

After Trump's NATO Criticism, Countries Spend More On Defense

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David Greene talks to NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg, who met with President Trump this week. Top on the agenda was defense spending, Iran and the war on terrorism.

Transcript

DAVID GREENE, HOST:

President Trump once called the North Atlantic Treaty Organization obsolete, but the rhetoric Trump used on the campaign trail and in the early

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PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP: NATO has been working very closely with the United States. Our relationship is very good. Together, we've increased and really raised a lot of money from countries that weren't paying or weren't paying a fair share.

GREENE: Trump speaking there yesterday as he met with NATO's secretary general, Jens Stoltenberg, who joins us this morning in Washington. Mr. Secretary General, thanks again for coming on the program.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much for having me.

GREENE: So did President Trump's strategy work? Did his earlier criticism of NATO pressure countries into spending more for defense?

STOLTENBERG: So his very strong message has helped. And what we see now is that after years of decline or reducing defense spending across NATO allies in Europe and Canada, all allies have stopped the cuts. All allies have started to increase defense spending. And more and more allies have spent 2 percent, which is a NATO guideline of GDP on defense. So we still have a long way to go, but I commended the president yesterday for his strong message on burden sharing because all allies have to contribute to an alliance as NATO.

GREENE: Well, he kept up with at least a part of that strategy it seemed yesterday. He said, countries that don't contribute enough. He singled out Germany - will be, quote, "dealt with." What does that mean?

STOLTENBERG: It means that all allies have to do what they promised. And as I just said, that's exactly what is now happening. We didn't promise to meet the 2 percent target - 2 percent of GDP for defense - in one year. We promised to stop the cuts, gradually increase and then move towards 2 percent within a decade. So...

GREENE: But forgive me, what does dealt with mean? I mean, do you approve of that sort of language when you're talking about allies?

STOLTENBERG: Well, what we all do is that we meet, we discuss and we focus on the gaps and the need for - especially those allies spending less than 2 percent, that they have to do a bit more. And that's the way we have handled this issue all the way since we made the decision back in 2014, and that has made it possible for us to move forward. So I think we should just continue to do exactly what we've done the last year and then we'll continue to make progress.

GREENE: So the president mentioned the Iran nuclear deal yesterday, saying, again, what he has said before that it's, quote, "terrible." The U.S. pullout from that deal has divided the United States and Europe. I mean, an EU leader said this week that the U.S. seems almost like an enemy now. Are you feeling that in your job? And is that tension making it harder to keep the NATO alliance unified?

STOLTENBERG: So, honestly, there are differences. NATO is an alliance of 29 democracies, both sides of the Atlantic with different history, different geography but also sometimes different political views on serious issues like, for instance, the Iran nuclear deal or climate change, the Paris accord or trade issues. We have had that kind of differences before in NATO, dating back to the Suez Crisis in the 1950s or the Iraq War in 2003 and many other examples.

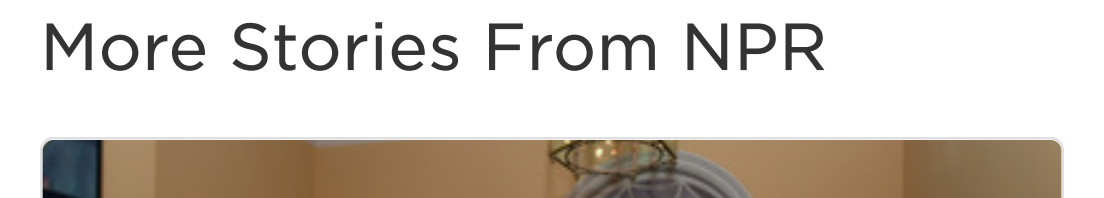
But the strength of NATO is that we, despite those differences, have proven again and again that we are able to unite around NATO's core task. And that is that we're able to protect each other and stand together because we are stronger together than alone. So I'm not saying that these differences are of no concern for me, but I'm saying that NATO has proven that, despite differences on important issues, we have been able to maintain the unity as a transatlantic alliance defending each other.

GREENE: Jens Stoltenberg is the secretary general of NATO. He was meeting with President Trump yesterday at the White House and was kind enough to join us this morning. We appreciate your time. Thank you so much.

STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much.

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