North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

# Pre-ministerial press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

2015-11-30

(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

The Foreign Minister’s meeting which starts tomorrow takes place amid turbulent times.

We face unprecedented security challenges both at home and abroad.

NATO is responding to these challenges.

And I expect Foreign Ministers to take important decisions to further enhance our security.

And I will briefly mention the main areas where I expect ministers to take decisions tomorrow and the day after tomorrow.

First, on Afghanistan, we will review our mission in light of the security situation.

We will do that together with Minister Rabbani and our operational partners. Meaning the partner countries which join us in our operation in Afghanistan.

We will discuss how we continue our mission to train, advise and assist Afghan forces during 2016.

We will also launch work to ensure we can finance the Afghan security forces from 2018 to 2020. Because as you know we made a pledge back at our summit in Chicago several years ago to finance Afghan national security forces but that pledge ends in 2017 so we have to make a new decision to continue to finance the Afghan national security forces also after 2017. And we will start to address that at our Foreign Ministerial meeting and then hopefully make the final decision at our summit in July next year.

And we will also look at ways to strengthen our long-term partnership with Afghanista, looking into what we have called the enduring partnership.

Second, we will discuss and address the challenges we face from the south.

We will be joined by the EU’s High Representative Federica Mogherini to discuss the security implications of what we see in our southern neighbourhood.

This is important because the risks we see can only be addressed by a coordinated international effort and by closer cooperation between EU and NATO.

NATO is stepping up its efforts to deal with the challenges from the south.

We have already increased the readiness and preparedness of our forces.

I think we have to remember that now have the Enhanced NATO Response Force and established the Spearhead Force that is not only relevant for what we see in challenges stemming from the east, but it's also relevant and something we can use in the south.

And the enhanced NATO Response Force and the VJTF or Very High Readiness Task Force was actually tested just a few weeks ago in Italy, Spain and Portugal during our Trident Juncture exercise.

We are increasing our intelligence and situational awareness in the region.

We are setting up our new Allied surveillance drones in Sicily.

We are also working on further assurance measures to support Turkey, the NATO Ally who's on the frontline of that volatile region, bordering Iraq and Syria.

And I met with Prime Minister Davutoğlu earlier today and we discussed last week's incident which led to the downing of a Russian military aircraft. All Allies fully support Turkey's right to defend its territorial integrity and air space. I welcome Turkey's efforts to de-escalate the situation and to establish contacts with Russia. It is important to stay calm and our Ministerial meeting will also enhance our support for partners in North Africa and the Middle East.

To help countries like Tunisia, Iraq and Jordan build up their own security.

Third, we will adopt our new hybrid warfare strategy.

This is an important step.

Our new strategy will help us to prepare, deter and defend against hybrid threats.

Fourth, we will address how we take forward our relationship with Russia.

Russia's actions in Ukraine and the military build-up I our neighbourhood have led to new risks for our security.

We need to restore predictability in our relations.

Through the OSCE, we will seek to modernise the rules governing military activities in Europe, including observation and notification of military exercises.

To allow for greater scrutiny of snap exercises.

And we will develop further proposals on transparency and risk reduction.

The importance of this was highlighted by last week's incident with the Russian plane.

Fifth, we will reconfirm our political support to Ukraine.

And we will review our practical support, to help Ukraine modernise its command and control, cyber and logistic capabilities.

These projects have an impact on Ukraine's ability to defend itself and to reform its institutions.

Foreign Minister Klimkin will update us on Ukraine's reform path and we'll meet in the NATO-Ukraine Commission.

It is key that Ukraine remains committed to implementing ambitious reforms.

Last but not least, I expect Foreign Ministers to decide whether to invite Montenegro to begin accession talks with NATO.

Montenegro has come a long way on its path to join the Euro-Atlantic family.

But there is more to do.

Extending an invitation to Montenegro to start accession would be a historic decision.

It would signal our continued commitment to the Western Balkans.

And our Open Door policy.

But I can't pre-empt at this stage what Ministers will decide.

So, a busy very important two days ahead. Which will ensure that NATO is able to keep all Allies safe.

And with that I am ready to take your questions.

MODERATOR: We'll start in the front row, Pobjeda, Montenegro.

