

**Jens Stoltenberg
Secretary General of NATO**

**Defense Writers Group
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Moderator: Mr. Secretary General, good morning.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: Good morning, good to see you.

Moderator: Thank you, sir. Well, we welcome you and all of the reporters to this Defense Writers Group discussion hosted by the Project for Media and National Security which is part of George Washington University's School of Media and public Affairs.

We're honored to have the Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, as our guest. This is just one day after he convened an extremely important summit of the 30 NATO member nations in Brussels. So Mr. Secretary General, thank you for this opportunity to engage directly with Washington's premier national security reporters.

We know, sir, you have a hard stop in 45 minutes so I'll start the discussion right off with a question before calling on other reporters. Some of you emailed me as requested to put in a request to ask. If you didn't just drop a direct chat line to me and I'll call on as many people as we can in 45 minutes.

So to open the discussion Mr. Secretary General, I listened very carefully to your statement immediately following the summit yesterday in which you said that NATO's relations with Russia were at, and I quote, "the lowest point since the Cold War." Given your stature and experience, sir, that warning pretty much kept me awake all last night so I'd like to ask you today, given that ominous assessment, what specifically will be done across the alliance to strengthen deterrence and defense against Russia? And does this affect in any way the ongoing dialogues with Ukraine and Georgia?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: What we will do when it comes to Russia is to pursue the dual-track approach. Meaning we need the strong deterrence on defense and we need because Russia is our neighbor, we need to talk to them.

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We will continue to invest in new modern capabilities. We have promised to keep up and to continue to implement the defense investment edge, meaning that we move towards spending two percent of GDP on defense, and we have a very good track record, seven years, seven consecutive years of increased defense spending since 2014 and I expect that to continue so there will be more money for everything from air defense systems to modern fighter jets to high readiness of our forces and so on. That's important for our readiness and our collective defense.

We have also agreed to invest more together in a NATO common funded budget that will also enable us to invest more effectively or more efficient because we believe that a NATO common funded budget is a force multiplier and this can be used for investing in infrastructure, prepositioned equipment, equipment, all of that.

There are many more things to say, but we are doing a lot of things to strengthen our defense. But we will continue to talk to the Russians because, partly because we need to strive for a better relationship; but even if we don't believe in a better relationship in the near or foreseeable future, we need to manage a difficult relationship with Russia to address risk, to do what we call risk reduction transparency to prevent incidents and accidents along our borders when we have more military presence. There is a risk for incidents and accidents that can spiral out of control and we need to prevent that.

But also of course for this arms control. Therefore we must welcome the extension of the New START Agreement and all allies welcome and support that President Biden is going to meet with President Putin. We welcome the opportunity to consult with him ahead of his meeting with President Putin and for us dialogue is not a sign of weakness, it's a sign of strength. So President Biden has a united NATO behind him when he meets with President Putin on Wednesday.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

Our next question is from Michael Gordon of the Wall Street Journal.

DWG: Thank you. I'd like to follow up on the Russia issue, please.

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The Black Sea region remains tense and Russia's fleet is blocking the northern half of the Black Sea. The Russians still have other forces in the region. [Zapad] is coming up.

NATO has what's called an enhanced forward presence in the Baltic region. It only has a so-called tailored forward presence in the Black Sea region.

My questions are, what does NATO need to do to be better postured in the Black Sea region? What is NATO going to do to be better prepared for potential Russian escalation in this particular region?

And a related question, the Russians have clearly positioned forces or are supporting proxies in Ukraine and Georgia on the assumption that it would doom any prospect for these countries being considered for NATO membership. Should NATO in principle be willing to consider membership for a country that has Russian or Russian-enabled forces on its territory?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: I fully understand and I agree that it is important to look at the posture, where we have deployed NATO troops and forces like we have with battle groups in the eastern part of the alliance and the forward presence we have in the Black Sea region or Romania. And we will constantly assess whether there is a need to increase our presence both in the Baltic region and the Black Sea region.

