

Jens Stoltenberg: Nato countries taking steps to increase defence spending

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News

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has said he does not believe that the current trade war between the US and EU will adversely affect long-term transatlantic relations.



Jens Stoltenberg | *Photo credit: Press Association*

He also said allies have now stopped cuts in defence spending and started to increase burden sharing, an issue which, along with trade, has also been highlighted by US President Donald Trump.

On the trade spat between the US and Europe, which has seen the EU threaten tit-for-tat retaliation in response to US tariffs on steel and aluminium, the Nato chief said, "I agree that there are differences related to issues like trade, the Iran nuclear deal, environmental issues and climate change. We also see some differences within Europe regarding the future direction of Europe. But then we have to

remember that it's nothing new.

“Yes, there are differences between allies but within Nato, we have actually been able to strengthen our cooperation and strengthen the transatlantic bond.”

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Stoltenberg was speaking at a meeting of Nato defence ministers in Brussels, ahead of a much-awaited Nato summit in the city in July.

On spending, he told reporters, “All allies have stopped the cuts, all have started to increase, and the majority of allies have put forward plans on how to meet the two per cent, or spend two per cent on defence by 2024.

“I welcome the fact that Germany has stopped cuts, Germany has started to increase, and also the plans to increase German defence spending by 80 per cent over a decade. These are steps in the right direction. I welcome them. It's part of a pattern we now see across Europe and Canada where allies are spending more.”

Washington wants Nato allies to increase their military spending and thus reduce the burden placed on the US, the alliance's biggest member.

Trump has repeatedly called on all 29 Nato members to increase their military budgets to meet a target of two per cent of economic output spent on defence every year by 2024. US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, on a recent visit to Brussels, called on allies to raise military budgets.

Calling defence investment “a matter of fairness” and “security in a more unpredictable world”, Stoltenberg said, “we are going in the right direction, but we still have a long way to go.”

Burden-sharing is not just about cash but also about capabilities and contributions and, here too, the trend is up, said the former Norwegian Prime Minister.

“Allies are investing more in major equipment and increasing their contributions to Nato so we have turned a corner,” he said.

At the two-day meeting - the first in the alliance's new headquarters- ministers will take a series of decisions on the Nato command structure and military readiness, discuss plans for a Nato training mission in Iraq, and review progress in achieving more defence spending and better burden sharing.

They will also discuss defence capacity-building support for Jordan, and consider what more Nato could do to help Tunisia.

On the command structure, Stoltenberg said he expects a boost of more than 1200 personnel to be agreed, adding, "I also expect we will agree that our new joint force command for the Atlantic will be based at Norfolk in the United States, and that our new enabling command will be based in Ulm, in Germany."

Noting that "high readiness is essential in a more unpredictable world", Stoltenberg said allies are also expected to agree a Nato readiness initiative - the 'Four Thirties'. This would mean that allies would have, by 2020, 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 combat vessels ready within 30 days or less.

"This is not about setting up or deploying new forces, it is about boosting the readiness of existing forces," he said.

At Friday's meeting, Nato allies held a joint session with EU foreign affairs chief Federica Mogherini, Finland and Sweden to review Nato-EU cooperation and ways to ensure complementarity of Nato-EU efforts on defence.

Mogherini updated Nato allies on recent developments at the EU level to strengthen European defence, in particular on military mobility, and ways to best ensure efforts by Nato and the EU in this area go hand in hand. The just-launched €5.5bn European defence industrial development programme (EDIDP) was also debated.

Stoltenberg said, "Allies and partners are stepping up - with both forces and funding."

He said that around 3000 more trainers have been added to the mission, and that discussions are underway to extend funding for the Afghan forces beyond 2020.

Stoltenberg welcomed the increased US presence in Europe, despite what he called "serious disagreements" between the two sides on "serious issues," including trade.

"I'm not saying it is not serious but it is possible to limit the repercussions and the negative effects on Nato."

He also rejected calls by Italy, among others, to lift economic sanctions against Russia but added that Nato did want to isolate Moscow.

Stoltenberg also told reporters that decisions taken at the ministerial "will ensure that the summit strengthens our alliance for years to come."

About the author

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