

Press conference
by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meetings of
NATO Defence Ministers

15 February 2018

Good morning.

We have just finished the last working session of this defence ministerial meeting. We have taken decisions that will further strengthen the security of our Alliance. NATO is committed to projecting stability beyond our borders and playing a key role in the fight against terrorism.

We support the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS with AWACS surveillance flights and with the training for Iraqi forces. The Coalition has made significant gains. 98% of territory seized by ISIS in Iraq and Syria has been liberated.

And more than seven and a half million people have been freed from ISIS oppression. Now we must ensure we keep those gains. Because security abroad means security at home.

So we have just agreed to start planning for a NATO training mission in Iraq. This has been requested by both the Iraqi government and the Global Coalition. NATO already trains Iraqi forces. But establishing a mission will make our current training efforts more sustainable. It would benefit from better resourcing, and a well-established process for Allies to contribute forces. We will also plan to help the Iraqi forces become increasingly professional.

By establishing specialized military academies and schools. We are planning to scale up NATO's presence. But we are not planning for a combat mission.

We can make a big impact with our trainers and advisers – in full coordination with the Iraqi Government, the Global Coalition, and other actors, such as the UN and the EU.

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Today we also considered NATO's other priorities in the Middle East and North Africa. We agreed that we need to improve our ability to react to future crises in the region. Including with enhanced planning and exercises. And as our experience has shown, building local capacity is one of the best tools we have in the fight against terrorism. NATO continues to help strengthen the Afghan security forces. And we work with our partners like Jordan and Tunisia.

Helping them to modernise their security institutions and train their forces.

So we addressed what more we should do.

Including closer cooperation with the European Union.

Last night, we were joined by EU High Representative Federica Mogherini and our partners Finland and Sweden.

We had a very good discussion on NATO-EU cooperation, which we all agree is of strategic importance.

We are committed to stepping up our cooperation on military mobility, cyber defence and in countering terrorist threats.

We also discussed recent EU decisions on defence, and how they can complement NATO's work.

This Ministerial has helped to lay the foundations for our Summit of NATO leaders in July. And that meeting will set the direction of our Alliance for the years ahead.

So then I'm ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll start with CNN in the fourth row.

QUESTION [Ryan Brown, CNN]: Thank you. Ryan Brown with CNN. I just wanted to talk to you about the issue of burden sharing. You didn't mention it in the opening remarks, but there has been a lot of political pressure to get the Allies who do meet the 2% of GDP to come up with national plans to do so, but I understand that some 13 countries have yet to do that. You do not name those 13 countries. Wouldn't it benefit from some additional pressure by naming those countries, to kind of help encourage them to come up with national plans?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The message on burden sharing is that we are making progress, but that we still have a long way to go. We decided back in 2014, to stop the cuts, to gradually increase, and then move towards spending 2% of GDP on defence. Since then, we have actually stopped the cuts and we have seen that, across Europe and Canada, there has been an increase in defence spending for the first time in many, many years. And we are also moving towards spending 2% of GDP. So, we are moving in the right directions. All NATO Allies have in their national plans promised to continue to increase defence spending in real terms, and back in 2014 three Allies met the 2% target. This year, we expect eight Allies to meet the target, and by 2024, 15 Allies have stated that they will be at 2% or above. This is a good start, but this is the first time we have national plans. We will revise them, we will update them, and of course we will continue to urge those countries who have not yet provided plans, meeting the 2% target, to do so. So, this is a beginning, this is a start, and we will continue to work for even more progress. We will publish, later on, figures when it comes to individual Allies, on defence spending. We do that in the regular way, so that will be figures that will be provided later on. The national plans are not going to be public, but figures on defence spending in each individual Allies will be made public later on.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Associated Press, third row.

