North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the President of the United States, Donald Trump
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US President Donald Trump: Secretary General Stoltenberg, it's a pleasure to welcome you to the White House, especially at such an important moment in our great alliance. I also want to acknowledge the great work being done by our secretary of state, Rex Tillerson, to strengthen the NATO alliance, as well as the secretary's trip to Moscow to promote the security interests of the United States and its allies. He did a terrific job. Just watched parts of it, he did an absolutely terrific job.

Sixty-eight years ago this month, not far from where we are gathered today, President Harry Truman spoke at the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. In the nearly seven decades since Harry Truman spoke those words, the NATO alliance has been the bulwark of international peace and security.

NATO allies defeated communism and liberated the captive nations of the Cold War. They secured the longest period of unbroken peace that Europe has ever known. This enduring partnership is rooted out of so many different things, but our common security is always number one, and our common devotion to human dignity and freedom.

Since 1949, the NATO member states have more than doubled, increasing from 12 to 28.

On Monday, I signed the protocol to approve the 29th, the country of Montenegro. In the coming months and years, I'll work closely with all of our NATO allies to enhance this partnership and to adapt to the challenges of the future, of which there will be many. This includes upgrading their focus on today's most pressing security and all of its challenges, including migration and terrorism.

We must also work together to resolve the disaster currently taking place in Syria. We are grateful for the support of NATO members and partners in their condemnation of Assad's murderous attack using the most horrible weapons. The vicious slaughter of innocent civilians with chemical weapons, including the barbaric killing of small and helpless children and babies, must be forcefully rejected by any nation that values human life. It is time to end this brutal civil war, defeat terrorists, and allow refugees to return home.

In facing our common challenges, we must also ensure that NATO members meet their financial obligations and pay what they owe. Many have not been doing that. The Secretary General and I agree that other member-nations must satisfy their responsibility to contribute 2

percent of GDP to defense. If other countries pay their fair share instead of relying on the United Sates to make up the difference, we will all be much more secure, and our partnership will be made that much stronger.

The secretary general and I had a productive discussion about what more NATO can do in the fight against terrorism. I complained about that a long time ago and they made a change, and now they do fight terrorism. I said it was obsolete. It's no longer obsolete.

It's my hope that NATO will take on an increased role in supporting our Iraqi partners in their battle against ISIS.

I'm also sending General McMaster to Afghanistan to find out how we can make progress alongside our Afghan partners and NATO allies.

Every generation has strived to adapt the NATO alliance to meet the challenges of their times. And during my visit to Brussels this Spring, which I look very much forward to, we will work together to do the same. We must not be trapped by the tired thinking that so many have, but apply new solutions to face new circumstances, and that's all throughout the world.

We're not here to stand on ceremony, but to develop real strategies to achieve safety, security and peace. We're here to protect the freedom and prosperity of our citizens and to give them the future they so richly deserve.

Secretary general, I'm honored to have you here today and to reaffirm our commitment to this alliance and to the enduring values that we proudly -- and I mean very proudly -- share.

Thank you, very much. Thank you for being here. Thank you.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg: Thank you so much, Mr. President.

We just had an excellent and very productive meeting. And it’s really an honour to meet you for the first time, here in the White House.

We agree that NATO is a bedrock of security both for Europe and for the United States.

Two World Wars and a Cold War have taught us all that peace in Europe is not only important for Europeans, but is also important for the prosperity and the security of North America.

So a strong NATO is good for Europe, but a strong NATO is also good for the United States.

And therefore I welcome the very strong commitment of the United States to the security of Europe.

We see this commitment not only in words but also in deeds.

Over the past months, thousands of US troops have been deploying to Europe. A clear demonstration that America stands with Allies to protect peace and defend our freedom.

And yesterday you announced the completion of the ratification of Montenegro's membership in NATO – another expression of your strong commitment to Europe and to the transatlantic bond, and we thank you for that.

In a more dangerous and more unpredictable world, it's important to have friends and Allies. And in NATO, America has the best friends and the best Allies in the world.

Together, we represent half of the world's economic and military power. No other superpower has ever had such a strategic advantage.

This makes the United States stronger and safer.

We saw that after the 9/11 attacks on the United States.

That was the first time NATO invoked our Article 5, the collective defence clause.

Allies sent AWACS surveillance planes to help patrol American skies.

And we launched NATO's biggest military operation ever, in Afghanistan.

