North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

ahead of Meetings of NATO Defence Ministers
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(As delivered)

Good morning.

It has been just over one hundred days since NATO's landmark Summit in Warsaw in July.

And in July at the Summit, the Heads of State and Government of NATO took a series of decisions to boost our deterrence and defence and to project stability in our neighbourhood.

Over the next two days, NATO Defence Ministers will take stock of our progress and map out the road ahead.

From early 2017, NATO will have four multinational battalions in the eastern part of the Alliance.

This is credible deterrence.

Not to provoke a conflict, but to prevent conflict.

Concrete proof that NATO can and will deploy thousands of forces to support our Allies. And a clear demonstration of our transatlantic bond.

Tomorrow at our meeting, the framework nations, the nations which are responsible for leading the four different battalions, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom and the United States – will set out their plans for the battalions they will lead.

And other Allies will confirm their contributions. And tomorrow I will be able to tell you more about the contributions from different NATO Allies to the four battalion.

We will also take forward plans to strengthen NATO's presence in the Black Sea region.

We will assess the infrastructure we need in Allied countries to enable rapid movement of our forces in Europe.

And we will assess the growing role of cyber defence in our operations.

Our second session will be devoted to Projecting Stability in our wider neighbourhood.

Because when our neighbours are more stable, we are more secure.

As part of this effort, NATO is stepping up in the fight against ISIL.

We have already trained hundreds of Iraqi officers in Jordan – in areas including military medicine and defusing improvised explosive devices.

And we will expand our support into Iraq itself in the coming months.

All Allies are members of the Global Coalition fighting ISIL.

The Coalition’s success has been enabled by the ability to work together, developed through decades of NATO missions and NATO exercises.

And NATO itself is now offering direct support with our AWACS surveillance aircraft.

Providing surveillance to improve the Coalition’s air picture.

And making the skies safer.

And I can announce that the first NATO AWACS flight in support of the Coalition fighting ISIL took place last week, on the 20th October.

We are committed to sustaining the Coalition's momentum.

So that ISIL can be defeated once and for all.

Tomorrow, we will also consider the future of our deployment in the Aegean Sea.

And take decisions on a NATO role in the Central Mediterranean, which could support the EU’s Operation Sophia.

Illustrating how we are strengthening our cooperation with the European Union.

On Thursday, we will meet with EU High Representative Federica Mogherini to discuss how to deepen NATO-EU cooperation.

The relationship between NATO and the European Union has never been closer.

But we want to do even more.

Including on hybrid and cyber defence, maritime security, and exercises.

We have a full agenda ahead of us.

And in an unpredictable world, NATO is adapting for the future with determination and with purpose.

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

MODERATOR: Thank you very much. I would just ask you first to identify yourselves before you ask your question. We'll start over here with Reuters please.

Q: Thank you Secretary General. Robin Emmett, Reuters. NATO has been watching the Russian battle groups move through the English Channel over the last few days, can you give us any update on what you've learned, how many fighter bombers on board or any idea of whether your initial idea of the battle groups trajectory is correct? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): So Russia has the right to operate battle groups, naval ships like this in international waters and we have seen this battle group being deployed before also to the Mediterranean. So that is something which has happened before and we are monitoring the deployment and movement of this battle group in a normal way in a measured and responsible way as we always do. What is different this time is that the battle group may be used to increase Russia's ability to take part in combat operations over Syria and to conduct even more airstrikes against Aleppo and this raises serious questions and concerns over Russia's commitments to working to a political solution to the conflict in Syria and more airstrikes by Russian planes will exacerbate the humanitarian suffering in Aleppo and therefore we call on Russia to contribute to a political solution to implement a ceasefire and to stop the bombing of Aleppo. So, the concern is that the Kuznetsov carrier group can be used as a platform for increased airstrikes against civilians in Aleppo.

MODERATOR: Go to the second row here please.

Q: (inaudible). So, in the light of what you just said how would you comment on the fact NATO allies supplying the Russian ships?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Well it is for each nation to decide whether these ships can get supplies and fuelling and be fuelled in different harbours along the route towards the Eastern Mediterranean. But at the same time we are concerned and I have expressed that very clearly about potential use of this battle group to increase Russia's ability and to be a platform for airstrikes against Syria and this is something I have conveyed very clearly before and I repeat those concerns today and I believe that all NATO allies are aware that this battle group can be used to conduct airstrikes against Aleppo and Syria.

