

Remarks at a Press Availability

Mike Pompeo, Secretary of State

Brussels, Belgium, April 27, 2018

SECRETARY POMPEO: Good afternoon, everyone. It's truly been an honor to be here in Brussels today. I received a very warm welcome from my counterparts. It's never good to be late on your first day of work, and so after being sworn in I hustled here. The flight crew did great work to get me here and lots of great State Department officers helped me get this set up so I could be here in the nick of time.

It was important to me. There's no more fitting destination for my first foreign trip as the Secretary of State than a meeting of our NATO allies. This alliance has been an essential pillar of American security interests for decades. Some of our strongest bilateral partnerships are encompassed within this alliance, and I made it clear today that the United States is eager to continue to lead here in NATO.

Our commitment, the United States commitment to the collective defense under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty remains ironclad. As President Trump said, the alliance has been the bulwark of international peace and security for nearly 70 years, and it will remain so.

Threats to our common security come from many sources and we must address them all to keep people safe around the world. Our collective defense demands greater burden sharing. During the Wales Summit in 2014, all NATO allies agreed to increase defense spending to 2 percent of gross domestic product by 2024 with 20 percent of that share devoted to funding major equipment. It's now up to each ally to make good on that promise by presenting a credible plan before the summit in July.

European nations must bear the necessary responsibilities for their security and make the case to their fellow citizens why it is critical to fulfill their obligations on defense spending, investing capabilities essential to the long-term defense of their countries, and address threats emanating from neighboring regions.

Russia threatens allies and partners both militarily, as seen through its invasions of Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, and through an aggressive campaign to undermine western democratic institutions. In light of Russia's unacceptable actions, NATO is more indispensable than ever. As NATO allies agree, the use of military-grade nerve agent developed by Russia on UK territory was a reckless action that put the lives of innocent civilians at risk.

The United States has made abundantly clear that NATO should not return to business as usual with Russia until Moscow shows a clear change in its actions and complies with international law.

President Trump has also made clear that fighting terrorism must be a major focus of NATO. The alliance should work with our partners in North Africa and the Middle East to address conditions and activities that enable terrorism, such as traffic of weapons, irregular migration, and regional instability.

NATO's expertise can help strengthen the resilience of partner countries as well. We call on NATO to increase its interactions with regional organizations that are fighting terrorism.

The United States is unwavering in our support for NATO's open-door policy as well, and our commitment that any Euro-Atlantic country that wishes to join the alliance and meets the requirements may do so. We will continue to work with aspirants bilaterally and through NATO structures to help them meet those standards. And as the alliance works towards the July summit here in Brussels, we will focus on three priorities: increased defense spending and burden sharing, strengthening NATO's deterrence and defense, and countering terrorism. We look forward to making progress on each of those issues in July.

I also want to congratulate the Republic of Korea and North Korea on the historic meeting, and the Korean people's aspirations for peace and prosperity. Let there be no doubt: We would not be where we are today without President Trump's maximum pressure campaign and the work that has been done all around the world to apply pressure to North Korea. We are encouraged by President Moon and Leader Kim Jong-un's stated goal of complete denuclearization in the Panmunjom Declaration. We're studying the declaration closely to understand whether Leader Kim made any new commitments as part of this agreement.

Our objective remains unchanged. We're committed to permanent, verifiable, irreversible dismantling of North Koreans' weapons of mass destruction programs without delay. Until then, the global maximum pressure campaign will continue. As the President has said, the United States will not repeat the mistakes of the past. These talks and any others do not supersede any UN Security Council resolutions or any other sanctions.

As always, the United States will continue to coordinate closely with our allies, the Republic of Korea and Japan, on our unified response. North Korean promises are good, but transparent, verifiable action is essential.

And with that, I'm happy to take a couple of questions.

MS NAUERT: Okay, sir. We'll start with Carol Morello from *The Washington Post*. Carol.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. You are going to be leaving tomorrow for the Middle East. Do you have any plans to give a heads-up to the leaders you will be meeting with in three countries regarding the Iran deal decision? Or have you heard anything from the Europeans here today that has made you think that it might make more sense to stay in the deal while you are working on the supplemental issues?

And if I may, when you return to Washington, you will be facing a demoralized yet hopeful workforce. What are some of the first things you plan to do at the State Department to turn things around?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Let me take the second one first. I do look forward to getting to work in Washington. I'll be out there on Tuesday. And I've talked about this a lot. I just met with a great group of State Department officers who work here at the mission. They may have been demoralized, but they seemed in good spirits. They are hopeful that the State Department will get its swagger back, that we will be out doing the things that they came onboard at the State Department to do. To be professional, to deliver diplomacy, American diplomacy around the world – that's my mission set, is to build that esprit and get the team on the field so that we

can effectuate American diplomacy. I know that the State Department and the people there can do that.

