North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

’Projecting Stability: Charting NATO’s Future’

Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg to the Atlantic Council, Washington, D.C.
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Thank you Fred, for that kind introduction.

It’s an honour to address you all today. It is great to see so many of you, including members of the diplomatic community. Thank you for being here.

Let me also thank the Atlantic Council.

Fred and Damon,

Under your leadership, the Council has worked tirelessly to promote ever closer transatlantic cooperation. And in today's dangerous world, transatlantic cooperation is needed more than ever.

NATO embodies that cooperation. An alliance of 28 democracies, representing half of the world’s GDP and half of the world’s military might. A unique alliance that brings to bear the strength and unity of North America and Europe. That strength and unity is what I want to discuss today. Why it matters. How it is shaping our response to the actions of a more assertive Russia. And how it must define the way we tackle ISIL and the other challenges we face in the Middle East and North Africa.

The transatlantic Alliance has its roots in common culture and values. These are bonds which carried us through the Cold War. Today, NATO continues to serve the interests of each and every member.

Security, prosperity, open society. None of these are guaranteed by NATO alone – but all would be at greater risk without NATO. A safer and stronger Europe means a safer and stronger United States. That was the rationale behind the decision to create the Alliance and it is just as valid today. Because NATO is as much an American organisation as it is a European one.

This was the spirit in which the Alliance responded when the United States was attacked on 9/11. The only time the Alliance has invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. Which makes clear that an attack against one Ally is an attack against all.

That collective decision led to NATO’s biggest ever operation – in Afghanistan. Where hundreds of thousands of soldiers from Europe, Canada and NATO partner countries have

served, alongside US forces. And where many have given their lives.

Without NATO, transatlantic cooperation would be weaker, Europe and North America less safe, and the world a more dangerous place.

Take Russia… Last year, I spoke here in Washington about its destabilising behaviour. Its military build-up and its aggression against Ukraine. And I outlined how NATO is responding. We have made significant progress since then. NATO is becoming more agile and better prepared. We are reinforcing our collective defence. The largest reinforcement since the end of the Cold War. NATO's Response Force is now three times bigger. With a brigade-sized high-readiness force at its core.

We have set up a chain of new headquarters in the eastern part of our Alliance. Boosting our ability to plan and exercise, and to reinforce if needed.

The European Reassurance Initiative, launched by President Obama two years ago, has been key. I met with the President on Monday and thanked him for his strong leadership. I welcome his plan to quadruple funding for the Initiative. This increase would mean more US troops and equipment on European soil. More opportunities for Americans and Europeans to participate in joint exercises. More prepositioned equipment. And better infrastructure.

Together, this bolsters our deterrence. And our ability to respond with strength and speed.

But transatlantic security does not rest upon American shoulders alone. European Allies are stepping up. They are in charge of the new High Readiness Force. They play a major part in policing NATO's air space and seas. Europeans are providing the majority of our forces in the Balkans. And for over a decade, have contributed a third of our forces in Afghanistan.

They are also reversing the trend in defence spending after a long decline. In fact, last year, defence cuts came to a halt. Sixteen European Allies spent more on defence than in the year before. And, they are adding real capabilities such as latest-generation fighter aircraft, helicopters and maritime patrol planes.

These are important first steps towards fulfilling our pledge to spend 2% of GDP on defence and to spend more on the capabilities we need. I am determined that all Allies make good on that pledge. Because the burden must rest on all our shoulders.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We face a new strategic reality. And we must be prepared for the long haul. At our Warsaw Summit in July, we will take decisions to further strengthen our collective defence and deterrence.

We will enhance the forward presence of multi-national forces in the eastern part of the Alliance. To make clear that an attack against one Ally will be met by forces from across the

Alliance.

We will enhance our resilience against hybrid warfare and cyber threats. And make sure that the nuclear component of our deterrence posture remains credible and effective.

We will advance our goal of a Europe whole, free and at peace, with Montenegro invited to join our Alliance. We will reconfirm our long-term commitment to Afghanistan. And we will agree further measures to respond to the challenges coming from the Middle East and North Africa. Because homeland defence is not just about what we do at home. It is as much about what happens beyond our borders. Where we see fragile and failing states struggling to keep control over large portions of their territory.

Millions fleeing the region in a humanitarian crisis of a magnitude not seen since World War Two.Terrorist groups like ISIL taking hold of ungoverned spaces. And spreading violence across the region and beyond. Inciting attacks on our streets. From Brussels to Istanbul, Paris to San Bernardino. These are attacks on our open societies. On the values we share.

So our response must be strong. And it must be united. The international community is rising to the challenge. I strongly welcome the efforts of the US-led Global Coalition to Counter ISIL. Because, to protect our territory, we must be willing to project stability beyond our borders. If our neighbours are more stable, we are more secure.

To be clear, projecting stability has several elements. To defeat and destroy groups like ISIL we need to use force. Military action is essential if we are to deprive ISIL of its strongholds in Syria and Iraq. And stop the horrific violence it is inflicting.

But projecting stability also means using our forces to train others to fight. In the long run, it is more sustainable to enable local forces to protect their countries than it is to deploy large numbers of our own troops.That is an important lesson we have drawn from past operations. Training matters. In the fight against terrorism, building local capacity is one of the best weapons we have. And the earlier we can do it, the better. Because a few months can mean the difference between a fragile state and a failed state.

