North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Speech

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Plenary session at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in Bucharest
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(As delivered)

Thank you so much President Alli, President of Romania, President of the Senate, President of the Chamber of Deputies, Ministers, dear Parliamentarians

Good morning to all of you.

It's a great to see you all of you here today and it is great to be back in Bucharest, to be among Allies, partners and friends.

Let me begin with thanking Romania for hosting all of us here today.

And also for Romania's very strong contributions to the Alliance and to our collective defence, to our shared security.

Romania is contributing in many different ways, contributing to NATO operations in Afghanistan and in Kosovo.

As the host of our ballistic missile defence site in Deveselu.

And as a nation committed to spending 2% of GDP on defence.

So, Romania is helping to keep NATO's nearly one billion citizens safe.

The NATO Parliamentary Assembly also makes an essential contribution to that mission.

And I want to thank President Paolo Alli and the Secretariat for all the very hard and important work they do to make this organization functioning as well.

And, of course, I also want to thank you, all the members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

NATO relies on you.

To engage with your colleagues.

And with the people you represent.

You can help explain what NATO is.

And what NATO does.

You approve national defence budgets.

And you ensure that the Alliance has the tools to do its job.

That’s why I am so pleased to be here together with you today.

I am very impressed by the work you are doing.

On topics very high on NATO’s agenda.

Such as cooperation with the EU.

Security in the Black Sea region.

The European defence industry.

Challenges from the South.

And of course burden-sharing within the Alliance.

Today, I want to outline where the Alliance stands right now.

And where we are all going.

Then I look forward to your questions, and to our discussion after my speech.

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Colleagues, friends,

NATO is an Alliance that keeps its promises.

We say what we do.

And we do what we say.

We are adapting to a new security environment and we are adapting to new challenges and to a new security threat.

We are adapting to the new security challenges we face.

Expanding our presence in the east of the Alliance.

Stepping up our response to the threats from the South.

Increasing our resilience to hybrid and cyber threats.

Boosting our support for partners.

And taking our cooperation with the EU to a new level.

I've been to all our new multinational battlegroups in the east of the Alliance.

I've seen them in action.

And I met their commanders and troops.

In Estonia, in Latvia, in Lithuania and in Poland.

The battlegroups are in place and fully operational.

Sending a clear message that an attack on one Ally will be regarded as an attack against us all.

The speed and efficiency with which they were deployed reflects Allies' strong commitment to our collective defence.

I want to thank Canada, Germany, the United States and the United Kingdom for leading the four battlegroups.

As well as the 16 other Allies who are contributing.

Including the four host nations.

But of course, we haven't only strengthened our forward presence in the North-east of the Alliance.

But also in the South-east.

Here in Romania, our multinational framework brigade is now operational.

I want to thank Romania for hosting the brigade.

And I am looking forward to visiting it later today with President Iohannis.

We are also seeing increased Allied presence in the Black Sea.

Allied jets continue to patrol the skies over Romania and Bulgaria as part of our ongoing air policing mission.

Canadian pilots flying alongside Romanians.

And Italian pilots working with their Bulgarian colleagues.

Our deployments are a direct response to Russia's aggressive actions in Ukraine.

NATO's actions are defensive, proportionate and entirely in line with our international commitments.

We are concerned by Russia's military build-up close to our borders.

And its lack of transparency when it comes to military exercises such as ZAPAD 2017.

This highlights the importance of our dual-track approach to Russia.

Which combines strong defence with meaningful dialogue.

In the NATO-Russia Council.

Throughout bilateral engagements.

And through military-to-military contacts.

We continue to call on Russia to abide by its international commitments.

Russia is our neighbour.

Russia is here to stay.

We do not want to isolate Russia.

NATO does not want a new Cold War.

Our actions are designed to prevent, not provoke conflict.

And we are committed to transparency and predictability, which are in everybody's interest.

Our Alliance has to face many different threats and challenges at the same time.

A pressing concern, of course, is the arc of instability from Afghanistan to the Middle East and North Africa.

Which has inspired terrorist attacks in our own countries.

NATO has played a role in the fight against terrorism for many years.

Our largest ever military operation is in Afghanistan.

Where today we have around 13,000 troops from 39 different NATO and partner countries training Afghan security forces.

Helping them to fight terrorism and stabilise their own country.

I have just returned from a trip to Afghanistan together with US Secretary of Defence Mattis.

There is a renewed commitment to our efforts in Afghanistan.

I have seen how well NATO troops are working with Afghan security forces.

Providing training and support to them.

Helping them to make progress on the battlefield, and reduce their casualties.

The situation in Afghanistan is challenging.

We all understand the cost of staying in Afghanistan.

The human cost and the financial cost.

But the cost of walking away would be much higher.

If NATO leaves too soon, we risk Afghanistan returning to a state of chaos.
A safe haven for international terrorism.

The last time that happened then it led to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States.
In which almost 3000 people were killed.

We cannot allow that to happen again.

That is why we remain committed to Afghanistan.

We are also stepping up elsewhere.

The Alliance is now a full member of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

Our AWACS surveillance planes are helping the Coalition to better understand the situation in the air.

NATO is training Iraqi security forces.

Bolstering their ability to win the fight against ISIS.

And Iraqi troops trained by NATO and Allies have put their skills to use in the battle for Mosul and elsewhere.

We are making progress.

ISIS is losing ground.

And they are on the run.

At the same time, we are boosting the support we give to partners in the Middle East and North Africa.

Including training programmes in countries such as Tunisia and Jordan.

We are working to improve situational awareness and information-sharing.

So that Allies can take even swifter action against threats we face, including terrorism.

That is why we have set up our new Intelligence Division at NATO Headquarters.

And the Hub for the South in Naples.

And we are working hard throughout the alliance to make our societies more resilient to attack.

Resilience is essential to our ability to resist hybrid threats.

Such threats are quicker, more potent and more intense than ever before.

Combining many different elements.

Including cyber-attacks, disinformation and the use of hard military force.

From tweets to tanks.

Guarding against such threats is an increasingly vital part of NATO’s mission.

And that’s what we are doing.

Including by strengthening our cooperation with the European Union.

Just last week, I took part in the inauguration of the Helsinki Hybrid Centre of Excellence.

Together with EU High Representative/Vice President of the European Commission Federica Mogherini.

Neither NATO nor the EU alone have all the tools to tackle the challenges alone.

So that is why we must work more closely together.

We have now started the preparions for the next NATO Summit which will take plate in Brussels next year at our new headquarters.

We will continue to build on the decisions we took at the Wales and Warsaw Summits.

Upgrading our collective defence.

And helping bring stability and security to our neighbourhood.

Both East and South.

Relations with Russia will, of course, be an important topic.

As will our cooperation with the EU.

And the continuing modernisation of the Alliance.

Crucially, going forward, Allies need to invest in defence.

At the Wales Summit as you know in 2014, all Allies made a pledge.

To stop the cuts in defence budgets.

