North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Keynote address

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the 60th Plenary Session of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly in The Hague (including Q&A session)
2014-11-24

Mr. President,

Distinguished members of parliament,g

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for that very kind welcome. It is a pleasure to be here at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. For more than 20 years, I was elected to serve my constituents as a proud member of the Norwegian Parliament until I became Secretary General of NATO.

That experience taught me the true value of Parliaments. To hold governments to account. Ensure that tax payers' money is well spent. And that the views of the people are heard.

This is my first opportunity to speak with you. But it will not be my last. I intend to meet with you regularly. To consult with you and seek your ideas. This is important to me.

Today, NATO needs your support more than ever.

We are working hard to turn the decisions we took at the Wales Summit into reality.

On my first day in office, I outlined my three priorities.

To keep NATO strong as a political and a military Alliance.

To work with our partners to bring more stability to our neighbourhood.

And to keep the bond between Europe and North America rock-solid.

Each of these priorities requires financial resources, underpinned by political will.

But without them, there can be no security. And without security there can be little else. No safety. No prosperity. No freedom.

The link you provide to our parliaments and our citizens is vital for NATO. This is why today I would like to discuss with you core issue: keeping the defence pledge that we made at the Wales Summit.

With the end of the Cold War, the world changed. And defence budgets were cut. As people – rightly – demanded a peace dividend. With no imminent territorial threat, this made sense. Later, with the financial crisis, the cuts became even deeper.

We have gone from standing armies to smaller, deployable forces. From a NATO command structure of 22,000 to less than 9,000. And from over 33,000 tanks, to less than 7,000.

We have also postponed new investments. Reduced our exercises. And cut back on the maintenance of equipment.

I'm not arguing that we need to return to where we were. And have exactly the same forces, capabilities and structures.

But once more, our world has changed.

To our East, Russia is trying to replace the rule of law with the rule of force.

To our South, we also see the terrible human cost of conflict. We see violence and extremism across North Africa and the Middle East. And we continue to face many other challenges – from missile proliferation to cyber attacks.

We must face up to these changes. We must have more and better equipped armed forces. We must have the right balance of forces and capabilities.

Let me be clear. This is not just an exercise in accountancy. The stakes are high. The threats are real.

So we must redouble our efforts to resource our Alliance.

The Readiness Action Plan we adopted at the Wales Summit is the most significant strengthening of our collective defence. It will help us deal with threats from wherever they come.

From the east or the south.

So it is vital that we implement the plan on time and in full.

A key part of it is the new 'Spearhead Force'. A very high readiness force able to react quickly. With a command and control presence in the Eastern part of our Alliance. And a demanding new exercise programme. So we can have the right forces, in the right place, at the right time.

At Wales, we also decided to launch a new mission in Afghanistan. To train, advise and assist the Afghan Security Forces from January.

And we also decided to increase our support for our partners, such as Iraq, to build their own defence capacity if they request it. And project stability in our neighbourhood.

All these efforts must be properly resourced.

And our military needs long term investment and political support. For readiness comes at a cost.

If we look around the world, while NATO has cut defence spending, others have rapidly increased it. Over the last 5 years, Russia increased its spending by fifty percent. And it plans further increases.

At the same time, total NATO defence spending fell by twenty percent. And some nations are cutting further.

In more peaceful times, it was right to reduce defence spending. But we do not live in peaceful times. So it is right to stop the cuts and to increase investment in our defence.

This is not just about NATO in comparison to the rest of the world. It is also about the balance within NATO. And within Europe.

All Allies are expected to shoulder their fair share of the burden. In terms of spending, in terms of capabilities, and in terms of contributing to our operations.

The GDP of the United States and that of Europe is almost exactly the same. Yet the United States spends more than twice as much on defence than all the other Allies combined. Providing over two thirds of total defence spending by NATO Allies.

For all these reasons, at our Wales Summit, we agreed to invest in our collective defence. And to have a more balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities. We made a joint pledge:

To stop the cuts

To increase spending in real terms as our economies improve

To aim to spend 2% of GDP on defence within a decade

To spend better

And to deliver the capabilities we need.

We also agreed that progress will be reviewed annually. We will start at the meeting of defence ministers in June. And we will also place it on the agenda of future summits.

By the Warsaw Summit in 2016, we must show progress. And a way forward to further improvement in the years ahead. So we need to make the best of the time we have.

I know that increasing defence spending is not easy. But it is possible. Step by step. And every step counts. Starting now.

The United States, the United Kingdom, Greece and Estonia are already meeting the 2 % guideline. And other Allies have outlined their own roadmap to get there.

Of course, this is not just about how much money we spend on defence. It's also about what we spend that money on. And how we spend it.

At Wales, we committed to spending 20% of defence budgets on new equipment, including research and development, within a decade.

We have identified specific areas where we need to improve our capabilities. Such as ballistic missile defence, training and exercises, and fully equipping our land forces.

We must make progress in all of these areas. To ensure that our forces remain strong and able to deploy at short notice.

NATO can really add value when it comes to how defence budgets are spent By helping Allies to align their priorities, to plan together, pool their resources, and get the most for tax-payers money.

There are many examples of how we're doing just this.

For example, the new system of drones and other capabilities that make up the Alliance Ground Surveillance system. Operated and maintained by NATO. Giving our commanders a comprehensive picture of the situation on the ground.

Or the Framework Nations Concept agreed at Wales. Where groups of European Allies work together to develop particular forces or capabilities, guided by a lead nation.

And here in the Netherlands, we are in a country that is a prime example of regional cooperation. Dutch armed forces cooperate closely with their counterparts in Belgium, Luxemburg, Germany and the United Kingdom. Naval forces combine with Belgian naval forces under a single Admiral.

Allies gain a great deal from Smart Defence and other types of multinational cooperation. Getting the most out of every dollar, euro and pound.

But this is not a substitute for more resources. We cannot do more with less indefinitely. And defence cannot take an excessive share of the austerity burden.

We must be clear with our publics about why we need to increase defence investment. And we must continue our efforts towards greater transparency.

When it comes to NATO's own budget, Allies maintain full control over how much and how effectively tax-payers' money is spent in the interest of our shared security. The budget is rigorously audited by an independent team of auditors. And this independent board regularly reports to the North Atlantic Council.

Allies review all reports. And all unclassified reports are now published on the NATO website. I also intend to continue publishing an annual report on everything that NATO does, including defence spending.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The time has come to stop defence cuts. We must invest more in defence and spend our money better. And you, the parliamentarians, play a vital role in fulfilling the defence pledge we made at the Wales Summit.

This is first time that heads of state and government have made such a pledge. And it is a pledge that we must honour.

Defence investment in times of austerity calls for hard choices at home. In every government. And in every parliament.

It is my responsibility to work with you to implement what was decided. And I am personally committed to this.

We all need to work hard. And we will all be judged on the progress we make.

So I need you to make the case at home. To speak up for defence. To increase the momentum for more defence spending. To reach out across the political spectrum. And to persuade your constituents of the value of defence investment.

If we fulfil the Defence Pledge that we made at Wales, we will keep ourselves safe. And, working with others, we will help to keep peace around the world.

So we have much to do together. And I thank you for your support.

Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY (President of NATO Parliamentary Assembly): Thank you, Mister Secretary General for a great speech. You rightly say that the way that the world will look at NATO's decisions from the Summit will depend upon how they implement it. And I'd... We, as parliamentarians meeting you regularly at our session, we'll be able to take the messages you give us back to our national parliamentarians with colleagues.

Now, I said I would invite questions in groups of three. I'll preannounce each group so you could be ready.

