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
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(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

We have just agreed on a set of principles to modernise NATO's defence and deterrence posture.

As part of this decision, NATO Defence Ministers agreed on an enhanced forward presence in the eastern part of our Alliance.

This will be multinational.

To make clear that an attack against one Ally is an attack against all Allies, and that the Alliance as a whole will respond.

It will be rotational and supported by a programme of exercises.

And it will be complemented by the necessary logistics and infrastructure to support pre-positioning and facilitate rapid reinforcement.

Our military planners will provide the advice on the size and composition of our enhanced presence this spring.

And I welcome the announcements made by many Allies at the meeting today on how they intend to contribute to the enhanced presence of NATO forces in the eastern part of our Alliance.

The US has already set out their plan to increase their force presence in Europe through continuous rotations of armoured or mechanised forces, additional exercises, and improved pre-positioning and infrastructure.

At the Warsaw Summit in July, we will take further decisions.

This is at the core of NATO's continued adaptation to a changed and more challenging security environment.

Besides force posture, other important elements are stronger cyber defences.

And a robust response to hybrid warfare, including resilience and civil preparedness.

Our deterrence and defence must be flexible and tailored.

We must be able to respond to the full spectrum of threats from any direction.

Whether they come from state or non-state actors.

Including non-state actors with state-like aspirations.

We have also made progress in connecting NATO's Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance assets.

This is a key capability for the NATO Response Force.

And it enables quick and informed decisions by our commanders and our political leaders.

Today, Ministers also reviewed the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan. And we agreed that we have accomplished a lot:

We have increased NATO's presence in the eastern part of the Alliance – with enhanced air policing, maritime patrols and robust exercises.

We have agreed assurance measures for Turkey – with Patriot batteries, AWACS surveillance planes, and an enhanced maritime presence in the Eastern Mediterranean and in the Black Sea.

We have tripled the size of the NATO Response Force to more than 40,000 troops, with the new Spearhead Force at its core.

And we have activated six small headquarters in our eastern Allies, and we are setting up two more.

Our Multinational Corps Northeast in Poland is on track and will be able to command and control the Spearhead Force by the summer.

And our Multinational Corps Southeast in Romania was activated as an International Military Headquarters in December.

So all of this proves that we are on track implementing the Readiness Action Plan.

For over sixty-five years, NATO's greatest responsibility has been to promote and to protect our territory and population against any attack.

Today, we face the most challenging security environment in a generation.

And NATO is responding.

Defence and dialogue are complementary. NATO remains committed to transparency and risk reductions.

That is why we agreed to do all we can to support Germany as the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE this year and its efforts for a full modernisation of the Vienna Document which governs military transparency.

This has a direct impact on Allied forces and operations. So I will name a special liaison to the International Organisations in Vienna to improve our dialogue and our cooperation with the OSCE.

So today's meeting was an important step forward. Both regarding defence and dialogue.

There will be more to come on the road to our summit in Warsaw in July.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Okay we'll start with Jane's here.

Q: Ah yes Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence. Just a question about the German Turkish request for naval assistance in the Eastern European, could you give us some sense of timing, when some decision might be made? And more important since you know the articles and all of the rest of constitution of NATO, under what conditions would NATO refuse to do this and why? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): We are now considering the requests for NATO support for coping with the migrant and refugee crisis. And we are of course doing that in very close dialogue with the allies which are most affected and there are consultations and discussions going on now. I cannot tell you anything about the conclusions but the considerations are going on now and they will continue and then hopefully we will have something more to tell you tomorrow when we will then have the, as a next session of our meeting and where we are able to address this issue. I think it is obvious that when NATO allies request support to cope with such great challenge and the human tragedy related to the migrant and refugee crisis which we see both in the Middle East, North Africa but now also in Europe, then of course then this is something we have to look very carefully into. Whether and how NATO could make a contribution and make a difference. But this is something which is being discussed and, and assessed now and then we will come back to what more I can say tomorrow.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. Still here in the front row, gentleman there.

Q: The enhanced forward presence sounds very like steps we have seen repeatedly before. Each time we hear of more troops, more equipment, is there a point at which NATO says we

have enough there or will we continue to see a build-up of troops and equipment in the east?

JENS STOLTENBERG: So we will have as much presence in the east as needed. Because we have to make sure that we are always able to defend all allies against any threat. And therefore we have increased our presence because we are faced with a more challenging and demanding security environment not least caused by a more assertive Russia investing heavily in defence and also a Russia which has used military force to change borders in Europe and to intimidate neighbours. But as I have underlined several times for NATO this is a question of both increased presence but also increased ability to reinforce, to stay agile, to stay prepared to increase the readiness and the responsiveness of our forces and we are doing both.

And moreover we have already implemented a lot, both with the assurance measures but also now with the plans of the United States to quadruple the funding for the European Reassurance Initiative and this extra U.S. funding will make it possible to fund both more presence but also more pre-positioning, more equipment, more exercises and all of this comes together as important elements in the adaptation of NATO. Let me underline also the importance of that the increased presence in the east will be multi-national and that's a key thing because that will send a very clear signal that an attack on one ally will be an attack on the whole alliance. And that's the whole purpose; the whole idea with NATO is that it's based on the idea of one for all and all for one. And that is strongly then signalled by a multi-national increased presence in the eastern part of the alliance.

OANA LUNGESCU: DG24, second person, second gentleman there.

Q: Mr. Secretary General, thank you very much. I would like to ask you if you can be more specific, can you underline difference between what has been made in the eastern part and what are the future steps? More troops. You will include the Baltics, also Romania, Bulgaria, Poland, all the eastern flank?

JENS STOLTENBERG: What we have done today is that we have made a very important decision and that is to decide on the principle of enhanced forward presence. Then we have asked our military planners to provide us with proposals, with recommendations, with assessments on how we can do that in the best way.

