

**PRESS CONFERENCE BY NATO SECRETARY GENERAL JENS
STOLTENBERG FOLLOWING THE MEETING OF THE NORTH
ATLANTIC COUNCIL WITH RESOLUTE SUPPORT OPERATIONAL
PARTNER AND POTENTIAL OPERATIONAL PARTNER NATIONS IN
FOREIGN MINISTERS' SESSION**

05 December 2018

Good afternoon.

We have just finished a meeting with all NATO Allies and partners in the NATO Resolute Support Mission format.

Together we reaffirmed our commitment to Afghanistan's long-term security and stability.

Now we are looking to next year's presidential elections.

It is important that the Afghan authorities improve the election process and audit the voter registration databases.

Because successful elections will reinforce Afghanistan's path towards stability and peace. And, in the pursuit of peace, the Taliban must understand that continuing the fight is pointless, and only causes more suffering. They should sit down at the negotiating table.

We remain committed to supporting Afghanistan. This is obviously good for the Afghan people. But it is also in our own interest. Because a secure and stable Afghanistan makes us all safer.

Last night, we addressed our response to challenges coming from the broader Middle East and North Africa. Including NATO's new training mission in Iraq. This will help Iraq tackle terrorism at its root. And make another important contribution to the fight against international terrorism.

This morning we discussed the Western Balkans. We were joined by High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini. This demonstrates once again that NATO and the European Union have a shared commitment to stability and security in the region.

Allies discussed the progress that Skopje is making towards NATO membership. Accession Talks have already begun. It is now for the parliament in Skopje to complete the process. And to seize this historic opportunity to bring the country into the Alliance.

Today NATO Foreign Ministers also agreed to continue supporting Bosnia and Herzegovina with its reforms. We are ready to accept the submission of the country's first Annual National Programme.

This includes practical measures covering political, economic, and defence reform. Which will help them prepare for membership. It is now up to Bosnia and Herzegovina to make the next step and decide whether to take up this offer.

Finally, Kosovo.

We discussed Kosovo's intention to move ahead with the transformation of the Kosovo Security Force into an army. Such a move is ill-timed. It goes against the advice of many NATO Allies. And may have serious repercussions for Kosovo's future Euro-Atlantic integration.

At the same time, the new tariffs introduced by Pristina create new divisions. Such steps are making the EU-mediated dialogue between Belgrade and Pristina even more difficult. But this remains the only way to bring durable peace to the region. We encourage both Belgrade and Pristina to show restraint. To refrain from provocative steps and statements. And to make the necessary compromises so that they can move forward towards a better future

NATO Foreign Ministers will meet again next April in Washington. And NATO Heads of State and Government will meet later next year.

Marking the 70th anniversary of our Alliance. It will be an opportunity to reflect on what Allies have achieved together: peace, security and prosperity in Europe and North America. But it will also be a moment to look to the future.

To how NATO is responding to a more unpredictable world. And must continue to adapt, to keep our nations safe in the decades to come.

And with that, I'm ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO SPOKESPERSON]: Okay, we'll go to the gentleman in the first row here. Thanks.

[ARIANA NEWS]: Thank you very much, Secretary General. My question is about the peace process in Afghanistan. Is there any indication that the regional powers – like Iran, Pakistan, Russia – are helping and supporting the peace process which – led by the US Peace envoy in Afghanistan?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: We call on all countries in the region to play a constructive role to support the Afghan-led and the Afghan-owned peace process and, of course, to refrain from any support to the insurgents, including any support to the Taliban and, of course, in no way provide any kind of sanctuary for the insurgents.

OANA LUNGESCU: We'll go to One TV in the third row, in the middle. Thanks.

ONE TV: Mr Secretary General, my question is regarding the replacement of SCR in Kabul, your senior representative in Afghanistan. What are the details who are going to replace Ambassador Zimmermann?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I am pleased to announce that I have appointed Sir Nicholas Kay as NATO's next Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan. He will take up his appointment in March 2019, so next year. Sir Nicholas knows Afghanistan very

well, having served for more than a year as the United Kingdom's ambassador in Kabul. And I congratulate him on his appointment, and I look forward to working with him.