The first group of three, questions will come from Beatrice Rodriguez Salmones of Spain, followed by Mike Turner from United States and Jacques Gauthier from France.

And the second group will come from Paolo Ali of Italy, Oias Kolnis(?) from Latvia, and Oevin Paleraka(?) from Norway.

So I invite first of all Beatrice Rodriguez Salmones in the red jacket, Mister the Secretary General, to ask the first question. You have a two minute limit. Beatrice.

Q: I will switch to Spanish if you don't mind. (SPEAKS IN SPANISH)

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you very much Beatrice. I now turn to Congressman Mike Turner from United States.

Q: Thank you Mister President. Secretary General, thank you for being here. And thank you for your offer of a dialogue with the NATO Parliamentary Assembly. It's incredibly important that you be here. And we certainly appreciate your willingness to both keep us informed; but also to listen to NATO Parliamentary Assembly. Thank you for your strong words concerning defence spending. The challenges that we face certainly are ones that go right to the issue of our reinvestment in our military capabilities. And the United States' delegation certainly appreciates your recognition of the gap that needs to be filled and the encouragement to our European Allies to increase their spending.

I have two parts. The first is with respect to enlargement. I wanted to express our support from the United States' delegation of the Wales Summit Statement concerning enlargement. The House of Representatives had passed a sense of Congress calling on NATO to be very strong on its positioning in the Wales Summit with respect to membership from Montenegro; full core press diplomatic resolution to the naming of Macedonia; working with Bosnia on the constitutional issues that are impediment to its membership; supporting MAP for Georgia; and of course support for Ukraine.

And my question goes to the issue of Ukraine. Many people asked whether or not the new relationship with Russia represents a Cold War. It is clear in the Ukraine it is a Hot War.

Poroshenko came before the United States Congress and addressed the Joint Session. He said two things that were incredibly important. One, he said: "In the Ukraine, you don't have to build a democracy, you merely have to defend it." And the second thing he said was: "We cannot win the war with just blankets. I'd love your thoughts on how NATO could be more forward-leaning in its both military support and its full support for the Ukraine. Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thirdly, I'd like to invite Jacques Gauthier from France.

Q: I would ask my question in French. Monsieur le Président, Monsieur le Secrétaire général, Mes chers collègues, permettez-moi, à mon tour de remercier nos hôtes pour leur accueil et la parfaite organisation de cette session.

Je souhaite également faire part aux Pays-Bas de notre solidarité et de toute notre amitié à la suite du drame du vol MH-17. Monsieur le Secrétaire général, je tiens tout d'abord à vous féliciter pour votre nomination. Nous vous apportons tous nos encouragements. Je crois qu'ils sont particulièrement importants dans cette période incertaine.

Incertaine, nous l'avons vu avec des agissements de la Russie en Ukraine et dans d'autres pays de la région comme la Géorgie ou la République de Moldova. Nous le voyons aussi avec les menaces que font peser sur notre sécurité des groupes terroristes particulièrement violents, voire barbares dans notre voisinage immédiat.

Le prétendu État islamique en Iraq et au Levant n'est bien sûr pas un État; mais il constitue plus qu'un simple groupuscule. Il occupe un territoire important et mène des attaques coordonnées.

La France s'est mobilisée en matières rapides et décisives pour stopper les groupes terroristes qui allaient conquérir le Mali. Et nous participons activement à la Coalition internationale qui intervient en Irak.

Mais nous voyons aujourd'hui que DAESH tend à fédérer ou au moins à rallier à son drapeau un certain nombre de groupes jusque-là éparpillés au Sahel ou encore au Nigéria.

En outre, DAESH exerce un pouvoir d'attirance incroyable pour un certain nombre de jeunes qui quittent nos pays pour aller faire le Jihad et sont susceptibles de revenir commettre des attentats contre.... sur nos territoires.

Quelle coopération les Alliés peuvent-ils mettre en place? L'OTAN peut-il jouer un rôle en la matière de coordination et de surveillance? Je vous remercie.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you. Mister Secretary General.

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): Thank you so much for the questions. First to the question related to North Africa. I would very much like to underline that what is happening in North Africa is actually a reminder of the changing security environment we are facing with the instability, insecurity coming closer to our borders. And therefore, what NATO does is to work together with our partners. Because, I think we have to admit that it is extremely important to try to avoid that we are coming in situations as we have seen developing some countries in North Africa, in particular in Libya. And we have to try to stabilize to help countries being able to take care of their own security by themselves.

And therefore, to build capacity to help them improving their own security, their own forces, is something we can do to try to project stability into North Africa. And part of the partnership cooperation which was an important part of the Wales decision is aiming exactly at that.

When it comes to Libya in particular, I think it reminds us that of course. What NATO did was to conduct a military operation which was successful related to the goals of that operation. And that was to stop the killing of civilians. And it had that clear UN mandate.

But after the military operation ended, the international society should have been more prepared to take care of the work to try to create a stable democratic Libya and to make sure that we were able to develop a more peaceful situation in the country.

That's something NATO is not, what I say, solely responsible for. That is other organizations: UN, the European Union, the African Union. And we have to work together with them in North Africa to try to create stability and to manage threats and the challenges we are seeing in North Africa.

Then when it comes to Ukraine, the question from Mark Turner... So what NATO is doing is that we are, first of all, of course, fully supporting the independence, the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Ukraine.

And we are calling on Russia to stop violating international law and to respect the sovereignty of Ukraine. And we are calling on Russia to pull back its forces from Eastern Ukraine and to respect the Minsk agreements; and to stop fuelling the conflict by supporting the separatists and use all of its influence on the separatists to make sure they are respecting the ceasefire.

We've also established several trust funds to which NATO and Allied countries are helping Ukraine in developing their defence sector, improving their own capability to take care of their own security by themselves.

And in addition to what NATO does, of course different Allies are contributing in different ways to support Ukraine.

Then to the question related to ISIL... of course we, as NATO and all NATO Allies are condemning the horrific atrocities and the use of violence which ISIL is responsible for.

And I welcome the actions and the airstrikes by the Coalition to stop the actions by ISIL. And I also welcome what France is doing in Mali to fight terrorists there. Because there are many different NATO Allies which are contributing in different ways both in Iraq, Syria to fight ISIL; but also in Mali and North Africa to fight extremist groups and terrorists there.

There has been no call for a NATO military role in North Africa. But we welcome the efforts by France and others to fight terrorist groups in North Africa. And as I said in my first answer, we're also trying to build partnerships with several countries in North Africa to try to develop stability and to project stability into the region.

HUGH BAYLEY: Before I call the next group, I would like to announce the people in the third group, there will be Dr Karl A. Lamers of Germany; Ali Reisa al-Boyin(?) from Turkey and Ross Islav Pavalenko(?) from Ukraine. But to go now to the second group... first speaker in the second group is Paolo Ali. Mister Paolo Ali of Italy.

Q: Thank you Mister President, I will address my question in Italian. (SPEAKS IN ITALIAN)

HUGH BAYLEY: There's too Oias Kolnis from Latvia.

Q: Thank Mister President. The establishment of a NATO Excellent Centre for Strategic Communications in Riga, Latvia, gives our country a powerful new tool to combat information

warfare on the world. And I stress around the world because it's not just Russia's propaganda war concerning Ukraine. But it's also international terrorist organizations like ISIL or al-Qaeda who have become masters of manipulating the social media.

I recently had a talk with High Representative Federica Mogherini who agreed that combatting information warfare in strategic communications may be an ideal opportunity for NATO-EU cooperation. And I just wanted to hear your views about that, thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thirdly, Oevin Paleraka(?) from Norway. Thank you President. Mister Secretary General, first of all, I will like to congratulate you for an effective start on your important work to further strengthen our Alliance.