And gradually move towards spending 2% of GDP on defence within a decade.

The good news is that we have seen real progress.

After years of decline, in 2015 we saw a real increase in defence spending across European Allies and Canada.

This continued in 2016.

And this year 2017, we estimate an even greater annual increase – of 4.3% in real terms.

That is three consecutive years of accelerating defence spending.

The trend is up and, with your help, we will keep it up.

Last year, five Allies met the 2% target.

Romania has announced it will join them this year.

With Latvia and Lithuania doing the same next year.

Increased defence spending is about making sure we have what we need in a more dangerous world.

But it’s also about burden sharing within the Alliance.

And keeping the transatlantic bond strong.

That’s why it is so important.

And why I rely on you all to make the case for more and better spending back home.

One way of doing that is by addressing the fragmentation of the European defence industry. And let me also give you some examples on what I mean of speaking about the fragmentation of the European defence industry.

The US has one type of main battle tank, while Europe has 17 different tanks.

The US has four types of frigates and destroyers; Europe has 29.

The US has six types of fighter plane; Europe has 20.

Think what that means for our ability to work and fight together.

And the unnecessary costs involved.

This is a challenge NATO is addressing through our work on capability development.

We are also now stepping up our cooperation with the EU on the issue of capability developments.

And I strongly welcome the commitment of EU leaders.

Colleagues, Friends,

Many thanks to your efforts, the Alliance is better prepared to face a new and changing security environment.

This assembly has long played an essential role in NATO's evolution.

As NATO continues to adapt to an uncertain world, I know I can count on you all.

To shape the debate.

To engage with citizens on our behalf.

Thank you for everything you do.

I look forward to your questions.

And our discussion.
MODERATOR: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General. We now come to the questions. I would like to remind the delegates about the procedure for asking questions. I'll follow our usual procedure. I will announce those called to ask questions in groups of three so that you will be prepared.
Anyone who would like to ask the Secretary General a question should let me know as soon as possible. We already have something like 14 requests for the floor. We cannot go… OK. So please raise your hands so that the staff of the Secretary can identify you and pass the name to me.

There will be a limit of two minutes for all questions. I cannot guarantee, of course, that everyone will be called because time is limited.

The first three questions are from Miro Kovac from Croatia, Ricardo Tarno from Spain, Joelle Garriaud-Maylam from France. Miro, you have the floor.

QUESTION: Thank you, dear President. I appreciate the speech delivered by the Secretary General, who spoke about one of the biggest threats nowadays, cyber warfare hybrid threats. And in this domain, we have basically NATO efforts, we have European Union efforts, and we have efforts of national authorities.

So I would like to ask you, dear Secretary General, how do you evaluate the cooperation in this domain between all these efforts – EU, NATO, national authorities? Are we efficient enough? Thank you.

MODERATOR: Before giving the floor to the next question, we have to thank our Romanian guests for their outstanding speeches, and of course we are closely united with Romania in their effort to peace and stability in the region. Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you for your speeches.

MODERATOR: So now, Ricardo.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, Mr. Secretary General. Dear colleagues, I am going speak to Spanish.

(Interpretation): Mr. Secretary General, you talked about new challenges, new threats. You also talked about Twitter and tanks. There's growing concern in our societies and in our governments and parliaments because of the new conflicts, the new forms of warfare, the new battlefields.

Today we see how satellite organizations from Russia, Moscow, social media are used for disinformation, fake news, and half-truths with the intention of having an influence… our public opinion in order to manipulate, in order to weaken our democracies. This is a new army. What role is NATO playing? What role will it play, and what role should member states play? Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Ricardo. Joelle.

QUESTION: We need to increase our complementarity, Mr. Secretary General, greater burden sharing without reducing the fragmentation that you have mentioned recently. We need to encourage a strong EU defence. What better means to reach this goal by EU strategic autonomy and to make sure that to reach this ambition is not in contradiction with NATO's aims? Wouldn't it be reasonable to support this EU strategic autonomy by articulating this ambition with the Allies' collective defence?

Do you believe, Mr. Secretary General, that we could only share the burden and not the responsibility linked to the EU autonomy, which is well understood and faithful to its commitment towards our Alliance?

MODERATOR: Before giving the word again to the Secretary General…

JENS STOLTENBERG (Secretary General of NATO): First to the question from Croatia. It's absolutely correct, what you are pointing at. And that is when it comes to cyber, we have national capabilities owned by the different nations; we have capabilities and systems in NATO; and there are also of course capabilities addressing cyber threats in the European Union.

And that's exactly why we need to cooperate. That's exactly why we need to coordinate both national efforts, NATO efforts, and EU efforts. And of course we still have a way to go. We still have unfinished business. But I really welcome that we have made a lot of progress.

In the cooperation with EU in general, but on cyber in particular, we have agreed a technical arrangement which enables our experts to speak together and work together with the EU experts. We saw the big cyber attacks early this year, then NATO and EU experts were able to exchange information and to work together. And of course we now are also addressing how can we better integrate national cyber capabilities into the NATO framework.

In one way, that's not so very different from what we do on, what should I say, a more classical, traditional, conventional capabilities. Because most of the NATO capabilities are not owned by NATO but owned by nations, but then we have training, we have frameworks, we have command and control, which integrate national capability into a broader NATO… as a joint or… framework.

So there are differences, but at least there are also some similarities when it comes to how to address cyber capabilities and other more traditional military capabilities. But you're right, and this is a key issue, and that's one of the reasons why I also welcome the cooperation with the European Union.

Then Spain. The challenge with hybrid threats is that it covers so many different things. So there is not one response to hybrid threats; there are many responses. And one of the challenges is of course that hybrid is about trying to combine military and non-military means of aggression, little green men with cyber attacks or disinformation trying to undermine our democratic institutions or trying to actually conduct aggressive actions but with retaining a kind of level of deniability, denying that the aggressor is behind the aggression.

And also then reducing the warning time and our understanding of what is going on.

And that's exactly why we have decided to improve our situational awareness; to strengthen our intelligence; to establish the new Intelligence Division; to develop better, as a, for instance, drones and a better reconnaissance, surveillance, and intelligence capabilities; to improve our understanding of what is going on to be able to react also to different kinds of cyber threats and cyber attacks.

Add to that that we are significantly stepping up our cyber defences, and we are working closely with the centre in Helsinki which was just opened last week, but also the Centre of Excellence on Cyber in Estonia, and, for instance, strategic communication, the Centre, sorry, of Excellence on Strategic Communications in Latvia. And there are many different tools in the NATO toolkit which we are now developing to strengthen our ability to respond to cyber threats.

Then France. So as I said it many times, I strongly believe in NATO-EU cooperation. I welcome that we have been able to push the NATO-EU cooperation to really a new level, partly because I think we have been able to kill some of the ghosts from the past. Because before, there was so much anxiety and so much concern, both in EU and NATO, about competition, about overlapping responsibilities, so we were not very successful in really moving forward the cooperation.

