



AP Fact Check: Trump’s Misstatements at NATO Summit

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President Donald Trump speaks during a meeting with Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau at Winfield House, Tuesday, Dec. 3, 2019, in London.

President Donald Trump on Tuesday wholly misrepresented the U.S. record on international trade disputes and dismissed as a mysterious “rumor” his own statement from months ago about Britain's health system.

Here's a look at some of his statements from London, where's he is attending a NATO meeting:

TRUMP: “We won, in the World Trade Organization, we won seven and a half billion dollars. We never used to win before me, because, before me, the United States was a sucker for all of these different organizations.” — remarks with NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg.

THE FACTS: He is wildly wrong to state that the U.S. never won victories in disputes taken to the trade organization before him.

The U.S. has always had a high success rate when it pursues cases against other countries at the WTO. In 2017, trade analyst Daniel Ikenson of the libertarian Cato Institute found that the U.S. had won 91% of times it brought a complaint that ended up being adjudicated by the Geneva-based trade monitor.

As Ikenson noted, countries bringing complaints to the organization tend to win because they don't bother going to the WTO in the first place if they don't have a strong case.

As for his claim that the U.S. “won” \$7.5 billion from the WTO, that's not quite right.

Trump was referring to a WTO decision in October siding with the U.S. on imposing tariffs on \$7.5 billion worth of European imports annually. The value of the tariffs on those imports is much less than \$7.5 billion.

The WTO announcement culminated a 15-year fight over EU subsidies for Airbus — a fight that began long before Trump was in office.

TRUMP: “We have a tremendous amount of captured fighters, ISIS fighters over in Syria. And, they're all under lock and key, but many are from France, many are from Germany. Many are from U.K. They are mostly from Europe.” — remarks with French President Emmanuel Macron.

MACRON: There are “very large number of fighters ... ISIS fighters coming from Syria, from Iraq and the region.” Those from Europe are "a tiny minority of the overall problem."

THE FACTS: Trump is incorrect to say the Islamic State fighters who were captured and held by the Kurds in Syria are mostly from Europe.

Of the more than 12,000 IS fighters in custody in Kurdish areas, only 2,500 are from outside the region of the conflict, some from Europe, some from other parts of the world. Most of the captured fighters — about 10,000 — are natives of Syria or Iraq.

European nations have indeed been reluctant to take detainees who came from Europe, frustrating Trump. But such detainees are far fewer than the majority he frequently claims.

TRUMP, speaking about claims that Britain's state-funded health care system would be part of future U.K.-U.S. trade talks: “I don't even know where that rumor started. We have absolutely nothing to do with it and we wouldn't want to. If you handed it to us on a silver platter, we want nothing to do with it.” — remarks with Jens Stoltenberg.

THE FACTS: He's referring to his own past statements as a “rumor.”

Asked about the National Health Service during a visit to Britain in June, he said “when you're dealing in trade, everything's on the table. So, NHS or anything else."

The service, which provides free health care to all Britons, could in fact be a bargaining chip in U.S.-U.K. trade talks. U.S. health-services firms can already bid for contracts if they have European subsidiaries. A future government could increase the amount of private-sector involvement or let U.S. companies bid directly.

As well, the U.S. could demand during trade talks that Britain pay American pharma firms more for drugs. Medicines became a big issue in negotiations on a revamped North American free trade deal, as the U.S. pushed successfully for tighter restrictions on the development in Canada and Mexico of generic versions of U.S.-patented drugs.

Leaked documents from preliminary talks between U.S. and U.K. negotiators over two years from July 2017 — released by the Labour Party last week — said “patent issues” around “NHS access to generic drugs will be a key consideration” in talks.

It's an overstatement to say the national health service as a whole would be up for sale, as Labour has alleged will happen if Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservatives win the Dec. 12 election and try to strike a post-Brexit trade deal with the U.S. Britain would not be “selling off” the health service, as Labour asserts, because taxpayers would still be footing the bill.

But it's also improbable to think U.S. negotiators would “want nothing to do" with Britain's health care market, despite Trump's words.

TRUMP, on protecting oilfields in Syria: “We have the oil, and we can do with the oil what we want.” — remarks with Stoltenberg.

THE FACTS: That's not true. The oil in Syria belongs to Syria and the U.S. can't do anything it wants with it.

As secretary of state, Rex Tillerson reviewed whether the U.S. could make money off the oil-rich areas and concluded there was no practical way to do so, said Brett McGurk, Trump's former special envoy to the global coalition to defeat the Islamic State. "Maybe there are new lawyers now, but it was just illegal for an American company to go and seize and exploit these assets," McGurk told a panel on Syria held in October by the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

Stephen Vladeck, a national security law professor at the University of Texas at Austin, said there is no solid legal argument the Trump administration could make if it sought to claim Syria's oil.

While Trump has said he will withdraw the bulk of roughly 1,000 American troops from Syria, he's made clear he will leave some military forces in the country to help secure the oil from any Islamic State resurgence.

The Pentagon has said it is committed to sending additional military forces to eastern Syria to "reinforce" control of the oil fields and prevent them from "falling back to into the hands of ISIS or other destabilizing actors."