

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

06 Jun. 2018

Good morning.

Tomorrow and on Friday, NATO's Defence Ministers will meet for the first time in this new building.

And they will make preparations for the upcoming Summit in July.

We will begin with a session on strengthening our deterrence and defence.

And I expect ministers will agree to boost our Command Structure by more than 1,200 personnel.

I also expect we will agree that our new Joint Force Command for the Atlantic will be based at Norfolk in the United States.

And that our new Enabling Command will be based in Ulm, in Germany.

These will be key to move our troops across the Atlantic and within Europe without delay, whenever needed.

To ensure we have the right forces in the right place at the right time.

High readiness is essential in a more unpredictable world.

So I expect we will also agree a NATO Readiness Initiative – the “Four Thirties”.

NATO's Readiness Initiative means that Allies would, by 2020, have:

- 30 mechanised battalions;
- 30 air squadrons; and
- 30 combat vessels,
- ready within 30 days or less.

This is not about setting up or deploying new forces.

It is about boosting the readiness of existing forces.

Across each and every Ally.

We will also address burden-sharing and defence spending at the Defence Ministers meeting.

The trend is up, and we intend to maintain the momentum.

All Allies have now stopped the cuts in defence spending, and started to increase.

And tomorrow, I will be able to announce the first figures for 2018.

Burden-sharing is not just about cash, but also about capabilities and contributions.

Here too, the trend is up.

Allies are investing more in major equipment, and increasing their contributions to NATO missions and operations.

So we have turned a corner.

And we are going in the right direction.

But we still have a long way to go.

And there is still hard work ahead.

Investing more in defence – and investing in the right things – is a matter of fairness.

Above all, it is about our security in a more unpredictable world.

During the second session, we will focus on NATO's work to fight terrorism and project stability.

NATO is contributing to the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS with AWACS surveillance flights and training for Iraqi forces.

Tomorrow, we will discuss our plans to launch a new training mission in Iraq at our Summit in July.

To help the Iraqis better fight terrorism.

And prevent ISIS from coming back.

We will also discuss our defence capacity-building support for Jordan, a valued partner in the region.

And we will consider what more we could do to help Tunisia, another key partner.

Because when our neighbours are more stable, we are more secure.

On Friday, we will discuss NATO-EU cooperation, together with High Representative / Vice President Federica Mogherini, as well as our colleagues from Finland and Sweden.

We will take stock of progress in our joint work, including on hybrid and cyber defence, maritime operations, and exercises.

We have already seen real results.

For example, NATO and EU now exchange real-time warnings about cyber-attacks.

And NATO's Operation Sea Guardian supports the EU's Operation Sophia in the Mediterranean.

Going forward, military mobility could become a flagship for our cooperation.

And we are working together to remove obstacles – whether legal, customs, or infrastructure.

Ensuring our forces can move quickly across Europe when necessary is in everyone's interest.

We will close the Ministerial with a meeting on Afghanistan, together with our Resolute Support partners.

Allies and partners are stepping up – with both forces and funding.

We have added around 3,000 more trainers to our mission.

And we are discussing how to extend funding for the Afghan forces beyond 2020.

The Afghan forces are performing with professionalism and bravery.

And creating the conditions for a political settlement.

So we must continue to assist them.

To support President Ghani's bold initiative for peace.

And to encourage continued reforms to fight corruption and uphold human rights.

We are now just five weeks away from the Brussels Summit.

And the decisions we take over the next two days will ensure that the Summit strengthens our Alliance for years to come.

And with that, I'm ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, we'll start with NRK in the third row.

QUESTION [NRK]: ...been affected by a very poor relationship between the US and Europe regarding trade issues and the US pulling out of the Iran Treaty. Are you concerned that this will affect the cooperation and security cooperation within NATO?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: NATO is an Alliance of 29 different nations on both sides of the Atlantic and we all have different history, different geography and also sometimes different views about serious issues. And that's exactly what we see now. We see differences on trade, we see differences on issues related to climate change, the Paris

Accord, and also to, for instance, the Iran Nuclear Deal. And these are serious differences between NATO Allies. At the same time, we have to remember that we have seen differences before, all the way back to the 1950s where NATO Allies disagreed on the Suez Crisis or when France decided to leave the Command Structure in the 60s, or the Iraq War in 2003. So, it's nothing new that there are differences between NATO Allies. And what we have seen again and again is that we have been able to unite around NATO's core task, to protect and defend each other despite those differences. And my main responsibility is to make sure that we continue to do that, despite the differences we see on trade, on environment and on other issues.

