North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

# Joint press conference

with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Minister of Defence of Spain, María Dolores de Cospedal García
2018-01-25

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(As delivered)

Thank you so much Minister de Cospedal, dear Maria Dolores,

I really appreciate to be here today together with my delegation and thanks for the warm welcome, it's always a pleasure to be in Madrid.

And to also say that we really appreciate the commitment of Spain to our Alliance and the Spanish contributions to our collective defence.

Because Spain is contributing in so many different ways to our shared security and to our collective defence.

You mentioned actually many of them but let me just highlight how much we appreciate that Spanish troops are in in Latvia being part of our Enhanced Forward Presence and helping to deter any aggression against our eastern Allies.

We also welcome the fact that Spanish planes, jets are regularly policing the airspace in the Baltics, and that you are hosting a very important capability for NATO, the Aegis ships in your base in Rota.

You have the Patriot batteries in Turkey and you are also playing a key role in the fight against terrorism, both with your presence in Afghanistan, because the reason why NATO is in Afghanistan is to prevent that country from once again becoming a safe haven for international terrorists.

But also by the fact that you are present in Iraq, training Iraqi officers, soldiers, and helping NATO to build up our training activity in that country.

So you are contributing in many different ways, both to our collective defence, but also to our fight against terrorism and we are extremely grateful for that.

We are confronted with a more demanding security environment, we see new threats and we see old challenges becoming more demanding. We see cyber and hybrid threats, we are making NATO's cyber defences even stronger with changes to our Command Structure. And we expect to set up a new Cyber Operations Centre.

And Spain’s national cyber command could play a key role in contributing knowledge and experience to NATO.

We have just had very good discussions addressing a wide range of issues on how Spain contribute to NATO and how NATO is adapting and responding to a new and more demanding security environment.

We also discussed as you mentioned the preparations for the NATO Summit in Brussels in July and we will work on two strands as we prepare for that meeting.

First: strengthening our collective defence and deterrence. This is about keeping the peace in Europe. And keeping us all safe.

And second: working to project stability beyond our borders. This is key in the fight against terrorism.

And NATO has played an important role in this fight for many years.

Today, we contribute to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS with AWACS surveillance flights, and training for Iraqi forces.

And in Iraq, Spain, as I mentioned, is making a real difference by providing specialized counter-IED training.

And as we prepare for the Summit, we will consider how our role could evolve within the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS.

Allies and partners are also adding three thousand more trainers to the Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan, helping prevent Afghanistan from ever again becoming a safe haven for international terrorism. Afghanistan has taught us that prevention is better than intervention.

So NATO is focusing on how to prevent conflicts and we are working with partners like Jordan and Tunisia to strengthen their defence and help them provide for their own security.

NATO is adapting to keep our people safe.

But in order to keep adapting, we all need to invest in defence.

In 2014, all Allies committed to stop the cuts in defence spending, gradually increase, and move towards investing 2% on defence within a decade. I welcome that Spain has recently announced plans for significant increases in defence investments.

And I encourage you to continue on this path. This is key for fairer burden-sharing between North America and Europe.

And for keeping our people safe.

So once again, thank you so much for hosting me and my delegation and I really look forward to continue working with you as we prepare for the upcoming Summit and continue to adapt NATO to a more demanding security environment.

QUESTION [AFP]: Good afternoon, France Press Agency, I have a question for you both. Spain is denouncing Russian intervention in the Catalan crisis. Have you talked about this during your meeting; and for the Secretary General, are you aware of this interference, does this matter worry you?

MINISTER DE COSPEDAL [Spanish Minister of Defence]: Regarding the subjects covered with regard to Catalonia, the fact that there has been so many fake news, that the media has witnessed so much manipulation in with things coming from the country you mentioned and also from other countries that we know well - yes we have talked about that and we've talked about how western countries and how Allies and NATO member countries, we need to know that we have to use all the means within our reach to prevent our public opinion from being manipulated.

