North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and members of the Bundespressekonferenz "The Warsaw Summit – Adapting NATO in Turbulent Times" - Secretary General's opening remarks
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(As delivered)

Thank you so much, and thank you for inviting me and it's great to be back. I was here, I think, approximately a year ago and for me it is a great opportunity to meet with you and also then to answer some questions.

I'll be very brief in my introduction.

The reason why I am in Berlin now is that we are preparing for the next NATO Summit which is going to take place in Warsaw 8th and 9th of July.

And that Summit is going to be one of the most important Summits in history of the Alliance.

Just because we are faced with fundamental changes in the security environment. So the way NATO responds to these changes, to more challenging and more dangerous security environment is of great importance and therefore this Summit will be a landmark Summit just because the environment it will take place within.

I expect the Heads of State and Government to make many decisions on many different issues. I expect also Germany to play a key role as it has done over many many years in the Alliance. And I've had very fruitful discussing both with Frank-Walter Steinmeier, with Ursula von der Leyen and with Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday and today and I also had useful meetings in the Bundestag.

There are going to be many decisions and many issues but there are in a way two main themes which will be the main challenges and the main focus of the Summit.

And first theme is everything related to deterrence, defence. And the other main theme is projecting stability beyond our borders.

And I will just briefly go into the main issues, the main messages related to these two main themes.

When it comes to deterrence and collective defence this is NATO's core responsibility. This is about providing credible deterrence so any adversary knows that an attack on any NATO Ally will trigger the full response from the whole Alliance. And strong defence and strong

deterrence is something we think is very important, not because we want to provoke a war but because we want to prevent a war. Strong deterrence, strong defence is the best way to avoid a war because we are sending a very clear signal that we are able to defend all Allies against any potential threat.

Since tensions are increasing and since we see a more assertive Russia, a Russia which has tripled its defence spending since 2000 in real terms, a Russia which has developed many new capabilities, which has modernised its armed forces and most importantly, which has shown the will to use military force in Europe, changing borders in Europe by force for the first time since the Second World War, that requires that NATO is responding. And we are implementing the biggest reinforcements of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War, with a combination of enhanced readiness, preparedness of forces to reinforce, to deploy if needed and with enhanced forward presence of NATO troops in the eastern part of the Alliance.

And we are now discussing how to increase our forward presence. We have a proposal on the table from our military planners, which recommends that we will have a robust multinational battalion in each of the three Baltic countries, and in Poland. And the idea is that this multinational presence will send a clear signal that an attack on one country will then trigger a response from the whole Alliance.

No final decision has been made but I expect Heads of State and Government to take the decisions at the Warsaw Summit. And I welcome that Germany has stated clearly that Germany is ready to lead one of the battalions and provide forces to one of our battalions in one of the Baltic countries.

Then the other main theme will be…I will add one theme and that is that we don't want a new Cold War, we don't seek confrontation with Russia. So what we do is defensive, it is proportionate and it's fully in line with our international obligations including the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

And we do that because we continue to strive to a cooperative and constructive relationship with Russia. We will continue to keep channels for political dialogue open with Russia. We just had a meeting in the NATO-Russia Council some weeks ago, we seek to convene a new meeting on the NATO-Russia Council because we believe that especially tensions are high. It is important to have transparency, predictability and to avoid incidents and accidents like for instance the downing of the Russian plane over Turkey. And if these kind of incidents happen, make sure that they don't spiral out of control and create really dangerous situations.

So we will continue to pursue and work for a dialogue with Russia because we think that's important especially in times like the times we are faced with now.

The other main theme is projecting stability to our neighbourhood. And this is relevant for many different kinds of neighbourhood. It's relevant for neighbours like Ukraine, Moldova,

Georgia, where we work with them in modernizing their armed forces. Implementing the reform of their defence institutions and fighting corruption. And the idea is that if our neighbourhood is more stable we are more secure. So this is also in our interest to project stability beyond our borders because that serves our own interest as NATO Alliance.

