North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by incoming NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg
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Good afternoon. And I am very glad to see all of you here today.

And I know that journalists in Brussels, they are among the best-informed journalists in the world. So I am really looking forward to working with all of you.

And I am grateful to the 28 NATO Allies for placing their trust in me. And I would also like to congratulate Anders Fogh Rasmussen on the great job he has done over the last five years.

It is indeed an honour to take up the post of Secretary General of NATO. The most successful Alliance in history.

We face serious challenges. Some familiar. Some new. But our democracies must continue to rise to each and every challenge. As we did at the summit in Wales.

The Summit set a clear course. The decisions taken in Wales will ensure that NATO stands ready to face the future. My responsibility is to implement those decisions.

This is a demanding job at a demanding time. And I count on all Allies to engage and deliver.

This morning, I chaired a meeting of the North Atlantic Council for the first time. We reviewed the changed security landscape around us.

To the east, the ceasefire in Ukraine offers an opportunity. But Russia maintains its ability to destabilise Ukraine. And Russia remains in breach of international law.

To the south, instability is spreading in our neighbourhood. The international coalition including NATO Allies and regional partners is taking decisive actions against the terrorist group ISIL.

We support efforts to strengthen Iraq’s ability to defend itself. And our Patriot deployment contributes to the air defence of our Ally Turkey. These challenges make clear why we need NATO.

So as I take office, these are my three priorities. Keep NATO strong. Help keep our neighbourhood stable by working with partners. And keep the bond between Europe and North America rock solid.

NATO’s most important task is to protect and defend our nations against attack. Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty remains the cornerstone of our Alliance. We will uphold our commitment. And we will defend our Allies. So we need a strong NATO. Strong as a political Alliance. And strong as a military Alliance.

A NATO with a collective defence where each Ally plays its full part and fulfils its responsibilities.

To be strong, NATO must remain ready. Ready to take decisions. And to adapt as challenges emerge.

The Summit approved the Readiness Action Plan. This enables us to respond even faster to fast-moving crises.

We will maintain a continuous presence and activity in the Eastern part of the Alliance, on a rotational basis.

NATO air patrols over the Baltic will continue. Naval deployments in the Baltic and Black Sea will continue. And rotation of forces throughout Eastern Europe for exercises will continue. For as long as necessary.

Our military commanders are setting up the Spearhead Force. So that our troops stand ready to deploy within days. To demonstrate that NATO is determined to deter any aggression.

In February, I expect NATO defence ministers to agree on the design, the composition and the size of the Spearhead Force. As Secretary General, I will engage closely with all Allied countries. I intend to visit East and South of our Alliance to see the situation on the ground. And in the coming days I plan to make my first visits to Poland and Turkey.

The crisis in Ukraine, caused by Russia’s military intervention, is a major challenge to Euro-Atlantic security. The summit sets out our clear position. NATO does not seek confrontation with Russia. But we cannot and will not compromise on the principles on which our Alliance, and the security in Europe and North America rest.

We will continue our full support for an independent, sovereign and stable Ukraine. Each European nation must be free to decide its own course. And we need to see a clear change in Russia’s actions. A change which demonstrates compliance with international law. And with Russia’s international obligations and responsibilities.

So let me be clear. I see no contradiction between a strong NATO and our continued effort to build a constructive relationship with Russia. Just the opposite. Only a strong NATO can build such a relationship for the benefit of Euro-Atlantic security.

A strong NATO is also an engaged NATO. Working with partners to build stability across the globe.

Our ISAF mission in Afghanistan has brought together a quarter of the world's nations. 50 countries in the largest coalition in recent history. And as we prepare to end our combat mission, we are opening a new chapter. And therefore I welcome the signature of the Status of Forces Agreement with Afghanistan. This is a decisive step forward by the national unity government.

This agreement provides us with the necessary legal framework to launch our new mission.

To train, advise and assist Afghan security forces from January. And it provides the Afghans with the confidence that we will continue to support them in a different way. To build on hard-won gains we have made.

Cooperation with nations and organisations around the world increases security for all of us.