But I would also like to take this opportunity to thank Ambassador Zimmermann for his service, and his outstanding service, being the Senior Civilian Representative for NATO and for the Resolute Support Mission in Kabul. So I thank him for his commitment, and I look forward to working with the new Senior Civilian Representative.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we'll go to *Voice of America*, lady in the second row.

[VOA]: SIGAR reports that the number of civilian and military casualties are increasing. Regional countries are interfering in Afghanistan, more than past. And also security situation is getting worse day by day. Considering all these points, what direction the country is going?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: We are, of course, concerned about the high number of casualties. And we have seen violence, we have seen the use of suicide attacks, and we have seen also casualties among the Afghan security forces, and also there have been some casualties among Resolute Support troops. All of this just makes it even more important that we continue to train, assist and advise the Afghan security forces. We have to remember that they are now responsible for the security in Afghanistan themselves, so they are actually now doing the job that more than 100,000 NATO troops or Resolute Support and ISAF troops did before.

And then, I think, also you have to understand that, as we now try to move forward towards a real peace process, then we have seen from other conflicts that sometimes there is an uptake, an increase in violence because the different parties try in a way to gain the best possible position at the negotiating table. So it may actually become worse before it becomes better in Afghanistan.

But the meeting we just finished demonstrated strong unity among NATO Allies and the partners that we will continue to support, to train, assist but also to provide financial support for the Afghan security forces.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we'll now go to the lady in purple.

[POBJEDA]: You had a meeting with Federica Mogherini this morning. Can you tell us what are the prospects for NATO-EU cooperation, especially on Western Balkan? And in that sense, how do idea of EU army can affect small countries, NATO members – member countries such as Montenegro, who also – which also wants to become a EU member but al-, but deploy their military capabilities to NATO already? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: First of all, NATO and the European Union, we have really lifted our cooperation up to a new level, unprecedented level of cooperation between the two organisations. And I really welcome that, because we share the same neighbourhood, the same security challenges. And we have to remember that more than 90 percent of the people living in the European Union, they live in a NATO country. So we are very, very much the same.

At the same time, I also clearly support EU efforts on defence, because I believe that EU efforts on defence – like PESCO, the structured cooperation, or the European Defence Fund or

European Mobility – all of that can contribute to a stronger NATO. Because new capabilities, more investments, increased interoperability, all of that will strengthen both Europe and NATO. And as long as the EU efforts on defence complement and not compete with NATO, then we strongly welcome those efforts. There is no way European unity can substitute transatlantic unity. And the security, European security, is dependent on NATO and transatlantic cooperation.

After Brexit, we have to remember that 80 percent of NATO's defence expenditure will come from non-EU Allies. Three of the four battle groups we have deployed in the eastern part of the Alliance will be led by non-EU Allies: United Kingdom, Canada and United States. And this is partly about ... [inaudible] but also about geography. Norway, Iceland in the north, Turkey in the south or Canada, United Kingdom and United States in the west, these countries are important for European security. So we welcome EU efforts, as long as they complement but not duplicate or compete with NATO. And that has also been the message from Europe: that they don't want to duplicate or compete with NATO.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have Geo TV in the front row.

[GEO TELEVISION PAKISTAN]: Secretary General, decades of pressure on Pakistan, and blaming Pakistan, now West is coming to terms. And President Trump requested Pakistan to help them out of Afghanistan. Are we going to see some sort of drastic changes now? And are we advancing towards solution or regional approach and regional solution? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The situation in Afghanistan is still very difficult, and we see violence, we see casualties, we see instability – there are many problems. But at the same time we have seen some encouraging signs. We had the first nationwide ceasefire this year. We have the beginning of a peace process. And we have parliamentary elections where millions of voters turned out and actually used their democratic right to vote. And one-third of the voters were women.

