

Beat: Politics

US SECRETARY ANTONY BLINKEN & NATO SEC GENERAL JENS STOLTENBERG BEFORE MEETING

TO REVITALIZE THE ALLIANCE

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USPA NEWS - On March 22-25, Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken traveled to Brussels, Belgium, to participate in the NATO Foreign Ministerial. During this visit, he met with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Allied Foreign Ministers, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Josep Borrell, and Belgian Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs Sophie Wilmès. Secretary Blinken will emphasize the strength of the Transatlantic relationship, NATO's ongoing success in safeguarding the Transatlantic community, the Alliance's adaptation to new security challenges, and the Administration's desire to repair, revitalize, and raise the level of ambition in U.S.-EU relations. We publish the full transcript of the conversation of Antony J. Blinken, Secretary of State with his host, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, at the new NATO headquarters, in Brussels. I've come here to express the United States' steadfast commitment to that alliance, which has been the cornerstone of peace, prosperity, stability for the transatlantic community, for more than 70 years. And I've come to Brussels because the United S

CONVERSATION US SECRETARY ANTONY BLINKEN WITH NATO SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG AT NATO HEADQUARTERS-----

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: Secretary Blinken, dear Tony, welcome to NATO headquarters.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you.

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: It's really great to see you here. And you have decades of foreign policy experience and national security experience, and I know you have a strong personal commitment to NATO, to the transatlantic bond. So therefore, I really appreciate this opportunity to welcome you on your first visit to Europe, to the NATO Headquarters.

We have now a unique opportunity to start a new chapter in the transatlantic relationship. And I strongly welcome the Biden administration's message on rebuilding alliances and strengthening NATO. This is what our NATO 2030 initiative is all about. Because we face great global challenges: Russia's destabilizing activities, the threat of terrorism, cyber attacks and nuclear proliferation, disruptive technologies, and the rise of China, and the security impact of global warming and climate change. No country and no continent can face these challenges alone. Not Europe alone. Not America alone. But Europe and America together, in NATO. And our meeting today will be an opportunity to address how we strengthen this bond as we prepare for our summit in Brussels later this year.-----

AT THE SUMMIT WE WILL SET AN AMBITIOUS TRANSATLANTIC AGENDA FOR THE FUTURE TO REINFORCE OUR UNITY-----

At the summit, we will set an ambitious transatlantic agenda for the future to reinforce our unity and solidarity and ensure we remain strong both as a military and as a political alliance; to broaden our approach to security by strengthening our resilience, preserving our technological edge, addressing the security impact of climate change and working more together; and to take a more global approach by protecting the rules-based international order, which is being challenged by authoritarian powers like Russia and China.-----

So we have a lot to discuss. So Secretary Blinken, Tony, once again, welcome to NATO. You are here not just among allies, but also among friends. And therefore, so much welcome to NATO.

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Secretary General Jens, thank you so much for your very warm welcome. I do want to start before we actually begin by expressing my own horror at the violence that occurred yesterday in Boulder, Colorado, and offer my deepest condolences to the loved ones of those who were killed, including a law enforcement officer.

Having said that, it is a pleasure to be back at NATO. This is actually my first visit to the new headquarters "" my first time at NATO as U.S. Secretary of State. So, again, thank you Secretary General for hosting all of us today. We very much look forward to a productive couple of days of discussions at really a pivotal moment for the alliance.

I've come here to express the United States' steadfast commitment to that alliance, which has been the cornerstone of peace, prosperity, stability for the transatlantic community, for more than 70 years. And I've come to Brussels because the United States wants to rebuild our partnerships, first and foremost, with our NATO allies. We want to revitalize the alliance to make sure it's as strong and effective against the threats of today as it has been in the past.

Secretary General, our conversations over the next two days will cover, as you've noted, a broad agenda, including NATO's ongoing

mission in Afghanistan; our regional security efforts, in particular, a response to Russia's aggression; and NATO's 2030 agenda. We share the Secretary General's vision of a NATO that has the capabilities to deter and defend against all manner of threats to our collective security, including threats like climate change and cyber attacks.

I'm very much looking forward to these conversations. I'm grateful, again, to you, Jens, for your remarkable leadership of this institution and very happy to be back at NATO.

MODERATOR: We'll take a question from Jennifer Hansler, please.-----

QUESTION: Hi. Mr. Secretary, what will you tell your NATO partners about the U.S. plans for Afghanistan? How are U.S. diplomatic efforts going? Will the U.S. still be on the ground on May 1st? And Mr. Secretary General, what do you hope to hear from the U.S. on this front? And do you think conditions on the ground are stable enough to have a U.S. withdrawal by the 1st? Thank you.-----

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thanks very much. As you know, we have a review underway in the United States. I'm here today in part to share some of our initial thinking with our NATO allies, but maybe even more important, I'm here to listen and consult, because that is what allies do. We heard this the other week at the NATO Defense Ministerial, but it's just as true today. We went in together, we have adjusted together, and, when the time is right, we'll leave together. There's a common theme or a common word, and that's "together." Last week, President Biden noted that it would be tough to meet the May 1 deadline for a full withdrawal, but whatever the United States ends up doing will be informed by the thinking of our NATO allies, which I'll take back to me after these conversations and consultations. Tactical decisions aside, we are united with our NATO allies in seeking to bring a responsible end to this conflict and to remove our troops from harm's way just as we are collectively determined to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists who could threaten the United States or our allies.