I expect to see concrete progress in our relations with partners by the time the foreign ministers' meet in December.

We will start implementing the NATO trust funds to support Ukraine in four areas: cyber, logistics, command and control, and rehabilitation of wounded soldiers.

And we will have in place a substantial package for Georgia, including a training facility.

NATO remains the most important transatlantic forum for security consultation and cooperation.

History has taught us, again and again, that the bond between Europe and North America is indispensable. I look to Allies on both sides of the Atlantic to play their full part in keeping our bond rock-solid.

To do so, we must invest in our Alliance politically and financially. We must invest more. And we must invest better.

At the Wales summit, we agreed to reverse the trend of declining defence budgets. And to raise them over the coming decade. We will review our progress every year. We will keep it on the agenda of future summits and meetings of defence ministers.

NATO must have the right balance of spending, the right capabilities, and the political will to do what we need to do. I regard this as vital.

Our Alliance is an alliance and a family of values. Stretching from Eastern Europe to the west coast of the United States. Defending almost one billion people.

I express my gratitude and respect to all the men and women in uniform serving under the NATO banner. Together, we will stand up for our values. We will keep our nations safe. And we will keep NATO an essential source of stability in this unpredictable world.

And with this, I'll be happy to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu (NATO Spokesperson): And I know there are many questions. Please don't forget to introduce yourself. We'll start with Associated Press here.

Q: John Dahlburg from the Associated Press. Welcome to Brussels, Mister Secretary General. Hum, your predecessor has often said that Russia is no longer acting like a partner of NATO but as its adversary. I wonder: "Do you agree with that as you're taking the job today? And do you think that the good relations that Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he's enjoyed with you can help change the balance... can help change the state of affairs? Or is it too late?"

Jens Stoltenberg: All the leaders of the NATO Summit in Wales agreed and made it clear that Russia is in breach with its national obligation, and in breach with international law. And therefore, we underlined... and I repeated today that we have to see that Russia change its behaviour and its actions; and return to compliance with international law and with its international obligations.

But we also underlined at the Summit in Wales that we still aspire as we've done for many years for a constructive and cooperative relationship with Russia. And my main message has been today and for many years that there is no contradiction between aspiring for a constructive relationship with Russia and at the same time being in favour of a strong NATO.

Actually, I think that a strong NATO, both as a military alliance but also as a political alliance, is a precondition and the best way to establish a constructive relationship with Russia again.

Oana Lungescu: Norwegian news agency NTB.

Q: Still on Russia. Anne-Marte Vestbakke, from the Norwegian News Agency. Deputy Foreign Secretary Alexander Yakovenko is quoted in Russia today, saying that the Russians may consider convening the NATO-Russia Council after the change of leadership in NATO. Do you wish to convene the Council any time soon?

Jens Stoltenberg: There has been no concrete request for convening the council... the Russia-NATO Council. But if such a request is put forward, of course, we will have an open mind considering that. I would also like to add that there has been at least two meetings in the council since the crisis in Ukraine started. And I would also like to underline that. What we have done is that we have suspended the practical cooperation between NATO and Russia both politically, the practical cooperation and the military cooperation. But we have underlined and kept the channels for political contact open. So it's in full accordance with what NATO has said since the crisis broke out that we continue to have political contact through political channels, even if we remain and continue with the suspension of the practical cooperation.

Oana Lungescu: Al Jazeera?

Q: Secretary General, Jonah Hull from Al Jazeera. Can you explain your personal journey from being a pacifist, anti-war, anti-NATO campaigner in the Seventies and Eighties to becoming with what seems a remarkable conversion, leader of this military alliance?

Jens Stoltenberg: Hum, first of all, I've always been in favour of peace. Then, I've always been in favour... In my whole political life, I've been a strong supporter of a strong Norwegian defence. And actually when I was the leader of the Young Labour Party I was able to turn that organization from an organization that was against NATO to an organization that was in favour. So you can hardly find any Norwegian politician who has been fighting so hard for NATO as I have. So I think it's very much in the line of what I have been standing for in my long political life. And that is that I believe that... the way we as a small country bordering Russia... the way we can have a relationship with Russia is through being a member of the Alliance and having a strong defence. And that's what I... also Norway is going to stand for us, the Secretary General of NATO.

