

Here is what happened in Mike Pompeo's first NATO meeting: Attacks on Russia

Newly appointed U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo met with his NATO counterparts in Brussels on April 27, as alliance members exhibited a united front.

At the meeting, Pompeo agreed with diplomatic counterparts to combat Russia's behavior, a senior State Department official traveling with him said. Russia's actions in Syria, its suspected use of a nerve agent against a former Russian spy and his daughter in the UK and its cyber activities were all discussed, the official said.



U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, left, waits for the start of the North Atlantic Council at NATO headquarters in Brussels on Friday, April 27, 2018. NATO is set on Friday to hold its last major meeting in its old headquarters, with talks focused on strained ties with Russia, a fresh peace effort in Afghanistan and a new training mission for Iraq. (AP Photo/Virginia Mayo)

"There was consensus on Russian aggression, the scale of Russian aggression, and this being a problem that requires a response," he added.

The NATO ministers also agreed on the need for member countries to meet their commitments to defense spending, an action U.S. President Donald Trump has strongly called on them to take.

The meeting marks Pompeo's first full day on the job. The Senate confirmed his nomination to become secretary of state on Thursday, paving the way for him to embark on a trip that will include stops in Brussels, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Jordan.

"No other secretary in recent history has gone on a trip as quickly as he has," State Department spokeswoman Heather Nauert said on Thursday, as reported in CNN.

Pompeo said U.S. President Donald Trump "very much wanted me to get here." Trump sent Pompeo to North Korea three weeks ago to meet the isolated country's leader, Kim Jong Un, ahead of a summit with the U.S. president aimed at convincing Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear weapons program.

Pompeo's comments on Russia are particularly notable as President Donald Trump has often

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soft-pedaled criticism of the country and its President, Vladimir Putin, despite US intelligence assessments that Russia interfered in the 2016 election.

After joining the NATO meetings, Pompeo will visit Saudi Arabia, Jordan, and Israel over the weekend, the department said.

He will have to quickly address a wide array of pressing international issues, including the long wars in Syria and Afghanistan, as well as Russia's assertiveness around the globe.



From left, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and British Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson speak prior to a meeting of NATO foreign ministers at NATO headquarters in Brussels, April 27, 2018. (Photo: AP)

He comes to the department as U.S. envoys have been working with European allies France, Germany, and Britain on strengthening a 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, an issue Pompeo is expected to discuss while in Brussels.

Trump said he was pleased by the Senate's confirmation of Pompeo and called him a "patriot" with "immense talent, energy, and intellect."

"He will always put the interests of America first," Trump said in a statement. "He has my trust. He has my support."

Pompeo has said that among his first tasks would be to fill the many positions at the State Department left vacant under Tillerson, a former ExxonMobil chief executive who Trump fired in March over policy differences.

Sources: CNN, AP, AFP, and Reuters

With additional inputs from Shiva Shankar Pandian

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