But projecting stability is also about projecting stability to the south. And that's everything from Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, North Africa. And of course, we speak about different nations, different situations and we can't have one size fits all. We need tailored approaches. But I think what we do in Afghanistan illustrates what we are aiming at doing more of. And that is to project stability not by deploying NATO forces into combat operations but projecting stability by training local forces. And I think that NATO has to be able to deploy forces in combat operations outside NATO territory also in the future and it may be that we have to do that also in the future and stand ready to do so.

But our focus is more and more on how we can enable local forces to stabilize their own countries, to fight terrorism themselves, and that's what we do in Afghanistan and that's what we're looking into how we can do for instance more of in a country like Iraq. We have started to train Iraqi officers. I hope that the Heads of State and Government at the Summit in Warsaw will give us a mandate to step up, scale up the work we do to try to enable countries in the Middle East, North Africa, to stabilize their own countries, to fight ISIL themselves because in the long run that's a more sustainable answer than we deploying our combat forces and fighting their wars. So this is the second main theme, how can NATO do more in support of the US led coalition to fight ISIL, how can NATO do more in general to stabilize our neighbourhood both in the east and in the south.

The last thing I'll just briefly mention. The EU-NATO cooperation will also be one of the main issues at the Summit and I expect us to be able to make progress and to lift the cooperation to a new level.

But I think the best thing now is to stop and to leave the time for questions, so…thank you so much.

Q: First of all, I would like to know the Cold War. You keep underlining again and again that you're not interested in a Cold War. But there are all the components that speak in favour of already existing Cold War. There's tension there. There's increased arming on both sides. And troops are being stationed on both sides of the border. How's this situation different from the normal or the former Cold War? Or what makes this current situation a situation in which we don't have a Cold War?

And secondly, I would like to know. There were some differences apparently with Russia about the NATO-Russia Council. Russia seemed to be surprised about the announcement of a meeting. Have these differences now been removed? Is there already a date for the next meeting.

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): First, when it comes to the first Cold War. We are not in a cold war. But we are neither in that strategic partnership we tried to establish after the Cold War. And I think that there are very important differences between the challenges we faced today compared to what we saw during the Cold War. The Soviet Union and the Warsaw Pact is something very different from today's Russia. And the Cold War was also characterized by much more ideological confrontation between NATO, the West and the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union. It was a global rivalry. And I'm not underestimating the challenges and the difficulties with the present situation; but it is a different situation than what we experienced during the Cold War.

But it's not the cooperation, the strategic partnership either. So it's something different, both from the partnership and from the Cold War situation we have experienced before.

Then on the NATO-Russia Council, I think it's important... The NATO-Russia Council is an important tool to facilitate dialogue, political contacts between NATO and Russia.

At our last meeting, we addressed Ukraine; we addressed military activities, including transparency, predictability. And as I said, the downing of the Russian plane over Turkey illustrates the dangers with increased military activities close to our borders. We have seen the unsafe behaviour of some Russian planes in the Baltic, very close to an American ship and an American plane. And these kinds of incidents are dangerous. And we have to prevent them. And if they occur, we have to avoid that they are spiralling out of control and creating really dangerous situations.

So I think that, at least, we should strive for a more predictable transparent relationship with Russia. And that's one of the reasons we continue to seek to convene the NATO-Russia Council.

No date is fixed. We have to agree with Russia also on the agenda and the different modalities. But there is agreement in NATO, among NATO Allies, that we will try to seek to have a new meeting and hopefully before the summit.

Q: Hello, it’s David Charles from the Times. The... I don't know if this has come up in your conversations here, Mister Stoltenberg, but German Defence Ministry is consulting at the moment on the future of German defence. And this includes more enhanced EU cooperation and more EU structure, such as an EU Military Headquarters.

We know the European Commission is also preparing a paper on this to come out in the summer. How is this compatible with what you've been just telling us about NATO? Won’t it divert resources from NATO to European structures at a time when they need it in NATO structures?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The important thing is that what the European Union does is not overlapping and not... It's complementary to what NATO does. And I welcome strengthening

of the defences of European … EU members; because a stronger Europe will also be a contribution to a stronger NATO.

