



## **Trump Hosts NATO Leader, Expected to Press on Defense Spending**

Brittany De Lea

April 12, 2017

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg is at the White House Wednesday to meet with President Donald Trump amid escalating international tensions over U.S. airstrikes in Syria and repeated calls from the administration for NATO members to pay their fair share.

Trump is likely to double down on requests for member countries to step up defense spending Wednesday, according to John Glaser, associate director of foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute.

"I imagine the emphasis will be almost entirely on getting NATO allies to spend more on defense, at least getting to the point of 2 percent of GDP," Glaser told FOX Business.

The United States contributed more than 22% of the organization's budget in 2016, according to White House data, which constituted 3.6% of U.S. GDP at \$664 billion, far outpacing all other members. Out of all 28 countries that belonged to NATO at the start of this year, only five met the minimum contribution level in 2016—the U.S., Greece, the U.K., Estonia and Poland.

At a NATO meeting earlier this month, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson suggested each member state falling short of its financial obligations should create a payment plan to reach the 2%-of-GDP target by year's end.

"Our goal should be to agree at the May leaders meeting that by the end of the year all Allies will have either met the pledge guidelines or will have developed plans that clearly articulate how, with annual milestone progress commitments, the pledge will be fulfilled," Tillerson said.

The United States' relationship with NATO has showed signs of tension since President Trump took office. Trump has been a strong critic of the intergovernmental military-based alliance,

which, just prior to his inauguration, he called “obsolete” for its failure to make substantial headway in the fight against terror.

The Trump administration has since softened its stance, relieving early worries among member countries about the United States’ commitment to providing defense to NATO nations.

“The overall tone of the Trump team has changed considerably from one of deep skepticism about NATO’s continued relevance and even existence to a simple emphasis on more burden sharing, which is pretty consistent with prior administrations,” Glaser said.

On Tuesday, President Trump supported Montenegro’s admission to NATO. It will become the 29<sup>th</sup> member of the organization.

Stoltenberg’s White House visit comes ahead of Trump’s scheduled trip to Brussels next month to attend a gathering of NATO leaders.

While Stoltenberg has come out in support of the recent U.S. airstrikes in Syria, Trump told FOX Business Wednesday that the administration was not considering further military action in the region at this time. He did however implicate Russia for allowing Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s to remain in power.

“If Russia didn’t go in and back this animal [Assad], you wouldn’t have a problem right now,” Trump said.