So, while NATO has to remain an expeditionary alliance, able to deploy forces outside our territory, NATO must also become a more effective training alliance. We need to upgrade our capacity building efforts and advance our cooperation with regional partners. And, today, I want to put forward three specific ways I believe can do that.

First NATO needs to strengthen its ability to advise and assist local forces. And for that we need to make training a core capability for the Alliance. We have trained local forces across the world for more than 20 years.

From sending advisory teams into ministries, to deploying military and police trainers on the ground, including in dangerous environments. We know how to generate a multinational force of trainers. Maximising every contribution from Allies and partners of all sizes. But today, we

need a more robust approach. A responsive, ready-to-go capability. So that we can plan, coordinate and deploy advisory support and training missions faster. And bring together the necessary tools for capacity building and training. As we are currently doing in Afghanistan.

Last month, I visited Kabul. And I met the men and women of the Afghan Air Force. Pilots and mechanics, trained by NATO. They were all proud of what they are doing. I met a remarkable group of young women who are working hard to become pilots. It is that resolve which makes me optimistic about what can be achieved.

Until a few years ago, there was hardly any Afghan air force. Last year, the Afghan Air Force flew 20,000 missions. Providing transport, resupply, medical support, and engaging the enemy. They are part of the 350,000 strong Afghan security forces built up by NATO trainers over the years. And they are now responsible for their country's security. We continue to support them, but we have ended our combat mission. This demonstrates what we can achieve by building local capacity.

The Afghanistan model is important, yet it is not the only one. We have also recently launched training and capacity building initiatives in Georgia, Moldova and Jordan. And we will soon begin advising Tunisia on counter-terrorism and help improve the capacity of their armed forces.

With respect to Libya, I welcome the arrival of the Prime Minister Designate and the Presidential Council in Tripoli. This is an important step in establishing the Government of National Accord.And setting the conditions for further international support. NATO also stands ready to assist Libya. They will need our help.

So it is clear. The demand for capacity building is growing. And that is why NATO needs to make training a core capability for the Alliance.

My second proposal is that NATO should step up our support for Iraq. The ability of an inclusive Iraqi government to restore security is critical to the stability of the whole region. And a stable Iraq is key in the battle against ISIL. Last week, NATO started training Iraqi officers in Jordan. Our program was developed in close coordination with the Counter ISIL Coalition. We should reinforce these efforts. And, when appropriate, expand them further.

When I visited Iraq last month,Prime Minister Al-Abadi and I discussed the challenges his country is facing – and why training is an essential part of the solution. He asked NATO for more help. We should provide it, and we can do that in many ways. One example is dealing with Improvised Explosive Devices. They were the biggest killer of Iraqi forces when they retook Ramadi from ISIL. They are a threat which NATO has extensive expertise in countering. So our current training program responds to this urgent need, and we should do more for Iraq.

My third proposal is that we take our cooperation with regional partners and international organisations to a new level. To project stability in the region, we need to work with those who know the region best.

A few weeks ago, the Secretary General of the Gulf Cooperation Council came to NATO Headquarters. We discussed the security challenges in the region and what more we could do together. The Gulf Cooperation Council is developing its ability to command large multi-national operations. And NATO has unique expertise in building and maintaining an integrated military structure. We can share that expertise.

We are also exploring what more we can do in areas such as counter-terrorism, energy and maritime security, and cyber defence. My aim is to bring forward our cooperation with the GCC at the Warsaw Summit in July.

The new NATO regional cooperation centre in Kuwait also provides us with a way to reinforce our partnerships. The Centre will be a focal point, where NATO and Gulf partners will work together. In areas such as military to military cooperation, strategic analysis and civil emergency planning.

The King Abdullah Special Operations Training Centre in Jordan is another platform for joint efforts. It is certified according to NATO standards. And this is where the training of Iraqi officers is now taking place.

We must do more of this, to complement bilateral efforts and to strengthen the capacity of regional organisations. Because it is the best way to leverage their expertise, their resources and their cultural awareness in support of our training initiatives. And to enable our partners in the Middle East and North Africa to play an even greater role in achieving regional security.

Everywhere I go in the region, leaders tell me they want more cooperation with NATO. We must answer their call.

The challenges from the Middle East and North Africa pose a direct threat to transatlantic security. To our common values. And to our common interests. We must all work together to respond. We need to strengthen our own defences. And to make our partners stronger too.

The threat from ISIL and other terrorist groups will be with us for a long time. So, we must bring all tools to bear. And NATO is a powerful tool in which all our nations have made great investments.

For almost seventy years, NATO has brought Europe and North America together. Providing security for both sides of the Atlantic. I know that I can count on the continued leadership of the United States.

I also know that the mutual interests of Europe and the United States are best served by a strong North Atlantic Alliance. Because the security of Europe and North America is

indivisible. And only by standing together will we remain safe and secure.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you, thank you Mr. Secretary General. You've given us a lot to think about. I think that NATO's Secretaries General are frequent visitors to Washington. I don't think I've ever seen a visit where so much attention was paid. I was told that in your conversations with Congress today you had a better attendance than has ever happened for a visiting NATO Secretary General. Obviously it comes at an important time in this country as Americans are trying to figure out who will lead them into the next part of the 21st Century. And your remarks on the subject of NATO's future address key questions about relevance, the why it matters part that you raised that have obviously been front and center in the political debate here. So I want to talk about some of the specific initiatives that you outlined but first would like to ask you as a European who spends much of your time around European leaders about that debate going on here. President Obama who you met with this week has repeatedly cited growing concerns expressed to him by America's allies about what he this week called some of the wackier suggestions being made by Presidential candidates. Secretary Kerry spoke about it last night on television again saying that European allies and other allies in the world but particularly the Europeans have expressed repeated concern to him. Many of the notions the President has referred to have specifically talked about the Trans-Atlantic Alliance both trade and defense and suggestions about the value of NATO. So I want to ask you if you've heard these same concerns and when you, Europeans are sitting around among yourselves when the Americans aren't in the room and you really let your hair down is that what you talk about? How much concern is there in Europe?

