

Administration of Donald J. Trump, 2019

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

April 2, 2019

President Trump. Thank you very much. It's great to have everybody with us. And I'm honored to welcome the Secretary General of NATO on a very, very big birthday and anniversary—70th. Mr. Secretary General, congratulations on your extension, something that very important to us and to me and to everybody.

Over the past 2 years, the Secretary General and I have developed a very strong working relationship. It's been as good as it can be. We're both committed to ensuring that NATO can address the full range of threats facing the alliance today. And there are many threats. And I think, also, we've had and really taken many great steps forward.

The United States alone accounts for the vast majority of NATO defense spending. And we really cannot rely on one nation to defend all. If you look at it, the disproportionality of what the United States is doing is really too great, but we're working on that. Over \$100 billion in new defense spending by the end of, actually, I think, this year, but it could be 220 [2020].^{*} But I think, by 2020, I think we'll have at least another \$100 billion spent by the allies, the other countries, the 27 countries outside of ourselves.

As we discussed in our meeting just now, we've increased the member contributions. And that will help, really, with the pressing security challenges, including terrorism, which we've really increased the scope of NATO. We said, you know, we have a new world problem that's not so new anymore, but it's called terrorism. Different than when you were originally founded. A much different problem. It's a horrible problem. It's people that don't wear uniforms, and they're hard to figure out. But we've been very successful in Syria. We've got now a hundred percent of the caliphate. We did it very rapidly, much faster than I was told it could be done. A lot of people did a fantastic job.

So I just want to thank you very much for being here, Mr. Secretary General. It's been an honor to work with you. I would like you to extend my thanks to all of the allies. They have really put up a lot more money than they have in the past.

I was explaining inside that, if you looked at a chart—prior to our getting here—NATO's spending was going way, way down. It was just a one-way road down. And since I became President, and with the help of Mike Pence and everybody—a lot of the people at this table—the difference has been tremendous. It's been a rocket ship up, and we have to keep it that way.

So thank you very much. And please, would you like to say a few words?

Secretary General Stoltenberg. Thanks so much, Mr. President, and thank you for hosting me and my delegation once again in the White House. And it's great to see you. It's good to be here. And thank you so much for your strong support and for your commitment to NATO and for your leadership, especially on burden-sharing.

^{*} White House correction.

NATO is a strong alliance, but to remain a strong alliance, we have to be a fair alliance. And therefore, allies have to invest more in defense. You have a very clear message on that, and your message is having a clear impact. Because allies are now started to invest more. After years of decline, we've seen that—we see now that all allies are investing more in defense.

And since 2016, they have added more than 40 billions already. By 2020, it will be, as you said, \$100 billion. And then, we expect that to continue to grow. We need to do more, and therefore, burden-sharing, the defense investments is a top priority for me in all my engagements with different NATO allies.

We are also stepping up our fight against terrorism. All NATO allies participate in the U.S.-led Global Coalition To Defeat ISIL. We have made, under your leadership, remarkable progress. But the job is not done. It is important that ISIL is not able to come back, and therefore, we think it's extremely important to train Iraqi forces so they prevent ISIL for—from coming back again.

And then, we also strongly believe that it's important to support the U.S. efforts to find a peaceful solution to the crisis—or the war in Afghanistan. We support that. And then, we are also working closely together with you in the way we respond to Russia. We see that Russia has violated the INF Treaty, and NATO allies have supported the U.S. position on that strongly throughout the whole process.

So it's great to see you again and great to meet all of the people around this table.

President Trump. Well, thank you very much. And I will say—you mentioned Afghanistan—I think we've made a lot of great strides recently in Afghanistan. It's—we call it the "endless war." Nineteen years. The real number is 19 years. It's unfortunate. It's ridiculous. And it's been a very interesting period of time. But we've made a lot of strides. A lot of things are happening in Afghanistan that are very positive. So we'll see how that all comes out. And I appreciate your help.

And, Vice President Mike Pence. Would you say a few words, Mike?

Vice President Michael R. Pence. Oh, thank you, Mr. President. And I want to also extend my congratulations to the Secretary General on the extension of your term to 2022. We welcome it. And your leadership at NATO has been a time of renewed strength in the transatlantic alliance, as you responded to the leadership that the President provided.

From early on, President Trump made it clear to our allies in Europe we couldn't care more about their security than they care about their security; that there was—it was not a choice between whether we're committed to the alliance or whether we can demand that our allies live up to the commitment in the Wales Agreement, we could do both.

And, Mr. President, I've witnessed the Secretary General in Europe, here in the States. I look forward to his remarks before the Congress tomorrow where you can unpack what American leadership has meant to really renew this NATO alliance.

Seeing the number of countries that are on track to live up to their 2-percent commitment, more than double, \$140 billion in additional defense spending for our common defense, you've given great voice to that. And I just wanted to express my congratulations and my appreciation for you recognizing the importance of this alliance; for us all to be standing with each other, standing, living up to our word and recognizing that the President's leadership ultimately has resulted in a strengthening of the NATO alliance.

President Trump. That is true. That is definitely true. Thank you, Mike.

Pat.

Acting Secretary of Defense Patrick M. Shanahan. Yes. Maybe just another big shout-out. Congratulations on your extension, but also your important partnership with General Scaparrotti, as General Scaparrotti retires after 40 years.

President Trump. That's right.

Acting Secretary Shanahan. The partnership has been significant in taking the cash and converting it into real readiness plans. And I think we'll see that in the capacity and capability. So your leadership there and then keeping the coalition together as we fight ISIS and take on these violent extremist organizations.

So welcome to Washington. And we look forward to your speech tomorrow.

President Trump. We do indeed.

John Bolton.

National Security Adviser John R. Bolton. Thank you, Mr. President. Congratulations. I think the work that you and the President have done to get the burden-sharing more equitably spread, to get closer to the 2 percent target that NATO allies themselves agreed in 2014 is very important. Now, of course, we all have the common challenge of making sure it's spent efficiently and in connection with agreed-upon strategy.

So a lot of hard work done, but a lot of hard work remains. We look forward to working with you on it.

President Trump. Thank you. Thank you very much.

Thank you very much, everybody. Thank you. Appreciate it. Thank you.

Q. Mr. President——

China-U.S. Trade

Q. [Inaudible]

President Trump. China is going very well.

Q. Can you address the situation in Venezuela, specifically Russia's involvement?

President Trump. Thank you very much, everybody.

NOTE: The President spoke at 2:30 p.m. in the Cabinet Room at the White House. Secretary General Stoltenberg referred to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist organization, also known as ISIS. Acting Secretary Shanahan referred to Supreme Allied Commander of NATO General Curtis M. Scaparrotti, USA.

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