North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO: a unique Alliance with a clear course

Speech by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the German Marshall Fund, Brussels
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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for that warm welcome. And thank you Karen for those kind words. And for coming over to host me in person. Karen – like me – you just started a new and challenging job. I wish you all the best in your new position. I look forward to working with you on many future occasions. I am really glad that my first public speech as Secretary General of NATO is hosted by the German Marshall Fund of the United States - another truly transatlantic organisation.

I know that I come into this job at a critical time. When we see national borders and international rules challenged by force. And turmoil in our neighbourhood. To the east, Russia's actions in Ukraine are in breach of international law. They have severely damaged trust. And they pose a major challenge to Euro-Atlantic security. To the south, borders are disappearing. States are fragile. ISIL, and other extremist groups across North Africa and the Middle East, are spreading violence and instability. And they risk exporting terrorism to our streets. These threats come on top of others. Missile proliferation, energy disruption, and cyber attacks. Not long ago, we used to refer to these threats as emerging. But they have well and truly emerged. And they are now part and parcel of our security environment. We can, and we must, rise to the challenge.

I grew up in a world that felt at the time as dangerous as the world we live in today. As a child in Norway during the Cold War, I didn’t know much about Article 5 or the Washington Treaty. But I did know that NATO was there to protect us. I felt safe, because of NATO. Later as a young conscript in the Norwegian Army, we were trained to hold out. In the secure knowledge that our Allies would quickly come to our rescue. We knew that Norway could not make it alone. But we also knew that we were not alone. Through NATO, we enjoyed a level of protection that only a transatlantic Alliance of democracies could provide. Today, I see it as my duty to ensure that current and future generations feel as safe and secure as I did back then. Security is the foundation for our freedom and our open societies; for our prosperity; and for our ability to address other great challenges of our time – such as poverty and climate change. If we lose our security, we lose so much more. The nature of the challenges to our security may change. But the answer remains the same: working together in a strong NATO. This is a winning combination. Over the past 65 years, it has helped us to weather many

storms. It will get us through these current turbulent times. And those we will face in the future.

Our NATO Summit in Wales last month set out a clear course. That makes my job both easy - and hard. Easy, because we know what to do. And hard, because we still have much to do. And time is short. At the Wales Summit we took key decisions. I am determined to translate those decisions into lasting results ahead of our next Summit in Warsaw in 2016. I have set out three priorities.

First, we must keep NATO strong. Strong as a political Alliance.And strong as a military Alliance. This starts with solidarity and resolve. We are an Alliance of democracies. We may not always agree at first. But by debating, consulting and working together, we arrive at firm decisions. And together, we act on those decisions. This is the strength of our Alliance. To stay strong we must preserve and strengthen collective defence. The pledge to defend each other - Article 5 of our founding treaty - remains the bedrock of NATO. It is the basis for everything we do.This is why the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan we agreed at the Wales Summit is key. This is the biggest reinforcement of our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. We are making our forces more agile. And able to deploy quickly whenever threats emerge. From any direction. We are also maintaining a continuous NATO presence in the Eastern part of our Alliance, on a rotational basis. To reassure our Allies. And to deter anyone who might wish to challenge us. In recent months, the number of NATO jets in the skies over our Eastern Allies has increased five times.We have deployed more ships in the Baltic and the Black Sea. And this year, we are conducting over 200 NATO and national exercises in Europe. A new exercise kicks off every two days. These assurance measures are just the start. We are also setting up a rapid reaction “Spearhead Force”. I expect Defence Ministers to approve the size and design of the force when we meet in February. We are also putting in place elements of a robust command and control structure on the territory of our Eastern Allies. And pre-positioning equipment and supplies. So that we can reinforce rapidly, if we need to. During my first weeks in office I have visited both Poland and Turkey. In different ways these Allies exemplify the challenges we face, both to the East and to the South. In Poland, I visited the Łask airbase. And I met with pilots and air crews from across the Alliance. From the United States and Canada, to Poland and Portugal. Working together as one. In Turkey, I saw the Patriot batteries at Gaziantep. And I met troops from the United States, Germany, and many other Allies. Helping to strengthen Turkey’s defence against missile attacks. This is what collective defence is all about. Twenty-eight for twenty-eight. And this is why we must implement the Readiness Action plan on time and in full. Of course this will be a challenge. But NATO is used to meeting challenges. And this is the plan we need - to deal with threats from wherever they may come. Whether they are conventional or unconventional. Or hybrid threats, as we have seen in Ukraine.

This leads me to my second priority. To work with our partners to bring more stability to our neighbourhood. Partnerships are one of NATO’s greatest success stories. Enlargement is another. Our partners have worked with us to increase the space of democracy and freedom

in Europe. Twelve of them have actually become Allies. And all partners have made important contributions to our operations. They have helped to enhance international security and to defend the values on which our Alliance is based. But today, Russia is trying to roll back the progress we have made in this collective effort. And some of our partners are facing great pressures. We will continue to support Ukraine and our other partners in our eastern neighbourhood. And we will continue to uphold the principle that each country has the right to choose its own path. This is fundamental. And we all subscribed to it. Including Russia. I congratulate the people of Ukraine for exercising their right to vote in the parliamentary elections on Sunday. Despite difficult conditions, these elections were in line with international standards. The large majority of the people of Ukraine have clearly and democratically spoken in favour of an ambitious reform agenda and a European path. I strongly regret, however, that many Ukrainians were unable to exercise their democratic right to vote. In Crimea, which Russia illegally and illegitimately annexed. And in parts of Eastern Ukraine, where violence and intimidation by Russian-backed separatists continues. NATO fully supports Ukraine's sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity within its internationally recognised borders. We call on Russia to end its destabilising actions in Ukraine, and pull back its forces.

