism. We saw the need to really step up in the fight against ISIS, Iraq and Syria. We have . . . we have seen a more assertive Russia over the last years. We see cyber threats. And of course, we also see the fundamental shift in the global balance of power with the rise of China. All of this together, combined with a more unpredictable security environment, is the reason why all NATO Allies decided to invest more. And now we are delivering on that. And that's the reason why we're doing it, because we actually agreed.

Then, of course, it will vary a bit from year to year between the different Allies, how much they increase and the exact numbers. For instance, if you have a huge investment, maybe your defence spending will go up and then a bit down the next year, that may happen, but there is no doubt that that trend is up. Because year by year we are increasing and year by year we are adding billions to our defence spending. And this is totally different from what we saw before, because then we had a decrease, now we have an increase and we have five consecutive years of increase across Europe and . . . and Canada.

Space, well, we all agree that that's important. I know that this is also important for the United States, but again, this is . . . these are decisions which we have made together, 29 Allies. And it shows that, that NATO is delivering, NATO is changing, NATO is adapting. And we modernise, and space is one example showing that.

So I cannot comment precisely on the figures for Bulgaria in 2020, so next year. What I can say is that they are now one more country at 2 per cent. So we have gone from three to nine. But also, those who are spending less than 2 per cent have started to increase.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we'll go to TASS.

QUESTION [TASS News Agency]: Thank you very much, TASS News Agency. Mr Secretary General, you have mentioned the disagreements between the Allies. Those disagreements are not critical, but they are multiplying since NATO decided to go back to its core task to deter Russia. Effectively we haven't seen any real aggressive actions from the Russian side towards NATO countries, don't you . . . don't you think that it's high time to think about the real change of NATO policy to face some real threats and not imaginary ones. Thank you very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: We don't see any imminent military threat of Russia against any NATO country, but what we see is a strategic challenge. And we see a Russia which is investing heavily in new, modern capabilities, including nuclear forces, and a Russia which is violating a cornerstone arms control agreement in Europe, the INF Treaty, deploying missiles capable of reaching European cities within minutes, and missiles which are nuclear capable.

And we see a Russia, which has been responsible for aggressive actions against neighbours: Georgia, Ukraine, but also have forces in Moldova without the consent of the government in that country.

So, yes, we have not seen any aggressive actions against a NATO country. But the reality is that that's exactly why it is so important for NATO to continue to provide credible deterrence and defence, also, in a more unpredictable world, and that's the reason why we have modernised, invested more and increased the readiness of our forces over the last years.

OANA LUNGESCU: NPR/Deutsche Welle, second row.

TERI SCHULTZ [NPR/Deutsche Welle]: Hi. Teri Schultz. Following on that, what do you make of President Macron's statement that he would like the Alliance to focus more on terrorism, because he doesn't feel that Russia is a threat? When . . . when one of the major European leaders says that, doesn't it . . . it sends a signal to Moscow that everyone's not on the same page?

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO doesn't have the luxury of either to focus on terrorism or on the challenge posed by a more assertive Russia and Russia's heavy investments in new military capabilities. We have to be able to respond to any potential threat and any potential challenge from any potential direction, in cyberspace and wherever it may come from.

And that's also the reason why we are investing in high-readiness of our forces, so they can be deployed where needed. They are not earmarked for any specific situation. They are flexible, they are ready and they can be moved and they can be deployed where needed. So for me, there is no . . . and actually, what NATO has proven over the last years is that we are able to both step up in the fight against terrorism with our mission in Afghanistan, with our new training mission in Iraq, and also being a member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, and working with partners, for instance, in Jordan and Tunisia and elsewhere. So, for me, we have to do both and many more things. And that's exactly what we are doing.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. Wall Street Journal.

JAMES MARSON [Wall Street Journal]: James Mason, Wall Street Journal. Secretary General, you just outlined a fairly convincing case as to why NATO has strengthened its defence and deterrence against Russia, what it's done and why it needed to do that. Do you worry that President Macron is perhaps moving too fast in . . . in his efforts to improve relations with Russia, when Russia hasn't really done very much to change what it's doing?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Within NATO, we have agreed on the policies towards Russia, and that's based on what we call the dual-track approach. And we had a very important summit in Warsaw, where we clearly stated this, meaning that we both deliver on deterrence and defence and at the same time engage in political dialogue with Russia. Russia is our neighbour. Russia's here to stay. We strive for a better relationship with Russia. But even without an improved relationship with Russia, we need to talk to Russia, because they are there. There is more military presence, more exercises, higher tensions. And then we need dialogue with Russia also to manage a difficult relationship, to have transparency, predictability, to avoid incidents, accidents that can create really dangerous situations.