But the important thing is that this takes place in ways which are... which are complementary and add value to what NATO already does. And of course we also have to remember that the European Union is important. The European Union is a key partner, strategic partner for NATO. But at the same time, NATO is the only platform for really transatlantic operation where we have the US and Canada as two key members and they, of course, are not members of the European Union.

The UK plays a key role both in NATO and in the European Union. And this... So the UK is a strong driver for enhanced cooperation between NATO and the European Union. That's something I very much welcome. And I think that a strong UK in a strong Europe is something which is good for NATO. And especially when we are faced with so much uncertainty, so much instability, I think that everything that can contribute to unity and building institutions is an advantage both for NATO and for the European Union and for our shared security.

Q: When you spoke about how to increase NATO presence in Eastern Europe, you mentioned Poland and the Baltic States. But what about the Black Sea? Romania will present an initiative at the summit that will call for a permanent multinational naval patrol in the Black Sea. Will there be a consensus? Will there be a support from all NATO members for this initiative? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: You are right that we are now also looking into the question of enhanced or increased NATO presence in the Black Sea. I think it's important to underline that we have already increased our presence in the Black Sea region with what we call Assurance Measures meaning air policing, meaning more exercises, meaning also more ships in the Black Sea.

But both Romania and Turkey have argued in favour of scaling that further up, to have more naval presence in the Black Sea. And I know that they're also now discussing with Bulgaria. So the three littoral States are in the process of looking into different proposals and then also consulting with and discussing that with other NATO Allies and NATO as an Alliance. So that's on the table. It's an issue which we address. I'm not able to provide you with the conclusions. But it's something which we are very much aware of also because we have seen a substantial Russian build-up in Crimea. And of course, that affects the whole security situation in the Black Sea. That's just one example of a pattern which we have seen over a long period of time with a more assertive Russia having advanced military capabilities also deployed in the Black Sea region.

Q: I would like to know … talking about the Baltic States and Poland. You have just mentioned the Rapid Response there and you said: "They need to be robust troops." But robust doesn't mean permanent I guess. This is just my question: "Does it mean permanent?" And the second one is fighting ISIL. I think there have been some discussions that NATO has

to restructure in terms of fighting ISIL better. Is there anything like this planned to be discussed in Warsaw? And third question, the German engagement. In Germany, at the moment, our government is also discussing about how much to spend: 2017 is pretty clear; but the next years are still being discussed after 2017. So do you actually there want to see some more engagement than we have now?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First, on the troops, and the presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance. There will be troops there all the time. But we're not speaking about permanent based troops; because they will be on a rotational basis. We will change the troops; it will be rotational troops.

But I think the reason why you ask about whether there are going to bea permanent based - that's the language which is used in the NATO-Russia Founding Act. I think that the important thing to underline is that in the NATO-Russia Founding Act we speak about that... there will be no permanent basing of substantial combat forces. "Substantial combat forces" was never defined when the NATO-Russia Founding Act was agreed in 1997.

But even if we take into account the Russian interpretation of what substantial combat forces are and the level, we are well below those levels. So what we do is in line with our international commitments including the NATO-Russia Founding Act. There are also many other aspects of the NATO-Russia Founding Act: for instance, that it addressed the situation... the current security environment. And that has very much changed.

So one small thing about our current... our presence in the East, I think we understand that's a combination of many different things. It's the forward presence of the battalion... battalions in the different Baltic States and Poland. But it's also about more infrastructure. It's about pre-positioning of equipment, of supplies. It's about more exercises. And it's also about, as I said, the high readiness of our forces, which can be deployed as reinforcement if needed. And we have tripled the size of the NATO Response Force to 40,000. And Germany is part of this enhanced readiness of our forces. So it's not only a battalion. The battalion is one element in a comprehensive answer which is about forward presence, infrastructure, prepositioning, more exercises and high readiness and the ability to deploy forces quickly if needed. That is the response. So that's part of a broader approach.