I am the first NATO Secretary General from a country that has a common border with Russia. I remember visiting that border when it was completely closed. Back in the days of the Soviet Union. When looking across was like staring into something dark and scary. Now there is a visa-free zone in its place. And hundreds of thousands of people cross the border every year. To the benefit of both our countries . The freedoms and prosperity that many Russians have enjoyed in recent years have come from open borders like this. And from integration into the global rules-based order. Russia is not just Norway's neighbour. It is NATO's biggest neighbour. And both NATO and Russia are here to stay. So we simply cannot ignore each other. One way or the other, we will have a relationship. The question is what kind. Norway's experience as a founding member of NATO is that a strong defence, based on a strong NATO, is the foundation for a constructive relationship with Russia. It gave us the confidence to work with Russia on a range of issues. From military matters to fisheries, energy and the environment. We also signed a treaty to establish the maritime boundary between our nations in the Barents Sea and the Arctic Ocean.I believe there is a lesson here for us now. That only a strong NATO can build a truly constructive and cooperative relationship with Russia. In the past, we looked at each other with suspicion, relied on deterrence, and talked to each other mainly to avoid dangerous misunderstandings and escalation. And let's face it, we can see echoes of that now. The other alternative is a relationship based on mutual respect, not suspicion.On the rule of law, not the law of the strongest. On common interest, not illusions. And NATO has invested a lot in building such a relationship with Russia ever since the end of the Cold War. NATO continues to aspire to a cooperative relationship with Russia.But to get there, Russia would need to want it, and to take clear steps to make it possible It is precisely at this time, when our relationship with Russia is the most difficult since the Cold War,that we need to have greater transparency and predictability. And to make sure that crises do not

spiral out of control. Let me be clear. NATO does not seek confrontation with Russia. And nobody wants a new Cold War, 25 years since the fall of the Berlin Wall.But we cannot and will not compromise on the principles on which our Alliance and the security of Europe and North America rest. This is my firm conviction.

Turning to the South, we see different threats. Many states are fragile. And extremism is fuelling instability. But there is no choice between providing for our security in the East or in the South. We have to do both. Our main responsibility is to defend and protect our Allies. NATO has already taken an important step by deploying Patriot batteries to our Ally Turkey. And by pushing ahead with our NATO missile defence system. This sends a strong signal of solidarity. And a strong signal of deterrence.

Crisis and conflicts beyond NATO's borders can pose a direct threat to our security. So we will engage to prevent and manage crises. To stabilise post-conflict situations. And to support reconstruction. And we must be prepared to use military force, when necessary.We will also continue to develop our relations with international and regional organisations. To revitalise and strengthen our political dialogue with partner countries. And to step up our practical support.We stand ready to help Iraq to make their forces and their defence institutions more effective. So that we strengthen local forces that already have boots on the ground. And help them find local solutions. For over a decade, NATO Allies and partner nations from across the world have stood shoulder to shoulder with Afghanistan. We have sustained the largest coalition in recent history.

And we have built up capable Afghan forces of 350,000 soldiers and police. They are ready to assume full security responsibility as we complete our ISAF mission at the end of this year.This unprecedented international effort has contributed to a better future for Afghan men, women and children. And it has enhanced global security. From January 1, we will launch a new and different mission to train, advise and assist Afghan forces. But the security of Afghanistan and the country's future will rest fully in the hands of the Afghans. To keep NATO strong, and help keep our neighbourhood stable, it is imperative that we keep the bond between Europe and North America rock solid.

And this is my third priority. Allies on both sides of the Atlantic must play their full part. North America needs a stronger Europe. And Europe needs continued strong engagement by North America. We all need to invest in our Alliance politically and financially. To make sure that NATO has the means to do the difficult jobs that it has to do. And the political will to use those means, when necessary. At Wales, we agreed to reverse the trend of declining defence budgets. And to aim to raise them over the coming decade as our economies improve. As a former Prime Minister and Finance Minister, I know how difficult this is. But I also know how important it is. And I know that, with political will, it can be done . Because the primary role of any state is to protect its citizens.I will engage personally with all NATO leaders to help us keep the pledge we made at Wales. I also intend to work closely with the new leadership of

the European Union. I am encouraged that they too will seek closer engagement with NATO. Because now, we need each other more than ever.

We face enormous challenges both in our Eastern and our Southern neighbourhoods.People across the Alliance are understandably worried about their security. And their security is NATO's responsibility. We must be fully committed to doing collective defence and crisis management both at the same time. We do not have the luxury to choose our challenges. We must face them all. North America and Europe must continue to stand together. To defend our common values. And to keep future generations secure.

Thank you for your attention.

Karen Donfried, President, GMF US MODERATOR: Well, Mister Secretary General, thank you so much. That was both powerful and thoughtful. And I just want to pick up on some of the themes you raised in your remarks.

