North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Statements

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and US President Donald Trump in the Cabinet Room at the White House
2018-05-17

(Source: White House)

Cabinet Room

2:25 P.M. EDT

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Thank you very much. And today I'm honored to welcome Secretary General Stoltenberg back to the White House as we prepare for the upcoming NATO Summit in July. That will be both interesting and exciting.

I've had the great pleasure of getting to know Secretary General Stoltenberg over the last year. We've worked very closely together and improved very much, with respect to everybody, the burden sharing. And we've really strengthened NATO and the NATO Alliance. The strong working partnership we forged has helped to produce significant increases in member-state contributions. We've worked very hard on that. And I will tell you, the Secretary General has been working on that for a long time, before I got there. But I think more progress — I can say with surety, more progress has been made in the last year and a half than has been made in many, many years.

We're delighted to report that last year, as a result of our joint efforts, we witnessed the single-largest increase in defense spending among European member states and Canada in a quarter of a century. That really is quite a spectacular achievement, so I congratulate you. I congratulate you very much.

We really have worked in many respects, but that was, I think, a big one. We had countries that were not paying what they were supposed to be paying. Now most countries are. Not all. And I think you'll be able to handle the ones that aren't. Right? I have confidence.

This afternoon, I want to thank the seven NATO nations, in addition to the United States, who will meet their 2 percent NATO defense spending. Now, unfortunately, we pay much more than 2 percent, which is probably unfair, and unfair to the taxpayers of the United States.

But the 2 percent number that's met is Poland, Romania, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Greece, and the United Kingdom. And they are right up to snuff. They paid. They were on time. They

paid the number that they're supposed to be paying. We have some that don't — and, well, they'll be dealt with.

As a result of these contributions, NATO is much stronger, taking in billions and billions of dollars — more money than they ever have before. But as the Secretary General and I have discussed, more work needs to be done. We're still waiting on 20 member states to meet their NATO commitments and spend at least 2 percent on defense. And 2 percent is a very low number. The number really should be 4 percent. Two percent is a very low number.

In particular, Germany must demonstrate leadership in the Alliance by addressing its longstanding shortfall in defense contributions. Germany has not contributed what it should be contributing, and it's a very big beneficiary — far bigger than the United States, frankly.

In addition to that, as you know, they're buying massive amounts of gas from Russia and paying billions and billions of dollars. So I think that's something we'll be discussing later and we'll be discussing that at our meeting, and probably long before the meeting.

We're going to successfully confront the full range of threats, and we're going to need every member state to honor its obligation. So, as we've just said, some do and some don't.

Today, the United States reaffirms our commitment to Article 5 and the mutual defense pact. We renew our call on nations to demonstrate their commitment to the Alliance through their actions, including by increasing their defense contributions under the Article 3 requirement for preparedness and military capacity. Have to be prepared. Never know what's going to happen.

I've also called on NATO to improve its counterterrorism capabilities. Since the founding of the Alliance, terrorism has claimed more lives in NATO countries than any other security threat. Think of that. This was something that years ago wasn't even a subject. And I would talk about it all the time on the campaign. And in all fairness to Secretary General Stoltenberg, he listened to me and they have a great counterterrorism operation. We appreciate that.

I was therefore glad to see, last May, NATO adopted an Action Plan recommending the Alliance to the fight, and to fight, against terrorism, which is now becoming a fight all over the world, no matter where you go; places that 10 and 20 years ago you wouldn't have even thought about it.

I also discussed with Secretary General Stoltenberg our commitment to stopping nuclear proliferation, including the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. We want a future of safety, security, peace for all Koreans and for the entire world.

My administration is also committed to working with our allies to halt Iran's nuclear ambitions and their destabilizing activities all across the Middle East. No matter where you go, no

matter where there's a problem, there's Iran right behind it, and we're not going to have that any longer.

I've said before: Our nations must be strong from within to defend ourselves from threats outside. The strength of the NATO Alliance does not depend on military might alone, but also the deep ties of history, culture, and tradition that have long united our civilization. Now, we must renew these ties and rededicate ourselves to our shared heritage. And in heritage, we want a heritage of peace. Strength but peace. Strength but peace.

I want to thank you, Secretary General, for joining us at the White House — it's a great honor — and for working with us to fortify the NATO Alliance which has proudly stood for seven decades as the bulwark of freedom, security, and prosperity. Together, we will make NATO and the NATO Alliance stronger.

We need fairness. We need to be reciprocal. Countries have to be reciprocal in what we're doing. Unfair that some countries pay, and some countries work, and some countries are loyal and terrific, and other countries aren't. And we just can't have that. So we're working on that together.

A great honor to be with you. Thank you very much.

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much, President, for hosting me and my delegation here at the White House. It's great to see you again. And in uncertain times, we need a strong NATO, so I would also like to thank you for your strong commitment to our alliance.

Last time we met, your main message was that NATO had to do more in the fight against terrorism and more on defense spending. All NATO leaders agreed and now we are delivering. We are stepping up our efforts in the fight against terrorism.

In Afghanistan, where we are increasing a number of trainers and to the support for Afghani government, and also in Iraq, where we also plan to launch a new training mission at the summit — at the NATO Summit in July.

On defense spending, I would say that I agree with you. We have to do more. And I would like to thank you for your leadership, and it has really impact — it is impacting allies, because all allies are now increasing defense spending; they're adding billions to their budgets. So your leadership on defense spending has really helped to make a difference, and that's something I thank you for.