QUESTION [Lorne Cook, Associated Press]: Lorne Cook from the Associated Press. Just on Iraq, Secretary General, if you could flesh that out a little bit for us. As you've said, there's already... there are training teams there at the moment. What are we looking at? How substantial is it? Some nations have mentioned the possibility of working in other cities in

Iraq, but also outside. I know you're in the planning stage, but if you can give us just a bit more that would be good.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The current training activity of NATO in Iraq is based on what we call mobile training teams, meaning that we are sending in mobile teams, who are there for a limited period of time, some weeks or some days, and then they go out again. There is a core team, which is fairly limited, that organise these mobile training teams which comes in, train and then leave again. Sometimes also we take Iraqi officers from Iraq and train them in NATO Allied countries and even in partner countries. For instance Serbia provides training for Iraqi officers in the NATO framework, as a partner nation. So, the current training activity is based on a small core team, organising, facilitating mobile training teams, providing training for Iraqi officers. The idea now is to go from this concept to a more substantive concept, which is based on trainers in Iraq, where we are going to train the trainers and help them to build a defence education, or to build some defence schools and defence academies. Exactly which areas it's a bit too early to say. We are now training in areas as, for instance, countering-IED, Improvised Explosive Devices, military medicine, logistics, and in some other areas, and we will look into what more we can do. We will scale up. Exactly how much, how many trainers, remains to be seen, that's exactly what we're going to look in to when we now have started to plan. But we will move from this mobile training concept to a more permanent training mission.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: RIA Novosti, in the fourth row, centre.

QUESTION [RIA Novosti]: Secretary General, Russia has, for the moment, no ambassador to NATO. What impact do you think it will have on NATO-Russia relations and will you discuss this subject with the Minister Lavrov during your meeting this week? And a second question, if I may, when do you expect the NATO-Russia Council meeting to take place? Is it this year? And on what level? Thank you very much.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: It is a normal thing that countries change their ambassadors and this is a rotation and we have seen before that sometimes it takes some time from an ambassador is leaving or going home, to a new ambassador comes. That was also the case last time. I look forward to meeting Minister Lavrov in Munich. That's part of our political dialogue with Russia. We will discuss many different issues, but I expect us also to address how we can make sure that the NATO-Russia Council can continue to be a platform for dialogue between NATO and Russia. I believe that dialogue is always important, but dialogue is particularly important when tensions are high and the relations are difficult, as they are now. And I also welcome the fact that after two years with no meetings in the NATO-Russia Council, from 2014 to 2016, we have been able to convene six meetings of the NATO-Russia Council. Addressing different issues, Ukraine, but also military transparency, risk reduction, air safety in the Baltic region - we are making some progress on that. Through a Finnish-led expert group, we are looking into how we can develop procedures, guidelines for increasing air safety in the Baltic region. We have also used the NATO-Russia Council to have reciprocal briefings on military exercises, the Zapad exercise and NATO exercises, and also on military posture. So, I look forward to meeting Minister Lavrov. We have met many, many times before, both in my capacity as Secretary General,

but also in my previous capacity as Norwegian Prime Minister. So, I look forward to that meeting.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Gentleman at the back.

QUESTION: I have a question on the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹. You were there recently. How likely is it for you that the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ will enter the NATO? How interested is the NATO in such a small country and how do you observe the country's relationship to Greece?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: NATO decided back in 2008, at our Summit in Bucharest, that we will invite the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ to become a member, as soon as the name issue has been solved in a mutual, acceptable way. It has not been possible, in all the years since then, to find a solution. I hope that the renewed initiatives we have seen now can lead to a mutual, acceptable solution. I visited recently Skopje. This was one of the issues we discussed and the government in Skopje, the new government there with Prime Minister Zoran Zaev, has clearly stated that they would like to show some flexibility, to try to find a solution. I also recently spoke with Prime Minister Tsipras of Greece and we have the UN negotiator, who has now put forward some new proposals on how to solve this issue, the name issue. I will be very careful speculating about the likelihood of an agreement. This is an issue that has been addressed for more than 20 years, since 1995, and the UN mediator has worked on these issues for many, many years, but I really hope that it's possible to find a solution because that will solve a problem which has been there for a long time, between the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia¹ and Greece, and it will also enable FYROM to become a member of the Alliance. So therefore, I urge them to be flexible and to try to find a solution, and I also discussed this issue with the Greek Defence Minister during this meeting.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Kabul Times, lady in the second row.