So dialogue with Russia is important for NATO. And I am . . . and I welcome the fact that after two years with no meetings in the NATO-Russia Council from 2014 to 2016, since then in 2016, we've actually been able to convene several meetings, briefing on exercises, briefing on military posture, addressing difficult issues like Ukraine, INF and so on. But I think it is important that we sit down with Russia. And I very often refer to, also, my own background from Norway, where we actually were able to work with Russia, also during the coldest period of the Cold War, and agree with them on different issues.

So the . . . but the message when it comes to Russia is that dialogue is not a sign of weakness. And we have to be strong and united. That's when we can unite and engage in dialogue with Russia. And therefore, it is extremely important that we have been united, for instance on the issue of the INF. All Allies agreed that Russia violated the treaty. This was not only based on US intelligence, but also intelligence from other Allies. And all Allies agreed on the US decision because no treaty can keep us safe if it is only respected by one side. And now we are working on how NATO's going to respond, meaning we have agreed some . . . what should I say, main principles, some main elements: that we are going to be coordinated, we are going to be defensive, we are not going to mirror what Russia is doing, so we have no intention of deploying land-based nuclear missiles in Europe. But we have to make sure that we have credible deterrence and defence, also, in a world without the INF Treaty and with more Russian missiles deployed in Europe. And we have to remember that the NATO nuclear deterrent is the ultimate security guarantee for Europe. And this is an arrangement which we deliver together, European Allies and the United States. We have common command and control. We have years of experience working together, common doctrines, common exercises. The US has forward-deployed nuclear weapons in Europe, but European Allies provide the bases, the aircraft, the support to build this NATO nuclear deterrent for Europe together.

So we, we have a stand . . . we have been able to stand together and we will continue to stand together in the way we approach Russia.

OANA LUNGESCU: Kabul Times, lady in the middle.

QUESTION [Kabul Times]: Thank you. Secretary General, you said that there may be discussion about Afghanistan in the next meeting in London. If I may ask about the . . . your comment about the President Trump trip or visit in Afghanistan? And also he said that ceasefire and intra-Afghan dialogue will be the best for the … [inaudible] which is always refusing by Taliban. Don't you think that they need more pressure on that? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So, I welcome that there are contacts, talks between the United States and the Taliban. This is also something which the US is consulting with other NATO Allies on regularly. Secretary Pompeo has discussed, briefed Allies. Ambassador Khalilzad had briefed Allies, discussed this with Allies. And we are consulting all the time, because it's

not only US that is in Afghanistan, but you have to remember that there are also many non-US troops in Afghanistan. And this remains our biggest military operation outside Europe.

So Afghanistan shows the strength of NATO, bringing Allies, partners together, addressing a common challenge to prevent Afghanistan from once again becoming a safe haven for international terrorists. And it's extremely important that we avoid or prevent ISIS to establish themselves in Afghanistan, or to try to re-establish a kind of terrorist caliphate in Afghanistan, which they lost in the Levant.

We think that the best way we can make sure that there is a credible deal, a real deal, is that we continue to support the Afghan security forces, sending a message to Taliban that we are ready to stay, we are committed, and they will not win on the battlefield. They have to sit down at the negotiating table and make real compromises.

And therefore, the message from NATO is that we are committed, we will continue to support the Afghan security forces, but of course, we also welcome any efforts to try to find a peaceful, negotiated solution, including, of course, reduction of violence.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. Ukrainian News Agency here.

QUESTION [National News Agency of Ukraine]: Just in few days after the London summit, leaders of Germany and France will go to Paris and meet in Normandy Format on Donbass settlement. Could we expect that leaders in a wider format will discuss that issue in London? And what is the vision, the idea for that . . . for outcome of these meetings, would be from the NATO side? Thank you so much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I am certain that also the situation in Ukraine and the efforts to implement the Minsk agreements will be part of the discussions in London.