After years of decline, all allies have started to increase defense spending. No allies are cutting their budgets anymore. And more and more allies are at 2 percent of GDP for defense.

But I also agree that we have to do more so allies will continue to work on defense spending because we need to invest more in our security when the world is more unpredictable as it is today.

We also support your efforts to try to find a peaceful and negotiated solution to the crisis on the Korean Peninsula. The aim should be to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula and to make sure that there are no nuclear weapons there, and also to stop not only the development of nuclear weapons, but also the missile program.

So, therefore, we support the initiative and the work for having a summit. We think it's important, also, to make sure that we still have pressure on North Korea, and North Korea has to seize this opportunity — this historic opportunity — to solve the crisis on the Korean Peninsula.

So once again, thank you so much for your strong commitment to our Alliance, and I look forward to continuing our discussion and to address these issues and many others.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Thank you very much. Thank you.

Q Mr. President, sir, could you clarify the context of your use of the word "animal" yesterday in referring to some people who were (inaudible) —

PRESIDENT TRUMP: No. It has nothing to do with this meeting. But I'm referring — and you know I'm referring — to the MS-13 gangs that are coming in. And I was talking about the MS-13 and also — and if you look a little bit further on in the tape, you'll see that. So I'm actually surprised you're asking this question because most people got it right.

But I'm saying the MS-13 — you don't have that where you come from — MS-13, these are animals. They're coming into our country and we're getting them out. They come in again, we're getting them out. We need strong immigration laws. We have the weakest laws in the entire world. We have laws that are laughed at on immigration.

So when the MS-13 comes in, when the other gang members come into our country, I refer to them as "animals." And guess what? I always will. But we're getting them out by the thousands. But it's a big, dangerous job. And they're able, in some cases, to come back in or new groups come in also from the gangs.

Thank you.

Q Mr. President, do you want NATO to play a bigger role in Syria? Especially that you, sir, announced before that you wanted the U.S. troops to withdraw. Will NATO take place of the U.S. troops there?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Well, I think we helped Syria, actually, by withdrawing from the Iran deal, which was a terrible deal for the United States and, I think, for the world. And I think

Syria — hopefully, Syria will start to stabilize. You see what's been happening. It's been a horror show.

And I have great respect for Syria and the people of Syria. These are great people. I know people from Syria. These are great people. It was a great culture before it was so horribly blown apart; a place where people would go, where they had tremendous professional people, as you know — doctors, and lawyers, and it's — friends of mine from the Middle East that say, "We used to go to Syria." That was a place to go, and you look at what's happened. It's so sad. But I'd like to see Syria come back. I think we've gone a long way to helping it with what we did with respect to the Iran deal. And you'll see what I mean by that over time. A lot of things will happen.

Q Mr. President, do you have (inaudible). Norway is the country who hands out the Nobel Peace Prize. A lot of your supporters says that you deserve a Nobel Peace Prize for what's happening with North Korea. What do you think you have to achieve in the upcoming summit to deserve a Nobel Peace Prize?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Well, I don't know. Look, I want to have peace in the world. That's what I really want. More so than the Nobel Peace Prize or any other prize, I'd like to see peace in the — ideally, in the Middle East — in fact, in the entire world. And I think we have a chance at doing it. North Korea is going to be very important. It's a tremendous part of the world. I think it's got tremendous potential. I think it's got tremendous potential for its leader and for its people. But we'll see how it all works out.

Right now, we're dealing with them. We're dealing — as I said just a little while ago, we're dealing as though nothing happened. They're dealing with us; we're dealing with them. They're working out times and meeting places and everything. But in the meantime, if I read your various media, I find — the various media — I find that maybe it's not going to take place. If it doesn't take place, that's fine. And if it does take place, I think some tremendous things can happen. We'll see what happens.

Q Do you think it helped your case to pull the U.S. out of the Iran deal, being that countries like Germany, France, and Britain (inaudible)?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Yeah, I think it's a great thing that the U.S. is out of the Iran deal, because it was a ridiculous deal for the U.S. and it's a ridiculous deal for the world.

Q Mr. President, the President of the EU said yesterday, about you, "With friends like that, who needs enemies?" How do you respond to —

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Well, I could reverse that. Look, the European Union has been terrible to the United States on trade. They've been terrible to our workers. The European Union — last year, we had a trade deficit of $151 billion. And I know Jean-Claude very well and I know

Donald very well. And I like them both, but they're very tough. And we never had anybody negotiating for us.

And frankly, the European Union — outside of China and a couple of others — treats us, on trade, as badly as you can be treated. They have trade barriers. Our farmers aren't allowed, to a large extent, to sell their product into the European Union.

It's very hard for us to sell our cars into the European Union. But the European Union — in this case, Germany — has its Mercedes and its BMWs and its cars pouring into the United States with no barriers. They pay a tiny tax, whereas the European Union charges a massive tax and doesn't even want the tax. They don't want the cars; they don't want the product.

So we lost $151 billion last year dealing with the European Union. So they can call me all sorts of names. And if I were them, I'd call me names also, because it's not going to happen any longer.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Thank you.

PRESIDENT TRUMP: Say hello to Jean-Claude, please. (Laughter.)

Q I will.

Q On the Iran sanctions, any comment on that?

PRESIDENT TRUMP: They'll be very massive. They're going to be massive. The Iran sanctions will be massive. Thank you.

END

2:40 P.M. EDT

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2018/05/17/statements