But that's only part of the picture. It's only part of our response to the pattern of more aggressive behavior by Russia we've seen especially since 2014. Because we have to remember that as important as what we have deployed or our NATO presence in the eastern part of the alliance, our ability to reinforce. And we have tripled the size of the NATO Response Force. We have increased our naval and air presence in both the Black and the Baltic Sea regions. And as part of our increased defense spending we are continuing to increase the readiness of our forces. We have also modernized our command structure with a new command in Norfolk, Virginia to make sure that we're able to move forces quickly across the Atlantic. And then we have a new command in old Germany which has been responsive to the plan and prepared also for moving forces across Europe and I participated in Steadfast Defender off the coast of Portugal just a few weeks ago and that exercise was actually about how to move forces across the Atlantic into Europe and into the Black Sea region,

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and we actually exercised the deployment of our High Readiness Joint Task force, or the DJTF deployed to Romania.

So the reason why I say this, I accept that the counting troops and numbers and battalions and so on which are already in place is relevant, but it's only part of the picture and NATO's strength has always been based on our ability to reinforce and to support any ally that might be under some kind of effect or even worse an attack.

Then you asked me about Georgia --

DWG: Should the presence of Russian-enabled forces on the territory of Ukraine and also Georgia preclude consideration of membership for those countries.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: The main focus now is on reform. And of course there are ways to deal with - I'll not speculate about that because the reality is that now the main focus on membership when it comes to regarding membership when it comes to Ukraine and Georgia, that is related to whether they meet the NATO standards, and that's the reason why we so much support the efforts to continue to reform, to modernize the defense and security institutions and that's the main topic and the main issue when it comes to whether these countries are ready for membership or not.

The other message on Ukraine and Georgia is that it is for Ukraine and Georgia and the 30 NATO allies to decide when they're ready to join NATO. It's not for Russia. Russia cannot veto whether an independent sovereign nation can join NATO or not. That's the sovereign right of any nation to decide its own path.

Moderator: Thank you very much.

The next question will come from Yasmin Tadjdeh of National Defense Magazine.

DWG: Hi, sir. Thanks so much for doing this.

Former U.S. President Donald Trump criticized and put a lot of pressure on NATO members to invest more in the alliance. With the new administration in place in the United States do you believe that pressure is going to continue, maybe in a more gentle way or subtle way? And if so, how many nations or

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alliance members do you think would reach the two percent GDP?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: On defense spending or burden sharing within the alliance, we have seen the persistent, consistent message from the United States over many years from different U.S. administrations. The style may differ, but the constancy of the message is the same, and that is that allies need to invest more in defense. We need fairer burden sharing. And it was actually under the Obama-Biden administration back in 2014 at the Wales summit, the NATO summit in Wales in 2014, that we agreed to the defense investment pledge that says that we should move towards spending two percent of GDP on defense.

At that time, and I was there, only three allies met the two percent guidelines, spending two percent of GDP on defense. I was there, and I remember that I thought well, it's great to make decisions and it's good to have good intentions and great promises, but we have seen so many times before that when the leaders meet in the UN or NATO or in other international organizations, they make pledges and promises but they don't deliver.

On the defense investment pledge, allies have delivered. They are making good on their promises. Because since 2014 after years of cutting defense spending across Europe and Canada, all allies have increased. And now ten allies meet the guideline of spending two percent.

I'm not saying that it's perfect or enough, but I'm saying that ten is much more than three, actually more than three times as many. And even those who are not yet at two percent, the majority have plans in place to be at two percent by 2024 which was the target date for the pledge made in 2014.

Also, for instance Germany, is not at two percent but they have increased defense spending with around 80 percent. That really makes a difference. And in total across Europe and Canada the allies have added 260 billion extra euros for defense since they made the pledge in 2014. And this was the message also at this summit of course from all allies, especially those allies who are already spending two percent, that we need to continue to invest. It was a message from President Biden, it's a message from me, it's a message from all of us. But the good news is that we are on the right track, allies are stepping up, and it shows that the allies take this very seriously.