Oana Lungescu: Danish Television.

Q: Yes, Lars Minner (?) from TV2 Denmark. Secretary General, in which way will you be a different Secretary General to Anders Fogh Rasmussen? Do you have another style? Will you be more soft in dialogue?

Jens Stoltenberg: Both Anders Fogh Rasmussen... and I respect Anders Fogh Rasmussen very much. We worked together for many years. But both he and I, we are representing 28 nations. We are... He was the Secretary General. I'm the Secretary General responsible for implementing decisions taken by 28 Allies. And I feel that my greatest responsibility is to be able to serve all 28 nations and to find solutions for right policies on behalf of all 28 nations. That was the task of Anders Fogh Rasmussen. And that's also my task. In that way, we are fundamentally representing the same policies and the same countries.

Oana Lungescu: NTV Turkey.

Q: Gul Sonumut from NTV, Turkey. I have two small questions. First is concerning Article 5. There are some countries like Turkey, Poland, Estonia or others who are very much concerned about the terms about the application of Article 5 bearing in mind what happened in their borders. How would you reassure the countries and their citizens that NATO is with them? And with regard to the Spearhead Forces, when do you think that this will be fully... I mean into force, into action? Thank you very much.

Jens Stoltenberg: Article 5, the security guarantee provided by NATO is the cornerstone of NATO. And that's valid for all Allies. And it's the fundamental idea of NATO is that we are able and that we shall protect every Ally against any attack. So that, of course, is also something which is valid for Turkey. And that's also the reason why we have deployed Patriot missiles in Turkey to enhance the capacity to support the air defence of Turkey and the difficult situation to the south of Turkey.

We are underlining and improving NATO's collective defence capabilities by the decision we have taken in Wales, especially related to the Readiness Action Plan. Our military commanders, the NATO international staff is working full-time on the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan. And I expect that by the ministerial meeting in February we will be able to decide on the composition, the design of the Spearhead Force and then continue with the implementation as soon as possible; because with that, there'll be an important contribution to increased collective defence capabilities of NATO.

Oana Lungescu: German Radio.

Q: Kai Kustner, ARD. Considering that it was Angela Merkel who made the first phone call to ask you whether you're ready to become Secretary General, does that mean you will be less strict on Germany when it comes to topics that country doesn't like, for example defence spending budgets?

Jens Stoltenberg: First of all, my obligation is that I'm going to represent all 28 nations in the same way. And I'm going to be kind and nice; but also strict when that's needed. And I'm going to treat all Allies in an equal manner. I would also like to underline that Germany is a staunch Ally. They contribute to collective defence. They contribute to the reassurance measures we see... we're now implementing in the Eastern part of the Alliance. They have contributed substantially to our international operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo. So I'm looking forward to working together with Germany, with Angela Merkel; but as I'm looking forward to work together with all the other 28 Allies.

Oana Lungescu: We have NPR, National Public Radio over there.

Q: Mister Secretary General... Teri Schultz with the National Public Radio and CBS News, just to press... on Russia just a bit more... what would it take to renew the relationship with Russia? Does Crimea have to go back to Ukrainian control in your mind? And to bring up the other subject that was a huge issue on the margins of the Wales Summit: the fight against the Islamic State. Do you see NATO taking any more role than an exchange of information as was agreed at the Summit? You've got a NATO Ally, Turkey, in a very dangerous location. Is there anything else that you could see NATO doing even as a coordinator? And has the government of Iraq come forward at all and asked for help in a training mission that NATO has said it would be willing to provide if asked, thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: What we need to see is a change in Russia's actions, meaning that we have to see changes that demonstrate compliance with international law. And we have to see changes in the actions of Russia which demonstrates that they are respecting their international obligations and responsibilities. And we will also very much underline that we see an opportunity in the ceasefire which has now been established in the Eastern part of Ukraine. But you also see that there are violations of the ceasefire and that it is a fragile situation.