And therefore I welcome the fact that what we see now is that ... yes there are differences and these are something we take very seriously, but at the same time NATO is able to strengthen the transatlantic bond on security. Because North America, the United States and Canada, are actually increasing their presence in Europe with more troops, more prepositioned equipment, more exercises. And European Allies are stepping up.

So, I take the differences very seriously, but at the same time I'm encouraged by the fact that when it comes to the security cooperation, the transatlantic bond has actually been strengthened over the last couple of years.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, and we had ANSA, gentleman in the last row, fifth row here.

QUESTION [ANSA]: ANSA, Italy. Yesterday, the Italian Prime Minister, in a speech from the parliament, said that Italy is a committed Ally... member of the Alliance with the US as the privileged Ally. But he also said that we will supported of an opening up of relationships with Russia and maybe promote revision of the sanction. Can you comment on it, please?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: First of all, I'd like to congratulate the new Italian Prime Minister, Mr Conte, with his appointment. I look forward to working with him and I hope to meet him soon. Second, Italy is a committed and highly-valued Ally. Italy contributes to our shared security and to our collective defence in many different ways. They are one of the lead nations in Afghanistan. Italy is playing a key role also when it comes to addressing the challenges we see to the south of the Alliance. And Italy is hosting many important NATO facilities, including the Joint Force Command in Naples and the Sigonella base in Sicily, where we're going to base our new surveillance drones soon. So, Italy is an important NATO Ally and I welcome the commitment by the new Prime Minister to our Alliance.

When it comes to Russia, I think it is important to highlight that NATO has what we call a dual-track approach to Russia, which is about that we need strong deterrence and strong defence combined with political dialogue, because we are not aiming at isolating Russia. Russia is our neighbour, Russia is here to stay, and therefore I also welcome the strong support of Italy to the dialogue we are having with Russia. Just last week we had a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, where we addressed Ukraine, military transparency and many other issues. But I think it is important to continue this dialogue. The dialogue with Russia is not easy, that's exactly why it is so important. The economic sanctions... I think the economic sanctions are important because they send a clear message that what Russia has done in Ukraine has to have consequences and Russia has to change behaviour before the sanctions should be lifted.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll go to the lady in red, Wall Street Journal. Fourth row.

QUESTION [Wall Street Journal]: Coming back to the issue of transatlantic tensions, you were saying that in recent years actually the security bond has strengthened, but one of the rationales of the trade tariffs, or the main rationale, is a national security threat of the United States' Allies. To what extent do you expect this to become an issue? To what extent do you expect this to become an issue at the Ministerial tomorrow and on Friday? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: There are now serious disagreements between NATO Allies on serious issues. And the trade issues are of course serious. My message is that despite those disagreements, we have to make sure that we continue to strengthen and sustain the close partnership on security between NATO Allies. And the good news is that, despite these serious differences, we have been able to do exactly that, because we don't see any weakening of the transatlantic bond within NATO. We see actually a strengthening of that bond with more US troops in Europe. After years of reducing the US presence in Europe, the US is now increasing its presence. And only during the time of President Trump we have seen a 40% increase in funding for the European Readiness Initiative, money for additional US military presence, more troops, more exercises, more prepositioned equipment. And we have for instance an ongoing exercise right now. This is something I also discussed with President Trump when I met him recently. He has of course a clear message on trade, but he also expressed very clear his commitment to NATO and to US presence in Europe.

At the same time, European Allies are stepping up, doing more, spending more, investing more. On defence we see and in NATO we see a strengthening of the bond, but of course I am concerned about the disagreements and I expect the future of the transatlantic bond and also how to deal with the military cooperation, but also the differences, is something which is going to be discussed among NATO leaders in many different contexts, maybe also during the meeting tomorrow. That's a bit early for me to say, because I have to see what they have to say.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, Süddeutsche Zeitung, middle of the last row?

QUESTION [Süddeutsche Zeitung]: Thank you. Secretary General, I have to ask again, do you think that it is possible to isolate the future of NATO from the resolution of those differences? Do you think that NATO can go on like this if those very serious hostilities and differences are not resolved? Or are you afraid that actually the very foundations... even though it might work now, that the very foundations of this Alliance might be endangered?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I believe it is possible to limit the repercussions, to limit the negative effects on NATO. I'm not saying it's not serious. I'm not saying that I'm not concerned, but I'm saying that we have proven before that it is possible to deal with these kind of disagreements without weakening NATO. And actually what we have seen over the last couple of years and what we see now is that we are strengthening NATO, we are strengthening the transatlantic bond within NATO despite those differences.

