North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Doorstep statement

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the meeting of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Defence Ministers
2015-10-08

(As delivered)

Good morning.

We are facing many challenges from many different directions. Conflict. Instability and insecurity. And a refugee crisis which is a tragic result of the turmoil we see to our South. NATO is responding.

We are implementing the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. We have stood up the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force. And we have stepped up our exercises. We have set up six small headquarters in Eastern Ally countries in Europe.

Today I expect us to approve the establishment of two more such headquarters, in Hungary and Slovakia. They will ensure that, our forces can move quickly and effectively if they need to deploy.

We will also give final approval to the military concept for the enhanced NATO Response Force – to make it bigger, faster and more capable. Our military commanders have confirmed that we already have the capabilities and infrastructure that we need to deploy the NATO Response Force to the South. And to sustain it there. But we will also consider what more we might need to do.

We will assess what we have to do to adapt NATO to current and future challenges - from cyber, to hybrid, to a conventional attack.

We will also address the situation in Syria and in Afghanistan. We will receive an update from our military commanders. In Syria, we have seen a troubling escalation of Russian military activities. We will assess the latest developments and their implications for the security of the Alliance. This is particularly relevant in the view of the recent violations of NATO’s airspace by Russian aircraft.

On Afghanistan, we will look at the security situation. And we will discuss the way ahead for our Resolute Support Mission.

Finally, we will meet the Defence Minister of Georgia. NATO and Georgia have made great strides in our partnership over the last year. We have opened a new training facility. And it has hosted its first exercise. Now we will look ahead to the coming year, and to further close cooperation between NATO and Georgia.

And with that I'm ready to take your questions.

BBC: Secretary General, Jonathan Marcus from the BBC, good morning. The Alliance has already stressed its solidarity with Turkey over the incursions. Are we going to see more than just words? When Turkey was previously threatened you deployed Patriot surface-to-air missiles to the country. Are we likely to see an extension of that deployment or any other practical steps to reassure Ankara?

Secretary General: NATO is able and ready to defend all Allies, including Turkey against any threat. And one of the main reasons we have increased the readiness, the preparedness of our armed forces why we have doubled the size of the NATO Response Force, why we have established a very high readiness joint task force, why we have increased the efficiency of decision making. All of this is a response both to the challenges we see to the East but also to the challenges we see to the South. With the turmoil and the violence which we have seen in Syria and in Iraq. So NATO has already responded by increasing our capacity, our ability our preparedness to deploy forces, including to the South, including in Turkey, if needed. We are constantly assessing the situation also with the Turkish government, I met with the Turkish Foreign Minister just a couple of days ago and we will continue to stay in close contact with them, and constantly assess if there is need for something more.

Reuters: Secretary General, will NATO extent its mission in Afghanistan due to the developments in Kunduz?

Secretary General: We will assess the situation in Afghanistan and also the need for the NATO presence based on military advice. We will assess both the security situation and also the capacities and the capabilities of the Afghan national security forces. And based on those assessments we will make our decisions. We have not made the final decisions related to the duration of the Resolute Support Mission, nor the force levels or the geographical footprint of the Resolute Support Mission. But what is certain is that we will continue to support the Afghans, either through the Resolute Support Mission, which is a non-combat, train-advise-and assist mission. Or with a new enduring partnership which will be a combination of a civilian led mission but also with military elements. So what is certain is that we will continue to support the Afghans but we are constantly assessing in what form and in what way we will do that. In addition to helping the Afghan national security forces with advice and training we will also continue to fund the Afghan national army and security forces.

ZDF: How will you react on the Russian intervention and which role will play Assad in the future?

Secretary General: What we have seen is a strong, increased military presence of Russia in Syria. We have seen airstrikes, we have seen strikes from cruise missiles, we have seen incursions into Turkish airspace and of course all of this is, or are reasons for concern and we have expressed our concern and we have also stayed in very close contact with the Turkish government and I will also meet the Turkish defence ministerr later on today. And we will assess the situation in the meeting today. What we see is that there is a renewed need for political initiatives to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria. Because in the long term there is no military solution. It has to be an end to the fighting there has to be a political solution, a transition. And my concern is that the Russians are not mainly targeting ISIS but they are targeting other opposition groups and they are supporting the regime. And I call on Russia to play a constructive and cooperative role in the fight against ISIS. Not to continue to support the Assad regime. Because to support the regime is not a constructive contribution to a peaceful and lasting political solution in Syria.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2015/10/08/doorstep-statement