MODERATOR: We'll go to NPR please.

Q: Thank you Mr. Secretary General, Teri Schultz with NPR. I'm interested in finding out what you know and how much you've been asking about the number of Turkish diplomats and military officers who are no longer here in headquarters, whether you've followed up on this issue with Turkey, if you're concerned about it. Just today Human Rights Watch has put out a

new report saying that people being held in detention there are being tortured and if you could also say something about your new Intelligence Chief, in an unrelated matter. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First on the Intelligence Chief,, or Assistant Secretary General for Intelligence - NATO has been working for a long time on how we can further strengthen our work on intelligence, how we can do even more when it comes to sharing intelligence and one of the important tasks for NATO is to share intelligence; is to enhance the way we do intelligence cooperation within the Alliance. And therefore we, therefore we decided to establish a new division to coordinate and to strengthen our intelligence work. This division is now being established and I just a couple of days I appointed a new Assistant Secretary General to be responsible for this new division and all of this is about strengthening the coordination and the work inside the Alliance on intelligence and intelligence sharing and I'm looking forward to work with the new Assistant Secretary General from Germany on strengthening our focus and the way we work on intelligence in the Alliance. Then on Turkey, I visited Turkey in August, I will visit Turkey again in November and I met with President Erdogan, the Prime Minister, the Foreign Minister and many other political leaders in Turkey when I when I visited Turkey in August. And of course Turkey has the right to prosecute the perpetrators; those behind the failed coup attempt in July. The important thing is that this is done in accordance with the rule of law and this is of course something I have discussed with my interlocutors in Ankara several times and I also welcome the cooperation between Turkey and the Council of Europe because I know that the Council of Europe is very focused on how they can work with Turkey making sure that prosecution of those responsible for the failed coup is done in a way which is in full accordance with the rule of law. Then we have seen a number of changeovers of Turkish military personnel at NATO, at different NATO headquarters. I'm certain that Turkey will continue to be able to provide Officers to NATO headquarters and we are in close dialogue with Turkey on this and that's also one of the issues I expect to discuss with my Turkish interlocutors when I travel to Turkey later on this fall.

MODERATOR: Thank you, we'll go to Al Arabiya in the fourth row in the aisle please.

Q: Noureddine Fridhi from Al Arabiya News Channel. Mr. Secretary General you received the Iraqi Foreign Minister last week. I imagine you discussed the war against DAESH. I would like to know what is specifically NATO is providing to Iraq and to allies, its contribution in the war against DAESH. And I don't know if you're, what is the assessment of your experts … if the DAESH fighters in Mosul are now fleeing Mosul to Syria or just the opposite side because some reports are suggesting that they are being joined by DAESH fighters from Syria to Iraq. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO provides support to Iraq and the global coalition fighting ISIL in Iraq in many different ways. All NATO allies are part of the coalition and of course it is a great advantage for the coalition - the inter-operability, the ability to work together - forces from

many different nations that has been developed through NATO exercises, through NATO standardization programs and through NATO operations where NATO allies but also NATO partners have participated over many, many years and this interoperability is something which is very useful now for the counter ISIL coalition in their fight against ISIL both in Syria and Iraq. So, NATO has provided a platform for many of the activities, the way the coalition is now working in Iraq and Syria. Then on top of that NATO provides direct support to the coalition. We have started to provide support with our surveillance planes, our AWACS planes and the first flight took place or happened last week on the 20th of October and we will continue to provide AWACS support for the coalition. We have trained the Iraqi officers in Jordan for a time but we are now moving into also training Iraqi officers inside Iraq and we will start that training in the near future so we can do even more to help the Iraqi forces. And the whole idea is that NATO of course has to be ready to deploy forces in big combat operations as we've done in Bosnia, in the Balkans and in Afghanistan before. But we are more and more focused in NATO on how we can project stability without deploying large numbers of combat troops and the best way to do that is to train local forces, to build local capacity and that's exactly what we are contributing to, by training Iraqi forces because we believe that in the long run it's a much more viable and sustainable solution to enable local forces to fight terrorism themselves, to stabilize their own country instead of NATO doing the combat operations fighting their wars and therefore we will train and we will step up our efforts to help the Iraqi forces. When it comes to the operational situation in Mosul, that's something I've discussed with both the Iraqi Foreign Minister; I discussed it with the Presidential envoy Brett McGurk when he visited NATO last week and I discussed it also recently with Prime Minister al-Abadi but I will not comment on the operational situation, the current operational situation in Mosul because I leave that to those directly responsible for the operations in Mosul.