And today, one day after the five-year anniversary of the attack on this wonderful city in Brussels, we're committed to that first objective as we are to the second. As we consult about the way forward on Afghanistan, we'll do so as an alliance, and those two imperatives will continue to guide our thinking and, ultimately, our decisions.-----

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: There are many reasons why we welcome that Secretary Blinken is here today, but one important reason is that we have an excellent opportunity to sit down, all 30 allies, and to consult on the way forward in Afghanistan. Because just as Secretary Blinken just stated, we went in together, we have adjusted together, and we when "" will leave together when the time is right. Therefore, we need to consult and to coordinate and make decisions together. And being together at this foreign ministerial meeting is one important part of that process where allies address this very difficult and important issue together as an alliance. European allies and partners from all over the world have been together with the United States in Afghanistan for two decades. More than 100,000 non-U.S. troops have served there and more than 1,000 have paid the ultimate price. So this is really a demonstration of alliance unity "" the first and only time we invoked our collective defense clause, Article Five "" and we have seen the commitment from all allies in staying the course in Afghanistan, making sure that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for international terrorists.

The challenge now is that we have the peace talks. We strongly welcome them. They are fragile, but they are the only path to a lasting political solution in Afghanistan. And therefore, we strongly support and welcome the renewed efforts by the United States, by Secretary Blinken, to create progress, to re-energize the peace talks, because that's the only way to reach a lasting solution. To achieve that, all parties need to negotiate in good faith. We need to involve also all the actors in the region. And we need to see a reduction of violence, and Taliban needs to stop supporting international terrorists, including al-Qaida. So there is a need for working together. This meeting provides a good platform for doing exactly that. And then we will continue to consult as we move together and address the challenges in Afghanistan in the coming weeks.

MODERATOR: We've got time for one last question from Ansgar Haase from DPA.-----

QUESTION: Secretary Blinken, you will have your first meeting with German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas here in Brussels. Can you tell us if you will talk with him about the Nord Stream 2 pipeline? And can you tell us if the United States will accept the completion of the project, and if so, where do you see room for compromise?

And also a question to the Secretary General. The ministers will endorse a policy paper on the security implications of climate change today. Can you tell us a little bit more about this paper? And can you already promise today that NATO will be climate neutral by 2050? Thank you.-----

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you. I very much look forward to seeing my German counterpart. We've had a number of conversations already, and I know we will have a lot to cover when we actually get together, face to face or mask to mask, as we do these days. And I suspect that Nord Stream 2 will come up in the conversation. President Biden has been very clear in saying that he believes the pipeline is a bad idea; it's bad for Europe, bad for the United States.

Ultimately, it's in contradiction to the EU's own energy security goals. It has the potential to undermine the interests of Ukraine, Poland, a number of other close partners or allies. And I'm sure I'll have an opportunity to reiterate that, including the law in the

United States which requires us to sanction companies participating in the efforts to complete the pipeline. But we have a broad agenda to cover with Foreign Minister Maas, but I very much look forward to that conversation and to dealing with a lot of common challenges.-----

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: I very much welcome that foreign ministers during our meeting today and tomorrow are expected to endorse, agree, a report on how to strengthen NATO's efforts to respond to global warming, to climate change. Climate change is a crisis multiplier. Climate change is making the world a more dangerous place. And therefore, it matters for NATO and therefore, NATO has to address climate change. And that is what we're going to do in this meeting. And I think there are for NATO three roles to fill, three tasks to address. One is to fully understand the link between climate change and security. Melting ice will heat up a geopolitical competition in the High North but also in the Sahel, in many other places where we see increased competition over scarce resources. And therefore, climate change is impacting our security. We need to be the lead organization understanding that link between climate change and security.

Second, we need to adapt our missions and operations because military forces, they're operating out there in nature. And therefore, when we have more extreme weather, when we have more windy and wetter and warmer weather, it matters for our armed forces. So for instance, NATO is in Afghanistan. Last summer we had many days with more than 50 degrees Celsius. Extreme heat, it matters for our uniforms, the equipment, the vehicles, everything. A rising sea level will impact naval bases' infrastructure. So we need to adapt. And the third thing we need to do is that we need to make our contribution to reducing emissions, looking into how we can reduce the use of fossil fuels in different military operations and missions. And we are making the first step today by endorsing a report, as I expect ministers to do that later on today, where we actually decide that we will first of all assess the consequences of climate change in our assets and operations; we will start to integrate climate change into NATO military planning and exercises; and we have, as part of the NATO 2030, proposals on the table on how NATO can contribute to the overall goal of net zero. So not all decisions have yet been made. Some will be made today and some will then be continued to be discussed as part of NATO 2030. And I believe that when NATO leaders meet at the summit later this year, they will agree a very ambitious agenda also on climate change.-----

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. This concludes this press conference. Thank you.-----

SECRETARY BLINKEN: Thank you.-----

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG: Thank you. -----Source: US State of Department

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Editorial program service of General News Agency:

United Press Association, Inc.
3651 Lindell Road, Suite D168
Las Vegas, NV 89103, USA
(702) 943.0321 Local
(702) 943.0233 Facsimile
info@unitedpressassociation.org
info@gna24.com

www.gna24.com