The best thing would of course be if those differences were solved; trade, climate and all the other issues. But as long as they're not solved, I have to be focused on how to reduce/limit the

negative consequences for NATO. And so far we have been quite successful because the reality is that, when it comes to NATO, the transatlantic bond has been strengthened.

But again, we are part of a broader picture and in the long run, of course it will also benefit NATO and the defence cooperation if we are able to address/solve those other disagreements.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll go to some questions in the first row from our Afghan colleagues. We'll go to Mitra in the middle. Thank you.

QUESTION [Mitra]: Mr Secretary General, you referred to the Afghan government's peace offer, but the Taliban have repeatedly put down any kind of peace offers by the Afghan government. And reality on the ground has proven that it is really hard to defeat the Taliban militarily. So, what do you think the best solution would be to sort out this dilemma in Afghanistan?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The reason why NATO continues to support the Afghan army and security forces is that we have to be able to convince Taliban that they will not win on the battlefield and therefore create the conditions for a negotiated solution. Taliban has to understand that they will obtain more through a negotiated peaceful solution than through continued fighting. That's the reason why we are providing training and that's the reason why we are providing funding and that's the reason why we are actually now stepping up the training efforts. And we see that the Afghan forces are really professional, delivering, strengthening their special operation forces, air forces, and they have proven again and again able to actually deny Taliban any strategic victories, because Taliban had as its declared strategic goal to take control over provincial capitals. They have not been able to do that because of the bravery and the professionalism of the Afghan forces, supported by NATO with funding and with training. And that's also the reason why we are tomorrow... no, on Friday, going to address the issue of sustaining the funding from 2020 to 2024. And let me also add that I strongly welcome both the clear message from President Ghani, the invitation to peace talks, but also the very clear message from the religious leaders, condemning the extremist violence, condemning suicide attacks and calling for a negotiated peaceful solution.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, we'll go to 1TV, also in the first row. Gentleman with the hand up, thank you.

QUESTION [1TV]: Thank you, Mr Secretary General. As you know, Afghan government has few key assignment in the coming months and year, which is the election of Afghanistan. If the Afghan government could not hold a fair and free and transparent election again in Afghanistan, how would that affect on the commitment of the NATO, politically and militarily and financially, on the future? Thank you, Sir.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: We provide support to Afghanistan and NATO Allies and partners have done that for many, many years. We have very much changed the character of our support from a big combat operation, we ended that in 2015 and since then we have conducted a train, assist and advise mission.

At the same time, we expect Afghanistan to implement reforms, to fight corruption, to be transparent, and to, of course, also to hold elections. And therefore we welcome the

announcement of elections and it is important that Afghanistan continues to deliver on the reforms and to strengthen their democratic institutions, including holding elections.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, we go to Georgian TV in the second row.

QUESTION [Georgian TV]: As we have information our Minister of Defence of Georgia will also attend meeting day after tomorrow and in this case can we talk about Georgia's more involvement in Black Sea Security Policy and what can we expect from the upcoming Summit in July? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Georgia will be present at the Resolute Support meeting on Friday with all the other NATO Ministers and partners, and we are extremely grateful for Georgia's strong commitment to our mission in Afghanistan. Georgia is one of the biggest force contributors to the Resolute Support Mission. And Georgia has also proven over many years that they are very committed to our presence there in Afghanistan.

I am absolutely certain that the Summit in July will find ways to recognise the progress of Georgia, the progress in implementing reforms, the progress in modernising their defence and security situations and also the rule of law. And also the fact that Georgia is stepping up its efforts to fight corruption. So, exactly how we will do that remains to be seen, but I'm certain that Allied leaders will recognise that progress at the Summit in July.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll try to take a question over there, lady in the middle of the second tier.

