North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the launch of his Annual Report for 2015

2016-01-28

Good morning.

Welcome to the launch of my Annual Report for 2015.

Last year showed how insecurity abroad can directly affect our security at home.

We saw this in the brutal terrorist attacks in our cities. In the biggest refugee crisis in Europe since World War Two.

We also saw it in Russia's continued actions in Ukraine. And its recent military build-up in Syria and the Eastern Mediterranean.

But last year also showed how NATO is responding.

We implemented the greatest strengthening of our collective defence since the end fo the Cold War. And cuts in defence spending among European Allies have now practically stopped.

Let me start with collective defence.

We have visibly increased NATO's presence in the eastern part of our Alliance. And to the south, we have agreed to increase the presence of AWACS early warning aircraft over Turkey, as we continue to augment Turkey's air defences.

We have tripled the size of the NATO Response Force to more than 40,000 troops. And at its core is our new, very high readiness 'Spearhead Force.' That is now operational. Ready within days to deploy to wherever it is needed. I was really impressed when I saw it in action at its first deployment exercise in Poland.

We are also establishing eight force integration units or small headquarters in the eastern part of our Alliance. They support planning, training and reinforcements, if needed.

To combat hybrid warfare, we are improving our intelligence and early warning.

Speeding up our decision-making, and enhancing our cyber defences.

Last year, we conducted around 300 Allied exercises, including the largest and most complex one in over a decade.

With over 36,000 troops, 140 aircraft, and 60 ships from over 30 different nations. Exercise Trident Juncture took place in Spain, Portugal and Italy. A tremendous display of our capabilities and of Allies' ability to work together.

We will continue to step up our exercises this year, and we will remain transparent in what we do. As you can see from the exercise schedule we have posted online.

Over the last two years, Russian air activity close to NATO's European airspace has increased by around 70%. In response, Allied aircraft scrambled over 400 times to intercept Russian aircraft.

We have made substantial progress with our new Alliance Ground Surveillance system.

Including the first test flight of one of our new Global Hawk drones. This system will provide real-time intelligence to our commanders in theatre.

And we have also made important steps for NATO's ballistic missile defence system.

The arrival of two more US Aegis ships based in Spain. Progress towards the activation of the missile defence facility in Romania. And this spring, we will break ground for a new site in Poland.

This is a defensive system, to protect our European Allies against the real threat of ballistic missiles from outside the Euro-Atlantic area.

Of course, boosting our defence posture does not come for free.

And that is why in 2014, NATO leaders committed to end the cuts, and gradually increase our defence spending. Over the last year, we have started to move in the right direction. After many years of substantial reductions in defence spending, the cuts have now practically stopped among European Allies and Canada. And in 2015, defence cuts were close to zero.

Let me give you some figures.

Five Allies now meet our guideline on spending 2 percent of GDP or more on defence.

16 Allies spent more on defence in real terms in 2015.

And 23 Allies increased the amount they are spending on new equipment.

This has taken a lot of effort. But we all need to do more.

Because, to the east and to the south, we face the biggest security challenges in a generation. NATO is at the forefront of the fight against international terrorism.

The aim of our mission in Afghanistan has been to deny safe haven to international terrorists. We continue to train, advise and assist the Afghan army and police.

They face significant challenges, but they are holding their ground. We decided, in 2015, to maintain our current level of troops this year. And we are looking at how we can contribute to the funding of the Afghan security forces until 2020.

Every NATO Ally is part of the Global Coalition to counter ISIL. The Coalition's high degree of interoperability is a key asset. Built through years of challenging NATO-led operations and training.

To address the root causes of instability, NATO is working even closer with our partners in the region. We are building the defence capacity of Jordan. We will soon start training Iraqi officers. And we are working with Tunisia on special operations forces and intelligence to help them be stronger in defending themselves. And working with other countries in North Africa and the Middle East.

In the Western Balkans, our mission in Kosovo continues to bring much needed security and stability to a region that has been highly volatile. And in 2015, we took another important decision, which will advance stability in the Western Balkans.

We formally invited Montenegro to begin talks to become the 29th member of NATO.

And accession negotiations will begin in mid-February.

In the east, we continue to support Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova, to better resist outside pressure. We help them in different ways to build their defence capacity, modernise their institutions and strengthen their reforms.

In less than six months from now, Allied leaders will meet at our summit in Warsaw. We will take the next steps to strengthen our defence and deterrence. We will decide on the right balance between a forward presence in the east and our ability to reinforce.

