North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Doorstep statement

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the start of the meetings of NATO Defence Ministers
2016-10-26

(As delivered)

Good afternoon.

Today and tomorrow, NATO Defence Ministers will meet, and we will meet discuss how we will take forward the decisions we made at the Summit in Warsaw.

Both on how to increase NATO's deterrence and defence, and also on how to project stability beyond our borders.

We will mark progress in plans for more NATO presence in the eastern part of our Alliance, and also in the Black Sea region.

And we will discuss Russia's recent military activity along our borders.

Close to our borders, Russia continues its assertive military posturing.

Including with massive, non-notice exercises.

This month alone, Russia has deployed nuclear-capable Iskander missiles to Kaliningrad and suspended a weapons-grade plutonium agreement with the United States.

And Russia continues to destabilise eastern Ukraine with military and financial support for the separatists.

These moves do not lower tensions or restore predictability to our relations.

On NATO's southern neighbourhood, Russia's continued support for the Assad regime in Syria is also deeply troubling.

Russia has resumed the bombing of Aleppo which is exacerbating a humanitarian catastrophe.

Men, women and children are dying every day. Killed by disgraceful attacks on their homes and even their hospitals.

And I call on Russia to show real efforts to restore a cessation of hostilities and allow humanitarian access to Aleppo.

The deployment of the Kuznetsov carrier group to the Eastern Mediterranean raises concerns that these assaults could increase.

We need to see an end to indiscriminate attacks.

Dialogue is especially important when tensions run high.

And NATO is committed to pursuing both strong defence and dialogue with Russia.

Later today, we will take decisions on our planned training and capacity-building in Iraq.

We will consider the future of our Aegean deployment.

And decide on a possible maritime role for NATO in the Central Mediterranean, which could support the EU's Operation Sophia.

Tomorrow we will meet with EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and discuss how to enhance NATO-EU cooperation even more.

Together, we are stronger, more capable of tackling the shared challenges we face.

Just over three months ago at the Warsaw Summit, we can now conclude and convey a clear message that we are on the right track.

We are implementing decisions we made at the Summit. And implementing decisions which will keep our people safe in a more dangerous world.

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

QUESTION (ARD): What does it mean the transfer of NATO troops to the Baltic States and Poland for the relation to Russia? Won't it be even worse? Do you have any reaction from Russia over this transfer of NATO troops?

SECRETARY GENERAL: What NATO does is defensive. It is proportionate and it is fully in line with our international commitments. But it is important and it is necessary that NATO responds and that we are delivering a response when we see the substantial and significant military buildup of Russia over a long period of time. Russia has tripled defense spending. Russia has invested heavily in modern military equipment. They have conducted large scale no notice exercises close to NATO boarders, but perhaps most importantly Russia has been willing to use military force against neighbors. We have seen that in Georgia and we have seen it in Ukraine with the illegal annexation of Crimea and the continued destabilization of Eastern Ukraine. So therefore NATO has to respond. We are responding in a responsible measured way. We are deploying four battalions to the Eastern part of our alliance to the three Baltic States and Poland. We have increased the readiness of our forces, but what we do is defensive and it is proportionate. We continue to strive for a more cooperative and constructive relationship with Russia, and for NATO and for me there is no contradiction

between strong defense and predictable and firm response to a more assertive Russia, and to continue to work for dialogue and for de-escalation and for a more cooperative and constructive relationship with Russia.

QUESTION BNS (BALTIC NEWS SERVICES): Good afternoon Secretary General. Speaking of other Russian activities in the Baltic Sea region there was a concern from NATO side several months ago about Russian war planes' behaviour flying over the Baltic Sea. In response to that the Russians proposed to fly over the Baltic Sea with the war planes' transponders turned on. Has NATO responded to that and could you tell us the content of that response? Thank you.

SECRETARY GENERAL: We have now a dialogue with Russia on issues related to risk reduction and transparency concerning military activity along our borders and since we have seen such a strong increase in military activity both at sea and in the air there is an increased need for mechanisms to avoid incidents and accidents, because we had to avoid them happening and if incidents or accidents happen we had to make sure that they don't spiral out of control and create really dangerous situations. And we have seen some passing over American ships in the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea, we have seen some irresponsible behavior of some Russian planes intercepting NATO planes being very close and we have seen other incidents and accidents, for instance the downing of the Russian plane over Turkey some months ago. So therefore we have been very focused over a long period of time on how can we avoid this kind of incidents and accidents, how can we increase air safety and establish more predictability and transparency relating to military activities close to NATO borders and in the dialogue with Russia. Russia put forward some proposals on the table this summer in July. I met with Foreign Minister Lavrov in New York and we discussed these proposals. NATO has responded and we are now in a dialogue with Russia on how to follow up the different proposals and different ideas to create more predictability and more transparency and to develop mechanisms for risk reduction and we are ready to convene a new meeting of the NATO-Russia Council to take further these discussions. We are also in dialogue with Finland and Sweden. Being close to the Baltic Sea, they are also engaged in these issues related to how we can take forward the work on risk reduction and transparency.

QUESTION BBC (Jonathan Marcus): Mr. Secretary General, good afternoon from the BBC. It is obviously up to any individual NATO member to organize its own relationships with Moscow, but what signal does it send if Spain agrees to provide fuel for a Russian naval task group which we believe is on its way to join the air campaign in Syria? Have you made any personal démarche to the Spanish to ask them not to supply fuel? Could you give us a sense also of the mood within the Alliance as to this subject and whether you expect there to be a collective démarche to your Spanish colleagues today to ask them to reconsider any idea of supplying fuel to a Russian ongoing military operation?

SECRETARY GENERAL: Russia has the right to operate in international waters. We have seen before the deployment of Russian naval ships and also the Russian carrier group to the

Mediterranean. And we have also of course seen before port visits of Russian ships also to NATO ports. So this has happened before. The thing which is different this time is that we are concerned about the possibility that the Kuznetsov carrier group can be used as a platform for more attacks against Aleppo and Syria, and thereby exacerbating the humanitarian catastrophe we already see in Aleppo and Syria. And therefore we are following this more closely and we are concerned about the potential of increased Russian airstrikes against Aleppo. It is up to each and every nation, each Ally, to decide and it's a decision to be taken by individual Allies whether they provide fueling and supplies to Russian ships. But this time I have conveyed a very clear message that we are concerned about the potential use of this carrier group to increase attacks against Aleppo.

QUESTION BBC (Jonathan Marcus): We inforce its own borders against Russia and one Alliance member is potentially fueling an ongoing Russian military operation.

SECRETARY GENERAL: As I have said, it is up to each nation to decide. That has been NATO policy for many, many years. But we are concerned about the potential use of this carrier group to increase attacks on Aleppo. And I know that all Allies are aware of our concerns. And they also expressed concerns themselves regarding the Russian attacks on Aleppo.

QUESTION BBC (Jonathan Marcus): Collective concerns?

SECRETARY GENERAL: All Allies are aware of our concerns. And they share our concerns about Russian airstrikes against Aleppo. And we have seen the humanitarian catastrophe becoming even worse over the last weeks.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/10/26/doorstep-statement