When it comes to the part against ISIL, first of all, I welcome the actions taken by the United States, all the NATO Allies and the regional partners. I think it is actions ... which is right to welcome them; because ISIL represents a view... They are responsible for horrific atrocities. And therefore, I welcome the actions that United States and all the partners now are taking to fight ISIL.

We decided in Wales that we will continue our partnership with Iraq. We stand ready if the government of Iraq requests us to go into different measures of defence-capacity building. They have not put forward such a request yet; but we are ready to go into that kind of cooperation if they ask us.

And as you mentioned, we are already coordinating the provision of assistance among NATO Allies. And we are also exchanging information when it comes to foreign fighters returning home; because they pose a threat to the Allied countries of NATO.

Oana Lungescu: (Inaudible)... We will go over there: Finnish Media, second row, lady there.

Q: So there are countries which are really close to NATO; but not really members. I mean Sweden and Finland. What's your message for the political leaders of these countries?

Jens Stoltenberg: First of all is my message that we very much appreciate to be working close with Finland and Sweden. They are close partners. They participate in several of our operations. They participate in Afghanistan. And they work closely with NATO in any other areas.

And we've just signed agreements with Finland and Sweden, host country agreements which enable us to have even closer cooperation. So I welcome the cooperation with Finland and Sweden as partners of NATO. And we would like to expand... to build on that. When it comes to the question on membership I will leave that to the people of Sweden and Finland to decide. I think that if I start to intervene in that debate I will only cause problems. And that's not my intention. I think that at least as a Norwegian you should never have any meaning about the internal politics of Sweden and Finland.

Crowd: (LAUGHTER)

Moderator: Turkish News Agency here.

Q: Sertak Aktan . First of all, congratulations on the office! Second of... is NATO prepared to share more burden... for example, the Dutch says that they're going to withdraw their Patriots because of the cost? And there's also the humanitarian cost... huge humanitarian cost on Turkey because of the refugees coming. Is NATO prepared to share some burden on this?

My second question is that: "What will be your message to the Turkish Parliament that is going to have a very important vote on the military mandate proposal on Syria and Iraq which

is wide... has a wide coverage, including troops, air, what will [sic] your message? Thank you very much.

Jens Stoltenberg: So first of all, I would commend Turkey for what they're doing when it comes to receiving so many refugees. And that's a heavy burden on Turkey. And I also welcome that the international communities assist in supporting Turkey. At least some of them start doing to receive all the refugees which are coming... who are coming to Turkey. But that's not a responsibility of NATO to take responsibility for refugees. We have other international organizations and institutions who are working on that.

Our responsibility is ... the basic responsibility is to stand up and be very clear to everyone to protect Turkey - that collective defence, that Article 5 is something which is also going to be applied if Turkey is in any way attacked. That's the reason why we have the Patriot systems deployed in Turkey. And that's the reason why I will underline that when I visit Turkey in the near future. And we plan to continue to have a military presence in Turkey with the Patriot missile systems.

When it comes to the decision in the Turkish Parliament that's not related to a NATO operation; but that's a national Turkish decision. And I think I will leave that to the Parliament of Turkey to decide.

Oana Lungescu: We've got time just for a couple of questions. I'll go to Japanese Media in the second row.

Q: My name is Saito, Japanese Daily Mainichi. I would like to ask "hybrid warfare". When the summit decided to effectively address hybrid warfare. And recently, a Lithuanian fishery boat was captured by the Russian authority and also the Estonian border control man was abducted by Russian authority at the same Russia invade the air space in Baltic State. Do you see this as a kind of military pressure as a character of a hybrid warfare? How do you prepare for such hybrid warfare?

Jens Stoltenberg: One of the main messages from Wales is that we are adapting to a changing security environment around NATO. And that's the reason why we are implementing the Readiness Action Plan. One of the main purposes of the Readiness Action Plan is to make our forces more ready, able to deploy at short notice; and also increase our military capabilities. And that's... that will increase NATO's ability to answer to all kinds of threats both in the South and in the East. And that will also then increase our ability to answer to the threats caused by the idea of hybrid warfare... of hybrid warfare.