I was struck by your comment... I'm paraphrasing ... it may not be quite right. But that... in how we think about engaging with Russia, we will be in the best position if it's a strong NATO that is working to build a constructive and cooperative relationship with Russia.

And certainly at Wales, there was a decision about how to improve our readiness. But there's been a debate within the Alliance about whether we're right to focus on a persistent force having rotational forces go to the Eastern-most members of the Alliance or whether we should have a permanent NATO force deployed in those countries. And I'd just like your thinking on that difference between persistent versus permanent and whether we should be moving toward a more permanent presence there.

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): First of all, I think that my main message has been since I took office...and also in this speech... has been that there is no contradiction between being in favour of a strong collective defence, a strong NATO investing on defence; and, at the same time, being in favour of engagement with Russia. Actually, it's not a contradiction: we need a strong defence to be engaged with Russia in one way or another.

And part of that message is that NATO is here to stay. Russia is here to stay. So we're going to have some kind of relationship. The question is not whether we're going to have a relationship. The question is: "What kind?"

And as I told... as I tried to convene in my speech is that the (inaudible) experience is that by being part of a strong alliance; by increasing our defence expenditures in real terms, we create the basis, the foundations for also moving into ... or relating to Russia in a cooperative way.

That's also this is why I believe that the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan is so important for our relationship with Russia. And I very much welcome that we were able to reach an agreement in Wales which is so strong and which is completely in compliance with

our international obligations. And also with the Founding Act ... so there's no violation of any international obligations related to our implementation of the Readiness Action Plan and the international obligations of NATO.

And we have found a way to both increase our presence in the air, at sea and on land on a rotational basis which provides the necessary increased military presence. We're going to have prepositioning of equipment, of supplies; and also to establish command and control elements in our different Eastern Allies.

And we'll do that.... be there... as long as needed. So I think that, in a way, it gives us the way to address the question of permanent or rotational. We have found a way to address that, which is in accordance with our international obligations. But at the same time, it reassures and assures our Eastern Allies.

MODERATOR: So do you think permanent basing of NATO troops in the East would abrogate the NATO-Russia Founding Act?

JENS STOLTENBERG: So the NATO-Russia Founding Act it's... the words are about substantial combat troops. And what we are doing now is not about substantial combat permanent basing of substantial combat troops. But we are increasing our military presence. We are doing that in many different ways. And the important thing is that we are doing it in a way which has the full support of all Allies. We've agreed on that in Wales and met with the government in Poland a few weeks ago. They very much welcomed the Readiness Action Plan. What they are eager to see is that we're implementing it, on time, in full. And therefore, I think we're actually constructing a debate which we have left behind. If you are raising again the debate whether we're going to have permanent or not. We've found a way of dealing with that, which supplies the necessary assurance to our Eastern Allies.

MODERATOR: You also spoke, in your remarks about that you had this great comment about how both NATO and Russia are here to stay. They will have a relationship. And the question is: "What kind of relationship that will be?"

And there are some voices, in Washington, outside of government, who have suggested that we need to do more to broker a compromise with Russia. And some of those individuals have been suggesting that we should put NATO membership for Ukraine on the table and say we pledge that NATO will not accept Ukraine as a member, given what a sensitive point this is for Russia. Do you think that would be a sensitive way to move forward?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The way we should move forward is to stick to what we have decided. And I was present at the Summit in Bucharest in 2008 when we decided to... to state that Ukraine and Georgia will become members of NATO.

Since then, Ukraine has decided not to apply. And therefore, that's not on the agenda. But the whole idea is that the open-door policy has been a great success. It has enlarged the part of

Europe which is now living in freedom, in democracy. It has enlarged the whole NATO. We are now protecting almost one billion people in Europe and North America. And we are still standing behind the ideas of an open-door policy. But as I said, Ukraine has... it has to be up to each country to decide whether they want to apply for membership or not. Ukraine has decided not apply. So that's not on the agenda now.

MODERATOR: So clearly, NATO has a challenge to the East. You also referenced the challenges to the South. And you mentioned your visit to Turkey, visiting the NATO Patriot deployments in Gaziantep. And I'm curious if when you were there if your Turkish counterparts asked for any additional support from NATO. And beyond any request from Turkey, you have said that if there were requests from Iraq, for NATO help with training Iraqi forces, the Alliance certainly would consider that.

Beyond that either additional support for Turkey, potential support for Iraq, are there other ways you could see NATO engaged in support of the Anti-Islamic State Coalition?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First of all, I think that we have to remember very clearly that the Readiness Action Plan to make our forces more prepared, more ready to establish this Spearhead Force and so on, that's an answer both for the challenges that we see to the East; but also the challenges we see to the South.

So when we see emerging threats, instability in the South, that's something which also requires the implementation of the Readiness Action Plan and making our forces even more ready. So that's part of the answer to what we see to the South. This was something I discussed with representatives from the Turkish Government and they were much agreed on that approach.

Second, we have already deployed the Patriot batteries, augmenting the capacity of the air defences. Turkey is a strong Ally. They have the second largest army in NATO. So they didn't ask for any more NATO forces in Turkey. But of course, they underlined the same message as I did, that collective defence applies to all 28 Allies, including Turkey. So we will protect every Ally against any threat. And that, of course, also includes Turkey.

Then, there has been no question, no request for a NATO role in Syria. I welcome that many NATO Allies are taking part in the actions against ISIL. But it's not NATO as Alliance who is taking part. There are different Allies who participate in the US-led coalition.