Hundreds of thousands of Europeans and Canadian soldiers have served shoulder-to-shoulder with American troops. More than a thousand have paid the ultimate price.

Earlier today, I laid a wreath at Arlington National Cemetery, in tribute to the fallen. It was a deeply moving experience.

We owe it to our servicemen and women to preserve the hard-earned gains we have made together in Afghanistan.

We were reminded of their sacrifice just this week, when a US soldier was killed there fighting ISIL.

Our mission in Afghanistan is a major contribution to the fight against international terrorism.

NATO plays a key role in many other ways also. All NATO Allies are part of the Global Coalition to Counter ISIL.

And NATO provides direct support to the coalition. With training for Iraqi forces in their fight against terrorists. And more intelligence-sharing. And you are right, we have established a new division for intelligence which enhances our ability to fight terrorism and working together in the Alliance to fight terrorism in an even more effective way.

But we agreed today - you and I - that NATO can, and must, do more in the global fight against terrorism.

In the fight against terrorism, training local forces is one of the best weapons we have.

NATO has the experience, the expertise and the staying power to make a real difference.

And fighting terrorism will be an important topic when NATO leaders meet in Brussels in May.

The other major topic will be fairer burden-sharing in our Alliance.

And we had a thorough discussion on this issue today. And Mr President, I thank you for your attention to this issue. We are already seeing the effect of your strong focus on the importance of fair burden-sharing in the Alliance.

We agree that Allies need to redouble their efforts to meet the pledge we all made in 2014 to invest more in our Alliance.

It is about spending more on defence. It is about delivering the capabilities we need. And it is about contributing forces to NATO missions and operations. This means cash, capabilities, and contributions.

Fair burden sharing has been my top priority since taking office.

We have now turned a corner. In 2016, for the first time in many years, we saw an increase in defence spending across European Allies and Canada. A real increase of 3.8%. Or ten billion dollars more for our defence.

We are now working to keep up the momentum. Including by developing national plans, outlining how to make good on what we agreed in 2014.

We know that we all need to contribute our fair share. Because we need to keep our nations safe in a more dangerous world.

We discussed many different topics during our meeting today, including the horrendous use of chemical weapons in Syria. Any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable, cannot go unanswered, and those responsible must be held accountable.

So Mr. President, thank you once again. I look forward to working with you to keeping the Alliance strong.

And I look forward to welcoming you to Brussels in May, when Heads of State and Government in the Alliance meet there to address the challenges and they need to continue to adapt the Alliance to a more challenging security environment. And to respond both to the need for fairer burden-sharing and stepping up our efforts to fight international terrorism. So thank you once again.

DONALD TRUMP (President of the United States): Thank you very much. Great. Thank you. So we'll have a couple of questions. Jeff Mason.

JEFF MASON (Reuters): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President.

I'd like to ask you about two topics if I may. First, has your view of Vladimir Putin changed after what's happened in Syria? And what is the United States prepared to do if he continues to support Assad? And on a separate question, have you made a deal after your chat last night with the President of China about China helping to reign in North Korea, and is that one reason you have decided not to label Beijing a currency manipulator? For the…

DONALD TRUMP: Well I'll be speaking to… Yeah, you want to go ahead, go ahead.

JEFF MASON: May I? For the Secretary General, do you believe NATO should continue to bolster its presence along the alliance's eastern border? And do you have, are you confident that you have President Trump and the United States support for that?

Thank you.

DONALD TRUMP: I'll be speaking with Rex Tillerson in a little while, calling in. I think he had a very successful meeting in Russia. We'll see; we'll see the end result which will be in a long period of time perhaps. But the end result is what's most important, not just talk. And I think that … [break in transmission] everything I'm hearing things went pretty well, maybe better than anticipated.

It would be wonderful as we were discussing just a little while ago if NATO and our country could get along with Russia. Right now we're not getting along with Russia at all. We may be at an all-time low in terms of relationship with Russia. This has built for a long period of time. But we're going to see what happens. Putin is the leader of Russia. Russia is a strong country. We're a very, very strong country. We're going to see how that all works out.

Last night, separately, I spoke with a man that I have gotten to know. I don't know Putin but I do know this gentleman, I've spent a lot of time with him over the last two days, and he is the President of China. You were there, most of you were there, and it was quite an interesting period of time. President Xi wants to do the right thing. We had a very good bonding; I think we had a very good chemistry together. I think he wants to help is with North Korea. We talked trade; we talked a lot of things. And I said: the way you're going to make a good trade deal is to help us with North Korea, otherwise we're just going to go it alone, that will be alright too. But going it alone means going it with lots of other nations. But I was very impressed with President Xi, and I think he means well, and I think he wants to help. We'll see whether or not he does.

