North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Defence Ministers "Projecting stability"
2016-06-15

(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

We have just finished a very productive meeting addressing projecting stability beyond NATO's borders.

And NATO has been doing this for many many years. And we have unique experience. Through operations in Afghanistan and the Balkans, capacity-building for more than 40 partners around the world. And through political dialogue and practical cooperation.

But the challenges we face require us to do more. And that is what we discussed today, is how we can step up our efforts on projecting stability beyond our borders. And this is also part of the preparations for the Warsaw Summit where Heads of State and Governments are going to take decisions also on projecting stability.

First, on Iraq.

We are already training Iraqi officers in Jordan. Prime Minister al-Abadi requested that we should expand that training into Iraq itself. A NATO team visited Baghdad last week to assess how we could add value. And we discussed the next steps based on the team's report.

Today, we decided that we will develop a recommendation for NATO training and Capacity Building in Iraq. Our aim is to reach agreement at the Warsaw Summit. This will complement the training for Iraqi officers that NATO is already doing in Jordan.

Second, AWACS. We consider how we can provide direct support to the Counter-ISIL Coalition with AWACS surveillance aircraft. Our military authorities have been tasked to provide advice.

Third, maritime.

At our last meeting of defence ministers in February, we agreed to deploy ships to the Aegean.

To assist Greece, Turkey and the EU in their efforts to deal with the migrant and refugee crisis. This deployment has helped make a difference. And it continues to be effective.

We are also working to convert our Operation Active Endeavour into a broader maritime security operation. It will include tasks like supporting situational awareness, countering terrorism, and contributing to capacity building. This would create the right platform for a possible NATO role in the Central Mediterranean. And could support the EU's Operation Sophia, building on our successful cooperation in the Aegean. Our military authorities will soon make recommendations on this.

I welcome the adaptation yesterday of the UN resolution on the Libyan arms embargo. The NATO Military Authorities will take this into consideration when they provide their advice.

Fourth, we continue working with partners in the Middle East and North Africa.

We are supporting Tunisia develop capabilities in areas such as counter-terrorism, special operations and border security.

We have enhanced Jordan's participation in NATO exercises. And are working with our Jordanian partners on cyber defence and countering roadside bombs.

So NATO is already doing a lot to project stability by supporting our partners. And we are committed to doing more. Because when our neighbours are stable, we are more secure.

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

MODERATOR: Wall Street Journal.

Q (Wall Street Journal): On Afghanistan, I wonder if you think NATO is ready to keep the existing hub and spoke system of the existing bases, and on the Mediterranean I wonder if you personally think it would be wise if the time has come to move some ships from the Aegean mission to reinforce Operation Sophia.

JENS STOLTENBERG (Secretary General of NATO): We will take decisions on our presence in the Mediterranean when we receive the advice from our military planners soon, but I think it's important to underline that NATO already has presence in the Mediterranean. We have the Active Endeavour and then we have our presence in the Aegean, and when we transform or when we change or transform the present Active Endeavour mission into a broader security mission in the Mediterranean Sea then I think it will also become easier to coordinate and to assess how we can link the efforts in the Aegean Sea with the efforts in the rest of the Mediterranean. So that's one of the reasons why we are transforming the Active Endeavour into a broader security mission.

And then of course we should have a flexible and pragmatic approach where to deploy ships, depending on where they can add most value, where they are most needed. And actually

during our meeting today several allies announced that they are ready both to continue to support our presence in the Aegean and to provide assets and capabilities for a broader presence in the Mediterranean, including in the Central Mediterranean, and given the UN security resolution I think we also have at least one important element in place to do more in the Mediterranean. So the exact numbers of ships has to be assessed constantly and then we have to deploy them where they are most needed.

On Afghanistan, what we have decided is that we will continue our Resolute Support Mission. We will have what we call a flexible regional approach, meaning that we will continue of course to be in Kabul but also out in the different regions. We are now working on the final decisions for our exact force numbers into 2017, so that's something we will decide later on this year, but the thing is that we will continue in Afghanistan, also with a regional presence, we will continue to advise and train and assist Afghan National Forces because we are very much committed to continue to support Afghans. And I think it's also important to underline that also during this meeting several nations announced that they will continue, they have forces, and they committed forces also to a presence in Afghanistan in 2017.