I think that underlines that NATO is often... NATO is often the answer to many crises. But NATO is not always the only answer. And we have to work together with others.

And we have to try to develop more local strength. And that's the reason why we are now focussing more on defence-capacity and -building measures: train, assist, advise local forces. And that's also the reason why we have, in Wales, agreed on that we're standing ready to consider if Iraq requests, to train, help them enhancing their own security forces. I think that is

something we should also apply for other potential crises is to try to do more training, advising to enable them to manage their own local problems without troops from abroad.

MODERATOR: One final point I want to raise with you as you referenced that you're not only a former prime minister but you're a former finance minister. And the debate about defence spending in the Alliance is a longstanding one. And lots of people have tried to come up with new mechanisms of how to help generate political will and the ability to increase defence spending, accepting that there are real financial pressures on many of the NATO member countries.

And one of the ideas that's been out there is would it be helpful to involve finance ministers more in NATO conversations, either engage them in ministerials; or have them come to summits. I don't know what you think of that idea. But I'm just interested if you have other thoughts on mechanisms that might be helpful as you try to manage this difficult issue in the Alliance.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I believe it's important to speak to finance ministers; because they're very important persons.

MODERATOR: (LAUGHING)

JENS STOLTENBERG: But even more important are prime ministers and heads of states. And they weight twice. And they make the decisions. And actually I say "they"; because I have participated on many summits. But I didn't participate at the Wales Summit.

So when I'm going to travel around to different capitals and urge the different governments to make good on their pledges on defence spending. I'm going to help them doing what they have said they're going to do. And I believe that it's going to be a change. Partly, because this is the first time we have seen heads of State and government making such a clear pledge as they did in Wales; partly because the security environment has changed.

After the Cold War, of course, there were arguments in favour of reducing defence spending. But now we are moving into more uncertain times, more uncertain security environment. And therefore there are strong arguments of increasing defence spending again after a long period of reducing them.

And thirdly I would like to stress that we've already seen some countries... for instance Poland. I visited Poland recently as I said. And they are increasing. Romania is increasing. And other countries are increasing. So we have seen in several countries that they have been able to give priority to defence; saying that the environment is changing. There is more instability, more threats. And therefore, we also have to adapt this changing security environment by investing more in defence.

MODERATOR: Terrific! And now there are a lot more questions I could ask you. But I know that all of you in the audience have questions too! So I'm going to go ahead and open it up.

The first hand I saw was right here. And then we'll come back to you.

Q: Thank you...

MODERATOR: And please introduce yourself.

Q: Thank you, Charles Rozier (?), I'm a retired admiral. I'm presiding the Euro-Atlantic Association 11, one of the Atlantic Treaty Association's vice-presidents. Thank you for allowing me to put a question to you, Mister Secretary General.

At a recent seminar in Rome at the NATO Defense College the issue of the 2% was thoroughly discussed. And your answer to the last question and also your statement in engaging to keep the pledge is very clear for military.

But in Rome, the conclusion was that the 2% pledge was either a tendency or a political statement. And if you look to the budgets from the Eurozone that have been introduced to the Commission recently, all the budgets of the countries have budget cuts in defence. So my question again after the moderator's question is what do you have as mechanism in your political talks at the European Union, something as financial acts are possible... "les amendes" as we say in French; but nothing equivalent, except political statements exist in NATO. And under this political statement was an underlying argument, what can NATO do with a sudden big increase in money? Think of Germany, bigger countries if they doubled their budgets, what would NATO do with all this money? What are the capabilities needed politically agreed? So with this start of it... I know this is a very annoying question. But for a military having giving its career and seen the capabilities going down, what is coming up to make NATO strong again?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First... it's not an annoying question. It is an important question; because I think it's an important issue to address the question of implementation. We've made many good decisions at Wales... at the Summit... Now, the time has come to implement. And one of the most important decisions we made was related to defence spending.

But just to be very specific we actually said three things. The first thing we said was to stop cutting, just to stop the reductions. That... it is... that's absolutely possible. Because we have seen reductions for so many years. And I think there is a very strong understanding that this can't continue. The other thing we said is that those countries who are about 2%, they should at least... they should remain at about 2%.

And the third thing we said was we are during the next decade...are going to aim at increasing towards the 2%. So the most immediate goal was to stop the reductions. I accept that's a great challenge. But what I've said... and what I've tried to underline both in my speech and also in the last answer is that this is not something I or NATO try to push on the

Allies. It is something they decided. So what we are doing... what I'm doing is to help them to do what they themselves have decided to do themselves. And that should be possible.

And I agree with you that it's a political decision, it's a political statement. But in democracies that's the way we make decisions, it's by meeting all the politicians in parliaments, in governments. In an alliance as NATO, we make decisions. And then, it's up to us to implement them.

I cannot guarantee you for the whole 28... But what I can say is that I'm going to spend much time trying to convince all the leaders to implement also the defence pledges. And I have seen some very important examples. I mentioned Poland, Romania. But there are also others who have, at least, stopped the reductions; but also gradually started to increase.

MODERATOR: Yes, the gentleman in the third row from the back. Yes.