QUESTION: Thank you. Secretary General, you know that relations between Turkey and the United States have been strained over especially Mambij in Syria. We have just heard that a roadmap was agreed upon between Turkey and the United States. How do you evaluate the perhaps improvement of relations between two NATO Allies?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I welcome the fact that both Turkey and United States have confirmed that they have agreed on a roadmap on how to deal with the challenges in Northern Syria, especially Mambij. It's not for me to go into the details of the roadmap because I think that would be something that the two countries, Turkey and US, should do. But I can confirm that this was one of the main issues I discussed when I met President Erdoğan in Ankara recently and also one of the issues I discussed during my meetings in the White House and Washington a couple of weeks ago. So, this is of course important for NATO that two NATO Allies, Turkey and the United States, find ways to deal with the very difficult situation in Northern Syria, on the border of Turkey and the border of NATO. And of course we have to find ways to both fight terrorism, fight ISIL, all NATO Allies are part of the Coalition, but at the same time make sure that Turkey's legitimate security concerns are taken into account. And therefore, I welcome the agreement, the close dialogue between Turkey and the United States on this issue.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK, we have gentleman over there, second row, in the second tier.

QUESTION [Jyllands-Posten]: Yes, thank you. I'm Martin with the Danish newspaper, Jyllands-Posten. A question on Nord Stream 2, if I may? A few weeks ago, a representative

from the United States Secretary of State mentioned that this project would permit new technologies that can listen and follow and monitor, could be placed along the pipeline route in the Baltic Seas. And the US sees that as a threat. So, I'd like to ask if NATO agrees that this is a threat that comes with the Nord Stream 2 and well, does NATO think that this project should be stopped?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: As you know, there are different views among NATO Allies on Nord Stream 2. We have one pipeline already, Nord Stream 1, and the question is whether there's going to be one more. And Allies have different views on that project and we make decisions in NATO by consensus. What NATO is focused on is the importance of security of supply. Energy is important for all our societies and we are focused on the resilience of the infrastructure project and of energy supplies, and also we welcome all efforts to increase diversification of energy supplies, because that will make our systems and energy supplies more resilient. But regarding the Nord Stream 2 project, there are different views.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll go to the third row, gentleman with glasses.

QUESTION: Good morning. I'd like to go back to the 4 times 30 initiative that you mentioned is going to be at the Summit. I thought you mentioned it's going to be up and standing in 2020. Is it so that there... this new forces is going to be carried out on a specific few members or it's going to be a commitment for all NATO members to take part in? And if you can say something about the interest and the commitment on the allocation of forces, country by country. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The plan is that all Allies should contribute to this Readiness Initiative. But of course different Allies have different capabilities and different size, so the contributions will vary. This is about establishing a culture of readiness. And we need that because we have a more unpredictable security environment. We have to be prepared for the unforeseen and we have to be able to quickly deploy forces to deal with many different challenges and potential crises. But we also have to understand that this is part of an effort which has been ongoing for some time, because we have already tripled the size of the NATO Response Force, we have established the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, a brigade that can move very quickly, and also we have increased our presence in the eastern part of the Alliance. All of that increases the readiness of our forces, but then we need to have additional forces, follow-on forces, and therefore it is important to identify forces, national forces which are ready to move, ready to be used quickly, and that's exactly what we will do by this initiative. And the plan is to have it in place by 2020 and the plan is that all Allies should participate in one way or another.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll go to lady over there, Deutsche Welle NPR.

QUESTION [Deutsche Welle / NPR]: Hi, Teri Schultz with NPR and Deutsche Welle. My question is back to Afghanistan. NGOs have come out with a new report showing that the number of children, and particularly girls, who are not in school in Afghanistan, has risen. This of course was one of the benchmarks that NATO's been proud of, that individual Allies were working toward building schools and making it safe enough for girls to go to school. So, the

fact that this trend is in the wrong direction is, I would guess, very disheartening. I'd like your reaction to that. Thanks.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: The NATO presence in Afghanistan has made it possible for the Afghan government to strengthen the education for young people in Afghanistan, and especially girls. Because when the Taliban was governing in Afghanistan, girls were denied education. Over the last years, we have seen a significant increase the number of boys and girls which... or who attend... or who get education and especially a significant increase in the number of girls. I am not able to confirm... I have read the report about this new report saying that there has been a decrease recently. I'm not able to confirm or to comment on those specific numbers, but of course any report about that we are not moving in the right direction, but are moving in the wrong direction, is of concern. For me, this is only underlining the need to reach a peaceful solution because peace and stability is needed also to be able to build out education and schools. And we have to prevent Taliban from getting control because they are denying... they have as a kind of explicit goal, that they are against education for young girls. But in a country where there is so much fighting, so much instability, it is always difficult to build out education. And therefore, the best answer is to reach a political, negotiated solution, which will then enable also to strengthen the education system in Afghanistan.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We'll go to the front row.