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DWG: Just very quick to follow up, I thought it was 11, but you just said 10?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: I don't have the papers in front of me, but this number varies a bit because it depends on - I think it's 10, that's the latest number, but it may be that you've seen 11 because this is defense expenditure. Then of course the GDP data is based on data from the OCD and the RMS and these may vary. They revise up and down. And then suddenly a country that was at two percent, suddenly is 1.99 or something. So of course it matters whether it's 1.99 or 2, but the most important thing is that we actually see substantial increase in [money] and then the percent of the GDP may vary a bit depending on revised GDP numbers.

Moderator: Thank you very much. The next question is from Luis Martinez of ABC.

DWG: Mr. Secretary, thank you very much for doing this.

Yesterday you were asked about the differences between the Trump administration and the Biden administration and you said, "it's different." We've heard President Biden on this trip say Article 5 is a sacred obligation. Did you get the sense and from your interactions with President Trump that he did not consider that to be the same?

Also you talked about the resiliency of the alliance, speaking about weathering different political administrations. Do you think that the Trump focus, or non-focus on NATO as an alliance strengthened the alliance? Or do you think it actually weakened it for a time?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: I fully accept that you all ask those questions. At the same time I hope that you can respect that my job is to keep this alliance together and to make sure that we work well together despite the fact that there are different leaders in different NATO allied countries and they are shifting over time. And for me to fulfill that task, I don't think my main responsibility is to characterize different leaders. It is obvious that everyone can see that we have different leaders and they have their different personalities, they have their different styles, they have their different messages, and it's interesting to sort it out, but me as

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Secretary General, the main responsibility is to lead the North Atlantic Council, lead this organization, and to keep this family together. I don't think it will be helpful if I start to characterize for good or for bad the different leaders and start to compare them.

What I can say is that I strongly appreciate, welcome the fact that we have now a President in the United States, President Biden, who is so clear and so rock solid on his commitment to Article 5, to NATO, to our collective defense. And not only that, but he knows things, he knows Europe. He has worked with NATO allies for many years. That's a great advantage for all of us.

The second thing I'd like to say is that to have a strong alliance is good for Europe but it's also good for the United States. No other major power has 29 friends and allies as the United States has been in NATO and President Biden is aware of that.

The last thing I would say on this issue is the following. Yes, we had our difficulties. Yes, we had some discussions and some differences over the last four years between the different allies. You can read about that in newspapers, you have seen reports about that, and that's obvious. But over those four years actually NATO went from 29 to 30 members. NATO allies, North America and Europe, stepped up and did more together. More exercises, more activities, and there was an increased number of U.S. troops in Europe, and European allies stepped up too with more investments in defense.

So what we have seen is that over also years where we have political differences, discussions among allies, NATO delivered. NATO proved once again that the strength of our multilateral institution, NATO goes beyond individual political leaders. That's the reason why we need strong institutions in shifting times. And NATO is able to weather shifting political winds.

There will be new and different leaders in the future also in different NATO allied countries, but I'm certain that NATO will remain the cornerstone of our collective security because it is in the national security interests of each of us, that we stand together.

So I don't deny that we have seen differences, but at the same

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time it proves the strength of NATO and the importance of strong international institutions in NATO, or at NATO to maintain the bond between North America and Europe in NATO.

Moderator: Thank you so much.

The next question from Eric Schmitt of the New York Times.

DWG: Mr. Secretary, yesterday you confirmed that NATO would train Afghan Security Forces out of country after coalition forces including the United States leave sometime next month. Can you provide some more details about that? Which countries will this training take place in? What's the scope? How many Afghan troops do you believe can be trained at any given time? And when would this training begin?

And second, related, can you update us on the discussions with the Turks about the security arrangements at Kabul International Airport after the withdrawal? Thank you.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: Thank you for the question. The answer is in a way the same to both of them. We are working on the modalities. We are now working on the details. And I hope that we will have the different elements in place as soon as possible because as you know, we have decided to end our military presence in Afghanistan, the support mission after almost two decades. But we will continue to support the Afghans with funding for the Afghan Security Forces. That's extremely important because they absolutely depend on continued international support from NATO allies and all NATO allies have committed to do so and that was restated at the summit yesterday.

Second, we are working on out of country training. We are all considering some specific countries but I'm just afraid of starting to share those names and potential countries before things are more finalized than they are today.