Fighting ISIL, yes, that's one of... one element in our efforts to project stability to the South. NATO is already doing a lot. First of all, Turkey, a NATO Ally, is a key Ally in the efforts to fight ISIL; because Turkey has the infrastructure: airfields and so on. And Turkey is used to fight ISIL in Syria. Second, all NATO Allies contribute to efforts of the US-led coalition. Third, NATO has started to train Iraqi officers. The aim of that is to enable them to fight ISIL even better. And we're looking into how we can do even more. And we're also now considering to provide AWACS support to the US-led coalition with the NATO AWACS supporting the efforts of the US-led coalition fighting ISIL. And we're working with Jordan and Tunisia. That's also part of

our broader approach fighting ISIL. So yes, how we can do more and do this better is one of the issues which we will address at the Warsaw Summit.

The last thing is defence spending. I welcome that... First, we decided in Wales, at the summit in Wales two years ago, actually three things. We decided to stop the cuts in defence spending, to gradually increase and then aim at 2% within a decade.

Germany has already stopped the cuts. I welcome that. Second, Germany has started to have a real increase in defence spending. I also welcome that. But having said that, I underlined that Germany still have a long way to go before Germany reach 2%.

And of course I'm aware that Germany has a strong economy. And what Germany matters... what Germany does really matters; because Germany is so big, the biggest economy among NATO European Allies or European NATO Allies.

And therefore it is important that Germany, as all other NATO Allies spending less than 2% increases and also increases measured as percentage of GDP, meaning that the increase in defence spending has to be stronger than the GDP increase. Yes, so I have conveyed that message several times also in my meetings today.

[BREAK IN TRANSMISSION OF AUDIO]

JENS STOLTENBERG: We stand ready to help Libya and the new government of national accord. I spoke with Prime Minister Sarraj. And he wants to send...and they will send soon a group of experts to NATO headquarters to look into what kind of help we can provide and how we can help them in the best possible way. We do not speak about combat forces or combat operations. Any help from NATO will be, of course, based on a request from the new government and will be part of the UN-led efforts to stabilize that country.

Our main focus is on how NATO can help Libya build defence institutions, defence ministry headquarters, defence planning and so on. That sounds perhaps a bit bureaucratic; but it is extremely important. Because if the international community starts to train Libyan forces, it is very important that those forces can fit into a stable structure. Because if not, we just risk training forces which end up in some local militia. That will not contribute to stability in Libya. So our main focus is how can we help...

JENS STOLTENBERG: ... the numbers crossing the Aegean, illegal trafficking, illegal smuggling of people, has been reduced from several thousand per day to some tens. One in 90% reduction. That's not of course only due to NATO's presence. We have supported the implementation of the Turkey-EU Agreement. We have provided practical help to the Greek Coast Guard to FRONTEX but also to the Turkish Coast Guard. And the important thing is that Turkey is a NATO Ally but not an EU member. So NATO has been the framework for, in a way, creating a platform for enhanced cooperation between Turkey and the European Union

and Greece and thereby played a key role. Germany has a flagship. Germany is playing a key role. And we can learn from those experiences in the Aegean Sea.

But I think it's hard to copy; because we don't have any NATO Allies in Northern Africa. So it's going to be a different kind of presence if we move outside the Aegean.

Q: [Through interpretation] You mentioned Turkey quite often. NATO is not only a defence alliance but also a value alliance. And are you worried about the developments in Turkey in recent months as the EU is worried?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I think I mentioned in the press conference that Turkey is the Ally most affected by the crisis in Syria and Iraq. They have received close to three million refugees. They have suffered from several terrorist attacks. And they have suffered from many attacks with missiles, with artillery shelling coming from Syria, attacking civilians in Turkey. So we have to understand that Turkey is by far the NATO directly or most directly affected in many ways of the fighting, the turmoil in Iraq and in Syria.

At the same time.... and actually NATO provides support for Turkey. We have increased our military presence in Turkey. We have deployed Patriot batteries to augment air defences. We have AWACS planes flying over Turkey to help them with a better understanding of what's going on in the air space. And we also have increased our naval presence: more port visits to Turkey. So we have implemented what we call Assurances Measures for Turkey as a response to the threats and the challenges they see themselves.