Over the last years we have been able to bring the NATO-EU cooperation to a really new level, and just now we have in NATO the CMX exercise, and that is a parallel and coordinated exercise with the European Union. And I participated at the NATO… sorry, the EU defence ministerial meeting in Estonia some weeks ago. And then I participated for the first time as Secretary General in EU exercise on cyber.

And we are working together, as you mentioned, in the Mediterranean, in the Aegean Sea, and many other places. So step by step, we are moving forward.

On European defence, I would just stress what I've stressed before. As long as European defence is about strengthening defence in Europe in a way which is complementary to NATO, then it's absolutely fine. And that's the reason why I have supported stronger European defence, meaning more defence spending, more training, more capabilities, more coordination so there's less overlap, less fragmentation of European defence industry. That's really great. That is something that NATO has called for for a long time, and that will also contribute to fairer burden sharing between the United States and Europe.

Then we just have to remember that it is important what we communicate and the perception. Because we have to avoid the perception that European defence can replace NATO. It's not an alternative to NATO; it's something inside NATO.

And that has also been clearly stated from many European leaders: that collective defence is for NATO, not for the European Union. Just because of capabilities. Because we have to remember that, especially when UK leaves the European Union—Brexit—then 80 percent – 80 percent – of NATO's defence spending will be non-EU, with the US and UK as its biggest and second-biggest defence spender outside EU.

And then you have of course Norway and Iceland in the north, perhaps not the biggest countries in the world, but strategically important located to the north. You have of course in

the west UK and Canada and United States, and then in the south you have Albania and Turkey, which are key for the southern flank.

And for instance, look at the four battle groups we have in the Baltic countries and Poland. Three of the four battle groups will be led by non-EU member states: UK, United States, and Canada – after Brexit.

So stronger European defence is good, but it has to be within NATO, not an alternative to NATO, and of course not overlapping our structures. Yeah, that was the three. There are many, questions, I know.

MODERATOR: Yeah.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The problem is not the questions; the problems are the answers. They're too long.

MODERATOR: No, no, that's very good. Thank you. Mike Turner for United States. Please, Mike.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary General, thank you for your presence here. It is certainly important that you are as active as you are with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, and certainly in your strong statement of recognition of the role of parliamentarians in both funding and supporting military policies.

Also, thank you for including in NATO's summit our President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It shows the reciprocal nature of the relationship between NATO and the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

I appreciate your strong statements concerning the two percent spending and burden sharing. You referred to it as a pledge in Wales, and I appreciate that strong language. Certainly the United States has an expectation that the commitment in Wales was a pledge, although even in our debates here there are those who want to qualify the language as to the goals and objectives of Wales of reaching two percent.

Even though the United States looks to our NATO partners as an absolute commitment to increased spending, we, as you know, continue our commitment, allocating billions of dollars to the European Reassurance Initiative and the forward deployment of both equipment and troops.

But as you know, forward deployment is not enough. We've been undertaking exercises to train in the manner in which it would take to respond in case there is a conflict in the area. And what we're learning is that, both in infrastructure and bureaucracy, there are logistical difficulties in being able to move troops within Europe. As you know, you can't defend a territory if you can't get across a territory. It's an issue that we're very concerned about.

Obviously it's going to take NATO, EU, and I think the participating nations to bring down the bureaucratic impediments, but also to address the issue of infrastructure with both bridges and railways. I'd like your thoughts on what we need to do to try to address this issue of logistics. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Carlos Costa Neves from Portugal.

QUESTION: Thank you, President. Thank you, Secretary General, for your remarks. Dear colleagues, my question is about annual reports and burden sharing. The members of the Alliance agreed to present annual reports, I think this year until December. And what I would like to ask is if there is a framework for that annual report or if each member state will do whatever he wants.

Secondly, if Wales defence pledge will be considered in that annual report, and if we will have some kind of evaluation, a quantitative or a qualitative evaluation.

So what I would like to know is if that quantitative evaluation is only to see if there is two percent of the GDP in 2024, or if we will have a qualitative evaluation considering development aid, participation in NATO military missions, or European Union missions or UN missions, effective participation if we are going to evaluate the increase of capabilities and also coordination of capabilities. Thank you, Chair.

MODERATOR: Ojars Kalnins from Latvia. Please, Ojars.

QUESTION: Thank you very much, Mr. President, and thank you, Secretary General, again, for being with us. During your remarks, you talked about the Russia Zapad 2017 exercises. During those exercises, Latvia experienced a hacking attack on our phone service, which also shut down emergency phone services for several hours. I experienced this personally.

There are indications that a Russian ship in the Baltic Sea may have caused this shutdown. And so I have two questions. Does NATO have any additional information about this or any confirmation of what caused this shutdown? And second, and I just raise this theoretically, but would a cyber attack on a NATO member state's phone service that includes very vital emergency services be considered an act of aggression? Thank you.

MODERATOR: OK, the three next speakers after the answer from Secretary General will be Karl Lamers, Richard Benyon, and Rasa Juknevičienė.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. First to Mike Turner. The spending is a pledge we all made together, and the good news, as I said, is that European allies and Canada have started to deliver. The picture is still mixed, but it's much better than just a couple of years ago. And we have seen a significant increase across Europe and Canada, more countries meeting the two percent target, but also the fact that even those who are still, as I say, some way to go… still have some way to go to the two percent, they have started to increase. So total spending is increasing. That's good.

Let me add just one thing about the two percent. It’s that I understand that that's difficult because, I think, as I've said to you before, most parliamentarians, most politicians, they would like to spend money on health, education, infrastructure, or reduce taxes, instead of spending money on defence. But sometimes we have to spend money on defence because the world is more demanding. And since we were able to cut defence spending when tensions went down after the end of the Cold War, we have to be able to increase defence spending when tensions are going up, as they are doing now.

The second thing I'd like to say about defence spending and two percent is that two percent is not that much. During the Cold War, we spent three, four percent. And as late as the 1990s we had spent two percent. So we have been there before.

Then of course someone said that yeah, well, during the Cold War, the GDP was so much smaller. That's true. But they've asked you to spent two percent on defence, then you have 98 percent for something else. And if the GDP was smaller then, well, it should be a less problem now because 98 percent of big GDP is much bigger than 98 percent of a small GDP.

So two percent, yes, I understand, but it's absolutely possible. We have done it before, and we can do it again.

Infrastructure, just to say that, well, that's very high on our agenda now. And that's also one of the issues we are working together with the European Union on. We have increased the readiness of our forces. We tripled the size of the NATO response force. We have the new spearhead force. But of course we have to be able to move.

And therefore we have addressed both many legal hindrances, bureaucratic problems, moving equipment, forces across Europe, across borders, but also of course the fact that we need infrastructure which is able to facilitate the movement of heavy equipment across Europe. That's something which is now on the top of our agenda and addressing it both in the NATO framework and together with the European Union.