MODERATOR: Thank you. We'll go to the front row in the far left please.

Q: Nash Dziennik, Poland. Mr. Secretary General could you comment on proposed substantial increase of Russian military and defense expenditures; also general economic situation of Russia is declining. Is it the issue that NATO and the West are maybe concerned about?

JENS STOLTENBERG: We have seen a significant military buildup in Russia over many years and defense spending has tripled since the year 2000 in real terms. And this has enabled Russia to invest in new capabilities, in new weapon systems, to do more exercises and to significantly increase their military capability. Combined with the fact that Russia has also been willing to not only invest in their Armed Forces but also to use their Armed Forces against neighbours has we have seen in Crimea, Ukraine - this is the reason why NATO is responding and this is part of a pattern which has triggered a response from NATO. And that's exactly why NATO has implemented the strongest or the biggest reinforcement of collected offense since the end of the Cold War. We are in the process of deploying forces in the Eastern part of the Alliance, the four battalions. We have established eight new small

headquarters in the Eastern part of the Alliance and we have increased our ability to reinforce if needed with the new High Readiness Joint Task Force and by tripling the size of the NATO response force. We are also now in the process where we see a shift in defense spending within NATO because after many years of decline in defense spending, especially among European NATO allies, 2015 was the first year where we saw an increase in defense spending across European NATO allies; and 2016 we expect to see an even further increase in defense spending. So after many years of decline we now have seen the first increases in defense spending among European NATO allies. I welcome this and this shows that NATO is able to respond, NATO is able to adapt to a more assertive Russia and the increased military presence of Russia close to our borders But, but let me underline what NATO does is proportionate, it is defensive and it is fully in line with our international commitments and we are responding in a measured and responsible way because we don't want a new cold war, we don't want a new arms race and we continue to strive for a more constructive and cooperative relationship with Russia. So we keep the channels for political dialogue open with Russia because we strongly believe that it is in the interest of both Russia and NATO to avoid a further increase in tensions but to try to find ways to reduce tensions and to avoid a new arms race.

MODERATOR: We'll go to Europa Presse.

Q: Thank you. Ana Pisonero from the Spanish News Agency Europa Presse. Quick first question on the AWACS, how many are deployed, and will they have any kind of support role in the operation of, to liberate Mosul? And my second quick question Secretary General you just mentioned that allies would be taking a decision on support to Sophia. Will NATO take on board the three tasks that Sophia is currently doing meaning intel, well getting intel where the traffickers are operating or how they do and also in training the Libyan Coast Guards. And finally, as well to enforce the arms embargo in Libya, will NATO take on board the three roles? And just if you can really tell us where are we on the new NATO operation in the Mediterranean, is that on? We know already all the tasks, thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First on the AWACS, there will be several flights. We started last week and we will progressively increase the number of flights. So we will provide significant support with AWACS to the coalition with several flights providing support. This support is important because it helps the coalition to get a better picture, air picture and also provides surveillance and information for the coalition air forces. The importance of that is obvious because we see all the difficulties; we see the complex and complicated situation both over Syria and over Iraq. I cannot comment on the exact operational details but I can say that the AWACS planes will not be part of combat operations but they will provide information, surveillance and air picture for the coalition forces which is important for them and which increases air safety for the coalition forces. Then on Operation Sophia and Sea Guardian, I expect Defense Ministers to make decisions - the final decisions on the establishment of the new NATO security mission in the Mediterranean, the Sea Guardian, on the meeting which starts tomorrow. And then also to make decisions on providing support for Operation Sophia,

and after those decisions have been taken tomorrow and the day after tomorrow I can give you more details. But of course we are looking into how we can help Operation Sophia conducting the tasks they are conducting especially in areas of sharing information and logistics helping them to conduct and to do what they do in Operation Sophia. Hopefully I'll be able to provide you more details after the meetings which start tomorrow. And I think that was all.

MODERATOR: We'll go the third row in the far left please.