We will address the crisis to the south and the support we provide to our partners. And we will review the progress we have made on defence spending.

Over the last years, our world has become more dangerous, and more unpredictable.

But NATO is adapting to keep our nations safe. In 2016, and in the years ahead, NATO will remain an anchor of stability. Staying strong, open for dialogue, and working with our partners around the world.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu (NATO Spokesperson): Okay we'll go to Wall Street Journal.

Julian Barnes (Wall Street Journal): Julian Barnes, Wall Street Journal. Mr. Secretary General first how much of the change in defence spending trends do you think is directly related to Russia's actions in the east? And what sorts of measures to strengthen deterrence are you queueing up for the Warsaw Summit? What needs to build on the wrap of the, of the last meeting?

Jens Stoltenberg (NATO Secretary General): The reason why we decided to stop the cuts in defence spending at our summit back in 2014 was the changed and more challenging security environment and Russia is of course part of that. Because we see a more assertive Russia to the east, a Russia which has invested heavily in defence over several years and which has also shown the will to use military force to change borders in Europe and this is the first time this has happened since the end of the Second World War.

But then in addition or moreover we also see instability, violence, turmoil to the south and this is the reason why we decided that we have to stop the cuts and then gradually increase defence spending and now we have seen at least that we are moving in the right direction. The first year after we made the pledge the cuts have practically stopped among European allies and Canada, we have to do more, we have to start to increase but at least this is a first step in the right direction. Then the question was what are we going to invest in.

Well we need to invest more in modern equipment. A wide range of different kinds of modern equipment. But for instance to be able to deal with cyber-threats with hybrid challenges and threats we need more surveillance, we need more intelligence, we need more cyber-capabilities but we also of course need more high-end armour – equipment - for traditional collective defence. So we need air to air fueling, we need many kinds of capabilities and that's the reason why we have not only focused on the need to spend more but also to spend better and invest in modern equipment.

Oana Lungescu: Reuters.

Q: Good morning. Robin Emmott from Reuters. My question is about the force posture or the potential posture in the east. You talked about the NFIUs and we know about the Spearhead Force but what more could be done, what more is being discussed? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: We have already increased our presence in the east. With the assurance measures, with more planes in the air, with more boots on the ground, with more ships in the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and as you just said we have also been establishing these small headquarters and we have more exercises taking place in the east. So all of this is part of increased presence in the east, in the eastern part of the alliance which has already been decided and which has already been implemented.

Then we are as we move towards our summit in Warsaw addressing what more we need to do and that will be to find the right balance between increased presence in the eastern part of the alliance combined with increased ability, capability to reinforce if needed. It's too early to

prejudge or to tell you exactly what we're going to decide in Warsaw but I can confirm that we are discussing exactly those issues now.

Partly about increased presence, that can be of course troops but it can also be equipment, pre-positioning, infrastructure, to facilitate help, reinforcement if needed and a combination. But I would like to underline the following, we don't speak about moving back to the Cold War posture with hundreds of thousands of troops based, combative-based along the borders. We will, there's no way we'll move back to that posture but we are talking about some increase in military presence and increase in ability, the preparedness, the readiness of our forces to deploy. And this will be one of the key issues we will decide at our summit in Warsaw but it's discussed and addressed now among allies and in the alliance.

Oana Lungescu: We'll stay on this side with Europa Press. No.

Q: Thank you Secretary General. In the last military committee there was advanced that NATO allies would discuss possible options to reinforce support for the anti-ISIL coalition. I understand that one of the options that's being discussed is the possible use of AWACS and both the possibility to deploy them in theatre. I don't know if that would cover both Syria and Iraq but there's also a possibility that they would, that they would go to other theatres and then national nations could then send their own national AWACS to the area.

I don't know if there is any other kind of possible measures that the allies are discussing in this subject. And then if you could be a little bit more concrete about the NATO training in Iraq, Iraqi Forces, will it be done in theatre? How many people are going to be there? And with Tunis I understand that nothing has formally started, the package is still on the way in preparation, I don't know if you could precise this. And sorry to, very, very last question, sorry. On the defence expenditure I'm not sure if I'm reading wrong the data but I understand that actually the NATO European allies have cut, have cut and the total NATO spending actually went down by 1.5 % as a whole in 2015. So despite some allies have made efforts others are still cutting quite a lot and the whole NATO total expenditure has actually cut by 1.5 %. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: First the AWACS. I can confirm that we have got the request from the US to provide support to the efforts of their coalition and to help them with the NATO AWACS surveillance planes. And we are now looking into that request and this is a decision, a decision which will be taken by 28 allies and we are looking into how we can provide help and how to answer the request from the US.