At the same time, I underline again and again that NATO is an alliance which is based on some core values: individual liberties, democracy and the rule of law. And these values are core for our unity. They are... Our unity is based on these values. And therefore I attach great importance to them. I attach great importance personally. And I have underlined the importance of these values in many meetings also in Ankara.

NATO does not have the same kind of mechanisms as the European Union has addressing challenges related to, for instance, democratic institutions and so on. So we are in a different position than the European Union is in their dialogue, for instance, with Poland. So that's a very different situation: NATO and the European Union when it comes to this kind of challenge.

Q: I've got a question about the combat forces in Eastern Europe. What is to your opinion the maximum size of these combat forces in Eastern Europe? Maybe you could be more specific on that? And, in the past, Poland has asked for two divisions in their country. I've heard now four battalions could come. How many... the size to your opinion for Poland and the Baltic States? And thirdly, you still think this will not provoke any kind of reaction on the Russian side? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you. First, we speak about one battalion or what we call "robust battalion" for each of the three Baltic countries and for Poland. No final decision has been made. But that's the proposal we have received from our military planners. And that's the proposal which is currently discussed inside NATO. And we will make final decisions at the summit.

The number of troops in a battalion will vary. So it's hard to give you an exact figure. But a battalion is not a very big military force; but it has a combat capability. And our plan is to have a multinational battalion. So we send a clear signal that there will be NATO forces from several nations present in the two Baltic countries and Poland. And we're sending a clear signal that an attack one of the Baltic countries will be an attack on the whole Alliance.

So I will not give you exact figures; because battalions varies a bit. But it's not... There are many other military, as I say, presence or units which are bigger than battalions. And we don't speak about divisions.

Then, of course, there may be additional forces as part of exercises. And also the United States have also some bilateral presence. But what we are addressing now is a NATO presence of robust multinational battalion.

Then, you asked me whether this can provoke... That would be absolutely unjustified. Because I think it's obvious that what we do is a response to the actions of Russia in Ukraine, the illegal annexation of Crimea.

Before the illegal annexation of Crimea, no one spoke about any NATO presence of the kind we now are addressing in the Baltic States and Poland. So, for many years that was not on the agenda at all. So it's obvious that when we are addressing enhanced NATO presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance, that's something that comes after... and it's directly triggered by the Russian illegal annexation of Crimea. And of course, that affects all NATO Allies because it violates some basic rules which have been fundamental for European security for decades and that is to respect the territorial borders, the territorial integrity of all nations in Europe. And that was what Russia violated. And that's the reason why we have to respond in the way we are responding. But again I continue to underline that we don't seek confrontation with Russia. We don't want a new Cold War. We strive for a more cooperative relationship. But we have to, at the same time, send a clear message that we have a credible deterrence in place not to fight a war; but to prevent a war. And since Russia has tripled the amount of money they spend on defence, modernized their military equipment, are using military force against neighbours in Europe, then that requires a response from NATO. And that's exactly what we are delivering.

Q: One question, if you allow, I asked about the substantial combat forces in Eastern Europe. You said it was not put in a treaty with Russia how much the maximum was of these combat forces. But up to you, what will be for NATO the maximum of substantial combat forces in Eastern Europe?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Just to be clear, the phrase "substantial combat forces" is a phrase.... it's a phrase which was used in the NATO-Russia Founding Act. And my point was that.... and when this act was agreed, there was no precise definition. But there were different proposals on the table. And even if you take into account the Russian proposal we are well below their definition of substantial combat forces. We speak about a battalion-size presence. And that's in no way something which can be assessed as violating the NATO-Russia Founding Act.

Q: So how big is the Russian definition of "substantial"?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I will not go into a debate about the exact numbers. I'll just... You can go into... look into the historic debate back in 1997. And you will find out that what they addressed then at that time was much higher than our planned presence of a battalion-sized presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance.

MODERATOR: So I don't see any question, more. That's a perfect coincidence; because that's all. No time left. So it remains to say: "Thank you very much being our guest".

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you so much.

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