Also the scale and the scope of the issues we are now discussing with allies, but we have made a decision together that we will work on establishing out of country training.

The same with the airport. NATO allies are ready to provide funding for some services to continue the airport, Kabul International Airport, and also Turkey, United States and other allies are in dialogue and that was also discussed during the

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summit and on the margins of the summit yesterday on how to for instance provide security or protection of the airport.

So absolutely important and relevant questions. We are working on those issues and hope to be able to give answers and clarify that we will have all the modalities in place as soon as possible.

DWG: What's your alternative if the Turks ultimately decide not to continue the security at the airport?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: The Turks have been there for many years as part of the NATO mission. Turkey has contributed to our presence in Afghanistan over many many years and we value very much the Turkish contributions. But of course the whole complex for that [person] changes a bit since we are ending the military presence.

I know that also other countries are considering to continue with some kind of critical infrastructure including hospital, medical services and so on. So these allies are now working together. And I'm confident that we'll find a solution where we will have some critical elements in place provided by different allies. The fact of which allies provide what kind of services and support again it would be too early to say.

Moderator: Thank you.

The next question is from Theresa Hitchens of Breaking Defense.

DWG: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General, for doing this.

My question is about the development of the new Strategic Concept. I was hoping that you might inform us a little bit about where you're going with that and whether that's in line with the new or the emerging Joint Warfighting Concept that the United States is putting together.

And when you talk about common funding under that, can you talk a little bit about where that common funding might happen? In the past, for example, the AWACS plane was a bit article for common funding. There was some common funding in satellite communications.

If you could give us an idea of what you're looking at as you go

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forward with that I'd be very grateful. Thank you.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: The Strategic Concept is something we now have initiated that we will make our new Strategic Concept. I will lead that process. I will, of course, work with all allies and at the end of the day 30 of us have to agree to the new concept. We will then agree a new Strategic Concept at the next NATO summit in Madrid in 2022.

The need to up the Strategic Concept reflects that the world has changed since last time we agreed a Strategic Concept which was in 2010 in Lisbon. At that time we actually hoped, or we worked for a strategic partnership with Russia. Of course Russia is mentioned in the Strategic Concept but in a much more positive on account of, as a way of working with them in the Strategic Partnership. That's not the case now where we see a [inaudible] of behavior by Russia and aggressive actions against neighbors, so there was a need to change the language and the message in Russia.

China is not mentioned with one single word in the current Strategic Concept. In one way or another I'm absolutely certain that China will be reflected and the challenges that China poses will be reflected in a new Strategic Concept. As you can see from the communique agreed at the summit we, of course, state that we need to engage with China but we also need to take into account the challenges that Russia and China poses to our alliance.

It's also an opportunity to recommit to our core values and of course part of the context that the new Strategic Concept will be developed in is also that we have developed new documents when it comes to our defense spending and our posture which will then also be reflected. It's not for me to preempt the conclusions of the process which we start today, but I'm confident that it will be a very strong and clear and important strategic concept that we would agree in the next year at the summit.

Sorry, what was the second question?

DWG: It was related to the question of how you align future common funding with the New Strategic Concept. Also my key interest here is the question of Joint All Domain Command and Control and the role that's playing now in the U.S. Strategic Concept, the Joint Warfighting Concept, and how NATO might or

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might not integrate that into its new Strategic Concept and common funding. Thank you.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: First of all, when it comes to Strategic Concept, I think what I said gave the main guidelines, the main ideas for what is the purpose of stating the Strategic Concept. But now we start the process. Allies agree that we need to update because the world has changed so fundamentally since last time we agreed the concept. The revise started just hours after we agreed to open the concept, to tell exactly what will be the content of the new concept. And then that will be the order of making sure we have a good process. So therefore, we can tell you more about that when we have gone a bit further in the deliberations and the work on the new Strategic Concept. So that's the Strategic Concept.