But I would like to underline that all NATO allies are already part of the coalition. So what we are discussing is how NATO as an alliance can provide help to the coalition which all NATO allies are already part of. And then, and then we have this capability, we already have AWACS planes in Turkey and then we are looking into different ways of, of providing help and then we will make the decision as 28 allies. Then we will start training of Iraqi officers in

Jordan; they will be trained in Jordan. I think I have to come back to the exact figures because it's too early to say anything about exact figures but the training will start soon.

We have started the cooperation with Tunisia, we, I met with the Tunisian Prime Minister and I also met with the Iraqi Prime Minister just, it was last week in Davos and they very much welcome the support from NATO. They would like to see even more and we are looking into how we can expand and increase our support for these countries. And I think you have to understand that this is part of a very important way to approach the challenges and instability we see to the south. Because we think very much that, we think that it's extremely important that we are able to project stability, not always by deploying large number of NATO combat forces but by training local forces.

And in the long run prevention is better than intervention. NATO has to stand ready, to be ready to deploy large number of combat forces also in the future as we have done for instance in Afghanistan but at the same time we are focusing more and more on how can we help build local capacity, train, assist and advise local forces because in the long run it's better that they are able to defend themselves instead of we fighting their wars. So this is what we do in Afghanistan and we would like to do even more of it in the Middle East and North Africa.

Last on spending, I think we have to distinguish between two things. Yes the United States, they already spend much more than 2 %, so they are at a very high level compared to all other NATO allies. They have reduced, partly because they have reduced their military presence in Afghanistan and Iraq but they remain about 3 % actually. So yes there's been some further reductions in US spending but they remain far above 2 %. And since the United States is so big, so 72 % of NATO defence spending is US defence spending.

Of course any change in US defence spending directly affects the total NATO defence spending. The problem has partly been the burden-sharing between European allies and the US or among allies in the alliance and, and partly the total level in Europe. And that's the reason why we agreed to stop the cuts and gradually increase and one year after we made the pledge we are able then to stop the cuts among European allies, it's minus .3 % which is practically zero but as I said this is the first step. We need to see more, this is in a way just the beginning but it is a start after one year.

Oana Lungescu: I've got a long list of questions, possible questions down here so I would urge you to please not go beyond one or maximum two. We'll go to ABC in the back.

Q: Good morning Secretary General. This is Enrique Serbeto from the Spanish newspaper ABC. I'm sure you are aware what, of the political problems in Warsaw, the European Commission has started an investigation about the respect of the political rules of European Union for this according with some changes in the, make in the laws, in the constitution and the constitutionality in Warsaw. So are you worried about the possibility that this political conflict can affect the summit?

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO and the European Union is based on the same values. Democracy, individual liberty and, and of course these values are human rights and of course these values are of great importance for both the European Union and NATO. But NATO doesn't have the same kind of mechanisms as the European Union so this is an issue and a question which is now addressed in the European Union and I will not go into the process which is taking place inside the European Union.

What I can say is that the fundamental values for NATO, they are important and I adhere great importance to them because individual liberty, democracy, human rights are important values which NATO is formed and established to protect. And I met recently with the Polish President and we discussed the importance of these values for the alliance. And these values are important for the alliance also because they form the basis for the unity of the alliance and the unity of the alliance is the foundation for the strength and our ability to act together.

Oana Lungescu: ITAR-TASS No, behind, thank you.

Q: Thank you. Denis Dubrovin, Tass News Agency. Mr. Secretary General there is already two months since the tragic incident with the downing of Russian air jet in, by Turkey in Syria. My question is, there was said a lot about the need of communication between NATO and Russia to avoid any kind of incidents. So what has been done for those two months to establish such communication? And when can we expect next NATO-Russia Coucil? Thank you very much.

Jens Stoltenberg: The downing of the Russian plane which violated Turkish airspace illustrates the importance of strengthening mechanisms for risk reductions and transparency, predictability related to military activity. And that's the reason why we are pushing hard for both strengthening existing mechanisms but also looking into whether we can develop new ones.