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): So I have less and less hair so that's my problem. But if you would show old pictures of me you'd understand what I mean because I was very different then. First of all I would like to say that I welcome that's it more attention to NATO and NATO related issues in the American political agenda and that may be because of the election campaign. I will not be part of the election campaign. For many, for actually decades election campaign was an important part of my life and it's very hard to not … how should I say … (inaudible) election campaigns but that's my previous life. Now I'm in some other kind of business which is not addressing election campaigns especially not in the United States. So, so it's up to the people of America to decide who's going to be the next President and I will in no way be part of that discussion or that campaign. But what I can say is that when I travel in different capitals in Europe – you asked me about that - I see a very strong support for Trans-Atlantic cooperation for the North Atlantic Alliance. I think that some of them actually understand that in the United States people from different parties are concerned about that too many Europeans are investing too little in defense and that's exactly why we made the pledge to increase defense spending. And that's exactly why I personally every time I meet the political leaders in different European allies - allied countries - urge them to do something with it. And that's also the reason why I welcome that at least last year they were able to stop the cuts. To not reduce is not a very big achievement but at

least compared to continuing to cut defense spending it is the first step towards moving in the right direction and 2015 is the first year after we made the pledge in 2014 so it is the first step in the right direction after just one year. So I'm not certain whether you asked me about defense spending but you asked me about whether Europeans are concerned and they are concerned in a way that they are - that many of them understand that they have to contribute more to our collective defense and that we don't have a fair burden sharing now, and that's also the reason why all 28 allies all the Europeans agreed on the pledge made in 2014 to step up their investments in defense.

MODERATOR: Well said. Obviously there are concerns about - in this country as well in Europe - about how some of the conversations have been phrased about NATO but the overall question beyond the question of burden sharing about NATO's relevance is not really a new one. Sometimes it's spoken of in monetary terms - Europeans are free riders and I think you've addressed that just now and certainly in your remarks and shown that that situation in fact is improving. But more broadly in years since the Cold War ended you've had a lot of foreign policy experts from George Kennan to Donald Rumsfeld questioning whether NATO should survive. And most of those concerns were based on the end of the Soviet Union. You spoke of the largest re-enforcement of collective defense since the end of the Cold War and certainly some of NATO's Eastern members have argued that the Cold War never really ended. General Breedlove spoke recently of a shift in NATO doctrine from assurance to deterrence where, which I think in some ways is arguably return to the past. But I wonder if you could talk a bit about Russia, what you think the actual threat is that Russia poses to the Alliance right now. What are Putin's goals? Are his actions arguably a response as some argued years ago to NATO's expansion right to Russia's borders? Is there a limit that you see to - I'll say Putin - but Russia's desire to expand its own sphere of influence. Or do you think they see it as a defensive mechanism?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I would say some words about Russia in a moment but I will start by commenting on … how should I say – the introduction to the question because that is also related to this concern whether part of the debate in the United States provides reasons for concern in Europe that the United States is not focused on Europe - that the United States is not going to continue to be part of our Trans-Atlantic Alliance and so on. So, first of all I would like to say that the first time I visited the United States was in 1980 and then I was 21 years old - no not 21 years old - and I visited the United States together with my father. He was then Defense Minister of Norway and we travelled for a week around the United States at different military bases and different political think tanks and so on. I guess some of the people are still, should I say, around. And then the main issue then was the concern about that the United States was not going to be supportive of Europe and that was in 1980. So we have been concerned for many years but we are still going strong. So, so it means that of course we should always be concerned but at the same time we have to see that we are able to deliver every day as a strong alliance, the strongest ever and the strongest in the world. And we are able to deliver the terms, able to deliver collective defense and we are able to

stand together when it's really needed. So, for instance, as I mentioned in my speech the first time and the only time ever we have invoked the Collective Defense Clause was after an attack on the United States, and then Europeans stepped up to help and support our ally the United States. And one third of the forces, as I said, in Afghanistan - they have come from Canada, Europe and European NATO partner countries and more than a thousand European and Canadian soldiers have lost their lives in Afghanistan, and many more have been wounded. So it's just a strong example of how the European allies stand together with United States when needed. Then of course I would like us to do more. Yes so we'll address defense spending and other issues. But the Alliance is working; the Alliance is delivering and we are providing deterrence every day and we stand together in different operations and missions around the world. And we've done that every day since 1980 - since I was concerned the first time. So I'm permanently a bit concerned but quite successful and that's a good - what should I say - mix for the Alliance. Then about Russia, we don't see any imminent threat against any NATO allied country, including the countries in the Eastern part of the Alliance. But what we see is a more assertive Russia responsible for aggressive actions in Ukraine and willing to use military force. Not only invest in Russian military capabilities but also the willingness to use those capabilities to intimidate neighbours, to change borders in Europe, annex Crimea, destabilizing Eastern Ukraine and having troops in Georgia and Moldova and so on. And this, of course, is of great concern and that's the reason why we are responding and when I say we I mean the United States and Europe together. Before we didn't have forces in the Eastern part of the Alliance and now we have forces there on a rotational basis. And we have substantially increased our readiness to redeploy forces if needed. So again I'm concerned but as long as we are able to adapt and because we are able to adapt we are in a way responding to those concerns and making sure that the Baltic countries, all NATO allied countries are safe because NATO is there.