Collective defence in NATO is now higher on agenda following the Russian aggression in Ukraine. In Norway, we have, as you know, a history of good cooperation with Russia. But we also noticed increased Russian military activity in the High North in the recent year.

In light of the Russia military build-up, I would like to ask you how NATO can contribute to continued stability in the High North area in the coming years. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. First to the question from Paolo Ali related to the overall strategy when it comes to threats and instability in the Middle East and North Africa.

Overall, responsibility of NATO is to protect and defend all Allies against any threat. So therefore our main focus is always the defence and the protection of Allied members.

And that's also the reason why we have deployed Patriot missiles in Turkey to augment, to increase their air defence capacity. And that's the reason why we have also decided to increase, for instance, the sharing of the information on foreign fighters and returning foreign fighters; because that can pose a threat to our nations.

At the same time, I think we have to understand that even though NATO is very often at least part of the problem... part of the answer to many problems, NATO is not always the only answer to all problems.

And for instance in Syria and Iraq, there has been no call for a NATO organized military operational mission. But all NATO allies are in one way or another part of the coalition which is fighting ISIL in Iraq and Syria, some are part of the decisive military actions, the air strikes. Others are supporting the Peshmerga. And others are providing humanitarian aid. So the bulk of the resources in the coalition is provided by NATO Allies, even if NATO as such is not organizing the operations.

So we are... we are approached in these in many ways, partly as an Alliance and partly as Allied countries participating, for instance, in the coalition we have in fighting ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

Then also about Ukraine and if there is any possibility or need or a wish for a diplomatic solution... In the long run, we need a political solution to all conflicts. And what we are calling for in Ukraine is that the two Minsk protocols are being respected; and that the ceasefire is being respected. And we call for Russia and the separatists to be part of a negotiated peaceful solution and not continue a path towards isolation which is only fuelling the armed conflicts and fighting in the region.

Then, to Mister Kolnis(?) from Latvia, questions about strategic communication. I just visited Latvia and I'm very impressed by the knowledge, by the understanding of the importance of strategic communication. And that's part of the new security environment. That's part of the threat posed by hybrid warfare. And therefore communication is also important. And to avoid all kinds of cyber-attacks then so... And I very much welcome that we can look into how we can cooperate with the European Union on this. Because I met with the High Representative Federica Mogherini just two days after she took office. And we very much agreed that we should continue and expand our cooperation. And of course of one of those areas will be strategic communication which is just becoming more and more important.

And then to the High North, I think that... what I think the lesson learned from the High North is that there is no contradiction between military strength, a strong Alliance investing in defence and at the same time striving for dialogue partnership and cooperation.

Actually, at least in the Norwegian experience is that investing in our armed forces when I was prime minister then and also in previous governments and being part of a strong NATO Alliance was the precondition for engaging with Russia.

Strength (firm predictable policies) creates the foundation for engaging with Russia. And therefore we need to continue both as an Alliance; but also Norway as an Allied country to invest in defence; to keep up collective defence. And that creates the basis for engaging with Russia on issues which are of importance in the High North like energy, environment, search & rescue and all the areas where I know that there is a lot of cooperation in the High North between NATO Allies and Russia.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you Secretary General. Because I call the third group, I'd like to put the fourth group on notice Teddo Jafarizer(?) from Georgia; Soames Campbell from the UK; and Gerald Gallant from Canada. But to return to our third group, I'd like to introduce my predecessor as President of the Assembly, Dr Karl A. Lamers of Germany.

Q: Thank you, Mister President, Secretary General, first of all, congratulations and good luck and success for your work as Secretary General for peace and freedom.

NATO is facing many challenges. Let me turn to Russia. Russia for a long time was a strategic partner for NATO and a partner for modernization. And now we see a break of international law. We see disregard of the sovereignty of independent countries. And I think

Russia is aiming at this time to rebuild its sphere of influence in the post-Soviet area at the cost of its neighbours and especially those which have Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

Secretary General, we, I think as NATO has a two-trigger approach. First of all a very clear answer with the NATO Summit in Wales with its Very High Readiness Taskforce and with our policy to remain the door open.

Do you think, that is my question, that NATO in this time is unified and firm enough to give an appropriate answer to Russia; and to Putin that he will understand our signal? And secondly, do you think that he is open for dialogue? Does he listen to that what we say? And do you think that we both NATO and NATO Parliamentary Assembly can do more in our cooperation to enhance peace and security. Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you Karl. And I'll turn to Ali Reisa al-Boyin(?) from Turkey.

Q: Thank you very much Mister President. So I would like to congratulate Secretary General's new job. I'm sure he will be very successful. So he made one of the first visit to Turkey. So one of the main problems in the Middle East is Syria. You know, last three and half years we have been facing one of the biggest problem. And more than 250,000 people have been killed, almost around nine people either refugee or IBP.

And Turkey is almost hosting two million people... two million refugees from Syria. Last month alone, when the ISIL attacked Kobani, in two days, we received one thousand fif.... one hundred fifty thousand refugees from the Kobani Kurdish region of Syria. So we spend almost four billion dollar. It is going to create another social problem in Turkey... Turkey's political life and social life.

So Turkey demands a no-fly zone especially to keep the people in a proper and a safety zone. So what do you think about this. This is the first one.

Second question is regarding the territorial integrity of Caucasus. In the Wales Summit Declaration, Article 30 says that "Allies also remain committed in the support to territorial integrity, independence and the sovereignty of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova." But Russia has already separated Abkhasia and South Ossetia from Georgia. And Russia did the same thing: Crimea in Ukraine. So what do think generally in this subject? Thank you very much.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thirdly, in this group, Mister Rustislav Pavalenko(?) from Ukraine. Well, I think, Mister Secretary General, he's right at the back of the hall on left hand side.

Q: Thank you Mister President. Mister Secretary General, after Russia Foreign Minister Lavrov said that Russia demands guarantees that Ukraine will never be a NATO member, NATO representatives have expressed their surprise and reassured the choice of Ukrainian people. And we appreciate this very much.

Yet, we see some of the politicians from key countries cited that they would not see Ukrainian membership even in future. When Ukraine is ready? And as we know that successive summits of the NATO have stressed that the door is open. So provided that Ukraine is in NATO, if Ukraine is ready for the NATO, which would be the Alliance approach to this membership. Thank you very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you, first to Karl Lamers. No, you are right. What we did in Wales was to decide both to invest in our collective defence; to increase our military capabilities; to follow up the defence pledge and to implement the Readiness Action Plan which, altogether is as I said "the strongest increase in our collective defence since the end of the Cold War".

But at the same time, we stated once again that we aspire for a more constructive and cooperative relationship with Russia. And as I mentioned in my answer to... related to the High North, there is no contradiction between these two messages.

Because I'm sure that a precondition for NATO being able to, at some stage, reestablishing a more cooperative and constructive relationship with Russia that depends on our ability to deliver collective defence, be strong in our engagement with Russia.

NATO is going to be there; Russia is going to be there. Russia is NATO's biggest neighbour. So in one way or another, we're going to relate. And even during the Cold War we have areas where we worked together and where we develop different kinds of cooperation. And for instance, now, when you have a big military build-up we have more snap exercises. We have more military presence along NATO borders. We have the air... the increased military air activity by Russia along NATO borders. And we also have more NATO presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance as an answer to that.

The need for avoiding that situations are coming out of control... that (SILENCE) accidents are spiraling into something we all will avoid. It increases the need for transparency, predictability for instance related to different violations were bigger when the situation is bad as it is now; than when the situation is better as it was for some years ago. So that's just one area where I would like to have what I should say more transparency, more predictability related to exercises, military presence along the borders.