And just yesterday I met and the NATO Council met with the OSCE, the German chairmanship and the Secretary General, Ambassador Zannier, and we met with him to address exactly the importance of developing more transparency, more predictability for instance related to something called the Vienna Document which is a document which regulates especially military exercises. We have raised with our Russian counterparts several times the need for strengthening these kind of mechanisms and this is an issue which we will continue to discuss both in the OSCE framework but also directly with Russia.

We are looking into the possibility of holding a NATO-Russia Council meeting, we have never suspended the council but we think at the same time now it's time to have, to look into the possibility of having a meeting. No final decision has been taken but we will also discuss this with the Russian delegation at NATO and then make a final decision on when to have such a meeting.

Oana Lungescu: German Radio, Kai Kirchner.

Q: Mr. Secretary General, Kai Kirchner, ARD German Radio. Just a quick follow up to the US request to join the anti-IS coalition and the AWACS planes. I think it's safe to say that from Berlin there haven't been any cries of joy resonating in Brussels since that request. Are you in touch with the German side concerning the AWACS request since German troops are very much involved in this? And do you foresee any date for a decision to be taken? Will that be also a topic for the Defence Ministers meeting in February?

Jens Stoltenberg: Of course we are in close contact with Germany. Germany is both part of the coalition and this is a US-led coalition and the US is asking for AWACS to support the efforts of the coalition and Germany is part of that coalition. But at the same time of course Germany is also one of the 28 members of NATO and we are going to take this, this decision as an alliance of 28. So Germany is of course very close on this process and we will look into different ways of providing this support but no final decision has yet been taken.

I will not give you an exact date but of course this is an issue which will be also discussed among Defence Ministers when they meet soon but when the decision is going to be taken I will not give you any exact dates. But what I can say is that NATO of course already support the efforts of the international coalition to fight ISIL. We have, so we will start the training of Iraqi officers very soon, the reason why we do that is of course to enable Iraq to be stronger in the fight against ISIL. We help Jordan, an island or a key country in the region already and we have military presence in Turkey already augmenting their air defences and we have for instance Spanish patriot batteries very close to the border with Iraq and Syria where we have ISIL.

And let me also add that NATO's presence in Afghanistan is also about fighting international terrorism, different kinds of international terrorism but also in Afghanistan we now see some reports, some presence of ISIL. So I think we have to understand that this is a broad international coalition, NATO allies are part of the coalition and NATO is also playing a key role in the fight against ISIL in different places in the world.

Oana Lungescu: And now we've got a cluster of questions right here so we'll go with ANSA first.

Q: Hello good morning. Marco Galdi, Agency ANSA. Secretary General, you welcome the cuts close to zero in defence expenses but I can see in the report that Italy cut by 12.4 % last year. Is, what can you say about that? And in absolute term even Europe actually continued cutting expenses. What is your suggestion to Italian Government?

Jens Stoltenberg: First of all I think it's important to understand the following. That we have seen over many, many years substantial cuts in European defence spending, among European NATO allies, the important thing with the figures for 2015 is that we are very close to zero cuts. This is not something which is very great in itself because we need much more but compared to continued reductions at least to stop the cuts is the first step, the beginning. And we have also to remember that what we decided in Wales was in a way the three steps.

First to stop the cuts, then gradual to increase defending spending, then aim at 2 %. And this is the first year and we are making progress but we still have a very long way to go because it's not enough to stop the cuts; we have to also start to increase. Then the picture is mixed but the picture is better because before as I say the total NATO European spending on defence went down substantially over many years.

Now we see a more mixed picture, with some allies continuing to cut and others are increasing. But the numbers, the amount which defence spending is increasing within several allies is not, is now bigger so in total we are close to zero and that's at least the first step in the right direction. I would like to see all allies which are spending less than 2 % to stop the cuts and then to gradually increase and that of course also includes the Italian Government.

Oana Lungescu: Okay we'll go to Janes here.

Q: Yes Brooks Tigner, Janes Defence. Just one question, you did mention Libya which is in a mess, is there any allied contingency planning for securing future safe havens in the country if decided by the EU or the international community? So in other words are you doing any predictive planning? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: When it comes to Libya the important thing is to support the efforts, the ongoing efforts to try to find a political solution, to establish a unity government or a government of national accord and to have a ceasefire. And we have seen some progress but also some setbacks in the UN- facilitated talks. We support them and I think the most important thing we all can do now is to give full support to those talks. If there is a new unity government then NATO stands ready to provide support, to help, assist, build security institutions and to support a new unity government in Libya. But then a new government has to request such support and the conditions on the ground has to be different than they are today.