We have to prevent fake news and manipulation in the social media leading to situations that have nothing to do with reality and thus attempting to interfere in domestic or national issues – yes we've talked about that, of course, and we've also talked about cyber defence in general and the social media today, they are a de facto field of defence already.

We have also talked about the willingness of the Atlantic Alliance to make that field of action an active one to not leave it unprotected to increase our capabilities in that field.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: We discussed and addressed in our meetings today the reports we have seen about attempts by Russia to interfere in domestic issues in several countries, including reports about that in Catalonia and any interference from outside is of course unacceptable.

We have seen that there has been a significant increase in different attempts to try to interfere by different means in domestic political processes and the volume and the complexity of these attempts have increased significantly.

We take this very seriously, that's one of the reasons why NATO has strengthened our cyber defences but also why we are improving the way we are responding to this information and propaganda.

We don't believe that the way to respond to propaganda, disinformation is propaganda and alternative disinformation, but we strongly believe that the best way to respond to disinformation and propaganda is by providing the truth.

The truth will prevail, we need an open and free media press and we really believe that journalists you should ask the difficult questions, you should expose disinformation and

attempts to interfere when that happens because that's the best way also to make sure that the truth is communicated in an open and transparent way.

More specifically on the issue of Catalonia, that's a domestic Spanish issue which should be resolved within Spain's constitutional order.

At the same time, I think it is important to also state that a strong and unified Spain is good for NATO and therefore we are not going to interfere in domestic Spanish issues but we also follow the developments closely because Spain is an important and highly valued Ally.

QUESTION [EFE]: Hello, I am from EFE Agency. I have a question for Secretary General Stoltenberg. Have you come to Spain to ask for a greater contribution by Spain to NATO missions and what opinion do you have regarding investment in defence? Yesterday the Minister recognised that Spain would probably not reach that 2% in defence spending by the year 2024.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Spain is one of the Allies that really contributes to our missions and operations. They contribute to our enhanced forward presence in the Baltic countries with several hundred Spanish troops in Latvia.

They are a key Ally in our Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan and Spain is going to increase their presence in Afghanistan and, as I said, they are, Spain is playing a key role in our training activities in Iraq, especially when it comes to encountering improvised explosive devices and Spain is also contributing to different other NATO missions and operations, including air policing in the Baltic region and different maritime operations, for instance, Sea Guardian.

So Spain is really contributing a lot to our missions and operations and compared to many other nations, Spain is actually among the top performing nations when it comes to contributions to NATO missions and operations.

Regarding defence spending, I expect all Allies, including Spain, that spend less than 2% to increase defence spending and that's exactly what we agreed back in 2014, but I think it's important to remember exactly what we agreed in 2014 when we made what we call the Defence Investment Pledge. That was not to reach 2% immediately, but it was to stop the cuts; Spain has stopped the cuts.

Second, it was to gradually increase and Spain has announced that they will gradually increase and third, to move towards spending 2% and Spain has announced that they will then move towards spending 2% of GPD on defence.

So I expect Spain to deliver both on the commitment we all made back in 2014, but also I expect that Spain will deliver on the national plans, the plans they have just announced when it comes to increased defence investments.

So I welcome the fact that Spain, as NATO, is moving in the right direction and I will just share one short with you because we had actually a quite good story to tell that European Allies after years of decline have started to increase, and this is a chart showing decrease in defence spending across Europe and Canada for many, many years.

Now European Allies and Canada have started to increase defence spending again.

Meaning that burden sharing is something we really are addressing and I welcome that Spain is part of this story where European Allies and Canada are starting to invest more in defence.

You can have this [chart] afterwards if you want.

QUESTION: I have a question for the Secretary General. Are you worried about the offensive by the Turkish army in Syria? Do you think Turkey is entitled to deploying this offensive? Don't they realise that there are Americans supporting the Kurdish militia? Isn't that a problem? Aren't you worried that there could be clashes there between two Allies? And finally, is NATO going to take over the command in Iraq, the operation, and when would that be?

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO will not take over the role of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS in Iraq but we will work together with the coalition, meaning that we will work together with the coalition partly because NATO is only part of the coalition but also because NATO is now in the process of scaling up, or at least considering to scale up our training and capacity-building activities in Iraq.