Q: Thank you, yes, my name is Brooks Tigner. I work for Jane's Defence. I want to come to the same subject but from a different angle. And I'll talk about what the woods and the shirts and the needs; but what's more likely. And that is the Allies gave themselves 10 years to raise their spending up to the 2% recommended level as we all know. But the continuing financial crisis and public opinion, frankly mean they're going to need all 10 years and probably more to achieve that. And this is going to have a constraining effect on NATO. And that's the essence of my question to you. Where and how do you see this 10-year lag constraining what NATO can do to meet the security challenges it faces.

I'm not asking you to give us the silver to try find the silver-lining like all your predecessors have done. It's fine that Romania and the others are raising their defence spending. But this is not a game-changing increase for NATO as a whole. So where do you see the constraints? Some concrete examples! Do you think it's going to slow down missile defence? Is it going to restrict what the NATO Allies can do in the Eastern frontier? Give us some examples... concrete examples on where you think this may have an impact. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The strength of NATO is that we are a democracy: 28 democracies. The disadvantage of democracies is that it's not one person that decides. And that's what I say, it's not a problem. It's a... it's a good thing.

And therefore, I... we will have to rely on 28 nations... 28 parliaments. And they are making their decisions. And my responsibility is to convey the message from Wales reminding them on what they agreed on in Wales.

I'm not going to give you a list about what we will not be able to do if we're not implementing the defence .. [inaudible]. Because my responsibility is to do what I can to convince all countries to make good on the pledges they made in Wales. And as... and we have a comprehensive defence planning process within NATO. We have a list of actions on shortfalls.

That's also an advantage with democracies in an alliance as NATO is that we are transparent and open... also about shortfalls. And those are the shortfalls we're going to address also to increasing of our defence spending.

MODERATOR: The woman in the pink... We did not colour-coordinate.... (LAUGHING)

Q: Hi, Teri Schultz with National Public Radio and CBS. Mister Secretary General, you were just in Turkey and heard first-hand about the very complicated situation that Ankara faces with regard to ISIS in general; but very specifically Kobane. The US-led coalition would to see Turkey do more; would like to perhaps use Incirlik air base. And Turkey has said no. Do you think that Turkey as a NATO Ally needs to do more to protect NATO's border against ISIS, against the Islamic State? And how in your first month are you managing these new tensions among the Allies? Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Thank you, Turkey is doing a lot; because Turkey is receiving hundreds of thousands of refugees. And Turkey is the country most affected by the crisis both ... the NATO Ally most affected by the crisis in both Iraq and Syria. And therefore, I commend that when I was in Turkey the huge effort Turkey is doing to take care of all the refugees that are coming to their country.

In addition, I know there's a close dialogue between the United States and Turkey on how they can work together in fighting ISIL. I met with General Allen when I was in Ankara. And the operations... the air strikes in Syria is... as I said... a US-led coalition; it's not something NATO is doing. Our main responsibility is to defend the borders of all our Allies. And that includes Turkey. And that's the reason why we have the Patriot deployment in Turkey.

MODERATOR: Yes, there are two questions over on that side. (...) We'll go ahead and take both of them. And try to be as brief as you can.

Q: Maybe because it's linked to my colleague. My name is Wassim Ibrahim working for As-Safir newspaper. Secretary General, normally, you would speak more about what you are already doing. So why didn't you speak about the coordinating role that you already mentioned that NATO is playing between the Alliance and Iraq and Syria? You mentioned already that there is a coordinating role that NATO is playing in this coalition. But can you clarify more what kind of coordinating role? Because we know that the NATO Alliance is made to coordinate. So what specifically you are doing there?

And the second question is about the foreign-fighters threat. You didn't mention these today. And we know when you don't mention something it's not a coincidence. So are you taking a step back? Thank you!

JENS STOLTENBERG: No, we are not a step back. But I think that it's not possible in a speech to mention everything NATO is doing. So even if I didn't mention it, we are still doing

it. And we are following up also on what we decided. And that is to increase the exchange of information related to the returning foreign fighters which is posing a threat to our societies.

To fight terrorism and to deal with the threats posed by returning foreign fighters is partly an issue we address within NATO. And we are increasing the exchange of information, which is crucial for being able to deal with the threat.

But it is also, of course, something which the European Union, different nations, police, intelligence are deeply involved in. So this is an area where it's not NATO alone. It's NATO together with all the partners, Allies that are addressing the challenges related to the homecoming of foreign fighters.

We are also involved when it comes to coordination... coordinating relief and assistance. And we're also following up on that. And even if I didn't mention that, we're also doing that.

When it comes to Iraq, then we had this decision where we said that we stand ready to consider helping Iraq in enhancing their security forces if there is a request. So far, there hasn't been any request. But as I said, many NATO Allies are taking part in the US-led operations together with regional partners both when it comes to humanitarian aid, training; but also, of course, the air strikes both in Iraq and in Syria.

So NATO is often the answer to different crises; but often we are not the only answer. And what we've seen in Syria, it's a crisis... a situation where we also have other actors taking part, not only NATO.

MODERATOR: And the gentleman right in front of the...

Q: Hi, Jim Neuger from Bloomberg. I wanted to approach the defence spending question from yet another angle. The pledge runs is for 10 years. Your tenure at NATO will be roughly half that time. Will you set any interim targets, perhaps year-by-year perhaps for the duration of your time at NATO for countries to meet? And if so, will you publish those targets?