Q: Yes, Marija Markovic of Pobjeda, Montenegro. You already said that you don't want to predict any or decision but we know now that NATO ambassadors have made a decision about Montenegro and it's positive. Do you expect maybe the same decision for Minister of Foreign Affairs? But you said that you…

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): The decision is not made because it's very clearly stated and decided by the heads of state and government at the NATO summit last fall that it was, that it is going to be the Foreign Ministers who are going to make the

decision. So they are clearly mandated by their heads of states and heads of government to make a decision and they will decide Wednesday morning whether to invite Montenegro to start the accession talks. Of course this is something we have addressed over a long period of time and ever since the summit last fall we have had what we call focused and intensified talks with Montenegro. I have visited Montenegro twice, the North Atlantic Council has visited Montenegro and we have had several meetings here in Brussels. Montenegro is making and has made progress on reforms, on the rule of law, on modernizing its security sector but this is going to then be finally assessed by the Ministers on Wednesday morning and the decision is going to be made then.

MODERATOR: One Plus One TV.

Q: Ellis Bobrovnikov, One Plus One Media Ukraine. First one is on, say Syria, it looks like a pretty magnetic place for Russian fighters fighting there and one of the things is one of the, one of the rumours, one of the ideas was about the, the Russian fighters sort of being reinforced in Syria but travelling the, from the breakaway regions in Donetsk and Lugansk. So there, there seem to be some, some movement there and I would love to ask you about how do you see the situation on this, on this, in this particular context? That's the first one and the second one, there's, there was plenty of talk of, on Turkey here in Brussels on Sunday and the, the EU, the EU representatives talked a lot about the possible further integration with Turkey and it all looked like a piece of cake for Ukrainians. So what's new for Ukraine here? You have the Ukraine NATO Commission on Wednesday, what's new on the table? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First on the Russian presence in Syria. We have stated several times and I have stated several times that I would like to see Russia playing a constructive role in Syria and fighting ISIL and so far Russia has mainly attacked or targeted other targets than ISIL in Syria. So we will like to see Russia concentrating its efforts to fight our common enemy ISIL and to do so of course also in Syria. We have also expressed concerns about the increased Russian presence in Syria and the risks for incidents, accidents as we saw last week with the downing of the Russian military plane and for us this just underlines the importance of strengthening developing mechanisms for predictability, for transparency, for de-conflicting and to avoid this kind of incidents and if they happen, if they happen at least make sure that they don't spiral out of control and create misunderstandings and dangerous and even more dangerous situations. I will also underline the importance of, that there is now a renewed initiative to find a political and negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria. Russia is part of that, I welcome that because we need a peaceful negotiated solution more than ever to the conflict in Syria. The second question was about Ukraine. Well what we will do is that we will have the meeting with the NATO Ukraine Commission, that is something we have on a regular basis, and we will then partly reconfirm our very strong political support for Ukraine but also assess and discuss the practical support we are providing and you have to remember that NATO and NATO allies provide many different kinds of practical support for Ukraine. We have what we call the trust funds, financing improvements in command and

control for Ukraine, logistics, increasing their ability to, so, to improve their cyber defences. But in addition to that several NATO allies also provide other kind of support. For instance military training of Ukrainian forces and I visited Ukraine recently and there I took part or I visited a big exercise, a civilian disaster management exercise and I think that also illustrates that NATO is working in many different ways and supporting Ukraine in many different ways. And we will continue to do that but last but not least we will of course also assess the progress and the challenges we face regarding the implementation of the Minsk Agreements. And we saw for some time after the summer break some positive developments with increased or with at least a very large degree of respect for the ceasefire but during the last, recently we have seen an upsurge in the violations, more fighting, and this is of course something which causes concern because there's only one way to peace in Ukraine and that's the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements, meaning a full respect for the ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons and of course also that international monitors are allowed full access to be able to do their work to monitor the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

MODERATOR: Deutsche Welle for Afghanistan.

