North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press point

by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Angela Merkel, Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany
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(As delivered)

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg: It is a great pleasure to be back in Berlin and to meet with you, and it's really an honour to be here in this great city on the eve of the 30th anniversary of the Fall of the Wall, the Berlin Wall.

Germany is at the heart of Europe – and at the heart of NATO.

You play a leading role in our Alliance.

Germany leads NATO's High Readiness Forces.

And our multinational group presence in Lithuania.

You host NATO's new mobility command in Ulm.

And you make key contributions to our missions in Kosovo, in Afghanistan and the Aegean Sea.

We have just discussed preparations for the NATO Leaders' meeting in December in London.

We agree that a strong NATO is essential for peace and security in Europe.

And we agree that to keep NATO strong, we must continue to invest in the readiness of our forces.

Because in an unpredictable world, we must be ready to respond more quickly.

We also discussed progress on burden sharing.

Allies have already delivered five successive years of real growth in defence spending.

This will mean that European Allies and Canada will spend 100 billion dollars more on defense by the end of next year.

I welcome Germany's plan to raise its defence budget. And welcome the fact that you already started to do so.

And I count on Germany to keep up the momentum and stand by its commitments.

Because this is about investing in our own security.

Preserving peace and preventing conflict.

We also discussed the situation in northern Syria.

This is a concern for us all. And it is an issue on which Allies consult regularly in NATO.

It is clear that Allies have different views.

But we agree that we must not jeopardise the gains we have made together in the fight against our common enemy ISIS.

We must remain committed to our training missions in the region, so that ISIS does not re-emerge in Afghanistan or Iraq.

And we must continue to do all that we can to support UN-led efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

We also discussed the importance of arms control after the demise of the INF Treaty due to Russia's violation.

NATO is responding in a coordinated, defensive and measured way.

We will maintain credible deterrence and defence.

But we will not mirror what Russia is doing.

We have no intention of deploying new land-based nuclear missiles in Europe.

And NATO remains a strong platform for Allies to work together on arms control and disarmament.

So Chancellor Merkel, Angela

Thank you again for Germany's strong contributions to our Alliance.

And for your outstanding personal commitment to our transatlantic bond.

Thank you so much.

Question: I would like to draw both of your attention to the French President Macron's statement today on NATO being brain dead. If you agree on that? And to what degree there is a lack of confidence over the Atlantic at this time? And if I may to the Chancellor, is Germany going further on the initiative for security zone in Syria and what is the status now?

Angela Merkel [Interpreted]: Allow me, if I may on this to state on this interview – the French President has found rather drastic words to express his views. This is not how I see the state of cooperation within NATO. I don't think such a sweeping judgment is appropriate, although obviously we grapple with the issues. But NATO is in our interest. It is our security Alliance. And I've said time and time again, obviously, we have to take our destiny in our hands a little bit more in Europe, but the transatlantic partnership for us is absolutely indispensable and I think there are many areas where NATO is working very well. It has broadened its range over past few years, particularly we are working much more in the political sense than we used to work only ten years ago. And that's something that we need to nurture, that we need to develop, that we need to build on. And where we see certain lacks or flaws, we ought to work on this. So as I said, I don't share this view. As regards the security zone, our Minister of Defence has proposed this. I think basically it is a good idea, but we have to look at the realities on the ground I think. We are discussing this right now within the government. We also have to see, as I said, the realities of the day. I think the E3 format – so the United Kingdom, France and Germany – need to talk together with Turkey about the overall situation. Also to talk about this with the Russian President. And then draw the necessary conclusions for this, particularly the mandate of United Nations always requires a decision of the Security Council. And that needs to be prepared politically speaking. And right now conditions after the meeting in Sochi are different than they used to be. The Minister of Defence today talked about a strategic patience. We have to show this.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg: I agree with Chancellor Merkel. NATO is strong and the United States, North America and Europe, we do more together than we have done for a decade. We have implemented the strongest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. European Allies are stepping up – increasing the readiness of their forces, investing more in defence. And the United States is increasing their presence in Europe with more troops, more exercises and more investment in infrastructure. So the reality is that we do more together, we've strengthened our collective defence as a response to a more unpredictable and uncertain world. And I think also we have to remember that any attempt to distance Europe from North America risks not only to weaken the Alliance, the transatlantic bond, but also to divide Europe. So therefore we have to stand together. I welcome European unity. I welcome efforts to strengthen European defence, but European unity cannot replace transatlantic unity. We need to stand together. We need to work together, and that's exactly what we do in NATO every day.