Q: Daniel Brὸssler, Sűddeutsche Zeitung. I'd like to follow up on Teri's question on the Intelligence Chief. Why was it necessary to create a new division here? Is it due to the new security environment or is it just that intelligence sharing within NATO headquarters was not sufficient so far? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The reason is that NATO should always be able to adapt and we see a more complex security environment, we see a more dangerous security environment, we see different kinds of threats, we see a more assertive Russia to the East, we see the violence to the South with ISIL, Iraq, Syria on NATO borders. So we have Ukraine bordering NATO, we have we have Georgia bordering NATO and then of course we have Syria and Iraq bordering NATO; and then we have the situation in the Mediterranean and North Africa. All of this is close to NATO, all of this poses different kinds of challenges for NATO and then linked to the terrorist threats and the threats related to foreign fighters and also returning foreign fighters there is a need for more sharing of intelligence and better procedures for how to coordinate intelligence work inside NATO and across NATO allies. And we also decided at our Summit in Wales in 2014 to do more intelligence sharing especially related to foreign fighters and to contribute to the fight against terrorism. So, based on all this we came to the conclusion that the best way to make sure that we improve our intelligence work is to establish a division where the different strands of intelligence: the civilian intelligence inside NATO, the military intelligence inside NATO come together and then this new division with a new Assistant Secretary General would be an added tool to strengthen coordination sharing of intelligence among NATO allies.

MODERATOR: Go the Wall Street Journal please in the middle of the room.

Q: Julian Barns, Wall Street Journal. In the most recent American Presidential debate Donald Trump said NATO allies signalling out Germany are not paying enough for U.S., the U.S. defense contribution. He also noted that NATO countries have increased defense spending and suggested that that was a result of his critique. So, should NATO countries pay the U.S. for its defense contribution to Europe and are Mr. Trump's criticisms on target and does he deserve credit for the turn-around in defense spending?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I'm not going to be part of the U.S. election campaign. It is for the people, the voters of the United States to decide who's going to become the next President of the United States. But what I can do and as I've done before is to clarify what matters for

NATO. And it has been a very clear message from NATO over many years that European - especially European NATO allies - should increase defense spending and I strongly welcomed that after our decision in 2014 we have seen a shift that after years of decline in defense spending there's now an increase in defense spending among European NATO allies. But this is not something that was caused by the U.S. election campaign because we made a decision in 2014; it has been on top of my agenda in all my meetings with European leaders and we saw the first increase in defense spending already in 2015 and we see further increase in 2016 and that's not because of the election campaign in the United States but it is because 28 Heads of State and Government in NATO made a decision in 2014 and now we are implementing that decision. Second, I would like to underline that NATO's security guarantees are not conditioned; they are absolute, they are unconditional. So NATO is there to defend and protect all allies against any threat and that is essential for stability in Europe. We do not say that if you don't pay we don't protect you; we protect all allies against any threat and that is essential to keep stability and to prevent conflict. The NATO security guarantees are important for Europe but they are also important for United States. Strong NATO is good for Europe and good for United States. We have to remember that the only time we have invoked Article 5 - our collective security clause - was after an attack on the United States, 9/11. Then NATO provided AWACS surveillance planes for the United States and NATO has been responsible for our biggest military operation ever in Afghanistan where more than a thousand soldiers from non-U.S. NATO allies and partner countries have paid the highest price - have lost their lives in a military operation defending the United States. So I'm saying this just to underline that collective defense is important for Europe but it's also important for the United States. NATO has played a key role, has been on the front line in the fight against terrorism for many, many years with our operation in Afghanistan, training Iraqi officers, supporting Tunisia and Jordan and in many other ways. So, as I've stated many times the adaptation of NATO where we focus more on intelligence we step up our efforts to fight terrorism where we increase defense spending is not related to the U.S. election campaign; it's the implementation of decisions made by Heads of State and Government in NATO.

MODERATOR: Thank you, we're going to go to Norwegian media in row three.

Q: Yes, I'm Alf Johnsen, VG Newspaper. Mr. Secretary General ten days ago you expressed concern about that the deployment of the Iskander Missiles in the outskirts of NATO. Is this an enhanced threat to European security and would there be a forceful or will there be any NATO response to the deployment in the short term?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The deployment of the Iskander Missiles to Kaliningrad is yet another example of a Russian military buildup close to NATO borders. Also with dual capable capabilities like the Iskanders because they can carry conventional warheads but they can also carry nuclear warheads. And of course we are concerned about the Russian military buildup close to NATO borders and we see it in the East but we also see it in the South in the Eastern Mediterranean and in Syria close to Turkey, NATO ally. We are responding in a

measured and responsible way and that's the reason why we have over a long time now gradually increased our collective defense. With the increased deployment of forces in the Eastern part of the Alliance, with the establishment of the new High Readiness Force - the VJTF - able to deploy rapidly if needed to reinforce and with the tripling of the size of the NATO response force to 40,000. So we are responding but we are responding in a measured and responsible way and what we do is defensive. So it's always this importance of responding but not over-reacting and that's also what we're doing when it comes to the deployment of Iskander which is only one element of a broader picture.

