

**Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of the North Atlantic Council with Resolute Support operational partner nations at the level of NATO Defence Ministers**

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Good afternoon.

We have just concluded a very constructive meeting with our Resolute Support partners.

We were joined by Afghanistan's Minister of Defence Bahramee.

Together, we addressed the security situation in the country. NATO's continued support for Afghanistan. And the peace process.

NATO Allies and partners aren't just maintaining their contributions to our Resolute Support mission.

They are increasing them.

Based on our discussions today, I am confident that we will agree to extend funding to the Afghan Security Forces to 2024 at next month's Summit.

A strong signal of our long-term commitment to Afghanistan's security. Significant challenges remain. Insurgents continue to use violence against innocent civilians. But in the face of these challenges, Afghan forces are doing an outstanding job. They have been in the lead for three years now. And we see the real progress in their ability to conduct offensive operations. To develop their Special Forces, Air Force and other capabilities. And to deny the Taliban their strategic objectives.

Our aim is to strengthen the Afghan security forces so they can create the conditions for a peaceful solution. An Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process is essential to a long-term, inclusive political settlement.

President Ghani has made a bold proposal for peace talks.

And NATO will continue to do all we can to support that process.

Elections in October will be an important milestone.

And we encourage the Afghan government to continue along the path of reform.

To maintain its fight against corruption.

And to uphold the human rights of all Afghans. We also stressed the need for all countries in the region to play a constructive role. Over the last two days, ministers have paved the way

towards the NATO Summit next month. Taking substantial decisions on deterrence and defence, on projecting stability and fighting terrorism, and on cooperation with the European Union.

This meeting has shown NATO's unity despite any differences or issues such as trade, we continue to stand united around our core task. So I think we once again show that despite disagreements on issues like trade or the Iran nuclear deal, NATO is able to stand united around our core task to protect and defend each other.

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

**Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]:** We'll go to Reuters in the first row.

**Question [Reuters]:** Thank you, Secretary General. You talked about the funding of the Afghan security forces until 2024. In Warsaw, the announcement was for \$1 billion annually. Do you expect that similar funding level to remain and when do you think you'll have a decision on that? Thank you.

**Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]:** The plan is to have a decision on that at the Summit in July and based on what I hear today, where many Allies actually, and partners, announced new commitments, both for trainers and for funding, I'm very optimistic that the heads of state and government will decide to extend the funding to 2024. We haven't yet decided on the exact figures or numbers, but I think that to maintain the same level of support will be natural.

**Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]:** We go to the front row, ATN

**Question [ATN]:** Secretary General, you welcomed President Ghani's week-long ceasefire with the Taliban. During that ceasefire, have your forces, or Afghan forces, noticed mobilisation of Taliban around major cities of Afghanistan that may lead to large attack of Taliban to these cities after ceasefire. Will you still advise our forces to stay in defensive mode? Thank you.

**Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]:** NATO's presence in Afghanistan is in a non-combat mission. We ended our combat mission back in 2015 and since then, the Afghans have been in the lead, they have conducted the combat operations. We have supported them with training, with advice and assistance. And President Ghani and on behalf of the Afghan security forces and army has declared that they will have a unilateral ceasefire and we support his call on Taliban to join this ceasefire. What our troops will do is, of course, if they are attacked to respond in self defence, but NATO supports the ceasefire and of course we support that the ceasefire is upheld and respected in the period it is announced.

**Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]:** We'll go to the second row, 1TV.

**Question [1TV]:** Thank you, Mr Secretary General. My question is regarding the interference of the regional countries and security situation of Afghanistan. Recently, the military ... the US military commanders in Afghanistan expressed their serious concerns regarding the funding of Russia and Iran from the Taliban. Was this issue a topic that has been discussed and is it a concerning thing for you too? Thank you.

**Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]:** It was discussed during the meeting today, the importance of having a regional approach and that all countries in the region have to support an Afghan-led and Afghan-owned peace process. And, therefore, I call on all countries in the region to support the Afghan government, the Afghan government of national unity, in their effort for peace and reconciliation. And in that context, I think it is extremely encouraging to see the bold proposal by President Ghani, to invite Taliban to peace talks without conditions and at the same time, also to announce the ceasefire. So, now it's up to Taliban to show whether they really want peace. What we have stated from NATO is that our presence in Afghanistan is condition based. So, we will be there as long as needed, but of course the purpose of NATO's presence is to create the conditions for a peaceful solution, for reconciliation which is Afghan-owned and Afghan-led, and therefore all countries in the region should support that.

**Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]:** We'll go Salam Watandar.

**Question [Salam Watandar]:** Thank you, this is Nasir Maimanagy from Salam Watandar. NATO welcomed the week-long ceasefire announced by President Ghani. Don't you think one week is a little bit short, especially for the Taliban to come around for a response? And if the Afghan government extends the ceasefire, will NATO support that? Also, do you think the Afghan government should look into extension of the ceasefire? Thank you.

**Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]:** I think it's unprecedented to see an offer as President Ghani has made. First, to sit down with Taliban and negotiate, and then after that he followed up with the unilateral ceasefire, which was also a follow up of the very clear decision by the religious leaders, condemning violence and condemning suicide attacks. So, I think that President Ghani has shown, both with the offer to peace talks, unconditional peace talks, and also the ceasefire, that he is really committed to peace and that he is bold in his way to approach peace and find a path to peace. Then it's up to Taliban and they know that they have an opportunity now to seize the opportunity and to engage in real peace talks.

There's a big difference between Afghanistan and for instance Venezuela, but I met President... sorry, of Columbia, there's a big different between Afghanistan and Columbia and I recently met the President of Columbia and he told me about the peace process there, where they actually were able to talk and fight at the same time, and where he also had a lot of, you know drug trafficking and illegal income from that, so I think actually it is possible to also look to other peace processes where it has been possible to overcome years of conflict and then reach a negotiated peaceful solution.

**Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]:** We'll go to NPR Deutsche Welle.

**Question [Deutsche Welle / NPR] :** Thank you. Teri Schultz. Sorry, I wanted to go back to readiness. And you answered some of these questions in the previous press conference. But when it comes to mobility plus the new four 30s, if the military mobility plans don't move very quickly, doesn't the four 30s plan lose credibility? Because you could conceivably have 30 battalions, which is 30,000 military personnel needing to move at one time. I just want to know how, you know, how... how both of... if you don't move really quickly by 2020, neither can those forces. And also, who is going to pay for this? You mentioned that some of the governments will have to pay themselves, some of it will come from EU funding. But the EU has also said that NATO should not expect that you give them instructions and they pay for it. So, is there a consideration that perhaps Allies could fold some of these upgrades... needed

upgrades into their defence spending, to also help them on the, you know, 2% 20% issues? Thanks.

**Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]:** So, first of all, I am absolutely certain that we will move quickly because that's exactly what NATO has done over the last years. We have implemented the biggest reinforcement to our collective defence since the end of the Cold War. We have tripled the size of the NATO Response Force, as we announced, and within the time limits we set. We decided to deploy four battlegroups in the eastern part of the Alliance. We were able to do that within the time limits we set, within a year. So what we have seen is that NATO is delivering, NATO is adapting, and with the speed and the agility which is needed when we need to adapt quickly, as we are doing now. And therefore I am also absolutely certain that we will deliver now on the new promise, to have 30 battalions, 30 battleships and 30 air squadrons ready within 30 days or less, and to have that in place by 2020.

Then of course we also need infrastructure and some of that will take time, but we have to remember that we don't start in Europe with zero infrastructure. We have roads, we have bridges, we have some airports. So, this is partly about upgrading infrastructure we already have and also about building new infrastructure. And this is part of an ongoing modernisation of the Alliance.

When it comes to funding, I think that of course for EU members it's possible to get some funding from the European Union and I welcome the action plan which the European Union has already put forward. For non-EU Allies, of course they don't expect money from the European Union for their roads and their bridges. But the thing is that we relate to our members, our Allies, and they all have promised to follow up when it comes to military mobility, invest in infrastructure and I am absolutely certain that they will be able to do so.

**Oana Lungescu [NATO Spokesperson]:** OK, thank you very much. This concludes this press conference and I can see Secretary Mattis is already waiting at the top of the stairs. Thank you.

**Jens Stoltenberg [NATO Secretary General]:** Thank you.

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*Zdroje: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_155266.htm?selectedLocale=en](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_155266.htm?selectedLocale=en)*