Whether Russia is willing... it's not possible for me to give you an exact answer. What I see is what are the Russians actions on the ground.

And so far they have acted in a way which has... which undermines the possibilities and the conditions for a constructive relationship. And I regret that; because I'm really convinced that in the long run it's both in the interest of NATO; but also in the interest of Russia to have a relationship based on trust on respect for international law and open trade close cooperation.

Then, when it comes to the question from our Turkish MP... Member of Parliament, I will just say that I very much commend Turkey for the way you are hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees coming from Syria and Iraq. There is no NATO Ally more affected by the crisis in Syria and Iraq than Turkey. And I visited Ankara a few weeks. And I was very much reminded on the heavy burden Turkey shouldering by hosting so many hundred thousands of refugees.

Again, NATO's main responsibility is to protect and defend all Allies. And that's the reason why we are... And that's of course, also valid for Turkey. And that is the reason why we have deployed the Patriot batteries in Turkey. And even though NATO is not organizing or in charge of the military operations in Syria and Iraq all NATO Allies are in one way or other participating in the coalition fighting ISIL.

When it comes to no-fly zone, I think since NATO is not organizing or responsible for the military actions, I think I... it's wise of me to leave that to the dialogue between Turkey and the Coalition. And I know that there is close dialogue between the Coalition, the United States and Turkey to have to expand their cooperation on fighting ISIL. On the table, there's also the question of a no-fly zone. But that's not for me to give any advice on that.

When it comes to Ukraine, and the open-door policy, so first of all, the open-door policy has been a great success. I mean doing the last two decades, NATO has been enlarged and NATO now protects almost one billion people. And it has contributed to more democracy, more stability, more freedom, prosperity in a new members or new Allies in NATO. The enlargement has been a great success.

The open-door is still open. And it's something that we decided. And I remember I was at the Summit in Bucharest where we decided that Ukraine will become member. And that decision still stands of course providing that Ukraine fulfils the criteria for membership; and providing that Ukraine has the will.

Ukraine has decided to have a non-bloc policy. And therefore, the question of Ukrainian membership has not been on the table the last years because Ukraine has decided not to apply for membership.

I respect that; because it's up to each sovereign nation to decide itself what kind of security arrangements it would like to be part of. And therefore I respect the decisions of Ukraine. But our policy is the same. The door is open. And it's open for countries which fulfil the criteria for becoming a NATO Ally. And that's also valid for Ukraine.

HUGH BAYLEY: And now before introducing the fourth group, I'd like to put the fifth group on notice: Mrs. Marianne Mytho(?) from Estonia followed by Harry Van Bomell(?) from the Netherlands; and Corianne Nahapetian(?) from Armenia. But first the fourth group.

First of the fourth group is Mr. Teido Jaffariza from Georgia who is more in less in this direction.

Q: Thank you, Secretary General. Thank you very much at the outset on behalf of Georgian delegation, I'd like to thank you, President Bayley for this excellent job. And we really appreciate it very much.

Thank you very much, Mister Secretary General for your support of Georgia's NATO aspiration. And that support was reaffirmed by you and your recent meeting with our prime minister in Brussels.

This is a welcomed recognition of Georgia's steady contribution to NATO in Afghanistan and also to NATO Allies in Iraq in anticipation that Georgia will accede this operation without blood has been spilled demonstrate our commitment to the Alliance. And it is encouraging that NATO is also supporting our aspirations.

But there is still a couple of technical matters, Mister Secretary General, with compliance on that way, despite the fact that it has augmented to a codified document, Georgia has almost all the necessary tools of the Nation Action Plan, NATO-Georgia Commission and now NATO-Georgia substantial package.

So my question is... So what else should Georgia be engaged for its NATO accession agenda? And what else Georgia should do to facilitate this process? And another issue Mister Secretary General, exactly today, Russia is going to sign a treaty with Abkhazia. And soon it will be followed with their treaty with South Ossetia, in these occupied territories of Georgian... of Georgia.

So there is a question for you, Mister Secretary General, and my Turkish colleague talked about that, how a country like Georgia should deal with a neighbour like Russia? Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you. And the second question group comes from Somanes Campbell(?) who is in the middle of a block ahead of you.

Q: Secretary General, may I begin on the behalf of the United Kingdom delegation in congratulating you on you appointment and indeed to welcome your concentration a little earlier this morning on the issue of defence budgets.

I hope you won't be made pessimistic if I say that I've been coming to assemblies for quite a long time. And I've had Secretary General after Secretary General concentrate on the issue of expenditure. And yet we now find ourselves in the circumstances which you have described.

What makes you optimistic that on this occasion the views which you have expressed will be received and echoed in domestic parliaments and governments so as to ensure that obligations to this Alliance are properly fulfilled? And if they are not, what in your view will be the consequences?

HUGH BAYLEY: Thirdly, I'd turn to Mrs. Sherrill Gallant from Canada who is in the left-hand block, three rows back.

Q: Welcome to the Assembly, Secretary General, some of the general public already thinks that the efforts to stop the spread of ISIL are under NATO command. With reports of ISIL claiming part... a part of Libya as now part of its caliphate and currently ISIL being just next door to Turkey and other al-Qaeda splinter groups forming a front across North Africa is a consensus even forming in the NAC that a NATO-led force together with its partners, a NATO-led mission to stop ISIL and other al-Qaeda breakaway terrorist organizations from gaining ground in Europe?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you again. First to Deosante(?) from Georgia, we are now implementing the comprehensive package which was decided on in Wales. And that's about training. That's about defence capacity building measures. And it's also about establishing the training centre in Georgia and to have embedded trainers from NATO coming here. So we are now implementing the most comprehensive package we've ever had for Georgia. And that will, of course, move Georgia towards membership.

So I think we should implement that package and then to discuss after that whether there's a need for anything more because this is really a comprehensive package we have agreed on.

I will also commend Georgia for its very valuable contribution to many different NATO operations, especially in Afghanistan. So Georgia is already a very highly valued partner of NATO.

Then I forgot; because I was asked by the Turkish and now by you about Abkhazia. And of course NATO Allies do not recognize neither Abkhazia nor South Ossetia as independent States. They are part of Georgia. They are within the international recognized borders of Georgia. And we support Georgia and we respect the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of Georgia and we call on all other countries to do the same. So we.... NATO Allies do not recognize South Ossetia or Abkhazia being any kind of independent States; they are part of Georgia.

Then to Mr. Campbell. You told me that you have heard it before. And that's true. But... what should I say, it's an important message. So I think it's important to repeat. But then the question is why... why should it be reality this time?

And I think there are at least some very important things which make these times different. And the first thing is that the security environment has really changed.

During the 1990s, and also at least at the beginning of 2000, we have the end of the Cold War. We have the expectation, the kind of peace dividend, and that was some kind of reason (SILENCE) for reducing defence expenditure. And then we had the financial crisis on the top of that.

Now, we are seeing a much more aggressive policy, closer. Iraq is close to NATO borders. Afghanistan was of course a challenge and something which was also posing a threat to NATO, that's the reason why we went into the ISAF mission. But in one way it was a longer way. Now, it's close to our borders; both North Africa, Syria and Iraq is close to our borders.

So the first reason for really believing that we are going to make a difference now that defence budgets are going to be increased is that the security environment has changed. It's something new that Russia is using force to change borders in Europe and that requires a response change from NATO Allies.

The second reason is that this is actually the first time heads of State and government has made this kind of pledge. We've had some guidelines with all the respect from defence ministers before.