MODERATOR: But do you have a sense of what the ultimate goal is of Russia's actions as you try to strategize to provide this deterrent capability and this kind of show of strength? What is your sense of what they're hoping to achieve?

JENS STOLTENBERG: It's always dangerous to speculate too much but what we see is that they are trying, Russia is trying to re-establish a sphere of influence around its borders and that's why they are behaving as they are in Georgia and Moldova and Ukraine. And that's not acceptable because they are violating international law, they are not respecting the sovereignty and the territorial integrity - the sovereignty and the territorial integrity of independent Nations, countries in Europe and that's also the reason why it's important that we respond. At the same time - and we are responding by the biggest re-enforcement of collected defense since the end of the Cold War. But at the same time I always underline that NATO is not seeking a confrontation with Russia. We will avoid a Cold - new Cold War. Actually we are striving for more cooperative and constructive relationship with Russia but we believe that we have to be strong; we have to be firm; we have to be predictable to establish the basis for a political engagement and dialogue with Russia. And I think I mentioned many

times before but my experience as a Norwegian politician is that there is no contradiction between strong defense and political dialogue. Actually as long as we are strong we can also engage in political dialogue and in the long run Russia has to understand that they will gain more from cooperating with us instead of confronting us.

MODERATOR: You spoke about a new strategic reality that NATO's facing and the primary threat to security right now seems to be violent extremism and the spread of it in the world. You outlined what is not necessarily a new role for NATO but certainly a broader expansion of that role and making it into a core capability for NATO, and that's the training and partnership institutional aspects of it and you set out three ways of doing that. The first one was to build overseas capacities for countries on the frontline against violent extremism and obviously that's what NATO has been doing in Afghanistan, certainly since the end of the combat mission. But I wonder if you're concerned now about what's been happening in Afghanistan. General Nicholson - who's the new Commander there -is getting his own recommendations ready for the Administration about what the U.S. military presence should be after the beginning of 2017. And as you know current plans call for it to be almost cut in half - the U.S. presence. But General Nicholson has spoken recently about how the training program really has been set back because of the level of fighting during 2015 - which was one of the worst years that they've had certainly in a long time. Not only ground forces but also forces in the air. Would you expect NATO forces - assuming that U.S. forces remain there at their current level - would you expect those NATO components that are still active in Afghanistan to do the same? What do you think is the likelihood that they would be as some U.S. forces have been dragged back into the fighting as it becomes more difficult there and certainly as the fighting season starts to ramp up again?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The situation in Afghanistan is not easy and actually it's very difficult and I visited, as I said, Afghanistan just a couple of weeks ago, and there is fighting. The Afghan National Army and Security Forces there have also lost many soldiers and the Taliban is trying to control different parts of the country and we have many other groups - Al-Qaeda, different terrorists groups, also have some ISIL in Afghanistan and it's in no way an easy situation. But having said that I think we also have to remember that it hasn't been easy in Afghanistan for decades. So the starting point is not a peaceful stable country. The starting point is a country which was a safe haven for international terrorists with Taliban in Kabul controlling the country. And what we have achieved is that we have enabled - through the NATO presence there for many years - to build a strong National Afghan Army and Security Force which is capable, professional and strong enough to take responsibility for the security in the whole country. That is not a small thing, it's a big thing. So we have been able to end our combat mission because we have enabled them to do the fighting. And I think very much that we should continue to enable them, continue to support them and, therefore, I think it was a right decision of President Obama to maintain the current force levels through 2016. At the same time the U.S. Administration and the President has announced they will go from 9800 to 5500 by the end of the year. What we haven't yet decided in NATO is then what the

other allies will do. That is something we will address and decide by the latest at our Summit in July. Regardless in a way of what we finally decide when it comes to the scale and the scope of the rest of the support mission, we have already decided that we will continue to support and … (inaudible) into 2017 but we haven't decided on the force levels and we haven't decided exactly on the scope of our presence in 2017 and beyond that. So I'm not able to answer you precisely, exactly how our presence will be in 2017 but what I can say that we'll continue to support them, continue to train them and advise them and that we'll continue to fund them because you have to remember that we are supporting the Afghan Army and Security Forces in two ways. We provide training, assistance with 12,000 NATO troops but we also fund the National Army with U.S. funds and European funds and Japan, South Korean and others, and NATO partners are also contributing. And we are concerned in Europe that we are spending less than 2 percent of GDP on defense. In Afghanistan they spent 25 percent of GDP on defense but of course that's only possible because that is mainly funding coming from United States, European allies and partners. So we will continue to support Afghanistan, exactly how we will do it, we will decide at our Summit in Wales [sic]. But we will continue to fund them and we'll continue to have a NATO presence because I very much believe that we have to enable forces in the region - in Afghanistan, in the Middle East, in North Africa - to stabilize their own countries and in the long run that's better than we deploying a large number of combat troops.