Then Portugal, the annual report? Well, we have the annual report at the end of the year. They will be assessed and discussed, and we will discuss the annual reports among Ministers of Defence at our defence ministerial meeting in February.

And the annual reports, they will be both quantitative and qualitative reports. They will address both spending but also, as we have clearly stated, contributions to NATO missions and operations, for instance Afghanistan, Kosovo, enhanced forward presence, tailored forward presence, but also capabilities, to what extent we meet the NATO capability targets.

So all of this will be on the agenda, but it's not that we can choose between either meeting the pledges we have made on contributions or spending. We are asking for capabilities, contributions, and spending. And actually, you need spending to fund, for instance, new capabilities. You need spending to fund contributions to missions and operations.

But we will of course focus on all three aspects of the pledge we made – contributions, capabilities, and spending. And there is a framework, so this is not up to each and every country to decide exactly how they do, but will be as standardized as possible to try to be able to measure progress on the three strands of work.

Then on Latvia, so of course we are very concerned about reports about some cyber attacks, hacking. And that's also the reason why we have strengthened significantly the cyber defences of NATO networks, but also helping member states, allies, to improve their cyber defences, partly by sharing experiences, sharing technology, exercising, and also just by increasing awareness.

And I have met the commanders, I met the troops in the battle groups in the Baltic countries. They have focused on this, so the problem of hacking. And the vulnerabilities of the networks, for instance in the Baltic countries.

I cannot say anything about attribution when it come to the recent attacks we have seen, but it just underlines the importance of strengthening our awareness and our cyber defence systems.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Karl Lamers. Karl Lamers is also chairing our new working group on education and communication we have established to support NATO in giving better information through our parliamentary activities to our large public, and in particular to the schools, on what NATO is and what NATO does. Before you told more than once that this is important, the perception of people, also to facilitate our works as lawmakers and parliamentarians. Please, Karl.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr President, Excellency, Secretary General. In your impressive speech and in your answer you have already mentioned the deeper cooperation between NATO and EU. Since the Warsaw Summit, NATO and EU have already advanced their mutual cooperation. There is a list of 42 proposals which make this cooperation visible. But we all know not all of these are big projects.

Secretary General, do you think this list is enough for the moment, or is it only a first step? And if you think so, what are other fields you would recommend for the future?

Second, Germany is leading the framework nation, the enhanced forward presence in Lithuania. Unfortunately, we have seen Russian attempts to target the enhanced forward presence contingents through hybrid means. We have spoken about hybrid means. But especially on this very sensitive field, what can Alliance do more to deal with these hybrid challenges? Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Richard Benyon from United Kingdom.

QUESTION: Secretary General, first a comment and then a question. In your answer on cyber, you indicated a direction of thinking. But isn't the structure of command units, of

command within NATO making it difficult to deal with a disseminated, decentralized threat? Because the nature of the Alliance and the military command structure is one that is so centralized.

My question is on a different subject. Many people across the Alliance and beyond thought that when the Iran nuclear deal was signed, the world had become a bit safer. Now we see that deal under threat, and we see today some very aggressive comments from the Iranian government, and it looks like it could all come to an end. And I would be very grateful to know what your feeling is and what the Alliance is doing to secure a peaceful future in that region. MODERATOR: Thank you. Rasa Jukneviciene from Lithuania.

QUESTION: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. President, Mr. Secretary General. Mike Turner already mentioned the question I wanted also to ask, but I would like to put stronger stress on so-called NATO Schengen.

Russian President Vladimir Putin highlighted surprise is a strategy. That is the most worrisome element, and we have to be prepared for all possible contingencies.

In recent years NATO has greatly enhanced the scale of military exercises, and it is particularly important that they are held on the basis of Article 5. What are the main lessons learned? What challenges remain for NATO forces to work quickly and effectively so that there are no artificial obstacles for our troops from different countries, from one part of NATO to another part, to move, to respond quickly to sudden threats, and what we as NATO Parliamentary Assembly and national elements can do more to remove any obstacles to for our military to act? Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. The the next three speakers will be Lorenzo Battista from Italy; Jasna Murgel, Slovenia; and Ahmet Berat Conkar from Turkey. Please.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. First to Karl Lamers. We have, as you mentioned, 42 measures. I signed a joint declaration together with President Tusk and President Juncker in Warsaw in July last year. Then we followed up with the High Representative Federica Mogherini with 42 measures.

They are covering many different things. Some are small, some are big. I will say what we do, for instance, in the Mediterranean with our support to Operation Sophia is significant; also with the NATO Maritime Mission Sea Guardian. I also believe what NATO does in the Aegean Sea is significant, with the naval presence there led by Germany. And I will also say that we are making progress on important areas like, for instance, cyber. I already addressed that.

But I agree with you that we could do much more. So partly this is about identifying new areas where we can work together. But I think actually the main focus should be how can we do more within areas we have already identified, like for instance cyber, or like for instance

projecting stability to our neighbourhood, addressing the root causes of terrorism, or more exercises.

So we will update the 42 measures. We will do that before Christmas. I'm already working with the EU on that. I think the most important thing is not whether it's 42 or 52 or 32. The most important thing is the content and the substance of those measures. And I think to a large extent it will be about doing more stepping up on many of the areas we have already identified.

Let me just mention one of the issues I mentioned, and that is capabilities. Because addressing this big issue of more cost efficient, more coordinated development of, sorry, capabilities, defence capabilities within Europe, if we are able to make some progress there, it will increase the interoperability of our forces and it will increase the competitiveness of European defence industry, and it will reduce the cost of acquiring new capabilities. That's a big and extremely sensitive and difficult issue, but it has to be addressed NATO and EU together.

Yeah. Then you asked me about the tax, the disinformation and the cyber and hybrid attacks against the German-led battle group in Lithuania. We have seen that also in other countries, that at least it has been used as a disinformation. Cyber has been used against those battle groups. And that's exactly why we have to be very vigilant. That's the reason why we have to respond every time we see any attempts to try to erode the trust in NATO presence and the multinational battle groups in the Baltic countries and Poland, or, for that sake, the presence in the southeast, in Romania and Bulgaria.

NATO is engaging with journalists. We are every time we see false information, disinformation about our presence, we react and we provide facts. We don't believe that the response to propaganda is propaganda. We believe that the best way to counter propaganda is by providing the truth. The truth will prevail over propaganda in the long run.

But of course we have to be there sharing the facts, clarifying any misunderstandings, and countering disinformation about our battle groups and any other NATO presence. We do that in close cooperation with the NATO Centre of Excellence on Strategic Communications. And of course we can also work together with the new centre in Helsinki, which is supported by NATO and the European Union, on hybrid threats.

Let me also end around the following: that I strongly believe in the importance of free, independent press. Because if we have journalists, if we have independent, critical media, they will ask the right questions. They will check the sources. They will be able to distinguish disinformation, propaganda from facts and the truth.