But now we've made a pledge on a Summit where all heads of State and government were present. And of course, part of the pledge is some kind of long term. We will aim to move towards 2% within a decade. That's a big wait to be honest. But the direction is very clear: We're going to increase.

And then part of (break in transmission) increasing of our capabilities which can protect us both from threats coming from the South and from the East. So it just increase our collective defence against many different kinds of threats.

Then we have decided to work closer on fighting the terrorist threats coming from returning foreign fighters. And then we have, as I said, done something in Turkey which is the closest... which is very close to the challenges, the threats, the instability in Iraq and Syria.

But there has been no call for a NATO-led mission, military mission neither in Syria nor in Iraq or North Africa. Different NATO Allies are participating in different ways. And I welcome that but as I said, it's not always NATO that should organize or lead all different operations. Sometimes it is better to organize this in other ways like we have seen... has been the wish when it comes to decisive military actions which are now taken against ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

In addition to this, NATO stands ready to help Iraq increasing the strength and the capabilities of Iraqis defence and armed forces if so requested by Iraq. That was a decision taken in Wales. And we stand ready to do so when... or if the Iraqi government wants us to help them with defence capacity building measures in Iraq.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you. I put the sixth group on notice: Manuel Carrera de Jesus from Portugal, Boris Blasekovic from Croatia and Eva Kaili from the European Parliament.

But first to call our third group, Mrs. Marianne Myko(?) from Estonia who is...

Q: Thank you very much. First of all, I would like to congratulate you, Mister Stoltenberg of your appointment in this turbulent and uncertain time we all are facing here in Europe and

worldwide. We... NATO Parliamentary Assembly members have heard during these days here in Hague a lot of times we need to stand firm to our values. We need to maintain and communicate unity among ourselves. I fully agree.

But there were some details nice words have to be backed with action in reality. Otherwise, one could take wonderful words, nothing else but for here. Let me ask rhetorically how to remain united when one of us in NATO family is dealing with Russian maneuvers as usual, handing one or two helicopter carrier's to Russia. What about our values? What about the fact in Europe there is ongoing war in Ukraine?

Secretary General I would like to make it clear what is our NATO all about. Is it Allied values such as democracy, rule-of-law? Or is this just pure pragmatism? Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Next, I call Harry Van Bomo from the Netherlands.

Q: You seem to have... Thank you very much Mister Chair. Secretary General I'd like to congratulate you with your new mission. It is a difficult one. Indeed, we are living in difficult times.

I must say I was rather disappointed by your opening speech because it was about money, all about money. And we're very happy to have this question and answering session to ask you about crisis that we are facing and still facing.

For instance, in Afghanistan, Afghanistan was once called the litmus test for NATO. And one of our... one of your predecessors, Mr. de Hoof Scheffer even said that we must succeed in Afghanistan. If we fail in Afghanistan, NATO has no reason to exist. Could you comment on the present situation in Afghanistan and NATO's strategy in the near future in that particular country? Thank you very much.

HUGH BAYLEY: And thirdly in this group Mr. Corium Nahapethian(?) from Armenia who is on the right hand side of the hall, Secretary General.

Q: Thank you, Mister President. I would like to congratulate and wish you very productive performance on the indeed important job. A major concerning the South Caucasus and its wider proximity is the continuous way accumulating tensions that may lead to emergence of new geopolitical dividing lines in the national region and in Europe all. My question... first question is what's your vision on development of the cooperation with other partner countries particularly in so-Caucasus? What must be done in order to carry out the partnerships in Wales that would raise the overall security environment in the region and TransAtlantic space? What is the security case and economic ties all without risk or preconditions for additional security escalation in need of long-term? With a clear direction aimed at building a more inclusive Europe free of new dividing lines.

Secondly, there is an increasing atmosphere of distrust and suspicion building up as regards to unresolve conflicts with a sufficient and adequate reaction from the international

community, the frozen and unsolved threaten to become active with a potential of major distractions and colossal human loss.

In this regard, I would like to ask you isn't it time for the international community to call the recent act of aggression of shooting down the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic helicopter and killing of its three pilots during a training flight, true made. Instead of formulating diplomatic messages calling for balance, as you are aware, that such formulations are constantly being ignored.

Isn't time to use some real pressure and even sanctions toward initiators of hostilities in South Caucasus as well? Thank you Secretary General.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you, first Molean Myko(?), you underlined that we have to stand firm on our values. But it has to be actions. And you referred to the Russian aggression against Ukraine. And in my view, NATO has really responded in a firm and strong way to the aggressive actions we have seen in Ukraine which Russia is responsible for.

We have, of course, responded very clearly politically and supported Ukraine and called for Russia to withdraw its troops. But in addition we have implemented what we call the Assurance Measures, increased our presence in the air, more ships at sea and more forces on the ground.

And just to increase NATO air policing and the increase of NATO jets and AWACS planes in the Eastern part of the region means that we have five times as much NATO planes in the air now than we had at the beginning of the year.

So that's a substantial increase. It's actions. It's something concrete. We have more ships in the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea. And we have more troops on rotational basis in our Eastern Allied countries.

In addition, we are following up implementing the Readiness Action Plan, establishing the Spearhead Force, increasing our ability to do intelligence surveillance, strategic situation awareness. And we are investing in many different kinds of new capabilities.

So when it comes to being a response to what we have seen in the East, NATO has already delivered with actions, with boots, with troops, with planes, with ships. But in addition we are in the process of implementing and delivering even more. Because I a hundred percent agree with you that of course we need the values; we need the language; we need the decisions. But even more important, we need the implementation. And one of my main responsibilities as Secretary General is to make sure that we are implementing.

And that's actually one of the reasons why I also focus so much on funding under the defence pledge on financial resources. Because perhaps the most difficult obstacle we are facing is the lack of resources. We need... we need the funding, we need budgets to be able to implement the Readiness Action Plan; to have the Spearhead Force, to have more

capabilities, to invest in cyber-defence and many other capacities and capabilities we need. And without funding, without increased budgets we will not be able to implement.

And then Harry Von Bomell from the Netherlands, he asked me... You asked about my assessment of Afghanistan. And what I said in my speech is that we are going to launch the rest of a support mission at the 1st of January. And that's a mission which is a non-combat mission. It's Train-Advise-and Assist. And we're going to train-assist and advise the Afghan security forces.

What we have been able... What we have achieved in Afghanistan is that we have prevented Afghanistan from being a place where terrorist organizations can have a safe haven for organizing terrorist attacks. We have succeeded in developing the Afghan National Security Forces from literally, almost nothing, to now a strong force of 350,000 soldiers and police. And we are going to continue to support Afghanistan, partly by the Resolute Support Mission which is going to be launched first of January. And the legal arrangements were adopted by the Afghan parliamentarians a day ago; partly by continuing to finance... to give financial support to the National Afghan Security Forces and partly to a long-term partnership.

All of this will require financial resources. And that's again the reason why I focus so much on financial resources. Because if we're going to continue to support the Afghan National Security Forces and at the same time being able to go into long-term partnership and at the same time doing something with the crisis we're seeing in Syria and Iraq and North Africa and to develop and implement the decisions related to the Readiness Action Plan which is the biggest increase in our collective defence since the Cold War, then we need the increased financial resources.

So really the bridge we need, the tools we need to handle many different crises both the crises we see today; but also the crises in the future is that this time we have to deliver on the pledge when it comes increased defence spending. Because if we don't deliver on that, then it will be worse. And now what I say: concrete actions then will follow up of all the decisions we've made at Wales.