QUESTION [Kabul Times]: Thank you Secretary. You mentioned that Georgia and also Tunisia is trying to help with the training of Afghan security, for the Resolute Support Mission. Is there any deadline for the Resolute Support Mission, when it will be done? And also, regarding to Taliban sending letter to US, what's your comment on that for the peace negotiation? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Our Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan is a condition-based mission and the aim is to continue to strengthen the Afghan national security forces, enabling them to secure their own country and to be fully responsible, as they now are, for security in Afghanistan. And we have seen a lot of progress. There are many problems and in Afghanistan, we see violence, we see terrorism, we see attacks, terrible attacks against civilians, recently in Kabul, but we have also seen some progress, especially when it comes to the quality, the strength of the Afghan forces. We have helped to train their Special Operation forces, their air forces and also their Command and Control. And we are now increasing our presence in Afghanistan, to be able to provide even more support. Not in a NATO combat operation, but to train and help and assist the Afghan forces. We don't think that there is a military solution to the conflict in Afghanistan, but we

strongly believe that we need a strong Afghan force to be able to create the conditions for a political solution. Taliban has to understand that they will never win on the battlefield, so they have to come to the negotiating table and agree to a political solution. That's the reason why we are providing military support, it's to enable a political solution. We welcome any efforts to find a political solution and we strongly believe that this should be an Afghan-led and an Afghan-owned peace process, so therefore NATO support the Afghan-led and the Afghan-owned peace process, which also of course, at some stage, has to include finding a political solution with the Taliban. But Taliban has to understand that they cannot win on the battlefield, they have to sit down and negotiate.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Reuters.

QUESTION [Reuters]: Thanks, Oana. Secretary General, coming back to Iraq, would you favour a limited assignment, putting an end date on the mission, given the experience in Afghanistan and being there much longer than many Allies had hoped? And secondly, will you favour a call to the NATO partners, the non-NATO members, the close partners, to help the training in Iraq as well? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Yes, we will of course welcome support from partners, as NATO always does, because that's already the case. We have already partners helping us with training activities in Iraq. I mentioned Serbia, which do some mobile training team activities in Belgrade, in military medicine. And I think it's very hard to imagine that we will not welcome that also in the future training mission. I think it will be very wrong if I started to speculate too much about time limits and so on. I think what we have learned from Afghanistan, from Iraq, and from other places, is that one thing is to win on the battlefield, but afterwards we have to make sure that we are able to stabilise the country and enable the local forces, the local governments, the local authorities, to be fully in charge and to be able to stabilise the country. So, therefore I think that the lesson learned, for instance, from Iraq is that it's dangerous to leave too early, because then we may be forced back in combat operations. So, we should not stay longer than necessary, but we should stay as long as it is needed to make sure that we are not forced back in a combat operation.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Lady in the third row.

QUESTION [Ethnos Newspaper]: Good morning. Ethnos Newspaper, Athens. This week we saw renewed incidents and tensions in the Aegean Sea between the two NATO Allies, Greece and Turkey. Did you discuss this matter with the Greek and Turkish Defence Ministers? And are you concerned about this tension between the two NATO Allies? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I have discussed and addressed this issue in talks, both with the Greek and the Turkish Ministers of Defence, during our ministerial meeting. We were briefed about the incident in the eastern part of the Aegean Sea, involving Coastguard ships. I welcome the fact that the two Prime Ministers have talked on the phone and I urge them to continue to have direct contact, to make sure that we avoid similar incidents in the future, and to reduce tensions and avoid escalation. Both Turkey and Greece are two valued NATO Allies and of course we would like to do anything possible to

avoid any real problems or escalation in the conflict and the tensions between the two countries.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Thank you very much. This concludes this press point.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Thank you so much.

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