On common funding, allies agreed the NATO [Defensive Circuit] which is an ambitions, forward-looking agenda and the fact that we are now opening a new chapter in the transatlantic relationship. With the U.S. administration strongly committed to NATO, with a forward looking ambitious NATO [transatlantic] agenda that covers everything from reinforcing our collective defense, sharpening our technological edge, strengthening our resilience, and also addressing climate change for the first time in NATO's history, the security impact of climate change, and that we'll do more together. But to do more together we need also to invest more together. Therefore, allies agree that we need to strengthen, to add something to all the NATO common funded budgets. We have a military budget, we have an infrastructure or investment budget, and then we have the civil budget.

Again, what leaders have agreed is the direction that we need to do more, invest more together because the common funded budgets are [inaudible] suppliers, but the specific requirements will now be worked on, but increased common funding will enable us to do more command and control together, more exercises, high readiness, invest in critical infrastructure, and many other things.

So yeah, this is a great thing that we now have the ability to use more common funding for strengthening NATO.

Moderator: Thank you.

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Jack Detsch at Foreign Policy is next.

DWG: Thanks for doing this, Secretary General.

I'm curious just about the back and forth yesterday over Ukraine and their Membership Action Plan. President Zelenskyy of Ukraine obviously tweeted yesterday that they were in. It seems like they're far short of that. But I'm just curious if you can kind of give us an update of where the Ukrainians are along their Membership Action Plan and what reforms you would like to see from where you sit.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: NATO allies reiterated their policy on open door, meaning that NATO's door remains open and we have proven that over the last two years with the enlargement of NATO with North Macedonia and also Montenegro.

Ukraine is an [inaudible] country. We provide support to them especially to continue to modernize, to reform their defense and security institutions, civilian political control over their security services and not least, fighting corruption. We have a different building integrity program which is very much about how to fight corruption. It's part of the reforms which Ukraine have already embarked on but we need more. We work with them to make sure that they are fully implemented.

So our focus now is on reform, partly because that has value in itself. It will make the Ukrainian society, the Ukrainians more resilient, less vulnerable for foreign, Russian interference which has value in itself but it will also help Ukraine move towards NATO membership. To grant or to agree on the Membership Action Plan we need consensus among 30 allies. This was not the focus of this summit. We have language on Ukraine and Georgia in the communique but that is very much reflecting the position also stated at our last summit. So our main focus now is to support the Ukrainians with continued reform efforts.

Moderator: Thanks.

Next question is to Nick Schifrin of the PBS News Hour.

DWG: Thank you very much Secretary General. One on Afghanistan and one on Russia.

If I could go back to the questions that Eric was asking, one of

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the third aspects of what's being discussed here, as you know, is "over the horizon". Was there a discussion on the kinds of capacity that could be maintained and under what circumstances those capacities would be used, for example, if Kabul was threatened. Do you have any sense that the U.S. has actually made a decision on that?

And on Russia, as you know, both the Americans and the Russians seem to want to discuss strategic stability but both define that in different ways, so this is a question essentially about arms control. Have there been discussions within NATO about what the U.S. is looking for, of course trying to corral Russian non-nuclear weapon systems, and of course Russia's version is trying to corral not only American non-nuclear systems but also missile defense. I was wondering if there were discussions about that. Thank you.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: What we have discussed and not agreed at NATO is that we will provide support to Afghanistan off the [Inaudible] Support Mission with funding, with out of country training. We are working on that now and with helping to maintain critical infrastructure including the airport and also some medical services.

This is important for NATO but also important for the whole international community including diplomatic presence of other countries and of course development aid and so on.

And then with the civilian presence, continued NATO civilian presence in Kabul to provide advice, capacity building for the Afghan Security institutions.

Over the horizon is something which the United States is now looking into but it's not for me to go into the details of what kind of conservations the United States is doing related to that to work.

On Strategic Stability, the most important message is that NATO is and has been and will continue, that it's also fair to say in the decisions we made at the summit, the platform for coordinating, consulting, on arms control issues.

Of course many of these arms control agreements are, for instance, the New START or the INF Treaty, before [inaudible] the treaty. They are bilateral treaties between the United States

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and Russia. At the same time they matter for all allies, and especially for, well, for all allies. Therefore I welcome the fact that the United States is using NATO as the platform coordinate, consult, as also happened now when President Biden met with all the other leaders and discussed with them ahead of his meeting with President Putin.