When it comes to the specific issue about this Lithuanian's vessel, that is a national issue. And there has been no request to NATO to have any... to take any responsibility solving that problem. And I know that the European Union is involved. So on a general level, I can say that we are protecting all Allies. That's the cornerstone of NATO. And we are increasing our

ability to do so, also in the changing security landscape, by implementing the Readiness Action Plan.

Oana Lungescu: ABC from Spain here.

Q: (Inaudible) You are coming from a country which is not member of the European Union. Which plan do you have to strength (sic) the relationship with European Union?

Jens Stoltenberg: I very much believe that we should work for a closer cooperation between NATO and the European Union. And since so many of the NATO members are also member of the European Union, there are many areas where we are working together already. And we are covering very much the same geographical area. So I will strive for an even closer cooperation between NATO and the European Union. That's important both for NATO and for the European Union. And I think, particularly for those countries who are not members, I think it would have been a great advantage if we could be able to have an even closer cooperation.

Oana Lungescu: Al-Arabiya.

Q: Noureddin Fridhi from Arabia News Times. Secretary General, as you chaired the meeting of the council today, the Turkish authorities may send troops on the ground in Syria, North Syria which is theoretically still a sovereign country, what could be the degree of solidarity of NATO if Turkish authorities will come to send troops to Northern Syria. And another part of the Mediterranean area, Libya, where there is almost no state; and where NATO conducted a very huge operation which speeds to the change of the Libyan regime. Today, there is no state in Libya. There are al-Qaeda and there are al-Shabaab. There are all kinds of extremist groups. Would you be in favour of an international military operation as it is conducted in Iraq and to be conducted in Libya even though we do not imagine there is a copy-paste. Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg: So first of all I would like to underline that the main purpose of the NATO operations in Libya in 2011 was to protect civilians and was to prevent the regime in Libya to commit atrocities against its own population. And that we achieved by our military operations in Libya. The problem has been that even if the operation which NATO was responsible for was a success in the way that we achieved our goal the follow-up afterwards has not been as good as it should have been. That's more the responsibility for the whole international community. It has not been a specific responsibility for NATO.

When it comes to Iraq, I think I answered that: We are ready to assist; to work together with the government of Iraq also on defence-capacity building measures. But there has not been any request for that so far. So we are awaiting a request from the government in Iraq. And then we'll go into a dialogue with them related to defence-capacity building measures. When it comes to Turkey, I'm going to visit Turkey in a few days. And I'm going to discuss of course the very difficult situation also in Syria. And I very much understand that this is difficult for Turkey; because they're so close to the violence, to the fighting in Syria. And they are very

much affected by the huge amount of refugees coming to Turkey. The rest I'm... And then I'm looking very much forward to discuss this more in close detail with the Government of Turkey in a few days.

Oana Lungescu: Sddeutsche.

Q: (Inaudible) Sddeutsche Zeitung. A question about Germany if I may. Are you concerned about news from Germany where the minister of Defence had to acknowledge that there are serious problems with equipment resulting in difficulties to meet commitments to NATO. And what would be your advice?

Jens Stoltenberg: First of all, let me again reiterate that Germany is a staunch Ally. And they are contributing substantially to collective defence to our operations in Kosovo, in Afghanistan and also now to the reassurance measures in the Eastern part of the Alliance. At the same time, I think that we have to accept that we are 28 democracies with open debates, with the critical press, where we also are able to .... [inaudible] and to have open debate also about the shortfalls of our defence and armed forces. And of course, it is a problem every time some shortfalls are focussed or are revealed. But at the same time, I think it's some assurance of strength that we are open; that there is debate related to those shortfalls. And that's the reason why we are also able to act. And one of the reasons why we decided on the Readiness Action Plan and also decided on the pledge to at least stop the cuts in defence spending and gradually increase defence spending in the next decade was that we have seen in several countries that there are shortfalls; that there are a need for more investments in the armed forces. And therefore, I welcome that there's an open debate about this in many NATO countries including Germany.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much. That's all we have time for. For this time, this will conclude this press... this first press conference and the live cast on the NATO website.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2014/10/01/press-conference