



Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Defence Ministers

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(As delivered)



Good evening.

We have just had a very good meeting with the Defence Ministers of the NATO Allied countries.

We took further decisions to continue NATO's adaptation to the challenges we face.

A key component of our adaptation is a robust and agile command structure. This underpins both our strengthened deterrence and defence posture and our ability to project stability beyond NATO's borders.

At the Warsaw Summit last year, we decided to launch an assessment of the NATO command structure in light of the changed security environment. To ensure it can do the job across the full spectrum of Alliance missions. Today, we agreed on the outline design for an adapted NATO Command Structure, which will be the basis for further work.

Let me mention some key elements.

A Command for the Atlantic, to ensure that sea lines of communication between Europe and North America remain free and secure. This is vital for our transatlantic Alliance.

A new Command to improve the movement of military forces across Europe. And ways to strengthen the logistical function across the NATO Command Structure. Our military commanders will now flesh out the details. And the results of their work will be presented to Defence Ministers next February.

The adaptation of the NATO Command Structure will further strengthen our ability to reinforce Allies quickly and effectively. But military mobility is not only about new commands. It's also about the ability to move forces and equipment quickly, with the right transport means and the right infrastructure. Since 2014, we have made good progress in improving national legislation. Removing many bureaucratic hurdles to allow us to move forces across Allied territory. But much more needs to be done. We need to ensure that national legislation facilitating border crossing is fully implemented. We need enough transport capacity at our disposal, which largely comes from the private sector. And we need to improve infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, railways, runways and ports. So NATO is now updating the military requirements for civilian infrastructure.

Of course, military mobility is not just about the military. It requires a whole-of-government approach. So it's important that our defence ministers make our interior, finance and transport ministers aware of military requirements.

It's also important that NATO coordinates with the European Union and we are indeed working closely and actively together on this issue. For instance, we share information on standards, requirements, as well as challenges related to civilian infrastructure. So I envisage that military mobility could become a real flagship of NATO-EU cooperation.

Finally, we discussed ways to strengthen our cyber defences. We must be just as effective in the cyber domain as we are on land, at sea and in the air, with real-time understanding of the threats we face and the ability to respond however and whenever we choose. Today, ministers agreed on the creation of a new Cyber Operations Centre as part of the outline design for the adapted NATO Command Structure. This will strengthen our cyber defences, and help integrate cyber into NATO planning and operations at all levels. We also agreed that we will be able to integrate Allies' national cyber capabilities into NATO missions and operations. While nations maintain full ownership of those capabilities. Just as Allies own the tanks, the ships and aircraft in NATO missions.

NATO is a defensive alliance, whose actions are always subject to strict political oversight and always act in accordance with international law.

So we have taken many important decisions to pave the way to next year's Summit of NATO leaders here in Brussels.

We will continue doing whatever is necessary to keep our territory secure and our citizens safe.

And, with that, I'm ready to take your questions.

Moderator: Reuters, in the centre.

Q (Reuters): Thank you. I had a question on the cyber weapon issue. Would you say then that having a cyber weapon is less harmful than having a bomb? Is it the idea that bombing a server would be more dangerous than say taking down a webpage? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: Using cyber capabilities may be a more proportionate response and that's the reason why I welcome that we are now integrating national cyber capabilities into NATO missions and operations and that we have agreed the principles of doing that.

For NATO, it is always our aim to use minimum force to achieve maximum effect and therefore cyber effects may be the best response. That depends very much on the situation, but we have seen that NATO allies have been using cyber capabilities against ISIS in Iraq and Syria, and that has been important in the fight against ISIS, and I strongly believe that in any military conflict cyber will be an integrated part and therefore we need to strengthen our cyber defences and our cyber capabilities.

We will integrate national cyber capabilities into NATO missions and operations as we integrate their conventional capabilities, being it ships, tanks, planes. It will still be under full national control, it will be national capabilities but they will be integrated into NATO missions and operations. Let me also add that we have as part of our strengthening of our cyber defences we have also decided to establish or we have established cyber as a military domain and we have also decided that cyber attacks can trigger Article 5. So integrating national cyber effects into NATO missions and operations is yet another step to strengthen cyber in NATO.

Moderator: Washington Post, third row left.

Michael Birnbaum (Washington Post): Hi, Michael Birnbaum from the Washington Post. Another question about cyber: do you foresee a role for cyber effects to be used in the defensive operations related to the eFP deployment or in general in that area of NATO in the Baltics and Poland? And is that something that you would announce publically if they were to have a role that they haven't had previously? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO is a defensive alliance and what we do is always proportionate, it is always according to international law, and we are now integrating cyber effects into NATO missions and operations to respond to a changed and new security environment where cyber is part of the threat picture we have to respond to. I will not speculate exactly when and how we're going to use it, I'll only underline that it will be in accordance with international law, it will be national-owned and controlled capabilities, and it will be a way to respond in ways that can be more proportionate than when we are forced to only use conventional forces, but I think it will only be wrong if I start to speculate exactly on how and where. I can just refer to that NATO allies have used it against ISIS in a very effective way.