NATO has been on the forefront of arms control for decades. I see a need for, partly of course as we welcome the expansion of the New START, but we need arms control that covers more weapon systems especially now since we don't have the INF Treaty that covered intermediate systems. We now only have the New START covering the long range or the strategic warheads. But we have some non-strategic or tactical intermediate range, many other systems.

Then we need also some spaces to start looking to how can we conduct arms control when it comes to new constructed technology? Hypersonic weapons or artificial intelligence or autonomous systems. It opens up a total new chapter and a new dimension in everything we do on arms control. We still have a long ways to go but we see the fundamental change in technology that is relevant for military capabilities more than others. We need to address the issue of how and is it possible to develop any kind of meaningful arms control agreements that we are seeing these new novel weapon systems.

And thirdly, we have the issue of China. China invests heavily in new modern capabilities and one of the main messages from this summit is that all allies recognize this, that the rise of China matters for our security. I think I mentioned, this is actually the first time we have a clear united position among allies on China. And that also includes the issue of China's heavy investments in new mobile missile systems including nuclear and in some space we need also to make sure that China is part of effective global arms control arrangements.

DWG: Sorry, sir, just a very quick follow-up. Do you anticipate President Putin and President Biden announcing at least some kind of like working group or making some kind of progress to discuss arms control, strategic --

Secretary General Stoltenberg: I'll be very careful in speculating about that. I think the meeting will take place tomorrow. We hope that it's possible to make progress on arms

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control. We welcome the decision by the United States to extend the New START Agreement but that's only the first step. So of course if New START is only an extension, New START is only first step and it extends for five years, of course there is a need for some real efforts to address all these other aspects of arms control and all the other dimensions of arms control. So exactly how that will be organized, well, it's not for me to announce. But allies supported very much that President Putin and President Biden meet and also that arms control is high on that agenda.

Moderator: Two quick housekeeping matters as we are under the minutes left. There are more than 40 correspondents on the call. Thank you all for coming. I'm sorry we won't get to every question. I'm sure you understand.

And Mr. Secretary General, your staff asked me to note that the latest Defense Expenditure Report was published on the NATO website on June 11th. It's 10 allies at the two percent mark. So thank you.

The next question comes from Joe Gould of Defense News.

DWG: Thank you so much Thom and Mr. Secretary.

While we're talking about arms control, the communique included declaration that NATO members do not pretend to deploy ground-based nuclear missiles in Europe. If you've been making that clear in your public remarks for years and you have at least since 2019, can you help us understand why was it important to include that declaration in the communique? And also on the timing why and how was it important to do it at this time?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: First of all I think that a communique serves many purposes. If you read through the communique you will find many, many lines and paragraphs which are restating policies we have had for many years. So that's one of the purposes of the communique it's actually yes, we've said it before but then we repeat it again.

So I've seen that in one way since it was stated many years ago and consistent over many years, stated, that we will not mirror what Russia is doing. We don't have any plans to deploy nuclear capable missiles in Europe, land based. Then yes, I've said it before but that's actually an argument for restating it so we don't create any room for misunderstanding or wrong

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interpretation of the NATO position on that issue.

So that has been a consistent message with different U.S. administrations that we don't have any plans to deploy land based nuclear capable missiles in Europe.

But at the same time we will, of course, respond and we are in the process of responding to the demise of the INF Treaty and the deployment of different novel Russian missile systems in Europe or in Russia. This is partly about conventional capabilities. It's partly about air and missile defense. Land based but also for instance 5th generation aircraft. You may have seen that several NATO allies also in accordance with NATO defense spending are now investing in new, modern, in new air defense capabilities. For instance Patriot batteries and so on as well as readiness of our forces. And it's also about, of course, continue to push for arms control.

So we are in the process of strengthening our collective defense, our capabilities not least in Europe as response to past Russian behavior and the demise of the INF Treaty and then new Russian missile systems as part of that pattern. But we respond in the way we find most effective. We don't mirror missile by missile, battle tank by battle tank, or plane by plane what Russia does, and therefore it has been a message over several years that we are not, we don't have any plans to deploy land based nuclear capable missiles in Europe.