MODERATOR: Just to continue on that theme of the training as a core capability, you spoke about Iraq and the role - expanded role - that NATO could play there. There has been some suggestion that the coalition itself is sort of - coalition of the willing - an ad-hoc structure really without any particular structure and that perhaps this a role that NATO could play. That NATO could take over some of the organizational aspects of training, as well as putting the various components in place to do it and that NATO could actually serve in a way - that it has in Afghanistan - as a kind of Secretariat for that war. That seems to be what you were suggesting that this could be NATO, that NATO could undertake a much larger role in addition to direct assistance to Iraq; in some ways organizing the activities - some of the activities at least of the coalition there. Can you talk a little bit more about that?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The advantage of using the tool NATO - using NATO as a tool - is that, for instance, building capacity. Train as we have done in Afghanistan And let me just add before I continue that if there was anything wrong we did in Afghanistan, then it was that we didn't start the training earlier. We should have started to build capacity in Afghanistan earlier enabling them to take responsibility for their own security earlier. But the advantage of using NATO is that NATO has the structures. We have mechanisms for generating forces. We meet regularly - several times a year - to generate forces to our different missions in Kosovo, in Afghanistan, and other places, and of course, if asked also to generate forces to a training mission in Afghanistan – in Iraq - then we can also do that. So it's a stronger commitment when you are part of a NATO Alliance and partner countries to provide the necessary forces than the commitment being just a part of a coalition of the willing. Because a coalition of the

willing is in a way by definition more a question of whether you are willing while NATO is a stronger commitment to be part of that. So we have the mechanisms to generate forces and that's a great advantage and I think also we can then provide more support for the United States. Second we have the command structures, we have different training centers, we have some in Europe. We work with Jordan and King Abdullah training centres in Amman. And we will soon have a center in Kuwait and we have a lot of experience in doing training, capacity-building - everything from building institutions, Defense Ministry's headquarters, institution building to training soldiers in a dangerous environment. And thirdly, we have the expertise - the experience. And I mention, for instance, these improvised explosive devices. The reason why NATO knows a lot about how to counter IEDs is that we have done that for many, many years in Afghanistan. So we can take that experience and apply it in, for instance, Iraq. But we will - of course NATO will only do things which our allies ask us to do. And we have to find the right balance between high end fighting, and I think the coalition should continue to do that, and - but I think that NATO could do more as, coordinated with, and add value and complement what the coalition is doing when it comes to training. And also, and one more thing that is for many small and medium sized countries - NATO allies and partner countries - it is often extremely expensive and difficult to do training on a bi-lateral basis in, for instance, in Iraq because when NATO does the training, we have one agreement; one legal framework, and then you can plug into that, and we have - you know - infrastructure, transportation and so on organized as NATO, and then small countries can just send in some special operational forces and do some training, And in my own country we, in Norway, it was for them a big task just to negotiate all the legal arrangements you need to deploy forces in Iraq. While when Norway deploys forces to Afghanistan those things are in place and Norway just plugs in to that framework. So I think it is also more cost effective, we spend less money, less meeting, less people on organizing many bi-lateral efforts instead of plugging into, as I say, a NATO framework. So yes you are right I believe NATO could do more but it has to be coordinated with the efforts of the coalition and it has to be complementary. It has to be, as I say, done in a way which serves the purpose of the mission.

MODERATOR: Would you see that as taking over the existing bi-lateral training programs? You've got the Americans who obviously have a huge effort there, the Canadians, the Italians. There are lots of different separate training programs that actually are doing different things with different groups of Iraqis to a large extent.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I would rather speak about scaling up what we have started to do, we have started to train the Iraqi officers. I would like to scale up that and then I would like to consider whether we can start to do things inside Iraq but I think it's very important that we do this in absolute coordination with the coalition and that we, how should I say, don't move faster than the coalition and the allies are, what I say, ready to do so. I think we should do it step wise and then evaluate the experience and then decide whether we should do more and what more. So the scale and the scope I think we have to decide step by step and then have a pragmatic approach. Because I think, of course, we also need the high end fighting. We

need to continue to do air strikes, and I don't - and I'm not arguing in favour that NATO should take over that high end fighting. I think that could be done by and actually there are not so many allies doing that. It's the United States, U.K., France and some others. But the thing is that of course we need high end air strikes to, for instance, help the Iraqi forces liberate Mosul. But the thing is that when Mosul is liberated then the question is how do you hold Mosul, how do you maintain the control of Mosul and then you need trained, skilled, professional local forces and if that's not NATO forces, U.S. forces, French or German forces then it has to be local forces and therefore we should start to train them now and not to wait because if we wait it just becomes more difficult and more expensive and then always not as good. And that's also the case when it comes to another kind of group of countries. Iraq, it's a war going on. Jordan is a stable country; it's an island of stability in a sea of instability in the Middle East, but Jordan is under pressure, Tunisia the same. It's a stable, democratic country in Northern Africa but they are under heavy pressure from terrorist organizations and we should help them now, we should not wait until they are really in deep trouble and then start to help them. Prevention is better than intervention, that's a golden rule. So we should help now, not in the wind later on. So capacity building is also about building capacity before a country slides into conflict or crisis. And then if the country is in crisis we should help them build capacity to get out of that crisis as we are doing in Iraq, or hopefully also in Libya.

MODERATOR: What about Syria? Do you see any role at all for NATO?