And then the representative from Armenia: partnerships. We welcome that. And partnerships is part of... a very important part of the cooperative security NATO is driving to establish. And we have partnerships with Armenia. And partnerships is an important part of how we develop cooperation with different countries; and try to project stability.

Then, I'm also very concerned with the recent incidents of violence in Nagorno-Karabakh. And I think this just underlines that there is no military solution through the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. And there is actually no alternative to a political solution.

I don't see any direct NATO role. But instead NATO supports the Minsk process and the efforts of the three Minsk group chairs to try to push forward and to develop the conditions for

a lasting peaceful and negotiated solution to the violence and to the challenges we see in Nagorno-Karabakh.

HUGH BAYLEY: Colleagues, I'm looking at the list of members indicating they want to speak. And it seems to me... the fairest thing for me to do would be to cut the question time for each speaker to one minute, rather than two, which will mean we'll get extra colleagues in. I'm sorry to jump this on you in the middle of the proceedings; but it seems to me, it's the fairest thing to do.

The seventh group will consist of Mr. Hampton-Brook(?) from the Netherlands followed by Mrs. Malahat Ibrahim Gheezi(?) from Azerbaijan and Razia Jukonovitchien(?) from Lithuania.

But first we go to the sixth group. And I invite Manuel Carrera de Jesus from Portugal.

Q: Merci Monsieur le President, Monsieur le Secrétaire Général. Il y a quelques jours nous avons assisté à des manœuvres militaires russes aériennes et maritimes dans l'Atlantique qui ont conduit à l'intervention des forces armées portugaises, en particulier de la marine et de l'armée de l'air pour escorter respectivement un navire hydrographique russe en opération dans la zone économique exclusive portugaise et sept avions militaires de combat aussi russes.

Vous semble-t-il, Monsieur le Secrétaire général, que nous devons voir cette augmentation de l'activité militaire par Moscou comme une simple démonstration de force, ou comme quelque chose de plus grave avec laquelle l'Alliance devrait être sérieuse, même préoccupée.... Merci.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you Manuel. Thank you for reducing your question at such short notice. Next comes Boris Blasikovic from Croatia. He is on this side of the hall.

Q: Thank you Mister President. First, let me express my gratitude to our Dutch friends for hosting. That's so nice. Anton Brocka(?) you did a great job... Your team did a great job.

Mister Secretary General, NATO Wales Summit wants to get input and emphasize on its open door policy. And importance of enlargement of the Alliance. Montenegro country, we joined Partnership for Peace program in 2006; and was invited to join Membership Action Plan in 2009; did not receive the invitation to join the Alliance yet.

NATO leaders agreed to intensify talks in negotiations with Montenegro and decide if it's ready to join the Alliance by the end of 2015. Montenegro actively participates in NATO-led operations in Afghanistan in Somalia. It's currently conducting the reform of its armed forces and is producing a force to meet all the criteria set in front of them. Mister Secretary General, please could you say your expectations regarding the process of accession of Montenegro?

HUGH BAYLEY: Thirdly, Mrs. Eva Kaili from the European Parliament. (Inaudible)

Q: Secretary General, EU is a strategic partner for NATO and the cooperation is essential for the European collective defence and security policy for our territory and also assure common values in Democracy. So I would like to ask you: Do you think the increase of spending will help us serve the burden for stability of our common borders? And we face new global threats. Do you think we are ready to protect our citizens?

And how soon will the new Readiness Action Plan we'll be ready to answer these threats? Should these forces become permanent? And also I'd like to add if there is a plan to address tensions that might occur between Allies while implementing a plan B for energy security in the Mediterranean. Can we expect to be protected from men not respecting international law?

I'd like to ask also a timeframe. And if you could perhaps be more specific on how and when the decisions of Wales will be implemented so that from the Baltic States to the Black Sea and the Mediterranean EU citizens will feel protected? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. First, Mr. Manuel Collera. I'm not able to comment directly on the concrete incident of a Russian ship which occurred outside your country. But what I can say is that we have seen an increased Russian military activity around NATO borders especially in the air. And that's the reason why NATO stays vigilant. And that's the reason why we have increased air policing. And we are doing what we are supposed to do. We are intercepting Russian planes when they are approaching NATO air space. And of course, we are also following ships which are moving towards to our borders.

So that just underlines in a way that we have already implemented different measures which has increased our capabilities to follow and to be present along NATO borders.

Then to Mr. Boris Lashekovic(?). As you said we have established focused and intensified talks with Montenegro. And we have the honour and the pleasure of hosting the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister of Justice Markovitc(?) from Montenegro in the North Atlantic Council last week. And that was an excellent meeting. And we addressed also different areas where Montenegro has to make progress to become a NATO member. And it was a very good and constructive part of the intensified dialogue to have the Deputy Prime Minister in the NAC.

I think also very much that it is in itself important that we have decided the timeline; and that we're going to assess the results by the end of 2015. What I can say is that depends on the developments. It depends on the progress Montenegro is making on the different issues related to the defence performance so on, which we have identified together with Montenegro and which should now are working on together with Montenegro as part of the focused and intensified dialogue. We are still standing by the open-door policy. And the countries who qualify are then welcomed to be members as stated in the decisions NATO has made related to the open-door policy earlier.

Then Eva Kaili from the European Parliament. I think it is important to underline that the Readiness Action Plan is about many different measures and many different elements. One of them is to maintain and to continue with the assurance measures. And that means that we are going to continue with the increased air policing five times as many planes in the air as we had before: AWACS, fighter jets.

We're going to continue with the increased numbers of boots on the ground or forces on the ground on a rotational basis on our Eastern Allies. I have visited several of them both in the Baltic countries and in Poland. And we're going to continue with increased naval presence in the Baltic Sea and in the Black Sea. So the Assurance Measures which are of great importance, they are part of the Readiness Action Plan. And they are going to be continued. That's not something we're going to do in the future. That's already, what should I say, in action; and is going to continue.

The second thing is that it's going to take some time before we have established the Readiness Action... the Spearhead Force. But in the meantime, we are establishing an interim solution where we are establishing an interim Spearhead Force based on the existing NATO Response Force. So actually making part of the NATO... existing NATO Response Force more ready and that will be an interim solution until we have the more permanent Spearhead Force in place. And actually Holland or the Netherlands is going to contribute to such a Spearhead Force and other countries have already... have the interim solutions... And other countries have already also made pledges for contributing to the interim solution which we're going to have already next year.

Then there are already many elements, command and control more situation awareness, intelligence and so on. And we're working on all of them. And all are going to be implemented. But some are going to take some time before all are in place. But the implementation is actually already going on and the rest is going to be implemented later on. And the decisions related to the composition, the size of the Spearhead force is going to be taken at a NATO Defence Ministerial Meeting in February. That was 3 questions.

HUGH BAYLEY: I'm afraid we won't get down the whole list. But we'll make as much progress as we can. The eighth group will consist of Khalid Pashtun(?) from Afghanistan, Josephina Topali from Albania and Edmund Vitt-Brot from Poland. But first the seventh group: I invite Han ten Broeke from the Netherlands.

Q: Thank you Mister President. And thank you Secretary General. That comment (inaudible). I'm very happy that you talked about transparency in finance is the thing that we have been pushing for a very long time. Our prime minister has also addressed it. So thank you for doing that and keeping it up.

One more thing that you want to keep up is the pledge that we made or you made in Wales. And we would like to ask you how are you going to do it? How are you going to make the governments honour their pledge on three issues: first, increase spending in real terms;

second, enlarge the capabilities; and third beefing up the contribution to NATO missions. Thank you, good luck with your work in the upcoming years and luck at you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Next, Mrs. Malahaat Ibraham Ghizy(?) from Azerbaijan who is over at the side of the hall.