Moderator: I'd like to squeeze in one more before our time expires, Mr. Secretary General. It's From John Donnelly, Congressional Quarterly Roll Call.

DWG: Mr. Secretary, cyber was an issue that came up yesterday and this week at the NATO meeting, and it's really the one area where there are ongoing attacks on NATO members. Can you give us a little bit more detail on what this new commitment means for member nations?

Secretary General Stoltenberg: Cyber has been important for NATO for several years and as you know, we decided in 2016 that a cyber attack can trigger Article 5, our collective defense clause, because it can potentially be as a kinetic attack. So in one way we treat all the different domains - air, sea, land, cyber, and also space in the same way. We are ready to respond and an attack in any domain can of course trigger Article 5.

Then what is new is that we see more sophisticated, we see more frequent cyber attacks and it demonstrates that cyberspace is continuously contested, meaning that it is kind of an ongoing contest in cyberspace. It's almost something we see not every day, but we see it as a constant threat and cyberspace is at all times contested.

That's the reason why we as part of the decisions we made at the summit yesterday are stepping up and in line with NATO's defensive mandate, we are a defensive organization, we have agreed that we should change the conditions for bad actors by increasing the costs and denying potential benefits of cyber attacks.

This means partly to call out cyber attacks as we for instance did with SolarWinds, also with the failed cyber attack on OPCW, The Organization for Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. It's about hardening our own cyber defenses. And then it's also about offensive cyber. NATO has established and we are developing and strengthening the framework we have to be able to include offensive cyber in our missions and operations and for instance in the efforts of NATO allies to fight Daesh, offensive cyber was a tool we used. And it proved very important in reducing the cyber capabilities of Daesh which were very important in terms of funding, recruiting, and also [studying] their [program].

So we have also seen recently many cyber attacks across the United States. We have seen attempts to use cyber as a means to undermine the trusting of democratic institutions. So an important part of NATO then [inserting] in the agenda, we agreed yesterday, it's also about [resilience] and that covers of course also cyber defense, protecting our civilian infrastructure because it is so important. The first time our defense is resilient, cyber is part of that. And of course NATO also constantly strengthens our own networks and has to make sure that we are protecting our own cyber networks. And I have the honor of recently also inaugurating together the Portuguese Prime Minister Costa, the cutting age cyber academy outside Lisbon in Portugal. Just one of the many efforts we make to make sure that we are able to defend ourselves also in cyberspace.

Moderator: I just received permission from your headquarters for one final question. There's time. So we'll go to Courtney Kube of NBC News at the Pentagon.

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DWG: Hi. Thanks, Thom and welcome. It's great to have you.

Mr. Secretary General, just a very quick one for you if I might. There's been a lot of talk here in the U.S. about the Afghan interpreters who have been working with NATO for the last two decades, and getting them out before the U.S. and NATO troops leave. I'm wondering if NATO has any role in that, if there's any talk about NATO countries or any kind of effort to get these people out and get them to safety.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: First I will say there are many Afghans who have worked with us for many years, supported the NATO mission including interpreters and other local Afghan employees who have been very critical for our mission. I have met many of them during my different visits to Afghanistan. Therefore I also welcome the plans of several NATO allies to resettle Afghans who have worked for us in Afghanistan over these years. And I see that more and more allies do that.

NATO Is a multinational organization so it's not for us to grant visas or asylum. I cannot grant visas and asylum to NATO headquarters. It has to be individual countries. But I know that allies are doing that and I welcome that. We all have to recognize the extremely important job they have done, recognize the risks they have taken and therefore I also welcome the fact that I see that allies are giving them asylum and visas and resettling them in different ways.

Moderator: Mr. Secretary General, we thank you most sincerely for your time and wisdom and insight. It's been an extremely substantial conversation, so again, thanks to you and your staff and to all the correspondents who have joined us here today.

This ends our session.

Secretary General Stoltenberg: Thank you so much. Have a good day.

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