Q: Thank you. I am Arif Farahmand from Deutsche Welle Afghanistan Service. Mr. Secretary General, Afghan officials are complaining of, for lack of air force equipments and what we have seen in many major security incidents in Afghanistan, what is needed, what they lack was the modern air force equipment. Is there any plan from NATO to provide more air force equipments for Afghan Security Forces? And secondly what changes could be happen for the Resolute Support Mission for next year?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First about the Resolute Support. Well the details are going to be decided at the Foreign Ministerial Meeting but I welcome that several allies and partners, United States but also what we call the framework nations have already announced that they are ready and willing to continue with their military presence in Resolute Support Mission also through 2016. And, and we are, we will as I said make final decisions but what we are aiming at is to keep approximately the same force level, around 12,000 troops, also through 2016. And almost half of them will be non-US troops and the rest will be US troops. The exact figures and the exact as I say way of organizing this is something we'll come back to but that's approximately what I can say now. So we will continue, we will maintain, sustain our force levels in Afghanistan and also we will also have a presence not only in Kabul but also a regional presence in Afghanistan. Then on, on the question of equipment and, and help with air forces. NATO does not possess equipment so we cannot transfer that to Afghanistan, but NATO allies have and I know that NATO allies are in the process of helping the Afghan National Army and Security Forces with equipment, also when it comes to air force capabilities and also with training. So NATO allies are working with Afghan Armed Forces to increase and to strengthen their air force capabilities because that's something they need when they now are taking over the responsibility for the security in Afghanistan themselves.

MODERATOR: NPR, at the back, lady at the back.

Q: Hi. Teri Schultz with NPR and CBS, thanks. You have said that the allies all support Turkey, Turkey's defence of its air space and also that allies version of what happened in the shoot down support Turkey's version. Can you give us an explanation of that more closely? Because of course Russia is still saying it did not enter Turkish air space and the US hasn't been so specific. Also President Putin says that the US knew of the Russian planes flight plans, which would be different than the Russians have been doing when they buzz air space. Can you just sort of clarify what your understanding is of all of this? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: We have been very, we have been briefed by Turkey in the North Atlantic Council, went through all the information they have, at least they provided us with a lot of information and details. But in addition we have our own sources and our own information is consistent with what we have been given by Turkey. So they are providing the same main message, namely that it was a violation of Turkish air space. And this is not the first time, this has happened before. So that's the main thing when it comes to what happened. I think that the important thing now is to of course state once again that Turkey has the right to protect and to defend its territorial integrity and its air space and that we all now should focus on how can we calm tensions, de-escalate and to avoid that this is a situation which creates new problems and is undermining for instance the efforts to try to find a political negotiated solution to the crisis in Syria. Therefore I welcome efforts to try to establish further contacts between Ankara and Moscow and to avoid this situation becoming even more difficult.

MODERATOR: Reuters, just behind.

Q: Thanks. Robin Emmott from Reuters. Secretary General you've written about the need for a European rule book to avoid these kind of incidents, but from what we've seen so far Russia doesn't always play by the rules. I wondered what do you expect to get from this process?

JENS STOLTENBERG: What we will do tomorrow and the day after tomorrow is to discuss among Foreign Ministers how NATO can contribute to more predictability, more transparency and to enhance mechanisms for risk reductions to avoid incidents, accidents. And that's a clear political signal, it's pointing out in which direction we'd like to go. Then there are many details, many practical things we have to address and look into but one example is for instance what is called the Vienna Document which is a document which is negotiated and agreed in the OSCE framework but of course which is of great importance for NATO because this document provides guidelines, regulations for how we can conduct our military exercises and also provide guidelines for how international observation is facilitated for different kinds of military exercises. This is an important document but the problem is that it has to be modernized because there are several loopholes. For instance when it comes to snap exercises or exercises which are not notified there is no requirement for international

observation. So what we are, what we for instance could look into is whether we can establish mechanisms where if there are snap exercises there should also then be snap observation, international observation even if the exercises are with little or no prior notification. I think it is important to have these kind of rules and then to of course always do whatever we can to make sure that they are fully respected. The problem now is that there are too many loopholes and that's the reason why we will support efforts by NATO allies in Vienna, in the OSCE framework, to try to modernise this document. Another strand of work will be to look into the different bilateral arrangements which several NATO allies have when it comes to de-conflicting military to military lines of communication with Russia to avoid incidents, accidents. My own country NATO, my own country Norway, we have, we have had that kind of contacts for several years and that's useful to avoid incidents and if they happen to make sure that they don't spiral out of control. So we can learn from each other and see whether we can develop even better mechanisms. And I think what happened in Turkey last week just underlined the need for this kind of communications, lines of communications de-conflicting.