QUESTION: I just want to say congratulations for this building. I just brought the flower, but your team security, they didn't allow me, so... My question is about Turkish military is going to make a operation in North Iraq to against PKK. What's your reaction? Are you going to participate with the Turkish military? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: NATO's presence in Iraq is not in anyway part of any combat operations. What we do there is to train the Iraqi government forces. We have started to do so and we are now planning to scale up the training of Iraqi forces. And I hope that we can... or the plan is to launch a new training mission at our Summit in July. What we do is to support the Iraqi government and we are also of course part of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, which is present in Iraq. But we are not part of those operations that Turkey is conducting.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: We're going to the last row, in the middle.

QUESTION: [Polish Radio]: Concerning to... Secretary General, concerning to what you've said about the new readiness of the troops which you will discuss with the ministers tomorrow and at the Summit, there is a debate on if US independently would establish permanent bases in Poland. One of the Polish Former Minister of Defence asked the United States to establish the permanent bases in Poland. Right now, the case is in one of the commission of the US Congress. What is the view of... your view of such a possibility? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: I think it's a bit too early to comment specifically on that concrete proposal. It remains to be seen exactly what Poland will propose, but... and I spent a whole day in Poland last week, where we discussed NATO and NATO presence, and also of course the issue of US presence in Europe. But what I can say is that we have seen an increase of US military presence in Europe over the last years, because after the Cold War the United States reduced its military presence in Europe. And what we have seen

over the last years is that the US is coming back, both with troops, but also with prepositioned equipment. The last US battle tank left Europe in 2013. Now the US is back with an armoured brigade to Europe, so it shows that things are really changing.

There is already significant presence of NATO in Poland. We have a US-led battlegroup in Poland, so there are US troops leading the battlegroup. Poland is hosting different commands, in Szczecin and also elsewhere. We have the NATO Force Integration unit, or we have one NATO Force Integration unit in Poland and we have also the site which is under construction for ballistic missile defence.

So, there is already NATO presence and US presence in Poland. And then we see that the US is increasing their presence in Europe, I welcome that. But to comment on that specific proposal, I think it's a bit early.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK. Gentleman in the white shirt. Just in front. Thanks.

QUESTION: I am from Belarus, so I will continue the previous question. How do you think... will it lead to increased tension in the region, near the Belarussian borders when the... this base will constructed?

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Everything NATO and NATO Allies do is defensive and it is proportionate. And we have increased our presence in the eastern part of the Alliance as a response to a more difficult and demanding security environment, caused also by the behaviour of Russia, illegally annexing Crimea and destabilising Eastern Ukraine, and a significant military build-up by Russia. That's one of the reasons why we have invested more in defence and also increased the presence of NATO forces in the eastern of the Alliance, including in Poland.

When it comes to Belarus, I welcome the fact that we have a partnership with Belarus. We have a Partnership for Peace dating back to 1995 and we have also established a relationship with Belarus based on that we believe it is important to have chance for dialogue, and Belarus is an individual partnership, or is part of an individual partnership programme, and therefore Belarus is one of the NATO partners.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: OK. One very final question in the first row and then we'll have to wrap this up.

QUESTION: Mr Secretary General, Romanian Media. Staying in the same region, how will the adaptation of NATO's command structure will ensure an efficient and coherent chain of command for the eastern part of the Alliance, for the Eastern Flank? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: So, the whole adaptation of the command structure is about adapting NATO to a situation where we have to be able to react quickly and where we see more challenges and more demands and where we have to be prepared for the unforeseen, a more unpredictable world. Therefore, we will have the new Atlantic Command, making sure that we are able to move forces quickly across the Atlantic in a safe way. That is important for Europe and also for of course the south east of Europe, or Romania. We will have a new Support Command in Germany, Ulm, which will have as its

main focus, how to be able to move forces across Europe. We are now working on military mobility, which about infrastructure, but also removing legal hindrances, for the quick movement of forces. And the main purpose of doing that is to prevent conflict, because as long as we can provide credible and strong deterrence, including the ability to move forces, then we are preventing conflict. And also the high readiness of our forces, the new Readiness Initiative, with 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 battleships ready to move and to be used in less than 30 days, also that is relevant for Romania. And then we will also address an issue which will not be decided now, but that is where we locate something called Land Component Commands. We will not decide that during the Defence Ministerial meeting tomorrow, but that will also be relevant for Romania and the whole of NATO.

OANA LUNGESCU [NATO Spokesperson]: Thank you very much. This concludes this press conference. We'll see you tomorrow at the Ministerial. Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG [NATO Secretary General]: Thank you.

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