AUTHENTICATED
U.S. GOVERNMENT
INFORMATION
GPO

Remarks Prior to a Meeting With Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and an Exchange With Reporters

May 17, 2018

President Trump. Thank you very much. It's an honor to have Secretary General Stoltenberg with us. NATO has been working very closely with the United States. Our relationship is very good. Together, we've increased and, really, raised a lot of money from countries that weren't paying or weren't paying a fair share. We have a little ways to go, but many billions of dollars of additional money has been raised.

And I really appreciate the great job that you're doing. As most people know, you've been extended for a long period of time, and I was very much at—I think with my leadership and—really, the fact is, we pushed it very hard because this gentleman does a tremendous job at NATO. And I appreciate it.

Thank you. Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary.

Secretary General Stoltenberg. Thank you so much. Thank you so much, Mr. President, for hosting me and my delegation once again here at the White House. And let me thank you for the leadership you show on the issue of defense spending, because it is very important that we all contribute more to our shared security. And it is really having an impact, because, as you said, allies are now spending more on defense. All allies are increasing their defense budgets. And——

President Trump. Do you give me credit for that?

Secretary General Stoltenberg. You have helped to do that, because your leadership has been important, and it has had a real impact. And we see that because all allies increase and billions—they add billions to their budget. So that's important because we live in a more unpredictable world, and then we need strong NATO, and we need to invest more in our security.

President Trump. Well, thank you very much for being here. It's an honor.

Secretary General Stoltenberg. Thank you.

North Korea

Q. Mr. President, on North Korea—can I ask you a question about North Korea?

President Trump. Well, nothing has changed on North Korea that we know of. We have not been told anything. And if it does, that's fine. If it doesn't, I think we'll probably have a very successful meeting. But we have not been told anything. We're just reading stories like you are. We've heard certain things from South Korea. But we'll see what happens. If the meeting happens, it happens. And if it doesn't, we go on to the next step.

North Korea/China

Q. Is this just a typical thing that North Korea does? Did you expect this?

President Trump. I don't know. I really don't know. No, I want to give everybody the benefit of a doubt. I think that—I can only say our people are literally dealing with them right

now, in terms of making arrangements for the meeting. So that's a lot different than what you read. But oftentimes what you read, if it's not fake news, is true.

So we'll see what happens. We are dealing with them now. We may have the meeting; we may not have the meeting. If we don't have it, that will be very interesting. We'll see what happens. The border is still quite strong. I think things changed a little bit when they met with China. They met a second time. As you know, Kim Jong Un had a second meeting with China, which was a little bit of a surprise meeting.

And we have many of the Chinese here today, as you know—big delegations negotiating trade—because the United States has been ripped off for many, many years by its bad trade deals. I don't blame China; I blame our leadership of this country from the past. We have been ripped off by China, an evacuation of wealth like no country has ever seen before given to another country that's rebuilt itself based on a lot of the money they've taken out of the United States. And that's not going to happen anymore.

But there has been a big difference since they had the second meeting with President Xi. With that being said, my attitude is, whatever happens, happens. Either way, we're going to be in great shape.

North Korea/China

Q. Would you consider a personal outreach to Kim to get him to move toward—keep him moving towards——

President Trump. No, we'll see what happens. Look, you have to want to do it. With deals—that's what I do, is deals. And with deals you have to have two parties that want to do it. He absolutely wanted to do it. Perhaps he doesn't want to do it. Perhaps they spoke with China—that could be right—President Xi, a friend of mine, great guy. But he's for China, and I'm for the United States. And that's the way it is, and I suspect it's never going to change.

But I will say this: We are continuing to negotiate in terms of location—the location as to where to meet, how to meet, rooms, everything else. And they've been negotiating like nothing happened. But if you read the newspapers, maybe it won't happen. I can't tell you yet. I will tell you very shortly. We're going to know very soon.

Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

China-U.S. Trade

Q. Sir, what are you going to tell the Chinese trade official today during these trade talks?

President Trump. Well, I've been telling China that we are—you people have been covering trade, and you've been covering China, and you've been covering everything for a long time. Have you ever even seen a negotiating in trade? Nobody has ever seen anybody from our country even negotiate on trade—trade with China and with other countries. I'm not just blaming China; China is the biggest. But trade has been a total one-way street. Right outside of this Nation, you take money out like it's—by the bucket loads, into other—whether it's the European Union, which you know so well; whether it's Japan or South Korea, or I can name almost every single country in the world.

We had nobody representing us, and now you have somebody that's very good at this stuff—me—representing us. And China has taken out hundreds of billions of dollars a year from the United States. And I explained to President Xi, we can't do that anymore. We just can't do that anymore. It's a much different situation.

But with all the years and all the years that you've covered trade and nations and wars, and everything else, you've never seen people come over from China to work on a trade deal. Now, will that be successful? I tend to doubt it. The reason I doubt it is because China has become very spoiled. The European Union has become very spoiled. Other countries have become very spoiled, because they always got a hundred percent of whatever they wanted from the United States. But we can't allow that to happen anymore. We're an incredible country; we have incredible potential. The potential we have is incredible.

But we lost $800 billion on trade last year, if you add it all up, of which China was around the $500 billion mark. So we lost $800 billion. Can you believe that? Is that an amazing thing to even think about? We lost $800 billion on trade. We're not going to be doing that any longer.

ZTE Corporation/China-U.S. Trade

Q. But, just to follow up, sir, what's happening with ZTE? Are you going to lift the ban on them?

The President. ZTE was a company that I spoke to with President Xi. He asked me if I'd take a look at that because it was very harmful to them in terms of their jobs and probably other things. And I certainly said I would. He asked me to do it, and I would do that. I would certainly, out of great respect. I like him; he likes me. We have a great relationship. He asked me if I'd look at ZTE.

Don't forget, it was my administration, with my full knowledge, that put very, very strong clamps on ZTE. It wasn't anybody else. It wasn't President Obama. It wasn't President Bush. It was me. I put very strong clamps on ZTE. They did very bad things to our country. They did very bad things to our economy.

But one thing I will say: They also buy a large portion of their parts for the phones that they make, and they're the fourth largest company in terms of that industry. They buy those parts from the United States. That's a lot of business. So we have a lot of companies that won't be selling those parts.

But the President of China, President Xi, asked me to look at it. I said I would look at it. But anything we do with ZTE is always—it's just a small component of the overall deal.

I can only tell you this: We're going to come out fine with China. Hopefully, China is going to be happy. I think we will be happy. And as the expression goes, when you're losing $500 billion a year on trade, you can't lose the trade war; you've already lost it. We've had horrible representatives in this country that have allowed other countries to get away with murder, and those days are gone. Those days are over.

So we just want fairness for the workers of this country and for the United States. That's what's going to happen, okay? I'll let you know about—as time goes by, we'll let you know, as of this moment, everything we know. I mean, North Korea is actually talking to us about times and everything else as though nothing happened. Will it happen? Will we be going on that very special date, and can some great things happen? You know, we're going to be looking at it very soon.

Yes, Steve [Steve Holland, Reuters].

Libya/North Korea

Q. They seemed to get annoyed by a comment that Ambassador Bolton made about the Libya model of denuclearization.

The President. Yes. Well, the Libyan model isn't a model that we have at all, when we're thinking of North Korea. In Libya, we decimated that country. That country was decimated. There was no deal to keep Qaddafi. The Libyan model that was mentioned was a much different deal. This would be with Kim Jong Un—something where he'd be there, he'd be in his country, he'd be running his country. His country would be very rich. His people are tremendously industrious.

If you look at South Korea, this would be, really, a South Korean model in terms of their industry, in terms of what they do. They're hard-working, incredible people.