JENS STOLTENBERG: At the present, NATO's role in Syria is that NATO allies but not as an alliance are participating in the efforts of the NATO coalition – of the U.S. led coalition - and it is a great advantage for the coalition that so many NATO allies and NATO partner countries have been able to provide forces because NATO has developed what we call interoperability, experience to work together in high end dangerous military operations and we have developed that through NATO exercises, NATO standardization and of course, operations like in Afghanistan. And this experience, this interoperability developed among NATO allies and partners is extremely useful for the coalition in Syria now. And then of course we are also, what I say, responding to the conflict in Syria by supporting Turkey bordering Syria and Iraq. We have assurance measures: NATO presence in Turkey and everything we do related also to stabilizing the region is also relevant to Syria but we don't have a direct role inside Syria.

MODERATOR: I would like to open the floor to questions now. If you could I will call on you and if you could … are there microphones, yes, and identify yourself and hopefully ask a quick question so that we can have a lot of response here, yes sir go ahead.

Carl … [inaudible] from CSIS: Pleasure to hear your comments Secretary General. I was wondering you talked about how NATO can work closer with regional allies to stabilize fragile States. And I was wondering if you see a role for some of NATO's partners and I'm thinking of Sweden and Finland for example in particular who have unique stake building and security sector reform capabilities. Is there a role for them here and would that be a way to closely integrate them into NATO and even getting them - sort of persuade them for a membership in

the long term rather than having sort of the classic Russia debate? Would this be a way of making them more closely integrated into the NATO network? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I absolutely see for Sweden and Finland joining our efforts to build capacity in North Africa, the wider Middle East region and Sweden and Finland is already contributing and I welcome that very much. And that is one of the advantages of NATO is that we have proven our ability to mobilize partner countries. For instance in Afghanistan, Sweden and Finland have participated and contributed a lot. So I welcome that very much and I would like to see more of that and again this is important for the missions where Sweden and Finland participates. But we also have to understand that the way we are really developing our ability to work together with Sweden and Finland the interoperability is two big military operations like Afghanistan and perhaps also other places. And yesterday I visited Fort Bragg and I met with the 82nd Airborne Division and they told me about how they have been able to develop interoperability - the ability to work together with different military units by being stationed in Afghanistan and working with NATO allies but also with Sweden and Finland. Whether this will, what should I say, have any impact on the membership debate in Sweden, I don't know but I have said before that I have lost two referendums in Norway trying to convince Norwegians to join the European Union so you should not ask me for advice on how to convince the Swedes to join NATO. And that's, that's on the level of taxi driving, so it's… (laughter).

MODERATOR: Yes sir.

Thank you Rahim Rashedi (sp?) with Kurdistan TV. What are Russia and Iran's roles in Syria? Thank you. And your opinion of Kurdish forces, Peshmerga role in fight against ISIS? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The Peshmerga Forces play an important role and many NATO allies and partner countries are providing training for Peshmerga Forces as a part of the efforts to degrade and destroy ISIL. So I think that that's an example of how we are building local capacity. We do that already but I'm arguing in favour of is to do that more in a more organized framework, more cost efficient and with greater impact. Russia's role in Syria is that they - and also Iran - is that they support the Assad regime and they have declared that very clearly. And they have done that by deploying military forces in Syria and even though there has been some reductions in the Russian presence, Russia still has substantial military forces in Syria, air forces, ground forces and naval forces in the Eastern Mediterranean. So the main role of Russia in Syria is to support Assad.

MODERATOR: Wow, so many of you, yes ma'am. I told you NATO was a hot topic.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Oh ya I know.

I'm from GCC. I am from UAE and I want to ask you about how do you evaluate your relation with GCC in terms of cooperation? I believe they look for more from NATO rather than just

building their capabilities. Can NATO assure them stability and security in the region vis à vis the Iran? And the other question is how much can you give NATO and projecting stability in the region, how much from ten you give mark for NATO in the Arab region and projecting stabilization?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Well I, as I said, I very much believe that we can expand and enhance our cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council. I visited the United Arab Emirates a couple of weeks ago and and I think that in a way by helping countries in the region to stabilize the region we are of course also making the countries more secure. The whole idea is that if our, NATO's neighbourhood is more stable they are more secure and we are more secure so it's not in a way -security is not you get less of if you share it; you get more security if you create security together. So I strongly believe in us working together with the GCC. I also believe that the GCC countries can help us working jointly, for instance, with fighting ISIL, with building capacity in a country like Iraq so for me we have to do many things at the same time and we have agreed that we will start to step up and hopefully we will be able to make decisions related to this at our Summit in Warsaw.

MODERATOR: Yes in the back, way in the back. Lady in the red.

I'm Lieutenant Colonel (inaudible) from the Polish Embassy. I just wanted to ask you quick questions. First regarding political dialogue with Russia, what conditions must be fulfilled for full resumption of NRC works? And do you think it should be somehow balanced with increased cooperation with the Ukraine and Georgia? The second question is as for the realignment of NATO efforts to increase the presence on the Eastern flank with the American … (inaudible) initiative? And the last one is there an appetite in the NATO for more to look on the Arctic challenges? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: First NRC or the NATO Russia Council I think it's important to underline the following and that is that after the illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea in 2014 NATO decided to suspend all practical cooperation with Russia but we decided at the same time to maintain our political dialogue with Russia or maintain channels for political communication. So the NATO Russia Council has never been suspended. Actually we had two meetings in the Council after the annexation of Crimea. So the whole idea is that practical cooperation has been suspended, political dialogue has been in place. So the challenge now has been not to, what should I say, have a decision to have the NATO Russia Council because it has been there all the time. But the challenge has been to agree on the agenda for a new meeting and we are in the process of discussing that with the Russians and hopefully we will be able to agree on the agenda and then to convene a meeting. Let me underline that, for me dialogue is not an expression of weakness; it is an expression of strength because it is because we are strong, it is because we are confident that we are not afraid of talking to the Russians. And even during the Cold War we talked to them and I think it's in our interest to talk to them on many different issues especially risk reduction, transparency related to military activity. I think for instance that the downing of the Russian