With respect to the JCPOA, we talked about it some today. I'm confident that that'll be a topic on my trip throughout the Middle East as well, not only talking about the concerns that President Trump has expressed consistently, but talking about ways to potentially address those shortcomings, finding a potential solution to the very flaws that President Trump has identified for a long time now.

You asked if we talked about the decision. There's been no decision made. So the team is working, and I'm sure we'll have lots of conversations to deliver what the President has made clear. Absent a substantial fix, absent overcoming the shortcomings, the flaws of the deal, he is unlikely to stay in that deal past this May.

MS NAUERT: Okay, our next question goes to Ansgar Haase for DPA. Are you here?

QUESTION: Yeah.

MS NAUERT: That's you. Okay, go right – go right ahead, sir.

QUESTION: Secretary, when you look at the figures that were presented until now, do you think Germany is doing enough to meet the 2 percent target?

SECRETARY POMPEO: No. (Laughter.)

QUESTION: What should Germany do?

SECRETARY POMPEO: They should meet the goals that they agreed to. Look, this is – look, it's – it is the case over the past months that there has been progress made and lots of countries who are doing better. I think President Trump made that a priority. I think many of the NATO allies have, in turn, made it a priority for their country as well. I applaud that. I'm thrilled with that. But the goal remains clear, or the goals remain clear. That's the expectation. It's the expectation not only for Germany but for everyone who signed up for that agreement. So we're hopeful that at the summit every NATO partner will deliver a credible plan to achieve that goal. That's what they signed up for. That's our expectation for July.

MS NAUERT: Okay, next question goes to Lesley Wroughton from Reuters. Lesley.

QUESTION: Do I need a mike?

MS NAUERT: It's coming your way.

QUESTION: Thank you. Mr. Secretary, I want to ask you: Did a consensus emerge today on how to counter hybrid warfare emanating from Russia and elsewhere, and what concrete steps did you agree will be necessary?

And if I might just follow up on something on North Korea. The White House just released a photo of you and Kim Jong-un meeting. A central question on North Korea is if he poses – if it poses a unique threat because Kim is dangerously unstable. You've met him. Do you think he's unstable, or do you think that he's serious about reaching a deal?

SECRETARY POMPEO: What was your first question? (Laughter.)

QUESTION: On Russia.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I actually remember.

QUESTION: Okay.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Look, we had a lot of discussions about ways to put – push back against Russia. President Trump has made very clear, and so the choice is really up to Vladimir Putin and the Russians. We would love nothing more than them to rejoin, right, the democratic world and behave in ways that they're not doing today. So very much prepared to have that dialogue; it's their choice if they want to be part of that or not.

And to the extent they choose not to – and you were talking about hybrid warfare in particular – we talked a lot about that, the changing nature of the threat from Russia. When I was a young soldier it was T-72 tanks and T-60 tanks rolling across the then East German plain. This today is different. And we collectively, each nation individually, and NATO together, must come up with solutions to address that.

There were lots of ideas. There was enormous consensus of the risk that it poses to the West, those hybrid war activities pose to the West, and there is a real commitment to work together to mitigate those risks and to deter them from taking place in the first instance.

MS NAUERT: Our – pardon me, sir.

SECRETARY POMPEO: I was just going to – the second part, on Kim Jung-un, I don't want to say anything about the meeting itself.

QUESTION: Did you get a sense that he was serious?

SECRETARY POMPEO: Yes, I did get a sense that he was serious. The economic pressure that has been put in place by this global effort that President Trump has led has led him to believe that it's in his best interest to come to the table and talk about denuclearization.

So I'm – I'm always careful. There's a lot of history here, where promises have been made, hopes have been raised and then dashed. President Trump has made clear we're going to – we're going to work to get a meeting set up. The two of them will meet. In the event that it fails, respectfully, President Trump will walk away, and then the pressure will remain. But in the event we reach a resolution, it would be a wonderful thing for the world.

MS NAUERT: Okay. And our final question goes to Iryna Somer from UNIAN. Iryna.

QUESTION: Thank you. Iryna Somer, Ukrainian news agency UNIAN. And obviously, my question will be on Ukraine. Ministers today discussed aspiration, Ukrainian aspiration to join NATO. Can you please give us a flavor of this discussion? Did you actually discuss a request of President Poroshenko to provide Ukraine membership action plan? And what is your opinion on this issue? Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there was discussion today about Ukraine, Ukraine's potential entry to be a NATO partner, that there's much work to do along the way to achieve that. I think that I'm always careful to describe consensus when there were lots of differing voices about how to approach it and what the right action set ought to be to achieve it, but I think there – I think there was a large group who are hopeful that the Ukrainians will begin to take the actions that would put them in a place where they could, in fact, be an aspirant to become a NATO member.

MS NAUERT: Everyone, thank you. Thank you so much.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Okay, thank you, all.

MS NAUERT: Mr. Secretary, thank you. We've had an awfully long day, as you can imagine.

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