MODERATOR: Thank you we'll go to European Pravda please.

Q: Sergiy Sydorenko, Ukraine. More recently you met Ukrainian President Poroshenko and he stated after that visit and after that meeting with you that he expects NATO to help Ukraine push on Russia to fulfil Minsk obligations. Do you see how can NATO push on Russia? Do you see some ways probably with cooperation with Europe with some other measures and to probably you have some new data about Russian presence in Donbass. Thank you very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I very much appreciate the frequent meetings I I've had with President Poroshenko. We met in September in the U.N. and then we met last week here at NATO headquarters and that reflects the very close partnership between Ukraine and NATO. I assured him that NATO will provide strong political support and strong practical support for Ukraine. We provide practical support through our different programs, trust funds and I also encourage all NATO allies to provide support on a bilateral level, training of Ukrainian forces. NATO provides other kinds of support through our trust funds. And we will step up our support. We just made decisions at the Warsaw Summit to establish a comprehensive package for Ukraine. Then we support Ukraine by calling on Russia to make sure that the Minsk Agreements are fully implemented, and Russia has a great responsibility because Russia continues to support the separatists in Donbass, they continue to be present and therefore they have a special responsibility to make sure that Minsk Agreements are fully implemented which means full respect for the ceasefire, withdrawal of their weapons and then access for the international monitors so they can monitor - without being threatened - the implementation of the ceasefire. NATO also strongly supports the initiative by Germany and France - two NATO allies - working on how to implement the Minsk Agreements and also the meeting in the Normandy format and the agreement to try to establish a roadmap, how to step by step implement the Minsk Agreements. So I can assure you that we will continue to call on Russia to seek a peaceful negotiated solution based on the Minsk Agreements and we will continue to support Ukraine and we will continue to support all efforts to implement the Minsk Agreements.

MODERATOR: We'll go the front on the left please.

Q: Thank you. Slovakia Daily Prada. My question regarding propaganda and hybrid warfare. NATO has StratCom, E.U. has own task force, now Czechs are also establishing an anti-propaganda centre. Would you like to see some more cooperation among various actors we have? And the second one I'm following up on a question about Mr. Trump. Many observers are saying that Russia would be happy having Mr. Trump as a U.S. President. Do you agree with this assessment? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First on the propaganda. We see that Russia is providing a lot of, is supporting different groups trying to influence domestic debate in different countries in Europe and we see a lot of propaganda. But NATO will not counter propaganda with propaganda. Our message is that in the long run the truth will prevail so the best answer to propaganda is not more propaganda but the best answer to propaganda is facts, the truth and open democratic debate. And therefore we will continue of course to support the provision of facts of the truth because we are certain that in the long run that's the best way to counter propaganda. We do that by our own efforts in NATO but we work also together with the European Union on the staff level to see how we can improve routines, exchange of information so we can help each other with getting the facts straight. I also welcome very much efforts by different NATO allies on this issue. And the Czech Republic and other countries have done a lot and I welcome that. I will also underline that of course the main responsibility for taking part in the different debate and discussions in different NATO allies lies in the different NATO allies. We cannot do all this from Brussels. What we can do in Brussels is to provide facts, is to help, is to coordinate but the discussions, the countering of the propaganda has to take place in the ifferent member States.

MODERATOR: I'm afraid that's all we have time for. I apologize if I didn't get to you there were far more questions than we were able to get to this time but there will be several more…

JENS STOLTENBERG: I forgot one.

MODERATOR: I'm sorry.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yes, as I said I'm not going to be part of the U.S. election campaign. I just very clearly stated what matters for NATO and that is that the NATO security guarantees are absolute, they are unconditional. We do not say that if you don't pay we don't protect you, we protect all NATO allies and at the same time I welcome that more and more European NATO allies actually are increasing defense spending and that's a result of decisions taken by NATO back in 2014 and I welcome that these decisions are now being implemented.

MODERATOR: Thanks. I'm afraid that is all we have time for. There will be several more opportunities over the coming two days. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/10/25/press-conference-by-nato-secretary-general-jens-stoltenberg