plane over Turkey just underlined how important it is that we do our utmost to have military to military communications, to have transparency, predictability to avoid that kind of incident. We have to try to avoid them and if they happen we have to make sure that they don't spiral and come out of control and create real dangerous situations. So dialogue is not weakness, dialogue is strength. Now, sorry there were two more questions I forgot them. The Eastern part of the Alliance … well we are in the process - we decided at our Defense Ministerial Meeting in February to increase our military presence in Eastern part of the Alliance - the Baltic countries, Poland and perhaps Romania, Bulgaria. Exactly the scale and the scope is not yet decided. We're working on that now but what we are aiming at is a multi-national force sending a very clear signal that an attack on one Baltic country or one of a NATO allied country will trigger a response from the whole Alliance. The Arctic, it's cold there. (laughter) The other thing is that you know when people say Arctic, most - many people think about the North Pole but half of my own country is in the Arctic. So half of Norway is in the Arctic and I say I've seen many nice people up there and some polar bears and that's all and because the reason why I'm saying this is that NATO is present in the Arctic. And the main NATO forces in the Arctic is Danish Forces, Icelandic - not so many Icelandic - but at least Norwegian Forces and of course we have also then NATO exercises in the Northern part of Norway - forces from many NATO allied countries. We had a big exercise in the Northern part of Norway recently so we - NATO is present in the Arctic. And we have to follow the developments very closely because we have seen also a Russian military buildup in the Arctic. At the same time we have the Arctic Council where the United States is a member, Canada is a member, Russia, Norway, Denmark and many other countries and several other countries. We have also a degree of cooperation in the Arctic related to search and rescue, environmental issues with Russia. I think it's extremely important that we continue to do that and we don't increase tensions in the Arctic but try to calm the tensions.

MODERATOR: I'm going to ask people just limit themselves to one question. The questions have been really good but maybe we can take two or there at a time if you'll limit to yourself just to one. So yes sir. Then I'm going to come around this way.

Thank you, Ahmed ? (inaudible) from Al-Jazeera TV. Turkey - there are so many voices that are saying that NATO would be better off without Turkey. They are saying, they are claiming that Turkey has betrayed the Alliance, is helping to collaborating with ISIS in a way or another, is fighting the Kurds while fighting ISIS which is fighting the West. How do you comment on that?

MODERATOR: We'll take one more yes sir. Yes, go ahead.

Bill Drozdiak, Brookings. General Breedlove said recently that he felt the Russians were weaponizing the refugee situation with the aim of destabilizing Europe, and I know NATO has sent some sea patrols in the Aegean recently. But my question is why did it take so long for NATO to respond to such a serious security threat to the European continent when Greece and Turkey, both frontline States, are members of NATO?

MODERATOR: Those are two hefty questions.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Two questions. First of all the problem is normally not too many questions but too long answers, so but it's hard to very brief because the questions are important and demanding. First on Turkey, Turkey participate in the coalition fighting ISIL. Turkey provides military assets but in addition Turkey provides infrastructure, bases, the Incirlik Base and other facilities for the efforts of the coalition fighting ISIL. So without Turkey it would have been much more difficult to, for instance, to conduct many of the air strikes and so on fighting ISIL. Second Turkey is the NATO ally most affected by the influx of refugees. They host more than two million, close to three million perhaps refugees and so Turkey is heavily affected by the crisis in Iraq, Syria, ISIL. When it comes to NATO's role in addressing the migrant and refugee crisis, so NATO'S main role has been to address the root causes, the instability in the region and trying to help stabilize the countries where the refugees are coming from. When it comes to the managing or handling the refugee crisis in Europe, NATO is normally not a first responder because this is about, you know, border control, coast guard, border controls, humanitarian aid and so on to the refugees. But when we were asked we responded. And we actually responded very quickly because Germany, Turkey and Greece asked NATO for help and after 48 hours we were able to make the decision to provide the ships and assistance they asked for. And 24 hours after we made a decision the first NATO ships were deployed into the Aegean Sea. So for me this is an example of how NATO can respond quickly, if needed. And what we have done since is that we have several ships there in the vicinity of Lesbos and also a bit further south, and they are providing, they are doing reconnaissance, surveillance monitoring and they are sharing in real time the data they are gathering with the Greek Coast Guard, with the Turkish Coast Guard and with the European Union Border Agency Frontex, and this information is useful, for instance, for the Turkish Coast Guard when they are then turning back and intersect or intersecting the traffic of the smugglers and the illegal networks. So I think NATO plays a useful role helping the local Coast Guard Authorities. NATO is not in the business of turning back the boats with the refugees and migrants. Our role is to help, assist, and facilitate. Add to that, perhaps the most important thing NATO is doing in the Aegean Sea, is to create the framework, a platform for cooperation between Turkey and Greece. Turkey not being member of the European Union but Turkey and Greece both being members of NATO so NATO is an ideal platform for providing the necessary cooperation between Turkey, Greece and the European Union.