So NATO is partly in Iraq as part of the coalition but we are also in the process of doing more when it comes to training and capacity-building of Iraqi officers in Iraq but there is no question about NATO taking over.

What we will do is we will be in close coordination with the Global Coalition and also with all their international actors as, for instance, the European Union.

When it comes to Northern Syria, as I said, NATO is a member of the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS but we are not present on the ground in Northern Syria.

We provide support to the coalition with our AWACS surveillance planes and training in Iraq, but we are not present on the ground in Northern Syria.

Turkey is the NATO Ally which has suffered most from terrorist attacks over many years and Turkey, as all of the countries, have the right to self defence, but it is important that this is done in a proportionate and measured way, and that is the message I convey every time I discuss this issue with different NATO leaders, including of courser with political leadership in Turkey.

I spoke with President Erdoğan last week and we are in regular contact with other Allies who are involved, including United States and I urge also direct contacts between United States

and Turkey to try to find the best way to address the challenges we all see in Northern Syria.

QUESTION [Expansión]: I have two questions for the Spanish Defence Minister.

The first is, I would like to know what the main expenditure programmes are going to be, the new investment plan that the government is going to be launching?

And secondly, about doubling defence spending over 17 years, whether this will mean a 15% increase per annum?

MINISTER DE COSPEDAL: First of all, with regard to the investment cycle that you were referring to, there needs to be approved generally the government cabinet, we are looking at a period of over 15 years.

The programmes we have agreed we need to launch most urgently, taking into account their duration and due planning, we are talking about frigates, the F100 10 that we have announced on several occasions.

In additional also, the flight trainer for the air force, the resupply for the air force, the command and control system and the 8 by 8 vehicles for the army.

I have already given you more than three examples I think.

And these are the programmes that we will be starting most, more quickly because their duration is longer.

This is the forecast, we are combining it, it’s not necessarily tantamount to our commitment both in the framework of NATO and the EU but also, as the Secretary General has said, to gradually achieve over the time a 2% investment of our GPD in defence because we are talking about investment in security. We are talking about money and guaranteeing the rights and freedoms of Spaniards and I would like it to be perceived this way in addition.

Of course, initially the investment will be lower because programmes always require lower investment levels at the beginning until they start developing because first it’s invest... research and development plus it depends, depending on the programme sometimes their expense goes up and others it doesn’t and we can't annualise the information for you for every year with an exact percentage, that would not be correct.

I would like to underscore that the Spanish Government considers that the expenditure in defence is an investment in security instability in the fight against the global challenges we have today.

One of the most important things that our President of the Government has talked about with the NATO Secretary General and in which Spain is firmly committed and also NATO as you have seen from the words of the Secretary General is that NATO needs to be very aware and very present in countering this global threat of terrorism and Spaniards know very well what it

is to fight terrorism while preserving our rights of freedoms and our safety and that is no longer in physical borders, it goes well beyond physical borders and this is the spirit with which the Ministry of Defence and the Spanish Government is tackling our work for the coming years.

I would briefly before we end, if the Secretary General allows me, to say that we have known that there has been an information published in several communication media regarding the demise by accident of a Lieutenant Fernando Pérez Serrano in October in an F18 in Torre... at the Torrejon airbase. This has been published and mentioned in some communication media.

This news is absolutely false. I would like to deny here.

It was said that the false news is that he was pressured by his superiors to pilot that plane and this has been denied already and we are doing so here formally that he was under any pressure, the Fernando Pérez Serrano was pressured by his superiors to pilot any aircraft whatsoever and not that aircraft in particular.

At the beginning of any aerial exercise preparation is supreme for the air force and tantamount in taking its decisions, it is so included in all the regulations for military flights.

Right now there is an official investigation underway to determine the causes of the accident it is under the responsibility of the air force.

Their service is studying the causes of the accident which will be made public but I absolutely want to deny here in public the information that has been recently appeared in the press.

Thank you very much.

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Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2018/01/25/joint-press-conference