MODERATOR: Kabul Times, second row.

Q (Kabul Times): Thank you very much. Mr. Secretary General, as you know there is like a fight in the border of Afghanistan and Pakistan, what's your view about this tense fighting in the border of both countries, as Afghanistan and Pakistan is also a strategic partnership for you? What's your view? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I think the important thing now is to defuse tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, and to avoid more violence along the Pakistan-Afghan border. I welcome the ongoing efforts to try to calm the situation. We need dialogue and we should prevent more fighting at the border. Continued dialogue and cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan is key. That's important for the security of Afghanistan, but it's also important for the stability of the whole region.

MODERATOR: Gentleman in the front row.

Q: Yes, thank you so much Secretary General. I want to ask you about the Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria. Have you any plan for support of Kurdish forces in Iraq and Syria, for example Peshmerga forces now fighting against ISIS?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The important thing is that we fight ISIL, and NATO supports and helps the international coalition fighting ISIL in many different ways. We have started to train Iraqi forces officers in Jordan, we have just decided now to move on and make a decision at our summit in Warsaw on how we can do more to support Iraqi forces and train the Iraqi forces inside Iraq, enhancing their capabilities to fight ISIL, and of course we are also supporting Turkey, which is the ally most affected by the turmoil, the violence in Iraq and Syria.

Then, many, many NATO allies provide also direct support, and NATO allies are part of the US-led coalition fighting ISIL, and in that framework several NATO allies also train Peshmerga in Iraq, and that's an activity which is part of the US-led coalition, it's not part of the NATO framework, but NATO allies provide that kind of support.

MODERATOR: KUNA.

NAWAB KHAN (Kuwait News Agency): Nawab Khan from the Kuwait News Agency. Sir, when do you think a decision will be taken on the AWACS supporting and the IS coalition? And my second question is was there any discussion on the situation in Syria? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: We have of course addressed all the turmoil and instability and the violence in both Iraq, Syria, the wider Middle East region, and it was also announced that Italy will now deploy SAMP/T batteries to Turkey to augment their air defences, and this is part of the NATO assurance measures for Turkey. We already have Spanish Patriot batteries there, we have AWACS planes in Turkey, and we have also other kinds of assurance measures, which address some of the challenges and threats stemming from all the turmoil and violence in Syria.

Then, on the AWACS planes, I expect that heads of state and governments can make the necessary decisions in July at our summit. We also need to do some military planning work to coordinate the needs of the coalition with what NATO can offer, but we are doing exactly that now so I expect that we are ready to make decisions at the summit in July.

MODERATOR: Agence France Presse.

Q (AFP): Secretary General, on cyber defence, some allies have offensive capacities, I wanted to know how this was going to be framed within the NATO efforts. As NATO is making it an operational domain, will they be used? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO as an organization does not have or does not develop offensive cyber capabilities, but what we are doing is that we are both enhancing our capabilities when it comes to defending our own networks, our own systems, and we help nations develop their capabilities to defend their networks. For NATO it is important both to be able to protect our networks at headquarters but also when we do missions and operations, it's extremely important that we're able to defend our cyber networks.

What we did was that at our summit in Wales in 2014 we decided to make clear that a cyber attack can trigger Article 5, meaning that a cyber attack can trigger collective defence of the whole alliance because we regard cyber attacks as something that can be as devastating as a conventional attack. Then, today, we have taken a step further, or actually yesterday, we have taken a step further and that is to declare that cyber or recognize cyber as an operational domain, so we have air, land, sea and cyber as operational domains inside NATO and that will further strengthen our cyber capabilities and capacities.

MODERATOR: RIA Novosti.

Q: RIA Novosti, Russian News Agency. Secretary General, are you going to discuss with Russia when you meet in the NATO-Russia Council next time your plans to enhance your forward presence in the eastern part of the alliance and the placement of these four battalions? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So we have stated very clearly that we are ready to have a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council even before the summit, but now we are consulting with Russia to agree on the agenda, to agree on the modalities of a meeting on the NATO-Russia Council, and also agree on the timing. So that's something we now are working on and we are ready to have a meeting.