MODERATOR: There was something about Russia at the beginning of that question that you asked.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yeah, sorry that was about what Russia did especially when they were bombing Aleppo was of course to increase the number of people fleeing Syria and increasing the pressure on Turkey and on, should I say, Europe. And I'm very glad, I welcome very much that some weeks ago United States, Russia and other actors in the region were able to reach agreement on cessation of hostilities. And even if we have seen violations, hostilities have gone substantially down and we have also seen that the parties have been

able to meet again and start negotiations and try to find a negotiated political solution to the crisis in Syria. That will not be easy. It will not happen very fast. There will be setbacks and disappointments, but in the long run we need a negotiated political solution so I strongly support those efforts both to make sure that the cease fire is holding and to make sure that they continue negotiations and talks to find a political solution.

MODERATOR: Yes sir, I know I cheated you before so you go ahead and then yep.

Thank you. Meda Kolowski (sp?), United Macedonian Diaspora. You mentioned Russia violating international law. If you could comment perhaps on Greece's violating international law after blocking Macedonia's NATO membership in 2008. Greece has a fairly new government in place. Macedonia may have a new government starting June. What role will your office play in facilitating improving relations and finally lifting this blockage on Macedonia's NATO membership particularly on this point that you made before, you're a poll free and at peace.

MODERATOR: Yes ma'am.

Thank you Karen. Farah al-Tassi (sp?) I am a member of the Syrian opposition delegation to Geneva from here. You already spoke enough about Russia's role in Syria and I was waiting to hear the NATO's counter-strategy to at least having some balance of power on the ground. But I will not ask you that question, my question is there have been recently efforts by the GCC led by Saudi Arabia to establish the Islamic Coalition against ISIS, will NATO partner if they asked with this new formed Islamic Coalition against ISIS for a direct military intervention in Syria, yes or no? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: If the question was whether NATO is going to conduct a direct military intervention into Syria the answer is no. But if the question is whether we are going to work together with the Islamic Coalition to counter ISIL, then the answer is yes because I welcome that Islamic countries are going together to fight ISIL. And I think it's extremely important that Islamic countries are in the forefront and as, for instance, King Abdullah of Jordan has underlined again and again, this is not a fight between the West and the Muslim world, this is a fight against terrorists, criminals, people who are responsible for violence and atrocities and most of the victims are Muslims. So there - and Muslims are at the front fighting ISIL. And again my main message is that we should support, we should help, we should enable, we should train, we should assist, we should help them in many different ways to win that fight against ISIL. So if you ask me whether we should help the Muslim world, Muslim forces, Muslim countries to fight ISIL, it's a strong yes. That was the last question. The first one was about the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. And the reason why I say it like that is that you know and I know that the problem has been ever since the NATO Summit in Bucharest - I was there as Prime Minister of Norway -has been that we don't have an agreement on the name issue. As long as that issue is unsolved there is no way we can solve the question of membership. So, that's in a way the short answer.

MODERATOR: I think we have time for maybe two more…and then at back of you over there.

Robert (inaudible), Embassy of Romania. As a country on the Eastern border of NATO we are highly appreciative of your leadership and addressing the key issues of re-enforcing the Eastern flank. How do you see this re-enforcement process from a Black Sea perspective, a region that has multiple strategic challenges both from the East and from the South? Thank you.

Hello I'm Kevin Baron with Defense One. Last week Secretary Carter at CENTCOM said that the U.S. was talking to NATO about joining the counter ISIL coalition as NATO for the first time which would be a change so I'm wondering what would - what would that involve beyond advise and assist. You just said that NATO would assist with counter ISIL campaign, would it involve on the ground troops, special operators, air, sea - what else besides the advise and assist mission?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First Romania. The Black Sea is very important and we have seen that Russia is developing what experts call A2AD, or Anti Access Air and Denial capabilities and they are deploying those capabilities for, instance, in Crimea and we see a pattern all the way from the Baron Sea, the Baltic Sea down to the Black Sea, and of course one of the reasons why we are increasing our presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance, why we are increasing the readiness of our forces and why we are also developing our capabilities is that NATO has to be able to overcome those A2AD capabilities which we also see in the Black Sea. Our maritime presence is important and part of the high readiness force we have established we also have a maritime component there. We normally speak about this high readiness brigade but there's an air component, there is a maritime component and that's part of our response to what we also see in the Black Sea. So, yes we are very much aware of the challenges in the Black Sea being more - becoming more serious because of the Russian annexation of Crimea and the strong military buildup in Crimea.

Then NATO is not formally part of the coalition but NATO supports the coalition and first of all, all NATO allies provide forces and then as I said NATO supports the coalition in different ways: assurance measures in Turkey, capacity building in Iraq. I will also add that what we do in Afghanistan - our biggest military operation ever - is relevant for the fight against terror including against ISIL and we stand ready to do more in Libya which is also key when it comes to preventing that Libya becomes the kind of buildup area for ISIL. One issue we have discussed and also discussed during my visit here to Washington this week and also with Secretary Ash Carter was the possibility of NATO providing AWACS support, our surveillance plane. And that is on the table now and it's going to be addressed in NATO and then we will be able to provide you with a more precise answer but AWACS support in one way or another is now an issue which is discussed in the Alliance.

MODERATOR: We promised the Secretary General that we would get him out of here on time and I apologize to everyone whose questions we didn't get to. Thank you so much. I

think the fact that there’s so many questions testifies both to relevance and level of interest and we’ve still managed to cover an enormous amount of ground. And thank you so much for your candor and for the completeness of your answers. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you.

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