So the need to have free, independent press is even more critical when we are subject of outside attempts to interfere in our processes or… so disinformation about, for instance, our battle groups.

Then United Kingdom. Well, I think that NATO has proven able also to react to cyber and hybrid threats and challenges, partly by increasing the readiness of our forces. That's one way of reacting because then we are addressing the challenge related to reduced warning times. Just the fact that we are present, that we are able to react quickly, is a way to address hybrid threats.

We have significantly strengthened our cyber defences, meaning that we are able to protect our own networks. But we are doing a lot to also then increase the capabilities of different nations to protect their national networks.

And this is also very much about sharing capabilities because the capabilities, the skills, the knowledge in different countries varies. Some countries, like for instance the UK, they have really expertise in the field of cyber. And one of the areas we're looking into, how can UK share more of their knowledge, their expertise with other perhaps smaller countries which don't have the same level of expertise, at least not in all different range of cyber.

And that's the reason why we are doing that inside the NATO framework. We have the cyber pledge, and we have the different Centres of Excellence.

Iran nuclear deal. Well, I welcomed the Iran nuclear agreement when it was concluded. I also underlined the importance of full implementation of the deal. The deal is only working if it's fully implemented, and that's the focus now. And we of course support all efforts to make sure that the deal is fully implemented so we make sure that Iran is not able to develop nuclear weapons. So implementation of the deal is key.

Let me end at the nuclear deal addressed Iran's programs for developing nuclear weapons. The nuclear agreement did not address, for instance, Iran's program on missiles. And it did not of course address the many other problems with Iran, for instance Iran's support to terrorist organizations and its destabilizing activities in other countries.

So the nuclear deal, Iran nuclear deal, was about or is about nuclear weapons, not about the many other challenges we see related to Iran. They have to be addressed in other ways. OK, I think that was…

MODERATOR: Lithuania.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Oh, sorry, Lithuania. Sorry, sorry, sorry. Yeah. NATO Schengen. I understand the phrase. I accept that it's used, and it's also used at NATO ministerial meetings. But I would caution a bit against the phrase. Because NATO Schengen is a phrase which perhaps is useful for those countries which are part of Schengen, but you know, many NATO allies will never be part of Schengen, nor will they be a member of the European Union, and I regret that for at least one country.

But then the thing is that, for instance, one thing we need to be able to do is that we have to be able to move reinforcements from the United States and Canada throughout Europe, for

instance to the battle groups in the east. And United States and Canada will never, never become members of Schengen. And there are also other European allies who are not members of Schengen and will not be members of Schengen.

So I understand the phrase, and I understand why it's used, but we have to distinguish between Schengen, the EU institution Schengen, and what we are trying to achieve in NATO. And that is the unhindered movement of forces and equipment in peacetime across NATO borders.

And we have seen that there are two problems. There are legal hurdles. We have to address them, and you have to help us in the parliaments. We are addressing that at the ministerial level, and we are working paragraph by paragraph, directive by directive, in a way, to make sure that we remove all those legal hurdles.

Second, because you understand it’s meaningless that we have a spearhead force able to move within days if we're going to have, you know, bureaucratic hurdles at the borders making it impossible to move that force to send a clear message of deterrence. Second, we need, as Mike Turner mentioned, we need infrastructure. We need to make sure that our roads, our airports, our harbours, whatever it is, has the dimensions, has the size so they can facilitate the movement of heavy equipment. But I can assure you this is top of the agenda, both within NATO and also of course in the cooperation between NATO and the European Union.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Lorenzo Battista from Italy.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. Thank you, Secretary General. As we know, Russia is increasing missions to influence Middle East and North Africa. Libya could become a target of Russia and continue to destabilize Europe's southern borders. While the European actors want to avoid escalation and are promoting the government of national unity of Prime Minister Sarraj, Putin prosecutes with his ambiguous policy. A minimal but important military support to General Haftar could represent a condition to see a Russia military base on the coast of Libya. The same Russia did in Syria, as you know.

Maybe Libya doesn't represent main target of Russia but could become one important element of Kremlin strategy to have a key role in Mediterranean Sea. Do you agree that this scenario could be an additional threat to our Alliance? In our committee, in defence committee, we debate in our report about ballistic missile defence of NATO. And we focus also on the purchase made by Turkey of a system produced in Russia, the system S400. May we have a comment on this issue? Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Lorenzo. Jasna Murgel from Slovenia.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. Secretary General, we had a lot of debate in these two days, but we somehow forgot to speak about a region that is of crucial importance

for the European security, namely the western Balkans. And I'm very happy that the President of our Assembly reminded us that the stable western Balkans is a precondition for a stable Europe.

The main objectives of international organization in Balkans should… should include the expansion of the area of democracy, stability, development, and security. To achieve these goals, it is crucial that the western Balkans has a genuine Euro-Atlantic perspective, which also strengthens the motivations to carry out the necessary reforms.

In this regard, Montenegro succession to the NATO sends a clear message to the other states of the region that seek membership. If a country embraces reforms, develops democracy, and respects the rule of law, and it is willing and able to contribute to our collective defence, it can join the Alliance.

On the other hand, we, the NATO members, should give a clear message to the NATO open doors policy that it still remains high on the political agenda of the Alliance. We should bear in mind that an uncertain and unreasonably long Euro-Atlantic perspective might send to the countries of the region – and I'm talking about Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina – a wrong signal. It might have an undesired political repercussions, and it might be a fertile ground for new tensions that will lead those countries and the whole region in the direction which nobody wants.

What is your opinion on this issue? Are there any new developments within the NATO regarding this matter? Thank you very much for your answer.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Ahmed Berat Conkar from Turkey.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. Dear Secretary General, thanks for your remarks. From the very beginning, we have been warning the world against the spill-over effects of the Syrian civil war, not only for itself but also for the Middle East and Europe. The unstable environment in Syria offered an ideal opportunity for the terrorist organizations to strengthen their logistics and human resources.

International cooperation and a genuine commitment by all governments to fight against all forms of terrorism are the key to success in this area. No country can claim immunity from terrorism. It is a political and a moral failure to distinguish between good terrorists and bad terrorists in the name of national interest or global ambitions. No national interest can be protected if you fail to unite against terrorism in all of its forms.

The support for the PKK Syrian affiliate democratic union party, PYD, and its people protection units, YPG militia, is justified on the grounds that this group fights Daesh terrorists in Syria. Furthermore, any and all support given to the YPG is also a support given to the PKK, directly or indirectly, which is threatening a NATO ally, Turkey.

Mr. Stoltenberg, do you think that it is an effective and, if at all, a possible way to fight a terrorist organization with using another terrorist organization? And please comment how does this affect the spirit of NATO alliance and solidarity between allies? Thanks.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Berat. The three next speakers will be Koryun Nahapetyan from Armenia, Bastiaan Apeldoorn from Netherlands, and Pierre Paul-Hus from Canada. Please, Secretary General.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. First, regarding Libya, NATO strongly support all efforts to try to find a peaceful, negotiated solution. We strongly support the UN-led process to find a political solution, and we support and recognize the UN, recognize the government of national accord, the government of Prime Minister Sarraj.

