

Press Releases: Press Availability at NATO Foreign Ministerial 2019

Press Availability
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Secretary of State

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SECRETARY POMPEO: So good afternoon, everyone. Seventy years ago today, 12 courageous nations came together to form an alliance that to this day remains the bedrock guarantor of Western security and democratic liberties. Today, our 29 nations believe in our founding mission. We believe in deterrence to keep the peace. We believe in our common defense, as captured in Article 5 of the treaty. We believe that Western democratic ideals are worth defending – and defend them we will.

Our nations have inherited a strong alliance because our predecessors had the wisdom to continue to adapt to the challenges at hand. And now it's our duty to adapt to the challenges like radical Islamic terrorism, cyber attacks, uncontrolled migration, Chinese strategic competition, and indeed, still, Russian aggression.

Today, we had wide-ranging, robust discussions. We took important decisions on urgent problem sets. Vladimir Putin harbors dark dreams of imperialism. This is evident from his invasions of Georgia and Ukraine, his meddling in Syria, and now in Venezuela. He wants to split our alliance and weaken our democratic resolve.

In light of Russia's attacks on Western democracies, we agreed to improve our defenses against hybrid warfare, develop new strategies to deter it, and identify prompt and effective responses.

We also discussed terrorism. NATO plays a key role in the fight against Islamist terrorism both inside and outside of our alliance. The U.S. especially appreciates NATO's commitment to the NATO mission in Iraq. For nearly 18 years, NATO allies and partners have fought terrorism in Afghanistan. We've trained and advised and assisted the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces. I updated our NATO counterparts on the work of Ambassador Khalilzad and his diplomatic undertaking that he is executing at my direction. The United States will ensure that our collective sacrifices are not wasted and that terrorists can never again threaten us from Afghanistan's soil.

Lastly, we discussed burden sharing. No alliance can survive without proper investment from all of its partners. Our allies have joined the United States in recognizing the need for greater burden sharing – each and every one of them. I am pleased to say that since 2016 our allies have pledged 41 billion, and that number will increase to 100 billion by the end of next year, 2020. That's no small feat. It's money well spent. Nations who have contributed should be proud. You have the deep gratitude of President Trump for that.

But I told them too there's more work to do. It's important for them to make the case to their citizenry for why this collective deterrence remains important, that spending commitments matter; they lead to political solidarity. As a military alliance, our officers should be second to none.

It's self-evident that our armies, navies, and air forces must be fully trained and equipped and ready to go when called upon in conflict or crisis.

At the Leaders Summit last July, we took a major step forward in agreeing to the Four Thirties Initiative. Now it is time for us to fulfill those goals.

Seventy years ago, the great Dean Acheson said that the NATO alliance was, quote, "a statement of the facts and lessons of history," end of quote. He knew that if free nations do not stand together, they will fall one by one. The same is true today.

As for the United States, we will continue to bear our fair share. We will continue to lead within NATO, and by doing so we will defend the freedoms of the American people and the people of our allies.

I'm happy to take a few questions.

MR PALLADINO: We'll start off with Latvia TV. Ina Strazdina.

QUESTION: Thank you so much. Mr. Pompeo, Ina Strazdina, Latvian Television. Seeing growing aggression of Russia, do you see that NATO presence in the Baltics is sufficient, or would you see even plans to strengthen it even more? Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: So there's lots of discussion always – at this meeting, at the summit, at the Leaders Meeting last July – about proper allocation of resources. Where are the right places? Where do we need to do more? We've certainly talked about that as a geographic matter, so I don't have anything to add with respect to the Baltic states today.

But it's not just a geographic matter. We've also talked about new challenges that face us, right? So telecommunication systems, infrastructure, cyber, hybrid warfare – things that aren't resolved by more troops sitting on the ground someplace but which present risk to the Baltics, to all of your – to all the NATO partners, including the United States and Canada as well.

So we're trying to make sure that our resources, our focus, are meeting the challenges of today. We talked a lot about it, the 70th anniversary, we talked a lot about the history of the founders of the 12 nations that began this important alliance, and the fact that it's now our time, the leaders of today, to take on the mantle and the challenges that the world presents to NATO today.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to BBC. Barbara Plett Usher.

QUESTION: Test, test. Mr. Secretary, on Turkey. The Turks are disputing your readout of the meeting you had with the Turkish foreign minister this week. So my question is: Have you made any progress in meetings this week on issues like the S-400s and northern Syria, or have things actually gotten worse?

And then I have another question about China. NATO allies have not followed U.S. requests to cut off Huawei. So do you think that that could become a risk for intelligence sharing and military communications in the alliance in the future?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So as for the first question, I reread – I saw the comments by my Turkish counterpart. I reread the readout of our meeting – spot on. Stand by every word of it.

QUESTION: Have you made any progress?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We are continuing to have conversations. I think the Turkish Government understands the American position quite clearly. I think I heard the Vice President speak to that yesterday as well. Our position hasn't changed. There's great opportunities for the United States and Turkey to work closely together, and I had a good, long conversation with my – with the Turkish foreign minister yesterday, and I am very confident we'll find a path forward.

As for the risks associated with the installation of Chinese technology in systems related to security, there is undoubtedly the risk that NATO or the United States will not be able to share information in the same way it could if there were not Chinese systems inside of those networks, inside of those capabilities.