Oana Lungescu: NPR.

Q: A follow up on Russia. Could you give us your assessment of the status of the Minsk Agreements now? If you're going back into talks with the Russian representative I'd be very interested to hear what, what the status of that is since we have not heard a lot about major withdrawals. The OSCE still has a mixed picture on fulfilment. And also can you talk a little bit about where NATO is headed in terms of thinking about its counter-, its counter-propaganda efforts? There are some indications you are looking at getting a lot tougher on this. Thanks.

Jens Stoltenberg: First on Minsk. We have seen some progress and some setbacks and again the picture is mixed when it comes to implementation of the Minsk Agreements. But the only way to a peaceful solution in Ukraine is the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. Therefore it was encouraging when we - last fall - saw that the ceasefire was respected. Now we have seen more violations again and this was also an issue which we addressed when we met with the OSCE yesterday.

The importance of allowing the OSCE monitors full access to the area to be able to monitor, to monitor and to make sure that the ceasefire if fully respected and of course the withdrawal of heavy weapons. And again the picture is mixed, there have been some reporting about withdrawal of heavy weapons but then again some reports about the heavy weapons being moved back again to the front line. So it's a fragile, it's a mixed picture but we support the efforts of, of all the parties to fully implement the Minsk Accord or the Minsk Agreement because that's the only, only foundation for a peaceful solution in Ukraine. Then on, on the … sorry - Russian propaganda.

We have seen that Russia is spending a lot, is investing heavily in, in different kinds of propaganda and we will not counter propaganda with propaganda. But we have to stay vigilant, we have to be ready to answer and to provide the truth, facts, figures, because we will not answer propaganda with propaganda, we will provide facts and figures because in the long run we are certain that the truth will prevail.

And, and I think that you being journalists you are … have also a very important role to play in open democratic societies. To be critical towards governments, NATO, all of us but also to be very aware that there is a risk that people try to inform you with propaganda and then you are aware that you should avoid being used in any way. So we have to be critical regardless of where the information is coming from.

Oana Lungescu: Le Soir.

Q: Thank you, Phillip Regnier, Newspaper Le Soir. You mentioned that accession talks with Montenegro but how do you see the situation there evolving because there are some popular dissent against this prospect? And do you see any Russian influence in these demonstrations and movements? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: Montenegro is a democratic society. Montenegro is a society which has made a lot of progress, they have implemented reforms, they have improved the rule of law, they have fought corruption and we urge them to continue on the path of reform. But since Montenegro is a democratic society there are different views and I think we shall just respect that in any open society there will be different views and opinions about important issues like for instance joining NATO.

But Montenegro has decided several times that they will continue on the path towards NATO membership, they have applied through democratic decisions, the parliament and the government, to apply and to stand by their decision to apply for membership and then it's up to Montenegro and 28 allies to decide whether Montenegro becomes a member or not, no one else has the right to intervene.

Oana Lungescu: Last questions, Sūddeutsche.

Q: Yeah. Daniel Brȍssler, Sūddeutsche Zeitung. There would be another follow up on the US request for a larger participation of NATO in the anti-ISIL coalition. In Berlin there is a point they make saying that participation of NATO as an alliance might undermine the efforts of the coalition in the Arab world because it then might be perceived as a more western project, is that a concern that you share?

Jens Stoltenberg: NATO is already present in the region in many different ways. We, we provide support for Jordan, we provide support for Iraq, we have partnership cooperation with Iraq and we soon will start to train the Iraqi officers. We help Tunisia and of course we are present along the borders of Iraq and Syria with assurance measures for Turkey. So NATO is already there. Second I think it's hard to understand how anything can be more western than a US-led coalition with the UK, Germany, France and all the different western allies and actually all NATO allies being part of the coalition.

But what I would like to underline is the importance of building local capacity, building and strengthening forces and governments in the region to increase their ability to fight ISIL and that's exactly why I think it is important that the NATO is going to do more or should do more in training, assisting, helping forces and governments in the region because if they are stronger to fight ISIL that's good for them but it is also good for us. And Germany is part of the coalition. The US has requested support, we will look into that and make a decision as 28 allies.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much. This now completes the press conference.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/01/28/press-conference-by-the-nato-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg-at-the-launch-of-his-annual-report-for-2015