

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

June 17, 2024

President Biden. Well, Mr. Secretary General, welcome back to the Oval Office.

I have to say ahead of time, I'm going to miss you. I'm going to miss you.

You know, I believe that this one of the most consequential moments for Europe since World War II. I think you do too. NATO was founded 75 years ago, and it's—I think the lessons we've learned then and about standing together to defend and deter aggression have been consequential.

And we've made NATO—you—under your leadership, we made it larger, stronger, and it's more united than it's ever been. So I want to thank you, Mr. Secretary General, for the incredible work you've done.

Together, we deterred further Russian aggression in Europe. I think we—well, I know we've welcomed Finland and Sweden to the alliance. And we've strengthened NATO's eastern flank, making it clear that we'll defend every single inch of NATO territory.

And, Jens, we—a very important announcement to make today: A record number of allies are meeting the NATO commitment to at least 2 percent of their GDP on defense. And, in fact, the number has more than doubled since we took office—since I took office.

And I look forward to building it all—on all this progress next month when we have the 75th meeting here in Washington.

And I look forward to our discussion today.

So I want to thank you for being here. We've got a lot to talk about. And I mean it sincerely, you've been great. I just wish you'd extend your term another 10 years. [Laughter] You're doing a hell of a job, seriously.

Secretary General Stoltenberg. Thank you.

President Biden, dear Joe, thank you so much for your warm words. And thank you so much for your personal commitment to NATO, to our transatlantic alliance.

And, also, many thanks for hosting the NATO summit here in Washington, DC, next month. At that summit, we will celebrate the 75th anniversary of the most successful alliance in history, but we'll also make important decisions for the future, not least on the issue and the importance of investing in our security.

And today we are able to publish new figures for defense spending. They show that, across Europe and Canada, NATO allies are, this year, increasing defense spending by 18 percent. That's the biggest increase in decades. And 23 allies are going to spend 2 percent of GDP or more on defense this year. That's more than twice as many as 4 years ago and demonstrates that European allies and Canada are really stepping up and taking their share of the common responsibility to protect all of us in the NATO alliance.

It's also important for the United States to know that a lot of this money is actually spent here in the United States. Allies are buying more and more equipment from the U.S. So NATO is good for U.S. security, but NATO is also good for U.S. jobs.

Mr. President, and also thank you for your strong leadership on Ukraine. And congratulations on the bilateral security agreement you signed with President Zelenskyy, with Ukraine.

European Allies are also stepping up and matching the U.S. contributions, military support to Ukraine. And I expect that when we meet here next month, we will agree to have NATO in the lead role in providing security assistance and training and also that allies will agree to step up financial and military support to Ukraine. This will reduce the burden on the United States and strengthen our support to Ukraine.

I think it's important to understand that the stronger our support for Ukraine is, the sooner this war can end, because the sooner President Putin will realize that he cannot wait us out.

It is in—support Ukraine is not charity. Support Ukraine is in our own security interest. And therefore, I welcome the strong commitment of all NATO allies to continue to support Ukraine.

So, once again, thank you so much. Thank you for once again hosting me here in the Oval Office. And I look very much forward to the NATO summit in Washington, DC, next month.

Thank you.

President Biden. Thank you, pal.

Thank you very much, everyone.

[At this point, several reporters began asking questions at once.]

Q. Will the lack of a war cabinet impact the cease-fire deal? Are you worried about the war——

[President Biden pretended to shout back at reporters asking questions.]

Q. Are you worried about the war cabinet impacting——

NOTE: The President spoke at 4:13 p.m. in the Oval Office at the White House. In his remarks, Secretary General Stoltenberg referred to President Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin of Russia. The transcript was released by the Office of the Press Secretary on June 18.

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