JEFF MASON: Do you feel like you have a deal with him? And…

DONALD TRUMP: Excuse me?

JEFF MASON: Do you feel like you have a deal with him in terms of the currency manipulation designation, and have your views changed on Putin?

DONALD TRUMP: We're going to see. We're going to see about that. And I'll also see about Putin over a period of time. It would be a fantastic thing if we got along with Putin, and if we got along with Russia. And that could happen, and it may not happen; it may be just the opposite.

I can only tell you what I would like to do. I would love to be able to get along with everybody. Right now the world is a mess. But I think by the time we finish, I think it's going to be a lot better place to live. And I can tell you that speaking for myself, by the time I'm finished, it's going to be a lot better place to live in because right now it's nasty.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO is in the process of implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. And one element of that is to increase our military presence in the eastern part of the alliance. And we are now deploying four battle groups to the three Baltic countries and Poland, and there will also be more U.S. forces in that part of Europe. And this is the first time in many, many years that we see an increase in the military presence of the United States in Europe. So we are increasing our presence, and we are also increasing the readiness and the preparedness of our forces so we can quickly reinforce if needed.

We consider the presence we will have when the four battle groups are in place as sufficient given the current security situation in Europe. But of course we will assess the situation and follow the developments very closely.

The message from NATO is that what we do is proportionate; it is defensive. And we don't want a new Cold War, we don't want a new arms race. And actually we strongly believe that there is no contradiction between a strong NATO, a credible deterrence and defence, and political dialogue with Russia.

Actually we believe that a precondition for a political dialogue with Russia is that we are strong, and that we are united. But based on that, we can talk to Russia because Russia is our neighbour, Russia is here to stay, so we have to find ways to manage our relationship with Russia.

And I am absolutely certain that the United States supports this approach partly because the United States is contributing with forces to our enhanced presence in the eastern part of the alliance, and also in the southeast of the alliance, in Romania. And the United States and the President has clearly expressed that they want dialogue with Russia, but based on unity and strength in the alliance. Then the next question is from John Sopel.

JOHN SOPEL (BBC): Thank you very much. Secretary General, how long do you think it will take you to persuade the other European countries to burden share, and what are you going to do to persuade them?

Mr. President, could I ask you do you think it's…

DONALD TRUMP: I like that question.

[Laughter]

JOHN SOPEL: I'm here to help. And Mr. President, do you think it's conceivable, what's your instinct: was it possible that Syrian forces could have launched that attack in Idlib last week without the Russians knowing? And have you been disappointed, surprised by Vladimir Putin's reaction since then? Thank you very much.

DONALD TRUMP: I think it's certainly possible. I think it's probably unlikely. And I know they're doing investigations into that right now. I would like to think that they didn't know, but certainly they could have, they were there. So we'll find out. General Mattis is looking into it with the entire Pentagon group that does that kind of work. So it was very disappointing to see, it's disappointing no matter who does it, but when you get into the gases, especially that form, it's vicious and violent, and everybody in this room saw it all too many times over the last three or four days: young children dying, babies dying, fathers holding children in their arms that were dead, dead children. There can't be a worse sight. And it shouldn't be allowed. That's a butcher. That's a butcher. So I felt we had to do something about it. I have absolutely no doubt we did the right thing. And it was very, very successfully done, as you well know. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: On defence spending and burden sharing, that has been my top priority. I have raised it in all my meetings in all capitals. I visited with prime ministers, presidents, ministers of Finance, and of course also Defence and Foreign ministers. And I expect of course all allies to make to make good on what they decided back in 2014. And a very strong and clear message from President Trump has been very helpful, so now we see that things are starting to move in the right direction.

For the first time after many, many years of decline in defence spending, we now see an increase in defence spending across Europe and Canada. So they have started to move in the right direction: 3.8 percent real increase in defence spending across Europe and Canada is a significant step in the right direction.

It's not enough, we still have a long way to go, but at least they have turned a corner, the European allies have turned a corner, instead of reducing defence spending, they are starting to increase defence spending.

Then I think it is important to remember that this is something the Europeans do because they know that this is in their own security interest. It is in their interest to invest more in European defence because the role has become more dangerous.

