

Beat: Politics

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg - Vice President US Michael Pence

Meeting

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Joint press point

With NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Vice President of the United States of America, Michael Pence.
(As delivered)

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg -

So good afternoon, Vice President Pence, welcome to NATO headquarters. It is really a great honour and a great pleasure to have you here. Just a month after you took office and just a few days after your great speech in Munich. Where you so clearly declared the commitment and unwavering support of the US to the transatlantic bond. We welcome that because we see the strong commitment of the US to the transatlantic bond not only in words but also in deeds.

These days the US is deploying new forces, additional forces, to Europe which is of great importance for the security of Europe and which demonstrates the strong transatlantic commitment of the US and we are very grateful for this commitment.

You also stressed that just as the US stood with Europe, Europe stood tall with the US. And we have to remember that the only time that the Alliance has invoked our NATO has invoked our collective defence clause, Article 5, our, was after an attack on the US. And this was more than just a gesture. Several hundred thousands of Canadian and European troops have served in Afghanistan. And more than a thousand paid the ultimate price.

The bond between the US and Europe, embodied in the NATO Alliance, is very important today, because we live in times of turmoil and instability and then we need a strong Alliance more than ever. And we are stronger when we stand together.

During our meeting we discussed our progress in the fight against terrorism. NATO continues to train security forces in Afghanistan. We have started to train security forces and officers in Iraq. And we support the US-led Coalition against ISIL with AWACS surveillance planes. But we agree that the Alliance can, and should do more, in the fight against terrorism.

We also agree on the importance of higher defence spending and fairer burden-sharing in NATO. This has been my top priority since I took office. Europeans cannot ask the United States to commit to Europe's defence if they are not willing to commit more themselves. And they are committing more. In 2016, after many years of cuts, we turned a corner. Defence spending increased across Europe and Canada by 3.8 percent in real terms, or ten billion US dollars more. But we still have a long way to go, so all Allies must speed up their efforts to spend 2 percent of GDP on defence. This will be an important point when Allied leaders meet here in Brussels in May.

So Mr Vice-President, thank you for our excellent discussion. We agree that NATO is the most successful Alliance in history because NATO has been able to adapt and change when the world is changing. And we agree that we must continue to change, to keep our people safe. US leadership remains indispensable. So I really look forward to working with you.

And to welcoming President Trump in Brussels in May.

So please, you have the floor.

THE VICE PRESIDENT: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General.

It is a privilege to meet with you today to bring greetings on behalf of President Donald Trump and also to have the opportunity for a thorough and substantive discussion of the issues facing NATO and our historic alliance.

It has been a busy weekend for me. As I prepare to head back to the United States, I'm grateful. I'm grateful to have had the

opportunity to speak on Saturday about our shared security issues at the Munich Security Conference. And I appreciate your encouraging words about the message of the United States at that conference.

And I also was pleased to be able to hold a series of productive bilateral meetings with leaders from all across the world.

It was also deeply moving for me and my family to return to Dachau, the very first concentration camp, and to be accompanied by a survivor by the name of Abba Naor. I had first visited that camp in 1977. I wanted my daughter to see it. And we went there and walked through that historic memorial.

Abba told me that he arrived at Dachau as a 17-year-old boy. He told me of the nightmarish existence that he experienced there. But then he spoke words that resonate with our alliance. He said: "Then the Americans came."²

Those words touched my heart, and they speak volumes about the history and importance of the North Atlantic alliance and of NATO, more of which I'll address momentarily.

But I thank you again for your hospitality in this historic place at this important time.

I was also grateful today to meet with the leadership of the European Union. And on behalf of President Trump, I express the commitment of the United States to continued cooperation and partnership with the EU.

While we have our differences on some issues, I reiterated this point in all of my meetings with the EU leadership and appreciated the cordial and substantive discussions that we had.

But on Saturday, as the Secretary General mentioned, at the Munich Security Conference, I brought a message from President Trump -- the message is the same one I bring to you today.

It is my privilege here at the NATO Headquarters to express the strong support of President Trump and the United States of America for NATO and our transatlantic alliance.