MODERATOR: Bloomberg, just behind.

Q: Jim Neugar from Bloomberg. You said in your opening statement that NATO is working on further assurance measures for Turkey, what will these measures be? And secondarily on Ukraine, you mentioned the recent increase in fighting along the ceasefire line, what concern do you have that Russia may be using the world's focus on Syria to, as a distraction from increased rebel activity in Ukraine?

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO has to stay focused both on what's going on on its southern borders, Iraq, Syria, but at the same time of course continue to stay focused on the challenges we see to the east and especially in Ukraine. So we don't have the luxury of either being focused or addressing the challenges to the east or the challenges to the south, we have to do both at the same time. And that's exactly what we are going to do at this meeting. We are going to focus on Ukraine with the NATO Ukraine Commission meeting. We're going to focus on how we respond to a more assertive Russia, but at the same time we will address the efforts to fight ISIL and the efforts by all NATO allies which are part of the coalition fighting ISIL and of course also what Turkey is doing bordering Syria and Iraq and being so close to the violence and the turmoil we see caused by ISIL in that region. NATO has had for several years, for three years, assurance measures in Turkey. We have had the patriot batteries deployed there, this is part of our standing defence plan for Turkey and it's part of NATO being an alliance protecting each other and since Turkey is so close on the frontline of the fighting in Syria and Iraq we found it the right thing to do to augment their air defences some years ago. We will continue to provide support for Turkey, exactly with what kind of capabilities is what our military authorities are now looking into, assessing, and they will provide us some recommendations and we will make decisions on the specific kinds of assurance measures, capabilities, in the near future. But what is certain is that we will continue to support Turkey, we will continue to augment their air defences and, and that's part

of being an alliance which supports an ally which is so close to all the turmoil, the violence we see to the south of our borders.

MODERATOR: Wall Street Journal.

Q: Julian Barnes, Wall Street Journal. First Mr. Secretary General, what happened to your hand? And secondly on Montenegro, you've mentioned in the past you want to see public support for membership in the alliance as part of a, as a requirement for ultimate accession. Where do you think that public support stands? There have been protests there, some people have seen the hand of Russia behind the protests. Do you think that there is Russian agitation there to try to block NATO membership? Should Russia have some sort of veto over further expansion?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First my hand, I have broken a very small bone in my hand, but at a big cost. So that's, yeah, that happens. Then on Montenegro. What we will decide on Wednesday is whether or not to invite Montenegro to start accession talks. Then we have to go through that and then 28 allies have to finally then ratify, also if we invite Montenegro, then there will be accession talks and then eventually ratification in 28 allied national assemblies. So there is still a way to go even after a decision on Wednesday if that is to, if that is going to be to invite Montenegro. And one of the areas which we have focused on through the last year but also then continue to focus on if there is an invitation on Wednesday is public support. We have seen opinion polls with increased support for joining NATO in Montenegro. I welcome that but of course we have to continue to stay focused both on public support and on reforms related to rule of law and not least track record related to rule of law. So one important decision will then be taken on Wednesday but then even if Montenegro is invited we still have to continue to work closely with Montenegro on for instance public support. There are different opinions, I have been in Montenegro and I think that in any democratic society there are different opinions and that's part of being a democratic society. That's, and that we have some people who are demonstrating and showing their opinion by demonstrations are also part of something which is normal in a democratic society. So I think we have to live with and that's part of democracy that there are different opinions about such an important question as joining NATO.

JULIAN BARNES: And on the Russian aspect of it?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I will not speculate about who is behind of if they are playing a role. The thing is that it's a completely legitimate thing but in the country there are different opinions about NATO membership. Even in my own country Norway people have had different opinions about NATO for many years.

MODERATOR: Lady in the front row.