We have to build on this. And the way of – the way to do that is to continue to provide support to the Afghan security forces so they are able to send a clear message to Taliban that they will not win on the battlefield; the only way they can achieve something is by sitting down at a negotiating table.

And then, of course, Pakistan and all of the neighbours of Afghanistan have to support that process. Any kind of alternative processes will only make the efforts to create peace even more difficult. So we all need to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, we have AFP in the second row.

[AFP]: Hi, good morning. Thank you. The incoming or proposed new Commander of CENTCOM, General Kenneth McKenzie, yesterday said that the Afghan security forces are suffering an unsustainable level of casualties. I just wondered if you agree with that assessment and what it means for NATO in Afghanistan.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I visited Afghanistan recently, together with SACEUR and the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee, and we met with General Scott Miller, and we – and also, of course, with the Afghan military commanders, and we addressed this serious issue of high attrition and high casualty rates. This is something which

is very high on our agenda when we work with the Afghan security forces and the Afghan army. This is partly about the training, partly about equipment, partly about command and control, and partly also about the posture: too many static positions, which makes Afghan forces vulnerable. All these issues are addressed because they are the only way, or that's the only way, to reduce casualty rates and to make the situation more sustainable for the Afghan security forces. So I share the concern about the high casualty rates. But the consequence of that is not to reduce our presence but is to make sure that we provide support, enable them to increase their capabilities and their resilience even more. And therefore we are focused on how to help them with military education, command and control, military academies, developing their air forces and not least their Special Operation forces. And they are making significant progress.

OANA LUNGESCU: Associated Press.

[AP]: I just wonder on Bosnia: will you be sitting next to the fax machine, waiting for the – for the national programme to come in? What-what-what are your expectations that something positive will come from that, given the election results in October? And if I could ask just secondarily: you mention next year's events. Can you shed any more light on-on the leaders' meeting, perhaps: when that might take place, what it – what it might look like? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I haven't seen the fax machine for years! And I don't know whether there is one in this big building. And, if there is one, they will never show me that machine. So someone else has to receive that letter! Now it's up to Bosnia and Herzegovina to decide. We have made our decision. We are ready to receive their Annual National Programme. But let them decide. And then we are ready if they are ready.

What we have decided is that we will have a Foreign Ministerial meeting in April next year where we will celebrate 70th anniversary of the Alliance. Because we signed the Washington Treaty in Washington in April 1949. So that's the reason why we go to Washington in April. We haven't decided the exact date, and neither the venue of the leaders' meeting, but we have said that that will happen later that year, so most likely some time during the fall.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. NPR/Deutsche Welle.

[NPR/DEUTSCHE WELLE]: Hi. Back to the INF. Today President Putin says that if the US does pull out as threatened, that he will now start building an intermediate-range nuclear weapon. Obviously, NATO believes that that's already happened years ago, but nonetheless this obviously ratchets up the tension, just as people were worried about. And I'm interested in: over the - this next 60-day period, what do you see as NATO's role in possibly reaching out, talking to the Russians, trying to get more feedback? Do you think that this is – this is a place for NATO or – or for Allied governments themselves? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Russia has denied for years that they're violating the INF Treaty. But we have confronted them again and again with facts, with information, with our assessments, and they have continued to deny. And they have denied existence of the new missile system. But at the end they were actually forced to, or they had to admit that there is a new missile system. And now they're trying to tell the world that this new missile system is not violating the Treaty. Then it is a bit strange that for years they actually denied the existence of a system if it has been in compliance with the Treaty all the way.

Second, all Allies agree that Russia is in violation, is in material breach of the INF Treaty. All Allies also, of course, agree that US is in full compliance with the Treaty. There are no new US missiles in Europe, but there are new Russian missiles: SSC-8. They are mobile, they are hard to detect, they are nuclear-capable, they can reach European cities, and they reduce the warning time. And all missiles are dangerous, but, of course, missiles which are hard to detect, nuclear-capable and reduces the warning time, they are, if possible, even more dangerous than other missiles, because they increase the likelihood of any use of nuclear weapons in a conflict.