Q: Thank you very much Secretary General. The recent Paris talks between the President of Azerbaijan and Armenia. Created hope in us, concerning a peaceful settlement of a conflict in this region. Of course, it is a very good sign. But after the talks, Armenian armed forces held military exercise in the illegally recognized occupied territory of Azerbaijan; involved 14,000 soldiers and armed personnel, despite of these informations, Armenian side several times, Armenian military helicopters violated Azerbaijan air space. Armenia blatantly undermined principles of international law and thus NATO Partnership documents through aggression against Azerbaijan.

Dear Secretary General, considering that NATO pursues peace and the security in its neighborhood and in the region as well in this contest how do you see the future outcomes of the peace talks vis-à-vis this conflict settlement. And I use the opportunity: I would to congratulate your new position and good luck for your future. Thank you very much.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you for your question. Thirdly in this group Razia Youknovshian(?) from Lithuania.

Q: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you President. Many people were surprised what Russia did and what is doing in Ukraine. But I'm a bit surprised why there were so many surprised people. Preparations for aggression started not yesterday and not last year. Military and civilian intelligence services of some NATO countries were giving quite alarming information for NATO politicians at least for five last years.

My question will be on increasing Russian intelligence activities in the neighbouring countries and not only there. Russian hostile intelligence activities are in the highest levels. They are capable to intervene the political process; use their money to get influence by a business and especially energy companies to spread corruption by politicians, political parties, using media and decision makers.

Russia has built a structure for so-called soft power implementations and not hiding their interest to influence our societies. My question: "Does NATO and you personally see these threats and Russian attempts to increase influence in NATO countries?" They attempt to destabilize some countries even in NATO.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you, first to Han ten Broeke from the Netherlands. You asked me how I was going to make sure that the Allies are implementing the decisions we made at the Wales Summit related to the defence pledge and also providing capabilities forces to our operations. And I will do that by engaging personally with the capitals in all the meetings I'm

going to have with the prime ministers, with presidents, with defence ministers, with the foreign ministers and also perhaps sometimes with the minister of finance. I will urge them and underline that it's not me asking them; but they decided to do something. And I'm going in a way to help them doing what they want to do.

So it's not me deciding over them. I'm actually going to just remind them on what they have said that they would like to themselves.

But then I will do that in all my meetings, in all travels and so on. But then I would also very much depend on you. Because the primary responsibility of all Parliaments is to decide budgets.

NATO Secretary Generals and NATO Parliamentary Assemblies and the North Atlantic Council is very important. But we don't decide on national budgets. That is something decided by each of the 28 Allied National Assemblies. And you are members of those assemblies. So you are key when it comes to making sure that through the whole Alliance and also between different political groups we have to deliver. And the... since the world has changed, the level of defence spending that was right some years ago is wrong today. And that's the reason why we decided to increase. And that's the reason why we have to deliver.

And we did.... Partly, we decided that those countries who are about 2% and there are four today they should remain about 2%. Partly, we decided this is something which is kind of long-term at least a decade goal of 2%.

But you also made decisions which has immediate impact. And that was to stop cuts not tomorrow but today. That's not something which can happen later. It has to happen in the first budget we decide.

And in addition, we decided to increase in real terms as you rightly said defence spending when our economies are improving. So this is something you asked me what I could do. But I ask actually you to do the job for me. And that's my main purpose for being here. And we need those funds to be able to meet all the other challenges we are facing being it more aggressive action threats in the East, the South or whatever.

And that brings me then to the question from Azerbaijan. Both Azerbaijan and Armenia are valued partners of NATO. And we state that again in Wales. And all Allies remain committed in their support to the territorial integrity and independence and sovereignty of Armenia and Azerbaijan. And that's the reason why we continue to support efforts towards a peaceful settlement of the conflicts in the Caucasus, based on these principles and the norms of international law, the UN Charter and the Helsinki Final Act. But as I said, there's no direct NATO role in the conflict of Nagorno-Karabakh. But we support the efforts to try to find a peaceful negotiated settlement. And we support the efforts by the three chairmen of the Minsk process to try to make sure that we are moving forward in a difficult and important conflict.

Then Lithuania. My main answer to you is that perhaps some was less surprised than others. And some, in a way expected a more aggressive actions by Russia for instance in Ukraine. And others were able to predict that earlier. But regardless whether we were surprised or not. We have, at least been able to agree on what is the response now. And that is that we have to give a firm, clear and strong answer and response. And the best way we can do that is to continue to have increased military presence in the Baltic countries. We're going to do so. I visited all three of them last week. We had excellent discussions with all three. And also to implement the Readiness Action Plan, the Spearhead Force and all the other... the forward deployment of Command and Control, presence of forces on a rotational basis, intelligence situation awareness and develop our strategies when it comes to hybrid warfare and be able to protect all Allies against any threat. Cyber which is part of hybrid warfare.

But then it has to be... The Readiness Action Plan is a plan 28 for 28. So all have to contribute. And one of the main issues I discussed in Latvia, with Lithuania and Estonia was that Estonia they're going to remain at the level of 2%. Lithuania and Latvia have to increase as all other allied who are beneath or under the 2% level.

So big Allies have to contribute and small Allies have to contribute. So we all have to stop cuts, increase spending and move towards 2% guideline. And then we can implement the Readiness Action Plan. And that's the best answer we have to what we have seen in Ukraine and Eastern parts of our Alliance the last month.

HUGH BAYLEY: The Secretary General has very kindly offered to stay five minutes extra in order that we can get the last two rounds of questions which will mean that every delegation will have asked at least one question.

And I apologize to those who've indicated they won't be able to call. We've already announced members of group eight. Group nine will be Mr. Ezrapides Stanleandi(?) from Greece; Miss Tron-Igils-Todier from Iceland and Mr. Ahmed Couscous from Morocco.

But first I call Khalid Pashtun(?) from Afghanistan.

Q: Thank you President. I would like to ask you a question to His Excellency. You have just mentioned that the BSA, Bilateral Security Agreement in Afghanistan was just yesterday ratified by the Afghanistan Parliament. And besides that, we will have a freehand beyond 2014 in Afghanistan for the next 10 years. Our question... My question is here... that since we have 350,000 strong army and security forces in Afghanistan; but we have a very weak aerial support. Right now, as you know, there is heavy fighting on in the South of Afghanistan. And our army is not competent to compete with them without aerial support. My question is beyond 2014 would you be able or the NATO force will be able to continue the aerial support beside the non-combat operation in Afghanistan which you just mentioned it will be engaged... a NATO engagement...

HUGH BAYLEY: Thanks...

Q: But we are expecting more than that. Thank you Sir.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you, Khalid. Next, I call Mrs. Josephina Topali from Albania.

Q: Thank you Mister President. Secretary General, so this is the 60th Session of the Parliamentary... of the NATO Assembly in a time when the threat of terrorism is the top of the global agenda; where the multiple crisis in Iraq, Syria Ukraine etc. The American said that there is no Cold War it is a Hot War. The Pope said that we are just in the Third World War. During the last time as Secretary General, I read on the media that Russia is doing military exercise in the South of Serbia. Is this true? We have to see, to be also focused on the Balkans as in Ukraine in this moment of very dangerous threatening times. Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you Josephina. And thirdly in this group, Edmund de Vitt-Brott(?) from Poland.

Q: Thank you very much Chairman. Mister Secretary General, on behalf of the Polish delegation I would like to congratulate you and to wish all the very best on your new position. We're very glad to host the next NATO Summit in Warsaw 2016 and we hope that the key decisions for NATO will be undertaken during the Summit.

