

Speech: Foreign Secretary and NATO Secretary General joint press conference on the Salisbury attack

[joint press conference](#)

Jens Stoltenberg

Welcome to NATO headquarters, it's really a pleasure to meet you here today and also thank you for updating me on the latest developments on Salisbury investigation. The attack was the first use of a nerve agent on Alliance territory. It showed a total disrespect for human lives and the attack was an unacceptable breach of international norms and rules. NATO allies have been united in condemning this attack and they have offered their support to the ongoing investigation. Russia's response so far has demonstrated a clear disregard for international peace and security, we continue to call on Russia to provide complete disclosure of the Novichok programme to the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. And we welcome the UK's co-operation with the OPCW in the investigation of this horrendous attack.

The attack in Salisbury comes at the background of a pattern of reckless behaviour by Russia and NATO is responding to this pattern of behaviour. We have seen the illegal annexation of the Crimea, violating the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the Ukraine. We have seen Russia's continued efforts to destabilise Eastern Ukraine. And we have seen that Russia continues to interfere in our democratic and political processes and undermine our democratic institutions. We have seen different types of hybrid tactics including cyber-attacks. NATO's approach to Russia is firm, defensive and proportionate. It combines strong deterrents and defence with openness to a meaningful dialogue. So Foreign Secretary, thank you once again for coming here. Russia will continue to seek to divide us but NATO allies stand united and we stand in solidarity with the UK. So welcome.

Foreign Secretary

Well thank you very much Jens and thank you for welcoming us today to NATO. We met to discuss, as you've just said, the attack against Sergei and Yulia Skripal using a military grade nerve agent and you and I, Secretary General, are clear that the use of such an agent is a violation of the Chemical Weapons Convention and a flagrant breach of international law and I'd like to extend my gratitude to you Jens for the personal statement you made so soon after the attack.

We share the view that the poisoning of Sergei Skripal is not an isolated case, but the latest in a pattern of reckless behaviour by the Russian state. That behaviour goes back many years. From Russia's annexation of Crimea, to cyber-attacks and its involvement in the Syrian war, Russia has shown itself, the Russian state has shown itself to have a blatant disregard for

international order, for international law and values, our values. Those values sit in the heart of NATO and everything that we do, which is why our NATO allies have shown such strong and undivided support. The [North Atlantic Council statement](#) issued last week is a clear, powerful statement of political support and demonstrates NATO's unity, capability and determination to respond to the challenges that we face together. We stand united in the face of adversity, be it in response to the attack in Salisbury or the threat to any NATO ally, which is the founding principle of this organisation. Thank you.

Question from the BBC

What practical concrete steps is NATO willing to take now to put further pressure on Russia in the wake of the Salisbury attack, actions over deeds? And Foreign Secretary, what action of this kind have you requested from your European and NATO allies? And secondly on Brexit, isn't the case that today's agreement is once again an example of the UK side making concessions in order for this to move forward?

Jens Stoltenberg

Well we have expressed strong political support to the United Kingdom and that is important because it shows that all 29 NATO allies stand united, we stand in solidarity with the United Kingdom and the UK is not alone. We are responding as an Alliance. Second, NATO allies offered immediately after the attack support to the ongoing investigation if so requested by the UK. The UK has world-class expertise, capabilities to deal with this investigations themselves but if there is a request NATO is ready to provide support. And thirdly, and that is perhaps the most important role of NATO, is that NATO is responding to this pattern of reckless behaviour by Russia which we have seen over many years. So we are now in the process of implementing the biggest reinforcement of collective defence since the end of the Cold War with battle groups deployed to the eastern part of the Alliance, with the high readiness of our forces tripling the size of the NATO response force. But also the fact now we see increased defence spending across Europe and Canada for the first time in many years.

So NATO is responding to Russia which is responsible for aggressive actions in Crimea, which is responsible for reckless behaviour in many cases, and the attack in Salisbury takes place on the background of this reckless behaviour we are seeing over a long period of time and NATO is responding to that.

Foreign Secretary

Thanks Jens. I just wanted to say on the reaction of the world and all our friends and allies, it really is very striking the contrast between the powerful statements of support the UK is getting today and over the last few days with the much more muted reaction you saw 12 years ago after the death of Alexander Litvinenko. And I think there is a reason for that and it is that across so many parts of the world we are seeing, there are countries who directly or indirectly have experience now of disruptive or malign Russian behaviour and that's why what we are doing now is working with our friends

and partners on all sorts of measures. Tackling cyber warfare, intelligence sharing to do that, working together, we discussed this in the EU just now, working to tackle disinformation that comes from Russia.

A lot of the fake news that is pumped out. Tackling hybrid warfare as Jens just said, one of the key things that NATO now has to consider. And of course looking at how we go after the money, that may or may not have been, very likely has been corrupted or illicitly obtained. Of course, we in the UK now have powers to do that since the Criminal Finance Act of last year. There are ways of taking money away, unexplained wealth orders that we can put in place. Those can be done, and are being done now in concert with our friends and partners around the world, many of them in NATO. So, that is the work that is going on. On Brexit, all I can say is that there is a [great step forward in negotiation](#), how about that. I think things are going extremely well.

Question

The same question for both of you, Foreign Secretary, you today had a meeting with the EU where they unconditionally expressed their solidarity. From your perspective what would be the best way forward for the EU, the UK and NATO to do something together to increase the pressure on Russia?

Foreign Secretary

Thanks, a chance for me to repeat, if I may, the last answer, there are things we can and must do together. Tackling the disinformation from Russia and the UK has been helping to fund that at a EU level. Tackling cyber together, sharing intelligence about what Russia is up to in cyber warfare, which has had an impact on many countries around the European Union and in NATO. And going after the money that has been illicitly or corruptly obtained. That is one of the most important ways forward, unexplained wealth orders. We have a National Crime Agency, and National Economic Crime Unit that are looking at this kind of stuff right now. But you can only do it in concert with partners around the world. And it's very, very heartening and encouraging to find the level of support not just here in NATO, but in Washington and capitals around the world. Thank you very much everybody.

Jens Stoltenberg

Let me just echo what Boris Johnson said. I totally agree with him, we work together with the EU on hybrid, on cyber and on many other issues which are relevant to our response to Russia, and working with partners, for instance our eastern partners. So, this shows the importance of strong NATO-EU co-operation and we have been able to bring that co-operation to a new level. Unprecedented strong co-operation and that's part of our response to a more assertive Russia.