One of the reasons why we think a NATO-Russia Council meeting is useful is that we think that that's a framework where we can inform and update Russia on what we are doing because we are transparent, we are predictable, and the NATO military presence in the Baltic countries and Poland, which was agreed at this meeting, is defensive, it is proportionate and it's fully in line with our international obligations. So we think it is good that we are transparent and that we inform each other because we think that can reduce risks for misunderstandings, miscalculations, and this is even more important when tensions are as high as they are now. So, yes, military activity transparency is part of the agenda we would like to see for the NATO-Russia Council.

MODERATOR: UNIAN.

Q (UNIAN): Secretary General, what is the outcome of the meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group? Will NATO review its nuclear doctrine or not? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: We had the meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group yesterday and the main purpose is to make sure that we maintain and ensure an effective and safe and secure nuclear deterrence. And NATO remains a nuclear alliance. We take a concrete and deliberate approach to all our work in this area, and I will not go into details but I can say that we constantly review our policies and capabilities in a careful and measured way.

MODERATOR: NPR.

Q: Just to clarify your remarks, you said that you're discussing with Russia [inaudible]? Does that mean that conversations have moved on from where we had discussed before that you call they don’t pick up the phone? Perhaps somebody's answered? Can you just let us know? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG: They answer the phone calls and we meet in meeting rooms, so we talk and there have been meetings also between Deputy Secretary-General Vershbow and Ambassador Grushko to sort out exactly the agenda, the modalities and the timing of a

meeting. And I understand that there is a willingness on both sides to convene a meeting, so now we are actually discussing the timing and agenda.

So I can come back to you and inform you more in details when we have agreed on timing and agenda, but I think it's also important to remember that we never suspended the NATO-Russia Council. We convened a meeting some weeks ago. There we addressed Ukraine, military activities, transparency, risk reductions, and Afghanistan, and of course we didn't solve all the problems in that meeting but I think it is important in itself that we meet in the same room, that we present our views, and it was a frank and open discussion, and I think that is important because I think it's better to have dialogue than not to speak especially when times are as difficult as they are now.

Q: [Inaudible] military-to-military contacts, though? [Inaudible] picking up the phone…

JENS STOLTENBERG: One of the issues we will discuss hopefully at the NATO-Russia Council meeting, because we have not yet decided on the exact agenda, is also how we can develop transparency, predictability, including military-to-military lines of communications. So one of the reasons why I would like to see a NATO-Russia Council is that that's a framework where we can discuss exactly how we can strengthen military lines of communications.

MODERATOR: One final question over there.

Q (Le Soir): Yes, thank you. Philippe Regnier, newspaper Le Soir. Sir, could you please update us about the working dinner yesterday night, about the prospect of more cooperation with the EU? What are the fundamentals of this rapprochement between the two organizations? And you already mentioned Operation Sophia, but what is more in coming days with this cooperation? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The message from yesterday was that there is a very strong will in NATO. I also met with High Representative Frederica Mogherini, to strengthen the cooperation between NATO and the European Union. And that's based on a common understanding that we are faced with a more challenging security environment with threats facing both NATO allies and EU members, and neither NATO nor the European Union possesses all the tools needed to respond.

Just for instance, when you look at how we responded to the Ukraine crisis, the European Union delivered economic sanctions, NATO delivered the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War, so I think that this just illustrates that we have to work together, and especially when we see a more blurred line between war and peace, hybrid warfare, and all these new kinds of threats. There is an enhanced need for working together because EU has some capabilities, NATO has some capabilities, they are also partly overlapping, and therefore it is important to be as closely coordinated and cooperate as close as possible.

There is a momentum now because during the last few months we have been able to reach an agreement on arrangements on cyber, and also on our operational cooperation in the Aegean Sea, and these two arrangements which we have been able to reach over the last few months are actually more arrangements than we have been able to reach during the previous 13 years. So we are making some progress, we would like to see more progress, and that can be for instance related to our cooperation not only in the Aegean but also in the Mediterranean, and we are aiming at a statement from the EU leadership and from me at the Warsaw Summit to be able to express strong political support for enhanced cooperation between the European Union and NATO.

MODERATOR: This concludes this press conference, so hope to see you all at the Warsaw Summit in July. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much.

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