Many European allies of course reduce, or all European allies, reduced defence spending after the end of the Cold War because then tensions went down. But if you are decreasing

defence spending when tensions are going down, then you have to be able to increase defence spending when tensions are going up. And now they are going up.

So we have still a long way to go, but I'm encouraged by the fact that we have started to move in the right direction. Last year, there were five allies spending two percent, this year Romania has declared that they will reach two percent; next year Latvia and Lithuania will also reach two percent. So we go from five to eight, which is at least going in the right direction, but still we have some work to do.

DONALD TRUMP: And I did ask about all the money that hasn't been paid over the years, will that money be coming back. We'll be talking about that…

DONALD TRUMP: We want to talk about that too. Anita Kumar McClatchy, where are you?

ANITA KUMAR McCLATCHY (McClatchy Newspapers): (Question inaudible).

DONALD TRUMP: We did talk last night. I think it's wonderful that they abstained. As you know very few people expected that. And, no, I was not surprised that China did abstain. Very, very few people thought that that was going to happen. So we're honoured by the vote. That's the vote that should have taken place.

ANITA KUMAR McCLATCHY: Secretary General, you talked a little bit about Moscow, about Russia. … (inaudible).

JENS STOLTENBERG: The most important thing is to have a strong alliance to stay united and be firm and predictable in our approach to Russia. And that means that we have to invest in our collective defence, that's exactly what we are doing, deploy more troops in the eastern part of the alliance, increase the readiness of our forces, and increase defence spending. And I welcome the very strong message from President Trump on the importance of increased defence spending.

We have started to do this, so we are implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War, providing credible deterrence. But at the same time, we have to find ways to engage with Russia, to talk with Russia; because Russia will not go away, Russia will be our biggest neighbour, and we have to find ways to live with them and to try to avoid a new Cold War, a new arms race. And that's exactly why I am very much in favour of what we call a dual track approach to Russia. And as a former Norwegian politician, I had the experience to work with Russians because Norway is bordering Russia. And Norway was able even during the Cold War to develop … I would call it a pragmatic working relationship with Russia, cooperating with them on energy, on border issues, on environment, on fishery, and also on military affairs. And that was not despite our membership in NATO, but it was because of our membership in NATO. Because NATO provided the strength, the predictability, the platform for a small country to have a political dialogue with Russia. So I strongly believe that the only way to deter Russia is to be strong,

but the only way to avoid a new Cold War, avoid a new arms race and avoid increasing tensions is to continue to engage Russia in a political dialogue and to make sure that what we do is defensive and proportionate in response to a more assertive Russia.

(Norwegian media): What do you think European countries have to fear from Russia if this tension continues to escalate? And for you, Mr. Secretary General: the President said that the attack in Syria last week was warranted and it was also an attack on U.S. allies. Do you think that this attack was warranted, and do you see NATO playing any supporting role in future actions in Syria?

DONALD TRUMP: Well I want to just start by saying hopefully they are going to have to fear nothing ultimately. Right now there is a fear, and the problems, there is certainly problems. But ultimately I hope that there won't be a fear, and there won't be problems, and the world can get along, that would be the ideal situation. It's crazy, what's going on, whether it's the Middle East or… you look at no matter where, the Ukraine, you look at… whatever you look at, it's got problems, so many problems. And ultimately I believe that we are going to get rid of most of those problems, and there won't be fear of anybody. That's the way it should be.

We have a very big problem in North Korea, and as I said, I really think that China is going to try very hard and has already started. A lot of the coal boats have already been turned back. You saw that yesterday and today, they have been turned back, the vast amount of coal that comes out of North Korea going to China, they've turned back the boats. That's a big step, and there are many other steps that I know about. So we'll see what happens. It may be effective, it may not be effective. If it's not effective, we will be effective, I can promise you that. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO has constantly condemned the use of chemical weapons in Syria, and the use of chemical weapons is horrendous, and it's a clear violation of International Law. And any use of chemical weapons is unacceptable and cannot go unanswered. So those responsible most be held accountable. The strike against the airbase in Syria was a U.S. operation based on U.S. intelligence. But you have seen that within the alliance, this has been something which has been met with a lot of understanding because NATO allies do not accept that chemical weapons are used, and therefore we also strongly support the efforts of the fact-fnding commission to try to find out actually what happened and to make sure that we don’t see any use of chemical weapons in the future.

DONALD TRUMP: Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you.

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