We've done our risk analysis in the United States; we have now shared that with our NATO partners, with countries all around the world. They understand the concerns – not our concerns, but the factual concerns associated with companies so deeply connected to their own government who would be willing to act at the behest of their government, the risk that that presents to information management. And we have made clear that if the risk exceeds the threshold for the United States, we simply won't be able to share that information any longer. And our task is to do education, make sure they understand – every sovereign nation that will make its own decision, and then the United States will make its decision.

MR PALLADINO: Let's go to Italy. *La Stampa*, Paolo Mastrolilli,

QUESTION: Thank you very much. Two questions. Today, the Libyan General Haftar order his troops to march on Tripoli. Did you discuss them, this issue in terms of the terroristic threats from the south? And the second question: Italy signed BRI Initiative with China. Do you consider that to be a threat to the interoperability of NATO?

SECRETARY POMPEO: So with respect to the first question, let me – I don't have anything to add. We're following closely what has been taking place there over the past weeks and months. We have been following the UN process,

trying to do the best we can to be a positive force to deliver a good solution for the people of Libya and increase stability there, to be sure.

Second, as I said in response to the previous question, every country has to make its own decisions about how it wants to respond to Chinese debt-trap diplomacy or Chinese efforts to sell goods at below market. They clearly have a security component to the transaction. But each nation will make its own choices. Then the task falls to every other country to observe that, see what risk it presents to them if they begin to engage in those systems, in that infrastructure, that IT infrastructure or transportation infrastructure, and respond to that threat.

MR PALLADINO: Germany. DPA, Ansgar Haase.

SECRETARY POMPEO: Let me just add one thing to that. It is one thing to compete in an open, fair, transparent way. The United States is prepared to compete with our NATO allies, with China, with any country that shows up with a commercial transaction – a better mousetrap, a better idea – and compete with fair, reasonable, transparent transactions. It is a very different thing to engage in transactions that have a national security component to them. When a nation shows up and offers you goods that are well below market, one ought to ask what else is at play, why it was that that entity showed up with a deal that is literally too good to be true.

MR PALLADINO: DPA, please.

QUESTION: Thanks. Maren Hennemuth, DPA. The President and the Vice President have been quite clear that they want Germany to step up on defense spending. So – but according to the latest projection, they won't even reach 1.5 percent in 2024. What concrete consequences is the U.S. considering if they don't step up? Do you have any steps in mind, like withdrawing troops from Germany?

SECRETARY POMPEO: It's important to step back just a bit. Remember that this notion of 2 percent isn't made up. It wasn't created by this administration in the United States; it wasn't created by the previous administration in the United States. It was a commitment that every NATO ally agreed to in Wales. That includes Germany, who committed to that. So the promise that is being fulfilled is a promise that the German Government made. So we're very hopeful, and we're very hopeful that they will get it right, that they will understand that it is important for our collective defense, and we will urge them to continue to do so.

MR PALLADINO: Norway, *Aftenposten*. No?

Please, go ahead.

QUESTION: I just wanted to ask you, Secretary – I'm from Spain, from ABC. Did you manage to talk about Venezuela and the presence of Russian troops in Venezuela as a part of the meeting today, and what's your position regarding those 100 soldiers that, according to Special Envoy Abrams, were calibrating a missile system?

SECRETARY POMPEO: We did talk about Venezuela. The American position was made clear by President Trump. They need to – they need to leave. And we talked about that. We talked about that in the context of Russian efforts all around the world, whether that's efforts in Ukraine, the Russians' continued malign activity in Syria. We talked about it in Venezuela, we talked about what they did in the Sea of Azov. In each case we are doing our best, collectively, to respond. In the case of Venezuela, the United States has its responses being prepared as well.

MR PALLADINO: Let's do one more question. Sir, in the pink shirt back there. Please, yes.

QUESTION: Hello, my name is Farhad Pouladi. I'm with the Voice of America Persian Service. In your morning's remark, you said NATO should seek peace through strength in era of great power competition from Russia, China, and Islamic Republic of Iran. So my question is this: What challenges the NATO and specifically U.S. is facing from regime in Tehran? Thank you.

SECRETARY POMPEO: The list is long, but let me speak about it in countries other – the risk to countries other than the United States. I have articulated the threat that we believe the Islamic Republic of Iran presents to our country. They are many. We've asked the Islamic Republic of Iran to simply behave like a normal nation, but give me – let me give you a concrete example.

Today there continues to be a concerted assassination effort, campaign,

inside of Europe. We've seen it. You've seen European countries respond to this threat. This is real. This is – this isn't something that was made up. This is an effort by the leaders of the Islamic Republic of Iran – the president, Rouhani, who's the president of Iran, is permitting to take place, where they're going to Europe and killing people on European soil. This is unacceptable in Western Europe. To allow something like this to happen is just unacceptable. We are working with our partners all around Europe to make sure we all have the right information placed in the right place at the right time to reduce this risk and reduce this threat.

But a second component of this is the deterrence effort, which is the undertaking that the United States is engaged in to reduce the capacity of the Islamic Republic of Iran to undertake precisely this kind of activity by sanctioning them in a way that forces them to have fewer resources so that they can create these risks around the world.

I'll give you a second one we spent time on today. There are European foreign terrorist fighters sitting today in Iraq and in Syria that we now have to figure out a way to make sure do not return to the jihadi battlefield. The efforts that Iran is engaged in in Syria fundamentally make that problem set more difficult, as do Iranian Shia militias that are not under the control of the Iraqi Security Forces in Iraq. That malign activity by Iran makes Europe, NATO countries, less secure. We talked about those, we talked about how we would collectively seek to approach them to reduce the risk to NATO members.

Great, thank you all very much for being with me today.

MR PALLADINO: Thank you all. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

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