We welcome the efforts of Allies and the Normandy Format to try to make progress.

The North Atlantic Council and I visited Ukraine recently. We went to Kyiv, we met with President Zelenskyy, but we also went to Odessa where we saw how NATO is providing practical support to Ukraine, helping them to build their naval capabilities, especially the Naval Academy. And NATO will continue to provide practical and political support to Ukraine, at the same time as we support efforts to try to implement the Minsk agreements and find a sustainable, lasting political solution to the crisis in Ukraine.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we'll go over there. Associated Press.

LORNE COOK [Associated Press]: Lorne Cook from the Associated Press. You've spoken about NATO's core tasks and in particular, deterrence. There's a big military component, which NATO is doing many things on, of course, with deterrence. There's also the political element. How is it possible to project unity when the major Allies, the heavyweights, are

actually throwing mud at each other? Isn't deterrence failing when we can't talk with one voice?

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO deterrence works every day. We see that by the fact that we have been able to preserve peace in Europe for 70 years, for more than 70 years. And this is an unprecedented period of peace in Europe. We have to remember that the kind of normal situation in Europe has been war between the major powers.

Now, no NATO Ally has been attacked, has . . . no NATO Ally has been attacked since this Alliance was established. But over those 70 years, we have seen disagreements, differences between Allies before. I very often refer to everything from the Suez Crisis in 56, to many other crises and disagreements, up to the disagreement, for instance, about the Iraq War in 2003 and the discussions we have today about, for instance, the situation in northeast Syria.

But the strength of NATO is that despite these disagreements, we have always been able to unite around our core responsibility: one for all and all for one. Sending a clear message to any potential adversary that if one Ally is attacked, it will trigger a response from the whole Alliance.

And I can hardly think about any stronger way to send this message today, a political and military message, because NATO is a political and military Alliance, to send this message today, than the fact that we have more troops on high readiness than we have had for decades. And the figures I just showed you show that, actually, European Allies are investing in this. And the fact that we have, for the first time in our history, combat-ready battlegroups in the eastern part of the Alliance sends a very clear message. So . . . and also this idea that the US is not committed to Europe and to NATO is wrong, partly because it's stated clearly from the United States, from the President, from the Congress, from the political leadership in the United States that they are committed to NATO. But on top of that, or perhaps even more important, is what they actually do. Actions speak louder than words. And the US is now increasing their military presence in Europe for the first time in many, many years.

Next year, we have the new Defender 2020 exercise, with around 20,000 US troops deployed in Europe to exercise, actually, on how to defend Europe. That will be the largest number of US troops participating in an exercise in around 25 years.

So, yes, there is no way I can deny that Allies disagree on issues which are important: climate change to northeast Syria. But, at the same time, Allies are sending a very clear message that we are committed to our collective defence because that keeps us all safe.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we'll go to the other side of the room. Gentleman over there.

QUESTION: Good morning. Sec Gen, a week ago we had . . . we heard a lot about commissions in order to improve or in order to satisfy the French president's critique on

NATO. So far, nothing has been set. What is . . . will be the development, is that, this issue of commissions be discussed at the summit? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: We had a discussion last week, as you said, at the foreign ministerial meeting, and I said that I think it has some value to have some work reflecting on how to further strengthen NATO and especially the political dimension of NATO. This conversation, this discussion is ongoing. I think that the important thing is that, what we have seen is that all Allies have clearly stated that they would like to further strengthen NATO, and especially further strengthen the political dimension of NATO.

Exactly how we do that, what kind of tools we use to achieve that end? Well, that may be different views about that, but that's not the most important thing. The most important thing is that we actually are delivering a stronger NATO. And we have proven that we are able to deliver a stronger NATO over the last years, both to strength the political dimension and the military dimension. Just the way we have dealt with one of the most important strategic issues in Europe today, the demise of the INF Treaty, arms control, shows that NATO is a political alliance and the only place where North America and Europe sit down together every day and make decisions, consult and take actions together. And we have strengthened that. And then, I have a pragmatic, … the most important thing is to strengthen NATO, exactly how we do it is . . . is not the most important thing.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, gentleman there.