And now I have two questions. Rapidly, changing security environment, annexation of Crimea and Russia Federation's activity on Eastern Ukraine require decision of Wales Summit, formation of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Forces. What kind of decision mechanism would be applied for the deployment of these forces to the conflict regions? And additional question, what kind of rule could play the North Eastern Corps in Szczecin if these forces are deployed in Central and Eastern Europe. Thank you very much.

HUGH BAYLEY: Secretary General.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Now I have to be very brief; because we are over time. And the problem is not the length of the question. The problem is the length of the answers.

So first to the question from... from Afghanistan from Khalid Pashtun. And that's we are going from a combat mission to a non-combat mission by the 1st of January when we move from ISAF to Resolute Support.

And at the same time, we're going to continue to support the Afghan National Security Forces. And they have developed strong capabilities themselves. And besides that, I can just say the details are going to be decided when we make the final decisions on the execution directive which is going to be decided on in the NAC before we launch the mission of the Resolute Support mission.

Albania: Serbia is a sovereign and independent country. And they decide themselves who they are conducting military exercises together with. And the... But I agree with you that the Western Balkans is of great importance. There are several NATO partners there.

We are in the process of discussing... assessing the possibilities of membership for Montenegro and other countries and in Western Balkan region. So that's a region which is of very great importance for NATO.

Poland: The really High Readiness Force, that's going to be used when necessary. And the North East core headquarter in Szczecin is a headquarter which we expect is going to play an important role when it comes to collective defence in that part of Europe. But these are among the details which are going to be decided at the Defence Ministerial Meeting in February.

We are now in the process of implementing the whole plan and we are... we have... We will get the military advice within a few days. And then we will start the process within NATO and make the final decisions in February.

But North-East or the Core Headquarters in Szczecin is, as I said, a headquarter which is expected to play an important role in the whole Spearhead Force. Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Hum, I would like to call four speakers very briefly; because we are overrunning. First of all, Mister Everepidos Stanliandi(?) from Greece.

Q: Thank you Chairman, here. Mister General Secretary, on behalf of the Hellenic delegation, I would like to congratulate you for your new job. And I wish you all the best in your new important duty.

Mister General Secretary, thank you for the positive comments you have done for my country Greece. We live the most serious economic crisis after the Second World War. But we give more than 2% of our GDP for defence and security; because we feel the international and the national situation and the importance of NATO.

My question is 90% of illegal immigrants from the Iraq and Syria will try to come to the European territory; will come through Greece. And we have to filter them by ourselves; and more by our own cost. How can NATO help us to control if they are a bit ... if they are between them covert fighters of ISIS or Ebola victims, thank you?

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you. Next, I'd like to invite Mr. Turron-Egostodier(?) from Iceland.

Q: Thank you, Mister General... Secretary General, thank you for your informative presentation. I wish you much success in your new capacity. The importance of ensuring regional security is inseparable part of NATO and TransAtlantic cooperation. In recent years, we have witnessed increased attention on the High North, on the Arctic region. It is clear that the region is undergoing a transition which will have a growing effect on political and economic stability in the North Atlantic.

The Arctic is a region of enduring strategy, importance for NATO and Allied security, not least now with acknowledged increase of Russia presence.

Mister Secretary General, I want to ask you how the High North will be addressed by NATO in changing geopolitical atmosphere and if NATO has defined its rule in the region. Thank you.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you very much. I'd like to invite Ahmed Couscous from Morocco followed by a very brief from Mr. Dragan Somaz of Serbia. Mister Couscous.

AHMED COUSCOUS: Merci, Monsieur le Président. Monsieur le Secrétaire Général, tout d'abord au nom de la délégation marocaine, je voudrais vous féliciter pour votre nomination. Et je voudrais saluer les efforts fournis par l'OTAN afin de renforcer, assurer la stabilité dans les pays en crise et saluer aussi les pays de l'Alliance pour leur intervention en Iraq et en Syrie pour combattre l'État islamique DAESH qui constitue aussi une menace dans mon pays.

Alors, ma question porte surtout sur le rôle de l'OTAN en Afghanistan. Ne faut-il pas revoir la stratégie de l'OTAN dans ce pays. Ne pas se contenter de l'intervention militaire seulement et se pencher surtout sur l'instauration des institutions démocratiques et le renforcement de la société civile afin d'assurer le cheminement des aides financières directement au peuple afghan afin de gagner leur confiance et de trouver des solutions alternatives. Ça sera bien sûr un travail supplémentaire comme vous l'avez dit Monsieur le Secrétaire Général afin d'éviter ce que se passe en Libye.

Ma deuxième question, je voudrais savoir si l'OTAN peut-il jouer le rôle de catalyseur dans les négociations entre l'Afghanistan et le Pakistan, condition nécessaire pour assurer la stabilité et la paix dans le pays. Malheureusement, cette chose elle est rejetée par les Talibans, merci.

HUGH BAYLEY: Thank you and finally Mr. Dragan Somaz from Serbia wished to make...

Q: First of all, I want to... congratulation on your new appointment. I hope that you and Serbian government will bring our relationship on higher level next years. Serbia have soldiers in many missions: Mali, Central Africa, Somalia, Lebanon. We have co-sponsors of UN Resolution fight against ISIS or terrorism. And I must say one thing for my dear colleagues in Parliamentary Assembly. Yes, there's going to be a military exercise in Serbia and next year but American army not with Russian army. This is disinformation that my dear colleague from Albania have. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much. First to Greece. So I understand very much the concerns you have about illegal immigrants coming into your country. And of course, to some extent, that's also linked to the returning of foreign fighters of terrorist threat. And as I said, NATO has decided to enhance our cooperation and to increase the exchange of information related to foreign fighters and to work to do what we can to handle that threat which involves some of our countries.

At the same time, I think we also have to understand that, for instance, border control and issues related to that is not a military issue. It's not a responsibility of NATO. But it's more for the European Union. And I know that a former Defence minister of Greece is now going to take other responsibility for immigration. This is within the European Union. So I think you have also a good, what I say friend to raise these issues more related to responsibilities of the European Union than NATO when it comes to border control and so on.

Then, Haigue-Stotte(?) from Iceland on the High North. Well, I very much believe in cooperation in the High North. There is a great potential for more cooperation even though we have already achieved a lot. And that's important both for the enhancement of the resources there, environment, energy. In the end, we should also be able to continue the cooperation with Russia in the High North. But that's been as it has been for a long time depending on that we have a strong collective defence which creates the basis for also engagement with Russia in the High North.

Morocco: I think we have to underline that NATO is going to continue with Afghanistan. We're going to have the Resolute Support. We're going to have substantial financial support for the Afghan National Security Forces. And we're going to establish a long-term partnership. The content of that long-term partnership has not yet, what should I say, been properly discussed. Now, action should start. And President Ghani and Dr. Abdullah are coming to the NATO Foreign Ministers' Meeting in December. And that provides us with an opportunity to also discuss what kind of long-term partnership are going to NATO and Afghanistan.

And then Serbia, I welcome the cooperation we have with Serbia. And again, I leave into a way to Serbia to decide what kind of exercises they are doing. But anyhow, I believe that Serbia and NATO have a lot to do together. And I very much look forward to develop further the cooperation between NATO and Serbia into the future. Thank you.

Strength (firm predictable policies) creates the foundation for engaging with Russia. And therefore we need to continue both as an Alliance; but also Norway as an Allied country to invest in defence; to keep up collective defence. And that creates the basis for engaging with Russia on issues which are of importance in the High North like energy, environment, search & rescue and all the areas where I know that there is a lot of cooperation in the High North between NATO Allies and Russia.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2014/11/24/keynote-address