

NATO chief hits back at Macron criticism as two prepare to meet

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News

NATO's Jens Stoltenberg has made a robust defence of the alliance after French President Emmanuel Macron's critical remarks.



Photo credit: Press Association

Macron recently told *The Economist* that NATO was experiencing “brain death” citing a lack of coordination and US unpredictability under President Donald Trump.

The French leader also expressed doubt about the US-led alliance's security maxim that an attack on one ally would be treated as an attack on all.

However, speaking at a news conference in Brussels, NATO secretary general Stoltenberg defended

the alliance, saying it was “heavily strong, agile and adaptable.”

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He said this was the message he will convey to Macron when the pair meet later this week. He said he will also say the same at the NATO leaders' meeting in London next month.

France has traditionally had an ambivalent role in NATO, taking no part in its strategic military planning from 1966 to 2009 despite being a founding member. But Macron's comments in early November - a month before NATO December 4 summit in London - were unexpected.

Stoltenberg told reporters, “I always believe the best way to deal with any difference of opinion is to sit down and talk about them and that's what I will do with President Macron.”

When asked to comment on Macron's outspoken attack, he said, “Look at what we have achieved. Ours is a heavily strong, agile and adaptable alliance.”

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At Macron's suggestion that the US was far less reliable for Europe, he said, “The US is not leaving Europe but coming back to Europe.”

He said, “I would remind you that Allies are investing more in our defence than ever, there are new command structures in places and NATO is doing more together than for decades.”

“There is no doubt that NATO is able to adapt and respond to what is a more unpredictable and uncertain world.”

“In the past when we have had our differences our strength has always been our ability to overcome such differences and I am absolute certain we can do that now. That is what we will do including France.”

To those who fear the EU has ambitions to undertake the tasks currently done by NATO, he said, “The EU cannot replace NATO, that is the clear message from our allies. We need a strong Europe and a strong NATO and there is no contradiction between the two.”

“NATO has grown stronger over the past 70 years and provides security for one billion people. We have strengthened our defence with more forces and NATO plays a key role in the fight against international terrorism.”

He said, “There is no way European unity can replace transatlantic unity. We need both because Europe cannot defend itself, especially after Brexit. We have to realise this.”

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“My other message to President Macron and the leaders’ meeting in London is that we are 29 democracies and there will inevitably be differences. We have seen this all the way back to the Suez crisis.”

“But it’s the responsibility of all allies to ensure we act strongly and support multi-lateral institutions like NATO, especially as live in such uncertain times.”

Macron has hinted France will be Europe’s only power with nuclear weapons after Brexit and, on this, the NATO chief said, “We have three nuclear powers in the alliance, the US, the UK and France and we need to keep the alliance and Europe together, not compete with each other.”

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter at The Parliament Magazine

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