QUESTION [Kurdistan 24]: Thank you Mr Secretary General. Yesterday, Kurdistan Prime Minister had meeting with President Erdoğan in Ankara. Are you welcoming to this kind of talking or dialogue between the Kurdish authority and Turkish authority? And the second question: do you want peace in the Middle East? You have to accept the Kurdistan-like country. You know why? I'm going to explain you.

OANA LUNGESCU: Will you please ask questions, rather than making explanations, thank you.

QUESTION [Kurdistan 24]: Yes, all right. You . . . you're from Norway, you have a country, you have identity and all people, this room, they have identity, they have their country. But, except me. And not just me, 30 Kurdish million . . . 30 million Kurdish in the Middle East, they don't have identity, they don't have country. So I think . . . what do you think, if you give the country for the Kurdish in the Middle East? Do you think there will be the peace in this area? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First of all, I think it's a good thing that political leaders meet, and especially when we are faced with difficult challenges and complex situations, as we are faced with in that region, and therefore I welcome these kind of meetings.

Second, I think it's extremely important that we have a negotiated political solution through the situation we see in northern . . . or, in northern Syria, but in Syria in general. And I know that the UN efforts is also addressing, of course, the concerns and the issues which are raised by the Kurdish people. But it is not for NATO to, how should I say, say what the solution should be. We welcome and support the UN efforts to try to find a political solution.

OANA LUNGESCU: Last question. Danish TV, all the way up there.

QUESTION [TV 2 Denmark]: Yes, thank you, … [inaudible] from TV2, Denmark. Secretary General, back to my colleague's questions about throwing mud at each other. Are you saying that it doesn't worry you that you . . . we now have an Alliance that has been called both obsolete and now brain dead, and you have big discussions about the . . . Turkey's behaviour in Syria? What is exactly your strategy to bring people together?

JENS STOLTENBERG: To bring them together? Meaning . . . no, but, but . . . I think that it's obvious that it is easier to be a Secretary General of NATO when all Allies agree than when they disagree on issues. That's obvious. Having said that, I think what makes my responsibility important for this Alliance is that my main task is to make sure that despite differences on the important issues, we continue to deliver credible deterrence and defence and a political will to stand together when it really matters on issues like, for instance, arms control and the political will to defend each other.

So that's exactly what I'm doing. And that's my strategy: is to, is to either be able to solve the disagreements – that's the best thing, if we're able to agree on the areas where we disagree. But if we are unable to solve the disagreements we see on different issues, then at least we have to make sure that those disagreements don't undermine the strength of NATO, that we are able to continue to unite around our core task to protect and defend each other.

And then I, sometimes I refer to history saying that that's exactly what we have managed before, when we have seen disagreements over decades between NATO Allies on important issues. Partly I . . . I refer to the fact that that's what we are doing now. Because the reality is that North America and Europe are doing more together now than we have done for decades. So we are proving every day, through our actions that we are able to stand together and protect each other, just by the fact that North America and Europe are exercising more, deploying more, engaged in more operations, investing more than we have done for decades.

And the third argument I use is to say that it is in our security interests to stand together. It is the . . . in the security interest of each and every Ally to stand together because we are safer and stronger together than alone. This is, of course, the case for Europe, especially for smaller Allies like my own country. But it is also the case for the bigger Allies and also for the United States. Because we are faced with unprecedented security challenges, terrorism in a form we haven't seen before. And we have shown in Afghanistan, in Iraq, in the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, the strength of standing together. We haven't been able to make that

progress - to liberate the areas controlled by ISIS without standing together, as we did in that fight.

Or . . . and we see the shifting balance of global power with the rise of China. I recently went to the United States and there I hear people being concerned about the size of China. Well, if they are concerned about the size of China in the United States, then they should make sure that they keep their friends and Allies close. Because when we are together, all of us, Europe and North America, then we are 50 per cent of world GDP and 50 per cent of world military power.

So, yes, we have some obvious challenges, but history, what we actually do, and the fact that it is in our security interests to stand together, is the reason why I'm absolutely certain that we are able to deal with the differences also at this time.

OANA LUNGESCU: This concludes this press conference. On your way out you'll find the latest defence expenditure and the Secretary General's Adaptation Report ahead of the Leaders Meeting. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

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