JENS STOLTENBERG: I'm not planning to set any interim targets. But I will just underline that what we have decided is at least two things: one is to stop the reductions; and the other is to gradually to increase over the next decade as our economies grow. So my first and most immediate target is to stop the decline in defence spending.

And as I said, that's a challenge but I also underlined that's possible, partly because I think the understanding in the different capitals is that the security environment has changed. It's really present. It's something they understand and feel. And partly, because we have seen some countries who have been able to at least stop the decline and gradually start to increase.

But again, these are 28 parliaments who are going to decide. But we going to use those countries who are increasing as examples for the others to inspire them to do the same.

MODERATOR: There are a lot of hands. I'm just going to ask everyone to be as concise as possible. We have two, right up here in the front.

Q: Thank you... John Oliver from the Associated Press. Secretary General, as you said crises beyond NATO's borders can affect the security of NATO member countries. I was wondering if you could tell us what NATO... what... if anything... NATO was doing, now faced with the Ebola crisis? And if you think that NATO or its members should do more, thank you?

JENS STOLTENBERG: The Ebola crisis is very serious. And I very much welcome the efforts which many different countries now are taking to fight the Ebola crisis. Many of them are NATO Allies: United States, the UK are in a lead role in much of the efforts. And what we are doing is that we are in contact with the UN to discuss whether there are any specific role for NATO.

But again, I think we have to understand that Ebola is a really serious threat. The world reacted too... solely and too late. But real efforts are being made by the UN, by UK, US and other countries and of course through countries in the region.

And NATO Allies are contributing. The question is not whether NATO are contributing in fighting Ebola. But the question is whether this is best organized through a NATO structure. And that's too early to say. But we are in dialogue with the UN.

Q: Nawab Khan from the Kuwait News Agency KUNA. Sir, you referred to partner countries. So what are your plans to beef up cooperation with the Gulf countries in the region?

And my second question is on Afghanistan. There are concerns in the region that when NATO leaves Afghanistan it will lead to more insecurity and turmoil in the region, your comments. More insecurity and turmoil when NATO leaves Afghanistan!

JENS STOLTENBERG: On Afghanistan, I would like to underline that the main objective of the NATO mission... ISAF mission in Afghanistan was to prevent Afghanistan being a safe haven for terrorist organizations. And that goal we have achieved. And then, in addition, we have contributed to also an economic development in Afghanistan. Millions of children are attending school. Many of them, girls! And compared to the situation in 2001-2002 Afghanistan and the world is safer; because of what we have done in Afghanistan, our presence there. And we have seen economic, social progress.

Then, of course, Afghanistan is not a perfect society. And when we leave there is still going to be fighting, instability and uncertainty. But what we have done is to create the conditions for a stable, united and democratic Afghanistan. But then we hand over the responsibility, the full responsibility for the security; but also the future of Afghanistan to the Afghans themselves.

We have trained a force of 350,000 soldiers and police. We have seen the first peaceful transfer of power after a democratic election. And we have seen the establishment of a unity government. And NATO is going to remain there in another capacity in the Resolute Support

mission: training-advising-assisting the Afghan forces but based on the clear understanding that now the responsibility of the security is in the hands of the Afghans. So we're just assisting, helping, training them. So, yes, that was Afghanistan. The other question was about...

Q: ... (Inaudible)

JENS STOLTENBERG: Yes, we are going to... We have a close cooperation with the Gulf States. We have the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative which we're going to have a meeting... we're planning to have a meeting in the near future in that context or that frame. And I think it is important to keep up the dialogue because we are seeing so much instability, so many challenges in that region. And therefore, I very much believe in dialogue; because it's better to talk together; to understand each other than to not to have dialogue undermining the foundations for political cooperation.

MODERATOR: And there was a question on this side, in the back, kind of... they're still there. And then one here on the corner! Yes, yes, please.

Q: Thank you, Secretary General, I'm Tamás Meszerics. I'm a Member of the European Parliament from Hungary. And I would like to go back to the Eastern problem, the problem with the border with the East and not the military side of it; but the political rather. Some of the newer NATO member States, most notably Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia have become less than sanguine about NATO troop presence on their soil. Actually, some of them explicitly stated that these new troops would be unwelcome. This sort of reflects less than a 100% agreement about the Eastern policy, at least the military side of it. What are you going to do about it? Are you planning to visit any of these capitals in the near future? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: I'm planning to visit all NATO capitals. And I have started to do so. And I'm leaving for Greece tomorrow. And I'm going to visit all capitals of all NATO Allies.

And second, there's agreement in NATO that we are going to have more forces exercising, training and deployed on a rotational basis in our Eastern Allied countries. There's agreement in NATO that we have increased our air-patrolling, air-policing fivefold. And there's full agreement in NATO that we're also going to deploy elements of command and control and the prepositioning of equipment and supplies in Eastern Allied countries.

So what we are going to do is to implement on that. And our military authorities are now working on the detailed plans. And we're going to decide on the design, the scope, the size of the Spearhead Force on our ministerial meeting in February.

Q: (Inaudible)

MODERATOR: Yes, the gentleman here.

Q: Thank you, my name is (inaudible) from eanews.iz (?). Secretary General, I wonder if a Membership Action Plan will be offered to Georgia. Or you will continue this endless deeper and deeper integration? And if existing territorial conflicts will affect this perspective. Or you will avoid the presence in the South Caucasus because of Russia? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The open-door policy of NATO has been a great succeed. I was present in the Summit in Bucharest where we decided on Georgia. And my responsibility now as Secretary General is that we are implementing the comprehensive package we have agreed on. And I'm going to meet with the prime minister of Georgia quite soon to discuss the implementation of the follow-up of this comprehensive package for Georgia.