But the Libyan model was a much different model. We decimated that country. We never said to Qaddafi: "Oh, we're going to give you protection. We're going give you military strength. We're going to give you all of these things." We went in and decimated him. And we did the same thing with Iraq.

Now, whether or not we should have, I could tell you I was against it from the beginning, because look what we have right now: We've spent $7 trillion—can you believe that?—$7 trillion in the Middle East. Right out the window. You might as well throw the money right out the window. And we've done a lot of infrastructure. We just had airports approved. You saw that. A lot of things are happening. But we spent $7 trillion in the Middle East, and look where we are right now. It's pretty sad.

But the model, if you look at that model with Qaddafi, that was a total decimation. We went in there to beat him. Now that model would take place if we don't make a deal, most likely. But if we make a deal, I think Kim Jong Un is going to be very, very happy. I really believe he's going to be very happy.

But this is just the opposite. And I think when John Bolton made that statement, he was talking about if we're going to be having a problem, because we cannot let that country have nukes. We just can't do it. So that's the way it meant. It's really just the opposite. Because if you—if you look at—again, you look at Syria, that was a total decimation.

Yes, John [John Roberts, Fox News].

North Korea/Middle East

Q. But what security guarantees are you willing to give to North Korea, in terms of keeping——

President Trump. Well, I'm willing to do—we're willing to do a lot. And he's willing to, I think, do a lot also. And I think we'll actually have a good relationship, assuming we have the meeting and assuming something comes of it. And he'll get protections that would be very strong.

Syria had never had protections. If you look at Syria, if you look at—or if you look anywhere around the Middle East—you look at Iraq, you look at Libya—with Libya, certainly, they didn't have protection; they had the exact opposite.

Q. Reduce troop levels——

President Trump. That was—that was absolute decimation. And that's what we planned to do, and that's what we did.

North Korea/South Korea/China

Q. Reduce U.S. troop level is a possibility in South Korea?

President Trump. Well, I'm not going to talk about that. We're going to say that he will have very adequate protection, and we'll see how it all turns out. I think this: The best thing he could ever do is to make a deal.

I have a feeling, however, that, for various reasons, maybe including trade, because they've never had this problem before—China has never had this problem with us—it could very well be that he's influencing Kim Jong Un. We'll see what happens, meaning the President of China, President Xi, could be influencing Kim Jong Un.

But we'll see. That's just—look, if you remember, a few weeks ago, all of the sudden, out of nowhere, Kim Jong Un went to China to say hello, again, a second time, to President Xi. I think they were dedicating an aircraft carrier paid for largely by the United States.

Thank you very much, everybody.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization

Q. A question on NATO. Will you ask NATO to be—sorry, will you ask NATO to be more involved in the——

President Trump. I can't hear you. I can't. Can't hear you. Thank you, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 1:47 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, he referred to Chairman of the State Affairs Commission Kim Jong Un of North Korea; and National Security Adviser John R. Bolton. A reporter referred to Vice Premier Liu He of China, who led the Chinese delegation to the White House negotiating a potential trade agreement with the U.S.

Categories: Interviews With the News Media : Exchanges with reporters :: White House; Meetings With Foreign Leaders and International Officials : North Atlantic Treaty Organization, Secretary General Stoltenberg.

Locations: Washington, DC.

Names: Bolton, John R.; Bush, George W.; Kim Jong Un; Obama, Barack; Stoltenberg, Jens; Xi Jinping.

Subjects: China : North Korea, role; China : President; China : Relations with U.S.; China : Trade with U.S.; Commerce, international : Free and fair trade; Communications : News media :: Accuracy and fairness; North Atlantic Treaty Organization; North Korea : Chairman of the State Affairs Commission; North Korea : International diplomatic efforts; Syria : U.S. and coalition airstrikes; White House Office : Assistants to the President :: National Security Adviser; ZTE Corp.

DCPD Number: DCPD201800340.