The United States has been a proud and faithful member of NATO since its founding in 1949. This alliance plays a crucial role in promoting peace and prosperity in the North Atlantic and, frankly, in the entire world.

The United States' commitment to NATO is clear. As we speak, President Trump and our administration are developing plans to ensure that the strongest military in the world in the United States becomes stronger still.

Let me assure you, Mr. Secretary, that in the United States, we're about the process of strengthening our military and restoring the arsenal of democracy. Working with members of Congress, we intend to increase military funding to make it possible for us to provide for the common defense for the people of the United States, but also meet the obligations that we have with our treaty allies, including in this historic treaty.

America -- therefore I can say with confidence: America will do our part. But Europe's defense requires Europe's commitment as much as ours.

At the Wales Summit in 2014, all 28 members of the NATO alliance declared their intention to move towards a minimum security investment of 2 percent of their gross domestic product on defense within a decade.

As a candidate for office, President Trump actually called attention repeatedly to the fact that for too long, for too many, this burden has not been shared fairly among our NATO allies. And that must come to an end.

At this moment, the United States and only four other NATO members meet this basic standard. And while we commend the few nations that are on track and have met the obligation, the truth is that many others, including some of our largest allies, still lack a clear and credible path to meet this minimum goal.

So let me say again what I said this last weekend in Munich, the President of the United States and the American people expect our allies to keep their word and to do more in our common defense. And the President expects real progress by the end of 2017.

As Secretary of Defense James Mattis said here in Belgium just a few short days ago, if you're a nation that meets the 2 percent target, we need your help encouraging other nations to do likewise. If you have a plan to get there, as he said, our alliance needs you to accelerate it. And if you don't yet have a plan, these are my words not his: Get one. It is time for actions, not words.

And as I assured the Secretary General in our meeting today, in the wake of Russian efforts to redraw international borders by force, the United States will continue its leadership role in the Enhanced Forward Presence Initiative and other critical joint actions.

With regard to Ukraine, as I said before, our alliance will continue to hold Russia accountable and demand that they honor the Minsk Agreements, beginning with de-escalating violence in eastern Ukraine.

For the sake of peace and for the sake of innocent human lives, we urge both sides to abide by the ceasefire that began today. And we pray for peace in Ukraine.

Be assured, the United States, as well, will continue to hold Russia accountable, even as we search for new common ground, which President Trump firmly believes can be found.

As I said in Munich, though, NATO's continued leadership is also necessary in the fight against radical Islamic terrorism; this, another item that as a candidate for office, President Trump first raised.

As a candidate a year ago, he called on NATO to evolve by expanding counterterrorism operations. And we're encouraged to see under your leadership NATO is in the process of doing just that. It's hard to speak of these issues in the abstract as I stand here in Brussels, just now almost a year ago that three horrific suicide bombings occurred, 33 innocent victims, including four Americans, hundreds more injured. I just want to assure the people of Brussels and all the people of Europe that your pain is our pain, your loss our loss. And it's precisely why the President believes it's essential that NATO continue on this new path of evolving and expanding its mission to be more effective in counterterrorism.

We will work tirelessly with our NATO allies to ensure security in our countries and yours. But adapting to these new and ever-shifting challenges must remain a central focus of our collaboration and cooperation. Our alliance needs to intensify efforts to cut off terrorist funding and increase cyber capabilities. We must be -- as I said before, we must be as dominant in the digital world as we are in the physical world. And the United States is committed to continuing to work with our NATO allies to achieve that objective for the security of all the nations in our alliance.

By building on tactics from the last century with these new century opportunities and challenges, NATO will be better prepared to confront and overcome the new adversaries of the 21st century.

Under President Trump's leadership, the United States, I can assure you, is fully committed to NATO's noble mission. We are grateful for your leadership, Mr. Secretary General. And I know the President looks forward to working closely with you to advance our shared objectives. A strong NATO means a safer world. And the United States of America looks forward to continuing to work with our partners in NATO to achieve just that.

So, Mr. Secretary, thank you for your hospitality and for your leadership.

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com
www.gna24.com