Moderator: Agence France Presse, lady in green.

Q (Agence France Presse): Secretary General, thank you. The Turkish Minister of Defence has sent a letter of intent today with his French and Italian colleagues. This project is about acquiring ground-to-air missile systems. Given that Turkey has created some unease or questions within the alliance when announcing a project to acquire S-400 missile systems from Russia, I was wondering how you would see this step towards a real contract. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: So I welcome very much the cooperation between Turkey, France, and Italy on developing air defence systems. We welcome always when NATO allies are working together to develop different capabilities, and I think that this kind of cooperation is the best way also to make sure that we have the capabilities different nations need and is also a good way to make sure that when we have new capabilities they can be fully integrated into NATO air defence systems. For NATO, it's extremely important to have interoperability, and of course having three NATO allies working together that is an example of how we really develop interoperability, how nations can work together. So, yeah, so I welcome that.

Moderator: Gentleman over there.

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Konstantin Benyumov (Meduza): Thank you. Konstantin Benyumov, from Meduza. Have you decided on the location for the coordination centre for cybersecurity? And if yes, are there going to be specific NATO forces involved in working or just the capabilities of NATO members?

Jens Stoltenberg: The centre is part of the existing command structure, but to be honest I'm not able to tell you exactly where it's going to be located, but it's part of the existing command structure.

Moderator: Jane's, front row here.

Brooks Tigner (Jane's Defence): Yes, Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence. Coming back to this logistics aspect of the reformed NATO command structure, I was just wondering could you explain to us in more detail what this will mean. NATO already has a number of agencies that are intimately involved in logistics management, as you well know, so are you referring to simply closer relationship with the EU to tackle these things or do you have something more substantial in mind internal to the house of NATO? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: This is about updating, modernizing the military requirements to infrastructure, taking into account the fact that we are now much more focused on the importance of moving heavy equipment across Europe, because after the end of the Cold War we didn't pay so much attention to that. The main issue was how to move lighter forces into expeditionary operations outside NATO territory, for instance to Afghanistan. But now it is about how to move forces across the Atlantic and how to move them across Europe, and we speak also about much heavier equipment, battle tanks, armoured vehicles, and that kind of equipment.

To be able to do that we need infrastructure and we know that at least in many parts of Europe we don't have the standards, we don't have the strength of the bridges, of the roads, or the different types of infrastructure which can carry the heavy equipment we need to move, at least not enough, and it's about making sure that we have the means of transportation, the ships, the trucks, the planes, and to a large extent these means of transportation will be privately-owned

so we need to make arrangements with the private companies on how to make these tools available if needed.

it's about legislation, and of course it's about making sure that NATO allies implement those standards and those requirements. We formulate the requirements and the standards, but of course it's nations that have to implement them when they invest in infrastructure, when they make arrangements with for instance private providers of transportation. The European Union is important and I welcome the very close cooperation with the European Union on this, and I know that this is also something which the European Union has been focused on because this is partly about also European Union financing some of these investments.

So we have the ability to move forces today, but we would like to move more forces more quickly across Europe and then we have to invest more in infrastructure and to meet modern NATO standards.

Moderator: Wall Street Journal.

Q (Wall Street Journal): Mr. Secretary General, the U.S. raised the INF Treaty violations today. Was there new information about Russian violations of this treaty raised? What was the significance of the U.S. bringing this discussion at the NATO ministerial level and what is the importance in your mind of keeping the INF Treaty in place?

Jens Stoltenberg: Secretary Mattis briefed the allies on the INF Treaty and the U.S. has determined that Russia is in violation of the INF Treaty, so that was an important message in his brief. NATO allies stressed, just as they did at the Warsaw Summit in 2016, that the INF Treaty is very important and that a strong and viable INF Treaty is a pillar for European security. So they also expressed that they will follow this very closely. This is a bilateral agreement between Russia and the United States, but of course this has a great importance for all NATO allies, especially European NATO allies because the INF Treaty eliminates a whole category of weapons, intermediate range missiles, which can carry nuclear weapons.

And I'm part of a political generation in Europe which really grew up with the very intense debate related to the deployment of the SS-20s and the Pershing and the cruise missiles after the Dual-Track Decision of NATO in 1979 and we also very much welcomed the INF Treaty which then eliminated all these weapons in Europe. So I think that the INF Treaty is a cornerstone, it's extremely important that it is fully implemented, so we will continue to call on Russia to address the serious concerns in a substantial, transparent and verifiable way because the INF Treaty's important for all of us.

Moderator: Europa Press.