In addition, I would like to underline that Georgia is really a strong partner. And Georgia has participated in many NATO operations. They have provided valuable contributions to our operations in Afghanistan. And I also welcome the reforms, the progress that Georgia has made, especially related to their armed forces. And then we will continue to work together with Georgie and to implement the package we've done in Wales.

MODERATOR: And there's a gentleman here on the end; and then the two women in the second row.

Q: Thank you, Kris Famm (?), European Commission. Thank you, Mister Secretary General. Coming from a small country as I do, Sweden, we've just seen back in Sweden or I've seen on news staying here... But I've seen the biggest military ramp-up since the 1980s, looking and searching for a foreign submarine. I'm staying short of saying anything more. But the links and the allegation... well, the links elaborate to the hunt for the Red October in an October month... of course, comes to mind. Nevertheless, Sweden is a neutral country as is Finland. And it has been neutral for many years. Is the time up for being neutral? Should Sweden... here I'm seeking your advice back to Sweden and the Swedish fellow friends in this debate that follows now... should Sweden join NATO?

Your predecessor said: "Well, you can't think that NATO will actually defend you in case of a conflict. You'll have to stand up on your own." The twenty-eight of the twenty-eight.... Are you're not part of those twenty-eight. So should Sweden now rethink its policy? Should the... let's say links with NATO become stronger and more, let's say, direct as you have an open-door policy? What is your advice to Sweden and even Finland, thank you?

JENS STOLTENBERG: Was it...? I have the very strong feeling that both as a former Norwegian politician and as a Secretary General of NATO it would be very unwise ...

Q: (LAUGHING)

JENS STOLTENBERG: If I started to give advice to Sweden.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So I leave that to the Swedes. The union between Sweden and Norway was abolished in 1905.

CROWD: (LAUGHING)

JENS STOLTENBERG: And the... yes... And to some extent, yes, yes. So that... the Swedes have to decide! What I can say is that we have an excellent relationship with Sweden. Both as a former Norwegian prime minister but also as Secretary General of NATO, I can say that because NATO has a close and very constructive cooperation between... We welcome that cooperation. Sweden is a partner of NATO, participating in many operations in Afghanistan and other places. And I welcome that.

But I really mean that if I start to... even if I have an opinion, I should not tell it on.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So thank you for your question.

MODERATOR: And we had two women over on this side, in the front. No, right behind you, yes.

Q: Thank you, Mister Secretary General, thank you for your presence here. My name is Hereira Yadoo (?) from Bridging Europe. And I would like to draw your attention to the tensions going on right now in the Eastern Mediterranean that are causing friction between Turkey and Cyprus, a very traditional friction going on for the last 40 years; but also between member States, NATO member States such as Greece and Turkey. Where is NATO standing as an alliance regarding this issue thank you?

MODERATOR: Only thing: feel free to pass it to your neighbour. We'll take good notes. But please go ahead, Mister Secretary General.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So this is... this is a bilateral. The relationship between Turkey and Greece is a bilateral issue between Turkey and Greece. In addition, NATO is not involved in the efforts to try to find a solution related to the problems we see in Cyprus. And that's part of my obligation as Secretary General of NATO is to be very clear. What's my responsibilities? What are the issues I'm going to address? What are the conflicts I'm going to work on, and NATO is addressing? And which issues are not on my agenda? And the relationship between Turkey and Greece is a bilateral relationship. And I find that they're working together in NATO.

I'm going to visit Greece tomorrow. And I'll stay. And the bilateral issues between two members countries is not something that I want to solve out within NATO; or to address within a NATO framework.

MODERATOR: So, then, thank you please.

Q: Good morning, my name is Joanna Bouquier (?). Back to your speech, you speak about the key role of NATO in term of crisis management and its responsibility in term of stabilization and reconstruction. Back to 2011, NATO intervened in Libya. And what happened there was considered as a direct threat for Europe, so I just... I was just wondering: What are

the concrete measures in terms of reconstruction for NATO? And what are the means of NATO reconstruction in terms of this specific example? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: In Libya, yes. Well, I think that what has happened in Libya is in a way illustrating a dilemma and also a challenge for the whole international community. NATO acted in Libya on a very clear UN mandate. And the military operation which... in NATO... with the purpose of... was to defend the civilian population against the regime that was killing its own people. That military operation was actually a success. We achieved the goal of the operation. But after that, the international community was not present. And it was too little focussed on reconstruction, on the political process, on building the peace after the end of the NATO airstrikes in Libya in 2011. That's not necessarily the responsibility of NATO.

Our responsibility was to conduct the military operations. But the international community as such, the UN, the European Union and NATO we... we had too little focus. And it was not clear who was responsible for the follow-up. And therefore I think that we should discuss both within NATO; but also with our partners – other international organizations, the UN, EU, lessons to be learned from Libya.

I think that's partly... is very much related to... that we have to do something also after the end of the military operations. We have to focus on development, on political processes; not necessarily as NATO. It might be the responsibility of other international organizations; that someone has to take that responsibility after military operations as those we saw in Libya.