Q: Jelena Otasevic, TV of Montenegro. You have already said that Ministers will decide on Wednesday morning. When will we have the official publication of the, their decision, what

time? And you already said that Montenegro will continue negotiations and talks with NATO, when can we expect the official accession of our country to NATO?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The decision will be taken early Wednesday morning. So, and I, and we are planned then to announce it very soon after that. So that will be public very soon after we make a decision. Regardless of whether we decide or not decide to invite Montenegro then of course it will be announced Wednesday morning. The exact hour I'm not able to give you but it will be early. Second, second, then we will have the formal process of accession talks. That will take some, at least some months, and then there will be, if then we succeed, given that Montenegro is invited and given that we are successful in the accession talks then there is a process with a ratification in all 28 national parliaments or assemblies in all the 28 allies. That will take some time, I will not give you an exact date but that's a quite, a process which takes some time. So it will take some time before NATO [sic] can join the alliance even if we decide to invite them on Wednesday.

MODERATOR: Front row.

Q: Agency Euro Atlantica Ukraine. As you know yesterday Russian air forces targeted market on the north of Syria, for, forty people killed, destroyed water infrastructure, bakery, other things and I haven't heard any reaction of the side of EU or NATO. Have you appreciate this, how can you react on this? And the second, as you know Russia deployed rocket systems S400 on the territory of Syria. It's also question, what's your reaction of this? And do you believe that a large or wide coalition with Ukraine would be constructive or destructive? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The loss of civilian and the loss of innocent lives in the civil war in Syria is a tragedy and too many lives have been lost and we see that violence, fighting is going on and, and that's the reason why I and NATO so strongly support all efforts to try to find a peaceful negotiated solution. That will not be easy, it will take time but at least we have seen a renewed will and a renewed strength in the efforts to try to find a political agreement and to stop the fighting and the killings in Syria. I'm, I think it is important that we all fight our common enemy ISIL and that's the reason why I would like to see Russia targeting ISIL, our common enemy, instead of targeting so many other groups and areas in ISIL, in Syria, because very much of their bombing is taking place in territories or areas where ISIL is not present at all. And that will strengthen our fight against ISIL if also Russia concentrate their targets or their efforts fighting ISIL instead of bombing many other targets and groups in Syria.

MODERATOR: Over there, over there?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah we have seen a substantial Russian military build-up over a long period of time with both different kinds of missile systems, with naval presence, with, with also personnel on the ground, with air forces and so on. And I think this is part of the increased Russian presence close to NATO borders in many parts of the world. We have

seen it up in the north, we have seen it to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea and now also in the Mediterranean. And Russia is developing what we call anti-access air denial capabilities and that is something we are following very closely from the NATO side and that's also the reason, one of the reasons why we are adapting our forces and why we are implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the cold war, as response to the increased Russian presence in, also from the north, Baltic, Black and also the Mediterranean Sea. As I said we welcome all efforts to fight ISIL.

Q: Hello Secretary General. Jamey Keaten from Associated Press. You mentioned that you want to see Turkey and Russia have greater talks, better coordination but as you know President Putin is not taking calls from President Erdogan at the moment. So I wanted to know what is NATO doing specifically, what has NATO done to communicate with Russia directly since the incident last week? And what changes do you see between NATO's relationship with Russia in the wake of the biggest kinetic incident between Russia and a NATO member state for some time?

JENS STOLTENBERG: We have had direct contacts with the Russian delegation here in Brussels, the NATO, also the Russian delegation to NATO here in Brussels. The Deputy Secretary General met with the Russian Ambassador, Ambassador Grushko, some days ago or last week and in the wake of the incident last week and he expressed of course our strong message about that we of course support the right of Turkey to defend its air space and also the need to de-escalate, to calm the situation and he also expressed the need for direct contacts Ankara Moscow and that was a very clear message from, from NATO, from the Deputy Secretary General to Russia and the Russian Ambassador Grushko. We believe that the best way of de-escalating the situation and to calm tensions is by direct contact Ankara Moscow because then they can sit down, discuss exactly how they assess the situation and also look into how they can do whatever possible to avoid something similar happening in the future. So I will welcome any kind of contact and dialogue between Russia and Turkey on these issues.

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. We've now come to the end of this press conference, I know there are lots of questions that you still had, I'm sorry we don't have the time to answer them all however the Secretary General will be back tomorrow quite early in the morning and throughout the day. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.
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