QUESTION: Madam Chancellor, Secretary General, the situation in Iran is coming to a head. Over the weekend, Tehran is going to sort of increase uranium enrichment. So matters come to a head. Where is your red line? Where do you draw the red line? When do you would you say JCPOA is finally dead? And Secretary General, how do you see the situation right now as regards the situation in the Gulf region? Do you think that the conflict there with Saudi Arabia and Iran has been diffused, as you see it?

Angela Merkel [Interpreted]: Well, we are in a situation we still are in a situation where we have talks with Iran. The Minister yesterday pointed out that these are obviously steps that go in the wrong direction, that Iran is taking here, but we have not, as yet, come to a definitive evaluation. But obviously, with every step they take, the situation gets more difficult.

Jens Stoltenberg: Allies are concerned about the situation, and all NATO Allies are also concerned about Iran's destabilising activities in the region. And of course, all NATO Allies agree that Iran should not be able to acquire, to develop nuclear weapons. But at the same time, it's a well-known fact that there are different views between Allies on the question of the Iran Nuclear Deal.

QUESTION: I'm a Kurdish journalist. I have a question. There was already a question asked on the security zone. A 13 year-old was killed by a phosphorus attack. And what do you say, Frau Merkel, to this: a NATO member is attacking children in north Syria with phosphorus, with chemical weapons.

Angela Merkel [Interpreted]: I must say that I am not familiar with this case and cannot confirm this. But time and time again, I myself personally, also in telephone calls with the Turkish President, said that everything has to be done in order to avoid civilian casualties. And also that has happened. Many people had to take flight. Many people have suffered. But we are in dialogue with them and we deeply deplore this.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I have expressed my deep concern about the consequences of the incursion into northern Syria, and I also stated clearly that we must not jeopardise the gains, the progress we have made in the fight against ISIS. And all NATO Allies strongly support the efforts to try to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria.

QUESTION: Madam Chancellor, Secretary General, one question addressed to both of you. The Minister of Defence today made a number of proposals. First that, as regards the 2 percent goal to reach this by 2031 [inaudible]. I would like to know, Secretary General, whether that is something that you see as a message that Germany is actually ready to do much more than in the past? And Madam Chancellor, very concretely, are you for this goal 2031, to have reached this 2 percent goal at the very latest? And are you for an establishment of a National Security Council?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I welcome that Germany has started to invest more in defence. And I expect Germany to deliver on the commitments we all have made. The reality is that Germany contributes to the Alliance in many different ways, with the leadership of our High Readiness Force, with troops in our mission in Afghanistan, in Kosovo. You are the lead nation for our maritime presence in the Aegean Sea, and Germany is providing troops and forces to many different NATO missions and operations, and we are welcoming that very much. When it comes to defence spending, let me also add that European Allies should invest in defence, not to please NATO or the United States. They should invest in defence because it is in their own security interests. Because we need ready forces, we need well-

trained forces, we need modern equipment. And therefore, I welcome the fact that after years of cutting defence spending, all NATO Allies, including Germany, have started to increase investments in defence, and have added a hundred billion by the end of the next year, a hundred billion US dollars. So we are making real progress and I recognise and welcome that progress.

Angela Merkel [Interpreted]: Let me say, first of all, that our Defence Minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, has today actually stated very clearly what she intends to do. And that, actually, is in line with what we've said time and time again, what at the time Federal President Gauck said, what then-Foreign Minister Steinmeier said, what I said, that the tendency has to be that we shoulder more and more responsibility, which we have done. We've done it within NATO. We are now doing it in Africa. And also, what you mentioned in the Sahel, all of this is important, and we will probably have to continue that, and also build on this and enhance it. Let me just remind all of us of the G5 Sahel engagement that we pursue. As regards the 2 percent goal, I think that is a realistic view that was voiced here by the Secretary General. I think what we said in Wales, the sort of commitments we made, also as a grand coalition, is that we should move towards the 2 percent goal that we see as our commitment. And [inaudible] if I look at what we have been able to do since Wales and wish to do further, it is an ambitious but also realistic goal to say, we will want to reach this by 2031. Now, on this National Security Council, I think that's a good idea. Actually, my party was contemplating that years ago. So far, we have not been able to anchor that in our coalition agreement. But it's good that today there's already much better cooperation among the different departments in this integrated and coordinated approach to defence. But I think that a National Security Council might also go a long way towards even enhancing those common efforts. If you were to ask me for my party to write this down, I would say yes, because we have here a structure that we see basically in a presidential system. So it's not met with such great liking here as in the United States, but I think it's a good idea.

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