North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Doorstep statement

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of a working dinner with EU Defence Ministers (Zagreb, Croatia)
2020-03-04

(As delivered)

Good evening,

I'm looking forward to meet EU defence ministers. My participation as Secretary General of NATO in the EU defence ministerial meeting reflects the close cooperation between EU and NATO. And that's something I welcome, not least because we all face challenges, which are so difficult and so great that and no one, institution, organization alone can deal with them and we have work together. And we see that for instance in Syria where we have seen more violence, more indiscriminate bombings and hundreds of thousands of people have been forced to flee. We also see on the border between Greece and Turkey. It reminds us that the migrant and refugee crises are a common challenge and they require common solutions. And I'm in regular contact with the leadership in the European Union but also with the political leadership in Greece and Turkey because this is a situation that affects us all.

I will also discuss with the EU defence ministers the ongoing efforts to find a peaceful negotiated solution to the crisis and the conflict in Afghanistan. On Saturday, a peace agreement was signed. We know that the way forward will be hard and difficult but we have to continue to work for a peaceful negotiated solution in Afghanistan.

And Taliban has to honour their commitments under the deal, we need to see reduction in violence and we need to make sure that we make progress towards a peaceful negotiated solution.

Question: Any prospects for a safe zone in Syria, Mr Secretary General?

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO is not present on the ground in Syria but I welcome all efforts to try to find a common agreed solution to address the horrendous violence, the very difficult situation we see in Syria, including the significant increase in refugees, people that are forced to flee their homes.

So I expect many issues and many proposals to be discussed during the meeting now and the main issue is that we need common responses to common challenges like the situation in Syria.

Question: Turkey wants some concrete help from NATO, what could that be? Could that be the Patriot batteries that they want or something else? Maybe just a symbolic gesture in the help from NATO?

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO already provides support to Turkey. We have deployed the Patriot battery there - Spanish deployment, we have AWACS planes patrolling the skies, we have more port visits. So NATO is already present and we have what we called tailored assurance measures increased NATO presence in Turkey. Because Turkey is bordering Iraq and Syria, no other NATO Ally has suffered more terrorist attacks and has been more affected by the violence to the south than Turkey.

So we are constantly assessing what we the.. the situation and we are providing support to Turkey.

Question: Could NATO play any role in enforcing a no-fly zone above Idlib.

Jens Stoltenberg: I think it is very dangerous now to speculate too much because what we need first and foremost is an agreed solution. It is a political platform to move forward and therefore we need political commitments. If I start to speculate I think I can only add to uncertainty and create.. more uncertainty which is not what we need. So there’s been no call for that so far and therefore I am not speculating.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2020/03/04/doorstep-statement