And I met Prime Minister Sarraj, as I met him many times, but I met him… the last time I met him was in September in the UN, and we discussed NATO's support. We are working on how can we provide support for building strong defence and security institutions. And especially in a country like Libya, to have strong institutions is key to be able to make sure that when forces are trained, when forces are developed, that they fit into a stable and good framework, and not end up in new militia groups undermining the stability of the country.

So we are planning to help them with building a modern Ministry of Defence with the Joint Chief of Staff with Intelligence. So we provide support to the unity of national accord, the government of al-Sarraj.

Then of course we are following closely the situation in Libya more generally. We have seen the effects of Russian presence in Syria, how that has created an even more difficult situation in Syria, and of course we have to avoid anything similar happening in Libya. And we call on all actors, including of course Russia, to fully support the UN-led efforts and the UN-recognized government to try to make sure that we have a peaceful solution to the conflict in Libya.

Then, yeah, on the S400, well, it's a national decision by NATO allies what kind of military capabilities they acquire. The important thing for NATO is of course to make sure that we have the highest possible degree of interoperability. There has been no requests for integrated S400 in a NATO air defence system. But our focus is on interoperability with the rest of the NATO air defence system.

I also know that Turkey now are in dialogue with Italy and France on another air defence system, SAMP/T, and I welcome that dialogue. And I spoke with President Erdogan about the issue, and I conveyed the same message of interoperability, and also welcoming the dialogue with France and Italy on possible purchases of air defence systems from them.

But as I said, it's a national decision for allies to decide what kind of systems they invest in.

Then on the western Balkans, as you said, Slovenia, the NATO story is open, and the best proof of that is of course the fact that Montenegro just joined. Montenegro has implemented impressive reforms, modernized their defence and security institutions, and proven that they're able to meet the NATO standards. That is also their focus now of the other countries in the western Balkan region, which are aspiring for NATO membership, Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. We continue to support them.

When it comes to FYROM, the main issue there is the name issue. I was present at the summit where we decided to invite Macedonia or the FYROM as soon as the name issue was solved. And what we are working or hoping for is a mutually acceptable solution to the name issue within the UN framework.

To be honest, I didn't thought, when we made the decision back in 2008 I think it was, that it was that difficult, but it has proven difficult but there has been some progress, and I hope that that issue is possible to solve. And I also welcome the new government in Skopje, which is really making efforts on modernizing and reforming, and that's the key to moving towards NATO. And that's of course also the case for Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Modern defence institutions, the rule of law, and not least, fight against corruption is key to be able to join NATO.

Then Turkey. First of all, I would like to thank Turkey for its many contributions to the fight against terrorism. Turkey is key because Turkey is bordering Iraq and Syria, so Turkey has played a key role in the fight against Daesh, ISIS, and terrorism. And not only has Turkey played a key role, but Turkey has also suffered many terrorist attacks and have been the NATO ally that has suffered the most terrorist attacks caused by different terrorist organizations.

As you know, NATO is not present on the ground in Syria. NATO is part of the global coalition fighting ISIS, Daesh, but NATO… and we provide training for Iraqi forces, Iraqi government forces in Baghdad. But we're not present on the ground in Syria.

I have spoken with both President Erdogan, with Foreign Minister Cavusoglu, and with Secretary Mattis of the United States and many others on the issues you raised. And I know there are challenges. I know there are different views on how to best solve the situation, especially in Syria. What I have stated clearly on behalf of NATO is that we are urging as close cooperation, as close coordination between different NATO allies on the ground in Syria, especially then the United States, Turkey, but also some other allies present there, to make sure that the efforts of NATO allies in the fight against terrorism is as coordinated as possible. But I'm aware of that, there are some challenges, and you pointed at them in your intervention. OK. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Regarding what Jasna said about the western Balkans and you answered, I have to inform you that on Friday in our coordination meeting, there was a long

discussion on this topic because I saw that most of the delegation agreed that we must not lower the tension on the western Balkans, which sometimes seems to happen. So it's also, how do you say, a shared opinion in the Assembly that this is crucial topic for NATO and for Europe as well.

Koryun Nahapetyan from Armenia.

QUESTION: Thank you, President Alli, for your outstanding contribution to our Assembly.

Mr. Secretary General, throughout the recent couple of decades, the Syrian crisis has been the most…

(TECHNICAL DIFFICULTIES)

What specific directions of peacemaking, peace-building, and peacekeeping are required to mitigate the six years' crisis in Syria? As Armenia has already expressed its willingness to engage in possible discussions on the peacemaking efforts in Syria at the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, I would like to know your vision on peacemaking in Syria and the role of the partner countries. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Bastiaan van Apeldoorn from Netherlands.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. Mr. Secretary General, I heard the question on NATO's contribution to the war in Afghanistan. And I recall that this war has been going on for 16 years. In the US the cost of war is estimated at already 841 billion US dollars. And including future costs but excluding those for veterans, the tab is estimated to run to two trillion.

Meanwhile, thousands have been killed. Last year the number of civilian casualties in Afghanistan reached a record high, with US and Afghan airstrikes contributing significantly to civilian deaths. The Taliban are still there. Afghanistan's reconstruction has not been making much progress. Governance is still a shambles, and terrorism has not been defeated. And arguably, only refuelled.

So if you, Mr. Secretary General, are saying that the costs of doing nothing or withdrawing are even higher, I just wonder if you could indicate what the cost-benefit calculations are. How much more money should we then spend as an alliance, not to mention the terrible human costs, before it will be enough? When will our goals be reached, or could you indicate as concretely as possible what the benchmarks for success are for this continuing effort on behalf of NATO? Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Pierre Paul-Hus from Canada.

QUESTION: (Interpretation): Thank you, Chair. Mr. Secretary General, it's a pleasure to speak to you. I look forward to seeing the new headquarters in Brussels.

My question is really more of a request. At the moment we know that NATO is facing threats on the eastern and the southern flank, but we don't really hear about the western flank, which isn't the west of Europe but it's the western border of the United States and Canada. And there's a real threat on that western border, and that is North Korea.

Our colleagues and American partners, our neighbours, are currently involved in some level of conflict with North Korea, and Canada is pretty much caught between the two. So should there be a nuclear threat, Canada is of course right in the path of any possible missiles and might be hit. And so I feel that it's important to underscore to our European partners that the Alliance also has a western border, western flank, on the other side of Canada and the United States, and that is a major stake as well.

So my question to you, Mr. Secretary General, is the following. Do you expect, as Secretary General, to be involved in possible global discussions on behalf of the Alliance to also defend the interests of Canada?

MODERATOR: Well, the three next questions will be the last, and they're Julio Miranda Calha, Hannes Hanso, and Borys Wrzesnewskyi.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First to Armenia, and the role of partner nations in trying to help to find a peaceful solution or resolution to the conflict in Syria.

