North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press conference

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Bohuslav Sobotka
2015-09-09

(As delivered)

Thank you so much, Prime Minister Sobotka.

It is a great pleasure and a great honour to be in Prague. And thank you for hosting me and my delegation.

I have visited Prague several times before, it's a very beautiful city. But this is the first time I visit the Czech Republic and Prague as Secretary General of NATO. And it's an honour to do so, because the Czech Republic is a staunch and very committed Ally.

And we are very grateful for your contributions and commitments to the Alliance. We have seen that the Czech Republic has contributed troops to our operations in Afghanistan, the Resolute Support mission, and you're also contributing to the Kosovo, the KFOR operation in Kosovo. And we also welcome the contributions from the Czech Republic to what we call the reassurance measures. Air policing, more military presence in the eastern part of the Alliance. But also through air policing in the airspace of Iceland.

So the Czech Republic is really contributing to our Alliance, to our collective defence. And we are very grateful for that.

I would also like to thank you for being able to provide us with an excellent chairman of the Military Committee of NATO. General Petr Pavel is an excellent representative of your armed forces, and I appreciate very much to be able to work with him at the NATO Headquarters.

We are now facing a new and more challenging security environment. We are adapting the Alliance. The Alliance is adapting, all the Allied countries are adapting. And you are part of that adaptation.

We are making our forces more ready, more prepared. We have doubled the size of the NATO Response Force. We have established what we call a new high-readiness Joint Task Force, or Spearhead Force, and the lead element of this force is able to deploy within 48 hours. And just last week, I had the honour of inaugurating a new small headquarter in Lithuania, what we call a NATO Force Integration Unit. And this is one of six new small headquarters in the eastern part of the Alliance, in the three Baltic countries, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria.

And in addition to that, we have increased military presence, and we met with some US soldiers today in Prague.

And that's just one example of how the Alliance is adapting to a more challenging security environment, caused partly by a more assertive Russia being responsible for aggressive actions in Ukraine, but also of course, caused by the instability, the violence, the conflict we see to the south of the Alliance, in Iraq, Syria, North Africa, and in the wider Middle East region.

And all this requires that we are able to respond. NATO is responding. And I thank you again for being part of this great adaptation of NATO to a new security environment

When it comes to Ukraine, I would like to underline that we welcome the renewed effort to implement and to respect the ceasefire. And so far, it looks like the ceasefire is now more respected than it has been for a long time. And I welcome that. At the same time, the situation in Ukraine is still very fragile.

It is important that all parties respect the ceasefire, withdraw heavy weapons from the contact line. But perhaps most important that is that international monitors are allowed full access to the area so they can monitor and make sure the ceasefire and the Minsk agreements are fully implemented.

I would also like to commend you for what I see as a very impressive development in the Czech Republic. You have been able to come through the financial crisis, and now the economy is growing again. The economic growth in the Czech Republic is among the strongest in the whole of Europe. And this is good for the Czech Republic, unemployment is going down, economic growth is going up.

But of course, in addition, it also enables you to also increase investment in defence. And I welcome your very strong commitment to increase investment in defence. This is important because many years after the end of the Cold War, almost all Allies decreased their defence spending. Because that was in times where the tensions went down. Now tensions are increasing again. And then we have to once again increase defence spending. So I welcome what you said about increased investment in defence, and increased defence spending.

So once again, thank you so much, Prime Minister for this meeting, and for this opportunity to discuss with you the many different challenges we are facing together in the NATO Alliance.

Thank you.

Q & A

QUESTION IN CZECH

SECRETARY GENERAL STOLTENBERG:

The migrant crisis, they have a profound effect on us all. It's a big human tragedy. And it requires a very comprehensive response from the whole international community.

All NATO Allies contribute to the solving of the migrant crisis. They do it in different ways. Most of them are members of the European Union, and they are part of the efforts of the European Union to address this crisis. And I welcome the efforts of the European Union to try to develop a stronger and more comprehensive approach. And I think this is important, and most of our NATO Allied countries are part of this effort of the European Union to develop a stronger and more comprehensive response to the migrant crisis.

Then, of course, other ANTO Allies also contribute in other ways. Through the efforts of the United Nations, by supporting the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, and in other ways.

What NATO as an organisation is doing, is to address the root causes of the migrant crisis. Because we need immediate action in Europe. But in addition, we need to address the root causes in the countries of origin of the refugees.

When NATO is engaged in Afghanistan, when we are working with a partner country like Jordan, or when we recently agreed with the Government of Iraq to do defence capacity building, or we work with countries in North Africa – today we met with, for instance, Tunisia – then we are working with countries in the region to try to help them to increase their capacity, their capability to stabilize their own countries.

And in the long-run, that's the only possible solution. That is, to contribute to peace, stability in North Africa, in the wider Middle East, in Afghanistan. And our focus is to try to project stability without always deploying large numbers of combat troops.

But by training, advising, helping with reforms, helping with capacity-building, enable countries in the region to stabilize their own countries, and thereby addressing the root causes of the migrant crisis.

So there is a need for immediate measures, border, migrant, the discussion about quotas, so on – this is civilian issues, addressed by the European Union. But then in addition, there is a need for other, more long-term efforts, and I think NATO is now mostly focused on this.

And there is some kind of division of responsibilities between the European Union and NATO, and we have a big responsibility, all of us, to do whatever we can to address this human tragedy.

Then, sorry, I forgot – ISIL. All NATO Allies participate in the coalition fighting ISIL. And I welcome that, and I think also that the effectiveness of the coalition is very much, has taken great advantage of the interoperability of the many years of training, of developing ways to work close together. Which we have done in NATO for many years.

So for instance, the lessons learned in Afghanistan are important also when we are fighting ISIL. And of course, NATO Allies work closely together, but we also work closely together with partner countries. And again, the capability, the skills, the knowledge of how to work together, is something which is very much developed in a NATO framework and now it's very useful when we are fighting ISIL in Syria and Iraq.

But again, NATO's role is partly to focus on how can we help the countries in the region solve the problems themselves and fight ISIL. And therefore, we have agreed with the Government of Iraq to do defence capacity-building – train, advise, assist. And that's also the reason why we, for instance, are now stepping up our support for a country like Jordan. A key country in the region which is stable – an island in a sea of instability. And all of this is important to increase the ability of the countries in the region to fight, or stand, and to do it without support, but they being in the lead.

QUESTION (Reuters): Question for Secretary General. The question is actually following up on the previous question and it is regarding Russian military presence, which is apparently building up in Syria. Just been reports that Greece has allowed Russian Air Force use its airspace on flights to Syria. And that's one question – what's your comment on that? And second, in general, what is the NATO action to the Russian military presence in Syria? Thank you.

So I am concerned about reports about increased Russian military presence in Syria. That will not contribute to solve the conflict. I think it's important to now support all efforts to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria. We support very much the effort by the UN to try to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

When it comes to air traffic, and transiting national airspace, that's a national responsibility, and when it comes to civilian air traffic, that's something which is regulated by international agreements. I cannot comment more in detail about that, but as a general remark, I would say that we are concerned about reports about increased Russian military presence in Syria.

END

Q & A

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2015/09/09/joint-press-conference