That's the reason why we have been so concerned about this for years. That's the reason why US and other Allies and NATO have raised this issue with Russia for years. We raised it in the NATO-Russia Council just a few weeks ago. Several Allies announced in a meeting yesterday that they will raise this issue, the INF issue, with Russia bilaterally. We are ready to raise it in a NATO-Russia Council again, as we have done for years, all Allies. Russia has a last chance to come into compliance with the INF Treaty, but at the same time we have to prepare for a world without the Treaty. And that's exactly what we do when we now give Russia this last chance, but at the same time start to look into the consequences for NATO of a breakdown of the Treaty.

OANA LUNGESCU: Second row – lady in the second row from Kosovo.

[QUESTION]: ... tariffs and the creation of Kosovo and with transformation of the forces as main elements for the tense climate in the relation between Pristina and Belgrade. Are we to conclude that Serbia is fully in compliance and fully constructive in the normalisation of relations with Kosovo? And secondly, can you specify what kind of repercussions can happen to Pristina if they go ahead with the transformation of the Kosovo security forces which is scheduled in ten days' time?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: We call on both Belgrade and Pristina to reduce tensions and to refrain from provocative statements and actions. Today I pointed out the new tariffs, and - introduced by Pristina, and also the intention to transform the Kosovo security force into a Kosovo army. And as I have told the leaders in Pristina, both publicly and privately, before, this is an ill-timed decision. And NATO supports Kosovo security force within its current mandate. And any change of that mandate has to be done in accordance with the constitution. And what they have announced now is something which is going to happen not through an inclusive process but also where they consult with NATO Allies and other countries and also through an inclusive process in Kosovo.

As I have, and NATO has, stated several times, should the mandate for the Kosovo security force evolve, the North Atlantic Council would have to re-examine the level of NATO's engagement in Kosovo. This is something we have made clear several times, and of course that's still our position. Exactly what kind of consequences? Well, that has to be discussed and decided by the North Atlantic Council.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. VG.

[VG]: Thank you. On the anniversary, my mem-, from my memory the heads of state and governments met in Washington 20 years for the 50 years anniversary. So I wonder if the – if the ... [inaudible] from several European leaders, Allied leaders, and the conflicts that they might have with President Trump, is that kind of the back curtain for not having a meeting in Washington at the anniversary?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Not at all. I didn't participate in the 50th anniversary but I participated in the 60th anniversary. And that didn't happen in Washington; that happened actually in Strasbourg and Kehl, in France and Germany. So we don't have to have all anniversaries in Washington. We can have anniversaries in many different countries, because we are many different Allies. We will have the Foreign Ministerial meeting in Washington. And then exactly where the leaders' meeting will take place, it's too early to say.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay, one last question. NTB:

[NTB]: Thank you. I just wanted to ask about your Functional Review: has it concluded, and how will things change?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The Foreign Ministers supported the Functional Review, and that's something I really welcome because it gives ... or that means that Foreign Ministers support the modernisation of the NATO headquarters. And I think that's very timely, because we are now modernising the whole Alliance. We have implemented the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence. We have increased the readiness of our forces. We are in the process of adapting the command structure with two new commands: one in Norfolk and one in Ulm in Germany, and we are doing a lot of other things with the command structure. And we are now also then modernising the way we are going to work here at the headquarters – making us more efficient, more focused, and improve just the way we do things at these headquarters.

So I strongly believe in reforming and modernising organisations as NATO. The only way to maintain strong multinational organisations like NATO is to modernise them all the time. And I have tried for many years to modernise the Norwegian public sector. That's not always easy. It's not easy to modernise NATO either. But we see a lot of progress, and that's very inspiring for a Secretary General.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. This concludes this press conference and the Ministerial. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Thank you.

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