Let me state the following. What NATO has done in the conflict in Syria is to fully support the global coalition to the fight to defeat ISIS. And as you know, many NATO allies, or actually all NATO allies and many partner nations, have been part of that coalition or are members of that coalition, and we have made a lot of progress. ISIS is not yet totally defeated, but ISIS is losing ground and ISIS is on the run in most parts of Iraq and Syria.

And we welcome that significant progress because, without the engagement of NATO allies in the global coalition and partners in the global mission to defeat ISIS, I would have been very concerned about the situation because we saw that ISIS was close to taking control of a big part of both Iraq and Syria a year or two ago.

That's the military answer, which has been important because that was the only way to stop ISIS. Then we need of course a lasting political solution, and NATO's role there is to fully support the UN efforts. That's not easy, but at some stage there has to be a political negotiated solution to the conflict in Syria. We welcome also of course support and contributions from partner countries. But my message is that we should do that within the NATO—sorry, the UN framework and support the efforts of the UN, including the fact that several NATO allies are also providing humanitarian help and help to the refugees. So within the UN framework, Armenia and other countries can contribute.

Then to the Netherlands. I think what you address are very relevant questions and dilemmas with our presence in Afghanistan. Because we have been there for many years and we have

paid a high price, both in the number of lives lost and of course also the financial price.

And I think if you look back in the light of insight, of course there are things we could have done different. For instance, I think we should have started earlier to train the Afghans. It's easy to say today because it's always easier to understand afterwards what you could have done in a different way. But I think it's extremely important at least what we do now.

But in 2015 we handed over the full responsibility for the security in Afghanistan to the Afghans themselves. And we have gone from a combat mission with more than hundred—at the peak 140,000 troops engaged in big combat operations, fighting Taliban with NATO troops. Now we have a total different approach. We have not 140,000 but we have around 13,000 NATO personnel in a train, assist, and advise mission, which is something completely different. Because what we do is that we train, advise, and help the Afghans to stabilize their own country. And I am absolutely certain that it is a much more viable, much more sustainable, and much more efficient strategy to enable local forces, national forces, to stabilize their own country instead of we doing that for them.

So that's a big change. And of course the effect of that is of course also that the casualties when it comes to NATO soldiers has been drastically reduced.

I agree that we have been there for many years. But we have also achieved some important things. We have achieved that Afghanistan is not longer a safe haven for international terrorism. We have to remember that before 9/11, before 2001, al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations could freely operate, plan, train, exercise in Afghanistan to prepare big terrorist attacks on the United States and other countries. That's not the case anymore in Afghanistan.

I'm not saying that Afghanistan is a stable, peaceful country, but it's not a safe haven for international terrorists either. And we are gradually enabling the Afghans to improve their capabilities and to be able to fight Taliban and other terror—terrorist organizations in an even stronger way.

There are problems, but you have to remember that the strategic aim of Taliban was to at least take some of the provincial capitals. They have not been able to do that. And they are repelled; the Afghans are able to counter every time the Taliban is attacking one of the provincial capitals. And they have also tried to totally destabilize the government of national unity. They haven't succeeded in that either.

So many problems, but I am certain that to leave Afghanistan now and to end our train, assist, and advise mission would be wrong because then we will end in a situation where Afghanistan again is a safe haven for international terrorism, which is of course a big problem for the Afghans, and they beg us to stay. But it will be also a big problem for us because then Afghanistan will be once again a platform for organizing, planning terrorist attacks against our own countries.

So we are in Afghanistan to protect ourselves, to avoid these kind of large-scale terrorist attacks as we saw in 9/11. And I think the price of staying, even though it's high, it's much lower than the price of leaving.

Then Canada. No, of course we are extremely aware of the threat from Canada, from… North Korea. And we have addressed in NATO several times the nuclear and missile program of North Korea. We have discussed it several times with our partners in the region, meaning South Korea, Japan, also New Zealand and Australia.

NATO is an alliance which is there to protect and defend all allies against any threat, including of course Canada. And we have to remember that the only time we have invoked Article 5 was after an attack on North America. So yes, we are able, if needed, if called upon, to also help and protect North America – Canada and United States. And we had AWACS planes flying over North America, NATO planes after 9/11, and we have been in Afghanistan for 16 years as a direct response to an attack on United States or North America. So NATO is there also to protect North America.

We strongly condemn the North Korean missile and nuclear program. We call on North Korea to abandon their programs and to refrain from more testing. And we strongly believe that we need to put maximum pressure on North Korea to increase the possibility to reach a negotiated peaceful solution to the conflict.

It is not easy, but we have to work for room between doing nothing, just watching North Korea continuing developing their nuclear capabilities, and using military force. So we continue to support the diplomatic, the political efforts and the economic sanctions to strengthen the pressure on North Korea. Yeah.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Julio Miranda Calha from Portugal.

QUESTION: Thank you, President, and thank you, Secretary General of NATO, for your impressive information to the Assembly about the agenda of NATO.

As you know, the security in sub-Saharan region is highly volatile. And the insecurity spills over into the Middle East and North African region, not only as a result of illegal traffic of humans, arms, and drugs. NATO is obviously concerned about security in the MENA region. But I want to ask to our Secretary General if NATO is also monitoring the developments in at least the most volatile parts of sub-Saharan Africa.

And I had another point. At Wales and at Warsaw, NATO has made the progress in its relationship with European Union. We understand what is the point of the situation at this moment by your information. But I would like to understand how can it be further strengthened, and how could the NATO Parliamentary Assembly support NATO in this evolution and relation. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Hannes Hanso from Estonia.

QUESTION: Thank you, Mr. President. And dear Jens, when, Jens, you talked about in your remarks about Russia, I completely agree with you. Our aim should not be to isolate Russia. And to be honest, I think it is also unlikely that we can cause change in Russia. This change must come from within.

Meanwhile, I think we should be 100 percent principled and value-based, as the President of Romania just said in his speech, when it comes to dealing with this country.

And we have to adopt of course the defensive measures. And I'm very, very pleased that I had the privilege of serving as the Minister of Defence in Estonia during the Warsaw Summit when we adopted the EFP policy. It has been a great success, and fully implemented too.

Now, there are places, however, where I think NATO can cause a major positive change in Europe. And I'm talking about not only western Balkans but also Ukraine and Georgia. You know, we are sitting in Bucharest now nine years after the Bucharest Summit, which I just checked on Internet, we clearly explicitly stated that these countries can become full members, provided that they do the right thing.

I frequently go to Georgia, for example, and Ukraine, and I'm often struggling to answer the question: where is the progress that we have actually made? I wouldn't like to see these countries growing frustrated trying – trying and not achieving – the membership action plan. So I would like to, I think say that – and I hope we all agree – that we should show these countries a light at the end of the tunnel. Increasing frustration over there, we all know who will be happy if they're not succeeding. Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Now Borys Wrzesnewskyi from Canada.