And that's about the composition of the forces, the scope and the scale and also of course this, this balance between presence and the ability to reinforce. Moreover the U.S. has already announced an increased presence in Europe but also funding for more presence in the eastern part of the alliance. Then we are planning to make more decisions in June and then the final decisions at our summit in July. And this is just a step, this is one important building block but it's not the final decision, this is showing how NATO is able to adapt and adapt in a way which is a response to a new security environment.

OANA LUNGESCU: Gentleman over there, front row.

Q: Felix Kasten, Spiegel TV, Germany. How do you evaluate the Russian engagement in Syria right now? And is NATO planning anything, how is it evaluating the situation?

JENS STOLGENBERG: So we have already last month seen a substantial military build-up of Russian forces in Syria and in the Eastern Mediterranean. And this is something which is changing the strategic balance in the Eastern Mediterranean; it is something which has created dangerous situations with violation of NATO airspace or Turkish airspace. We saw the downing of the Russian plane and we have also seen several other violations of Turkish airspace.

And we also see that Russia is mainly targeting opposition forces and they are conducting intense airstrikes in and around Aleppo and this has caused an increase in the number of people fleeing the country and more suffering. The important thing now is that we need to support all efforts to find a political negotiated solution and the problem with the Russian bombing is that it is undermining the efforts to find a political negotiated solution. Actually when we saw that the negotiations were just or about to start then they paused because of the, for several reasons but not least because of the Russian bombing. So what we need now is calm, de-escalation and increased efforts to resume the negotiations and to find a political negotiated peaceful solution to the crisis in Syria. That's not easy but that's the only way forward.

OANA LUNGESCU: Kommersant.

Q: Thank you very much. Kommersant Newspaper Russia. Mr. Stoltenberg we already know that the United States committed to spend $3.4 billion dollars on improvement of their positions in Europe but what about other NATO members? Do you have exact figures how many other NATO members are going to spend on improvement of their stance on the eastern flank? And what total amount of troops will be stationed on the eastern flank in 2016? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: We have seen the announcement by the United States of the plans they have announced. We have seen what NATO allies have already done with the assurance measures, with more planes in the air, air policing and more ships in the Baltic Sea ... the Black Sea and also more troops on the ground, more exercises. And then there were made some new commitments or announcements at the meeting today but it's too early to add them all up, we will do that later and we will come back to more specific figures and the scope and the composition of the forces later on.

Because this is as I said one important milestone, NATO agrees on the principle of increased presence, we are starting to as I say deliver on the different components but we will add the whole thing together and then of course we will then also announce what we are going to do because we are transparent. Let me add that this is about striking many different balances. Part of the balance between forward presence and reinforcement but it's also the balance between strong defence and dialogue and for NATO there is no contradiction between a

strong defence and dialogue, actually we believe that this is complementary and if we are strong, if we are firm and predictable that creates the basis also for political engagement and dialogue. So, so yeah we will move on and we will announce our decisions when we are making them.

OANA LUNGESCU: NTB, there.

Q: NTB. On the NATO Russia relations, will you have a meeting with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Munich this week? And if so with what agenda and topics? Will you explain this strengthened eastern presence?

JENS STOLTENBERG: We are planning or I am planning for a meeting with Minister Lavrov in Munich. We have met several times before, we met in the UN during the UN General Assembly, we met last year in Munich and we have met in other fora and in other locations earlier. So this is part of the regular dialogue, NATO has never suspended the political dialogue with Russia and of course meetings with Minister Lavrov is a part of this dialogue. And we believe that to keep channels for political communication open is important, we believe that especially when times are difficult as they are now it's even more important that we have political dialogue and channels open between NATO and Russia.

And I will underline that what NATO does is defensive, it is proportionate and it's fully in line with our international obligations when it comes to our increased presence in the eastern part of the alliance. So this is a meeting which is part of a regular dialogue between, political contacts between Russia and NATO.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay we have Agence France Presse.

Q: Secretary General thank you very much. I wanted to come back to the request that you say NATO ministers are now considering. Since Monday and the meeting in Ankara with Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Davutoglu, we don't have details. Can you give us a general description of the, even very general, because the scope is very large. Can you give us some description of what is in the request? And also tonight there is a dinner, will the question of the refugees on the Syrian border with Turkey be addressed during that dinner or at another moment? And what is NATO's position on this? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: You have seen in the media that Turkey and Germany after the Chancellor met with Davutoglu, Prime Minister Davutoglu and she had the meetings in Ankara that they announced that they would ask NATO for support. And they, as you have seen in media, they spoke of different kinds of support and help from NATO.

It will be wrong if now ... I now start to go into the details and mention different kinds of capabilities or ways NATO can support in the efforts to cope with the migrant and refugee crisis because that will only fuel speculations. So I think that what we have to do now is to do the work inside the alliance to address the request, to address the different proposals, then

agree and then tell you what we have agreed on. So I accept very much your question but it will be wrong if I answer it, I will answer it when I'm ready to provide you with answers. Hopefully I will be able to say more tomorrow because we need this time to assess and to discuss and to elaborate a bit more on the different possible ways NATO can make a contribution.

Let me add that NATO has already different capabilities and assets in the region. Because in December NATO agreed on a tailored package of assurance measures for Turkey which includes AWACS surveillance planes, air policing, maritime patrol aircraft, increased naval presence in the Mediterranean and actually Germany has now the commandship of this naval group of NATO, and also other assets. So we have assets in the region but I think it's wrong if I now start to speculate on whether some of these are going to be used and in what way. So this is something we are assessing right now.

OANA LUNGESCU: I'm afraid that's all we have time for right now but we'll see you tomorrow. Thank you very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much.

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