Q (Europa Press): Thank you Secretary General. Going back to cyber, did any of the NATO allies today offer offensive cyber capabilities for NATO missions and operations, and also I'm wondering is this going to be, if it already isn't, fitted into the NATO defence planning process? I mean are the allies going to start getting from now on specific capability requests for cyber offensive capabilities? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: What we have done today is to agree the framework and the principles for how to integrate cyber capabilities into NATO missions and operations. Then it will be a decision by nations what kind of capabilities they are willing integrate and to use in specific missions and

operations, and nations will retain full control and ownership to [sic] the capabilities. But I welcome the fact that we now can strengthen NATO missions and operations also with cyber capabilities because we know that they are important, and we know that cyber will be an integral part of any potential military conflict.

It's too early for me to say exactly how we will integrate that into NATO planning processes, but as soon as this is becoming a part of NATO missions and operations we have to integrate it in one way or another in the way we plan for missions and operations. And this is just illustrating that we are adapting to a new world where cyber is becoming more and more important, but it's not that different than for instance conventional capabilities when nations have the ownership but they use them in a NATO mission and operation. And regardless of whether we speak about a plane or a tank or a cyber capability, the use of these capabilities is going to be in accordance with international law and it's going to be part of the defensive posture of NATO.

Moderator: Gentleman over there.

Waseem Ibrahim (Al-Ittihad): Hello, Waseem Ibrahim, from Al-Ittihad newspaper, Lebanese newspaper. Secretary General, you discussed the global challenges today and you said something before about that ISIS now has a very small risk that ISIS will focus on attacking partners or even alliance countries. Can you explain depending on what exactly you are building this assessment? And are you worried that this fight against ISIS will become also endless war like we see what's happening in Afghanistan? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: I think we have to be prepared that the fight against ISIS is a generational fight, that it will take time. It is an important achievement that we are now very close to totally eradicating the caliphate, the territory they controlled in Iraq and Syria, but ISIS or some kind of follow-up of ISIL, we have to be prepared that that may still be a threat to NATO allies and many other people in other countries. And we have seen before that terrorist organizations when they lose at one front they start to do aggressive actions in another area. We have seen that in Afghanistan for instance. I think the last couple of weeks and months where the Taliban and the insurgents have not been able to gain their main strategic goal to control provincial capitals, and then we have seen more high profile terrorist attacks against civilians.

So of course nothing is certain, this is an unpredictable challenge and threat, but I'm just saying that we have to be prepared and I don't think we have the final victory over ISIL even though it is a very important step that we have been able to get them out of the territories they controlled in Iraq and Syria.

Moderator: Okay, one question over there. That's AP.

Q (Associated Press): Associated Press, on the other side here. A lot of what the ministers have discussed, whether it's command, mobility and so on, has been in reference to Russia, although you've not really mentioned it. Could you give us an assessment of the threat, the risk that you think Russia poses right now? In terms of Zapad you said that the personnel had left; was any equipment left? Is there anything that leads you to think that Russia poses a greater threat today than it has over the last years?

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO's deterrence and defence is not directed against any specific nation, and we don't see any imminent threat against any NATO ally, and we have monitored and

followed the Zapad exercise very closely, but we haven't seen that they have for instance left or remained with troops or equipment for instance in Belarus as we saw some speculations about before the exercise.

Having said that, we have seen a much more assertive Russia, we have seen a Russia which has over many years invested heavily in their military capabilities, modernized their military capabilities, which are exercising not only conventional forces but also nuclear forces, and which has been willing to use military force against a neighbour: Ukraine. And of course, NATO has to be able to respond to that and we have responded to that partly with our enhanced Forward Presence with more deployment of troops in the eastern part of the alliance, but also by increasing the readiness of our forces and also increasing our ability to move forces. And we are constantly adapting and what we do in Europe now is part of that adaptation.

Moderator: Spiegel.

Q (Der Spiegel): Secretary General, one question also about the fight against ISIS. There has been an announcement more or less about a possible cap..., like a mission in Iraq to stabilize the Iraqi army, and there has been a fact finding mission as far as I know in February, what are the results of this fact finding and is this mission in itself moving forward and will it be discussed tomorrow at the meeting after the formal NATO meeting?

Jens Stoltenberg: I expect that it will be discussed tomorrow. It was also discussed today and NATO has already started training activities in Iraq. We were asked by Prime Minister al-Abadi, I met him, he sent a letter, and he asked for NATO support for training and capacity building in Iraq of Iraqi government forces. So that's something we have already started, it's still not so big, it's some training activities related for instance counter IED, it's helping them in maintenance of equipment, it's military medicine, and it's also helping them to build security and defence institutions, and in some other areas. So we are doing some training activities based on the requests from the Iraqi government.

What we are now discussing is whether we should scale that up. And again, this is not about NATO going into any combat role or combat mission in Iraq, but it is about the fact that we had to be able to make sure that Iraq is stable after ISIS is defeated and therefore we need competent, capable, well-trained Iraqi forces to make sure that we're not forced back again into combat missions or operations in Iraq. So training local forces is one of the best weapons we have against terrorists, and I strongly believe that NATO can do more when it comes to training and capacity building because if our neighbours are more stable we are more secure and one of the best weapons in fighting terrorism.

Moderator: Thank you very much. This concludes this press conference.

Jens Stoltenberg: Thank you.