QUESTION: Mr. Secretary General, my question is almost a follow-up to the Estonian question. After 2014 it took us, our Alliance, a little while to fully comprehend, to clearly understand the nature of this global hybrid war against liberal democracy. Our Alliance, our individual states have been under attack, continue to be attacked, and NATO understands that there's a hard military front line that runs from the Baltic Sea through to the Black Sea.

However, there is an active component in Ukraine, where every day there are artillery attacks, casualties. Russia continues to send military equipment onto Ukrainian territory since Minsk. Approximately 3000 Ukrainians have died.

With these realities, Canada has made, as you've referenced, significant contributions along this front line, in Estonia, here in Romania. However, we also are making major contributions and continue important missions to strengthen Ukraine's military capabilities and capacities.

I've had the opportunity to speak with Ukrainian soldiers trained by Canadian officers as they head to the front line. And they understand that they're not only going to the front line to face an active war, but they're there not just to protect the territorial integrity of Ukraine. They

understand they're on the front line for the liberal democratic west. In many ways, those battalions, Ukrainian battalions, are a shield for NATO today.

So my question is Canada's making significant contributions; how do you envision the Alliance's role to strengthen the capabilities and capacities of Ukraine?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. First to Portugal. NATO is working with partner countries in Northern Africa, especially with Tunisia but also with Morocco and other countries in the region. We are also, as I said, working with Libya to help them build defence institutions.

And then of course indirectly, NATO is also helping to cope with the challenges further south in the Sahel region, partly because several NATO allies are there, but not in a NATO framework but in the UN framework or the EU framework. The United States is present and provide help to the EU and a French presence in Mali.

And when I visited the UN earlier this fall, they expressed great gratitude to NATO because we helped to train, advise UN peacekeepers in different missions, including in Africa, and we also work with the African Union, and we help the UN implementing their missions in Africa.

So NATO as an alliance is not present on the ground in the Sahel or in Mali, but NATO allies are, and NATO help and support some of their activities taking place there.

And I think the main reason is that so far there has been no request for a NATO role, and I think that the institutions which are already there are, in a way, capable of handling the situation without any NATO presence as an alliance. For instance, in the Sahel region, there has been no request from EU or France or from the UN to have NATO there.

So that has been not agenda, but we indirectly support their activities in different ways.

Yeah, I think that was… yeah, how can the NATO Parliamentary Assembly support? Of course you can raise those issues. You can be very vocal and strong in your messages, both when you meet as NATO Parliamentary Assembly, but I think that the most important thing you do is that, by sitting together in this NATO Parliamentary Assembly and learning and understanding and discussing security issues, NATO topics, then the important thing is when you go back to the national parliaments. Because that's where you really have power to then follow up on defence spending or NATO's role in the fight against terrorism or NATO's work when it comes to projecting stability and work with partner nations.

So it is extremely important that we address all these issues when you meet like this, but even more important it is that you go back and follow up in the different national parliaments, also with your different national governments, to make sure that we have the necessary support within the Alliance to address collective defence, projecting stability, defence spending, and all the other issues which are on the agenda of NATO and this Parliamentary Assembly.

Then Hannes, or Estonia. Yes, I remember you were present, and you worked strong… also in a very committed way to make sure that we had the right decisions in Warsaw. And what I'm glad to see is that we have been able to implement and follow up the decisions we made both in Wales and in Warsaw on adapting NATO to a more demanding security environment.

When it comes to Russia, there are many challenges, and you raised some of them. But I think it's also important to underline that we have made not much progress but some progress, meaning that after a couple of years where we didn't have any direct bilateral dialogue with Russia in the NATO-Russia Council, we have been able to convene that council, address difficult issues, like Ukraine, like military posture in Europe, in an open and frank way.

And I think that's important, just to sit around a table and discuss difficult issues like Ukraine. It's not easy, but that's the reason why it's important to meet, because we are not aiming at isolating Russia. Russia's our neighbour. We have to talk. We need political dialogue with Russia based on strength.

Then when it comes to Ukraine and Georgia, and that's partly your question but also the question from Canada, I think it is important to underline the following: that NATO and NATO allies provide significant support – political support and practical support – both to Georgia and Ukraine.

When it comes to Georgia, we have the NATO-Georgia Commission, we have the Joint Training Centre. It's a training centre; I was there when we inaugurated it. And we have the substantial NATO Georgia Package, which is a package for, you know, NATO advisors, NATO personnel helping Georgia to implement reforms, but also to train and modernize their armed forces.

To some extent, we have the same in Ukraine. We have strong political support for territorial integrity, for the sovereignty of Ukraine, but also a lot of practical support: ten trust funds on command and control, logistics, cyber, many other areas. And several NATO allies, as for instance Canada, provide also on the bilateral level training and additional support. I welcome all of that, and NATO encourages also bilateral support from NATO allies to Ukraine.

And we have the NATO-Ukraine Commission, and we have the comprehensive package, which is also a framework for our many different practical arrangements and support. And I just inaugurated a new NATO liaison office in Kiev when the North Atlantic Council visited Ukraine in June.

So there's a lot of practical and political activities, many practical and political activities going on, both in Ukraine and in Georgia.

Then I know that of course many are raising the issue on initial membership. I would say that the focus both in Ukraine and Georgia now is on reforms. And those reforms are important,

regardless of whether they will become members soon or later, or regardless of whatever we will think about membership, because those reforms are strengthening both Ukraine and Georgia, and it is extremely important also to understand that there is a lot between nothing and full membership.

And I think the comprehensive cooperation we have both with Ukraine and Georgia highlights and underlines that strong partnership as we have both with Georgia and Ukraine has a high value, both for NATO and for Ukraine and Georgia, and we'll continue to strengthen that partnership with more practical cooperation and more political support.

MODERATOR: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General. Before closing the session, just a small remark from my side. I think that among the many things which NATO is doing for adapting to the new challenges, I believe that a very important political signal is the establishing of the new Strategic Direction South with the hub in Naples because it means, in my personal opinion, that NATO says that we have to face threats coming also from the front.

And during our next meeting of the special group of Mediterranean and Middle East, which will be held in Rome from 23 to 25th November, we will have the chance to visit the hub in Naples. I think this will be a great opportunity for our parliamentarians to see these new initiatives from NATO. And I strongly recommend to our delegation to take into consideration to come to the beautiful city of Rome in November. So just some publicity for that.

And the last thing, I have to tell you that Secretary General made a great speech in Italy, in Rimini, in August in front of a large audience of some thousand people, not specialized audience, not like us as parliamentarians or military people. And the reaction to his speech was great, was fantastic. So it means that our people needs to know more about security, and everybody is willing to understand better what is NATO and what NATO does. And this is also our, of course, commitment as parliamentarians.

Thank you, Mr. Secretary General, for your answers.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2017/10/09/speech