MODERATOR: Thank you. The gentleman here in the third row! And now, I'll already put out the warning that we're not going to get to everybody. We do have a hard stop at 11:30; but I'm trying.

Q: Mister Secretary General, my name is Kurt Engelen. I'm the vice-president of the Euro-Atlantic Association of Belgium and also a lecturer in international relations. Hum, in the strategic... in the new strategic concept of NATO in 2010, there are three points.

There is the role for NATO as an organization capable of managing crisis. There is the recognition that there is an added value in the comprehensive approach to a crisis. And then there is what you just mentioned: the cooperation with partners. The three bring me of course to the relationship between NATO and the EU and to the possibilities that these two organizations have to work together.

Now, knowing that one of the issues standing in the way of that is Cyprus and that there are ongoing negotiations which actually might end up with a solution quite soon, shouldn't NATO or wouldn't NATO be more involved in stimulating a solution in Cyprus; because NATO and EU have a lot to win from each other? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: Again, NATO is the answer to many problems, to many crises; but not to all crises and all problems. Sometimes, actually, it is important that NATO don't go into

problems or crises, it can just make it more difficult. And Cyprus is a question which involves Cyprus, Turkey and Greece, two NATO Allies. And therefore, I don't think that it would be good for the purpose of finding a solution that NATO as an Alliance got more directly involved. I welcome the efforts that are now being made to try to find a solution. And it's my good old friend Espen Barth Eide who was the Minister of Defence and Foreign Minister in Norway for many years. And we were together... We have been working together in politics since he was 14 and I was 18. And he's a very clever young man. And I think that the best thing I can do is to, in a way, leave it to him, support him. And he would be on the phone immediately, if I now started to assist him in solving the problems in Cyprus in this context. So leave it to Espen.

MODERATOR: (LAUGHING) Excellent! And there was a woman in the back row who had her hand up. Yes, please.

Q: Hello, my name is Emma Furst (?). And I'm an intern at the European Parliament. I'm also from Sweden. So I have some questions about Sweden. I know that you already said that you can't give advices to the Government in Sweden if they would like to join NATO or not. But do you think it will be important for Sweden to join NATO from a Swedish point of view? And do you think it would important for NATO that Sweden would join? Or do you think it will be more like a problem; because Sweden is a neighbour to Russia as well? And how would that change the rules and the relations to Russia if Sweden would join? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So very good questions. I'm not going to answer that.

JENS STOLTENBERG: So because we are back to that. My responsibility as Secretary General of NATO is not to comment on all possible issues or to give advice to all possible international actors. If I would like to do that, I should start some kind of consultancy. And then I could give you advices, yes.

JENS STOLTENBERG: But I'm not in that business. I am responsible for 28 Allies. And what we are going to do as an Alliance... and therefore I just had to be very clear what Sweden wants to do with the question of applying for membership or not is up to Sweden. What I can say is that we are conducting our open-door policy. We have the decisions that are taken several times that we are an open alliance: 28 democracies. And we are very much appreciating the cooperation with Sweden as a partner.

MODERATOR: And then, there are lot of hands up. But the last question is going to come over here to the gentleman in the second row.

Q: Yes, hello, my name is Henry Fassalov (?) from Solb (?). I'm also from Sweden. So the turn... return time, so I hope you can answer this question. This is not about Sweden though. You mentioned in your third priority: the strengthening of the bond between the US and Europe. And you also mentioned that you would in contact with the European institutions. The timing is quite good for that, I would say; because the TTIP has been negotiating that, as we speak. But defence is excluded from that; at least, is not part of the TTIP endeavours for the

moment. Do you think that defence should have a clearer role together with security in TTIP negotiations?

JENS STOLTENBERG: First of all, it's a trade... a free-trade agreement. And the defence and defence investment has very often been excluded; because it has been regarded as something different than the trade in other commodities, other industries.

And I think also it has something to do with that very many countries are very eager to have their own national defence industry. I think one of the challenges we are facing in NATO is how we can both respect in a way the natural need and the natural wish of so many nations to have their own defence industry; but at the same time working more closely together to reduce costs; to have Smart Defence Initiatives; and to find ways of working more closer together both within Europe; but of course also a Europe and North America. So that's already on the agenda. I don't know whether that will be wise to put into this already very complicated free trade agreements or negotiations.

MODERATOR: Well, Mister Secretary General, I think you should feel buoyed by the fact that we could continue on for certainly another hour and a half based on the very many hands that have been up. I'm thinking back to a year ago when the NATO Summit in Wales was being planned, and people asking questions about the relevance of NATO and what's its mission. And it's clear that people in this room not only appreciate the mission NATO is playing in everywhere from Afghanistan to Ukraine; but that people see other missions for NATO whether it's Ebola or Sweden joining.

But I'm also buoyed not only by the incredible command of what is a very extensive brief that you've shown here; but the wisdom that you've shown in all of your answers; and also the sense of humour that we're seeing most particularly when it comes to Sweden.

JENS STOLTENBERG: (LAUGHING)

MODERATOR: But I think it will be in that mix of wisdom and keeping a perspective that allows you also to have a sense of humour that will be so valuable not only to the 28 of us who call us members of this proud Alliance; but to all the other parts of the world to which this Alliance is important. And I'm going to ask everyone in the room to, in turn, thanking you; but also wishing you great success in this role.

CROWD: (APPLAUSE)

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