North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Doorstep statement

by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the start of the Munich Security Conference
2016-02-12

(As delivered)

I am glad to be back in Munich.

The Munich Security Conference is an important platform for debate and dialogue.

And this is especially important now when we are faced with a new and more demanding and challenging security environment.

And I'm coming directly from Brussels where we, yesterday and during the two days of ministerial meeting of the NATO Defence Ministers, made many important decisions addressing how we respond. We decided to increase the military presence of NATO forces in the eastern part of the Alliance. That will be multinational forces. They will be there and they will also do exercises and increase our presence in the eastern part of the Alliance.

In this context I very much welcome the announcement of the plans of the US to significantly increase its military presence in Europe. With more troops, with prepositioning of heavy equipment, with more exercises, with investment in critical infrastructure.

And I think this signals a very strong unity in the Alliance, the strong transatlantic bond in the NATO Alliance.

Then we also decided yesterday to assist with the migrant and refugee crisis in Europe. This is the biggest humanitarian crisis in Europe since World War Two. We will send our standing maritime group to the Aegean. We will increase monitoring and surveillance along the Turkish-Syrian border. This is not about sending back the boats but it is about NATO helping our Allies, Greece, Turkey and the European Union to better cope with the migrant and refugee crisis. And we will do so by providing critical information, surveillance, monitoring, so we can better coordinate the efforts, so we can better enable all the different authorities, which are addressing the migrant and refugee crisis, to better cope with the situation.

The migrant and refugee crisis in Europe is mainly fueled by the war in Syria. And therefore I welcome very much the agreement that was reached here in Munich late last night. The important thing now is of course the implementation, that we see that this agreement is translated into realities on the ground.

At the same time I think that it’s very important that we remember that we have to stay focused on the fight against ISIL.

The importance of degrading and destroying ISIL, our common enemy.

So I’m looking forward to discussing these and many other issues during my stay here at the Munich Security Conference today and tomorrow.

Q: Your message here today?

My message is that we will welcome a more constructive role of Russia in the fight against ISIL. So far Russia has manly targeted opposition groups and not ISIL and the intense airstrikes of Russian planes against different opposition groups in Syria have actually undermined the efforts to reach a negotiated peaceful solution. But I welcome the agreement reached here yesterday evening. The important thing now is to see this agreement’s full implementation on the ground.

Q: Comment on ceasefire agreed for Syria?

We’ve seen before that ceasefires are not always respected. At the same time, we all have to do whatever we can to support the renewed efforts to find a negotiated peaceful solution to the conflict in Syria. What we need is a lasting ceasefire, we need help to the civilians, a politically negotiated solution and of course, an agreement on transition which can create a lasting peaceful solution to conflict.

Q: Situation in Ukraine?

Ukraine will be on the agenda and of course we are very focused on how we can continue to supporting the efforts to the full implementation of the Minsk Agreements. That’s about respecting the ceasefire, withdrawal of heavy weapons and allowing international monitors full access to the area so they can monitor and make sure Minsk is implemented. Of course it is also about making sure that Ukraine regains full control of its international borders, including that with Russia.

Q: Role for Kurds in solution for Syria crisis?

The important thing now is to do whatever we can and support the efforts to try find a political solution to the conflict in Syria. In this context I welcome the agreement last night. We all have to support, try to do whatever we can to make sure it is turned into reality. Kurds are part of the conflict in Syria, but also in Iraq, and therefore they should also be part of the solution. That’s why all parties need to contribute to a negotiated solution in Syria.

Q: NATO increased presence in the Eastern part of the Alliance - challenge to Russia?

This is a decision taken by 28 Allies. We are responding to a pattern of behaviour which we’ve seen from the Russian side overs several years. A more assertive Russia, which is

investing heavily in defence, which is conducting snap exercises and which has used military force to change borders in Europe. What NATO does is to respond to that. We do that in a proportionate, defensive way, and fully in line with our international commitments. If NATO hadn’t responded, it would have been a reason to criticise us. Because NATO has to adapt when the world is changing. And this is what we do now.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/02/12/doorstep-statement