



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING, 22-23 OCTOBER 2020

Policy Brief

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NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING, 22-23 OCTOBER 2020:
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Agenda

- Strengthening Allied **deterrence and defence**
- Boosting the **resilience** of NATO member states' societies
- Fairer **burden-sharing**
- NATO missions in **Afghanistan** and **Iraq**

Decisions

- **Creation of a NATO Space Centre** in Ramstein, Germany
- **Expansion of the NATO training mission in Iraq** – details to be presented in February 2021

Other discussion themes

- The situation in **the Eastern Mediterranean region**.
- 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on **Women, Peace and Security**

I. COMMITMENT TO DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE

DECISIONS

- Ministers agreed on the:
 - **creation of a NATO Space Centre** at Allied Air Command in Ramstein, Germany, tasked with:
 - **coordination** of Allied space activities;
 - **support** of NATO missions and operations from space, including with communications and satellite imagery; and
 - **protection** of Allied space systems by sharing information about potential threats.

BACKGROUND

- The Secretary General stressed that *“our aim is not to militarise space. But to increase NATO’s awareness of challenges in space.”*
- Secretary General Stoltenberg also noted that *“What happens in space is of great importance for what we can do on the Earth [...]. So this is important for our civilian societies, but also, of course, for military capabilities.”*
- Russia and China are developing capabilities that can blind or destroy satellites.
- As Allies’ space capabilities vary, increased Allied coordination will strengthen the Alliance.
- The number of personnel will be limited in the beginning but an expansion is planned going forward.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- The Ministers assessed progress on their comprehensive response package of political and military measures to strengthen Alliance deterrence.
- In response to the growing Russian missile challenge, NATO continues to improve air and missile defences, and Allies are acquiring new systems, including Patriot and SAMP/T batteries.
- Allies are strengthening their advanced conventional capabilities, investing into new platforms, e.g. fifth-generation fighter aircraft, and adapting intelligence gathering and exercises.
- Allies keep the nuclear deterrent safe, secure, and effective, incl. through the annual exercises.
- Ministers discussed nuclear arms control, incl. with US Ambassador Marshall S. Billingslea, Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control. The Secretary General stressed that NATO remains fully committed to arms control and disarmament. Allies support the extension of the bilateral US-Russian New START agreement and welcomed progress on bilateral talks in recent days. The Secretary

General welcomed that the United States is closely consulting with NATO Allies on the issue of nuclear arms control in general and on New START in particular. Extension of New START provides more time to address other important issues not covered by the agreement and engage with China on arms control.

II. BOOSTING RESILIENCE OF NATO MEMBER STATES' SOCIETIES

DECISIONS

- Ministers agreed to strengthen the resilience pledge when NATO leaders meet next year.

BACKGROUND

- Ministers discussed the importance of national resilience and a report on the state of critical infrastructure, including ports and airports, supplies of fuel, food and medical equipment, and telecommunications, including 5G.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- The Secretary General underlined that resilience underpins NATO's ability to defend itself: "*we cannot have strong armies without strong societies*".
- NATO is playing an important role on national resilience, incl. by setting minimum standards. NATO has updated the baseline requirements for national resilience.
- Progress has been made but vulnerabilities remain, incl. with respect to foreign control of the critical infrastructure upon which Allied societies and militaries rely.
- NATO is also increasing its support to civilian efforts coping with the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Throughout October and November 2020, Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia are receiving dozens of ventilators and a total of about EUR 1.5 Million in medical supplies from the stockpile.

BACKGROUND

- Countries like China are investing aggressively in ports and airports, and Allied telecommunication networks remain vulnerable to attacks from the outside, and being compromised from the inside.
- NATO's military leadership warn the Russian navy is aggressively probing undersea communications cable networks, transmitting the vast majority of global communications data and telecommunications.
- Most cables are privately owned and most locations are publicly known, increasing vulnerability. The new Atlantic Command in Norfolk, USA is tasked to evaluate the threat and countermeasures.
- NATO militaries continue to play a crucial role in supporting national civilian efforts to cope with the pandemic. NATO has an Operational Plan for assisting Allies with the COVID-19 pandemic and has established a financial mechanism to fund support. Allies are helping one another by, for instance, setting up field hospitals and transporting patients.
- NATO coordinates the transportation of equipment, patients, and other material through the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC). NATO has also provided support to partners like Afghanistan and Tunisia, and additional efforts are undertaken through different NATO mechanisms and bilateral assistance.
- For more information and concrete examples of bilateral and NATO assistance to Allies, see the NATO factsheet [NATO's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic](#).

III. FAIRER BURDEN SHARING

DECISIONS

- Ministers discussed progress toward fairer burden sharing across the Alliance.

BACKGROUND

- The [defence spending estimates for 2020](#) show a real increase of 4.3%, marking the sixth consecutive year of increased defence spending by European Allies and Canada.
- Allies are also investing in major new capabilities. “A *majority of Allies now invest 20% or more of defence spending in this area*”, according to Secretary General Stoltenberg.

IV. NATO MISSIONS IN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAQ

DECISIONS

- Ministers agreed to expand the NATO mission in Iraq and tasked military commanders to prepare concrete plans for the next Defence Ministerial in February 2021, in close coordination with the Iraqi government.

DISCUSSIONS

- Ministers discussed **NATO missions and operations**, notably in Afghanistan and Iraq, which have received COVID-19 assistance after requests made through NATO.
- **Afghanistan:**
 - NATO backs the peace talks in Doha. While fragile, these Afghan-owned talks are the best chance for peace in a generation.
 - Allies have adjusted/reduced their presence in Afghanistan to support the peace process, but future adjustments are conditional. Conditions include the reduction of violence by the Taliban and breaking their ties with Al Qaeda. Also, the gains made over the last two decades, especially with regard to women rights, must be preserved.
 - Ministers will continue to assess the situation in Afghanistan to determine future presence. The Secretary General stressed Allies do not want to stay in Afghanistan longer than necessary, but also the importance of not leaving too early, to avoid the country once again becoming a safe haven for international terrorism.
 - Recently, Allies and partners renewed their commitment to provide financial support to the Afghan forces through 2024.
- **Iraq:**
 - The Secretary General expressed concern about the rise in the number and sophistication of attacks against the international presence in Iraq.
 - The Secretary General noted that the NATO mission, significantly reduced in the beginning of the year due to the COVID-19 crisis, is now restored to its earlier size of about 500 personnel.
 - Ministers reiterated the commitment to consult with the Global Coalition and the Iraqi authorities.

ADDITIONAL NOTES

- The aim of NATO’s mission in Iraq is to help build self-sustaining Iraqi forces able to fight terrorism and stabilise their country. The Secretary General noted that the new mission will be “significantly larger” than the current training mission.

V. OTHER DISCUSSION THEMES

- **The situation in the Eastern Mediterranean**

- The Secretary General welcomed the announcement by Greece and Turkey to cancel their respective military exercises, planned for the upcoming week, which will help de-escalate the situation and avoid unintended incidents.
 - Ministers also expressed strong support for the NATO de-confliction mechanism to avoid incidents and accidents in the Eastern Mediterranean. The mechanism might pave the way for progress in exploratory talks under German auspices to resolve the underlying disputes, the Secretary General noted. A resolution should happen at the political level, he said: *“we should not place it solely on the shoulders of the captains of our ships or the pilots of our jets.”*
 - NATO also offers a 24/7 hotline between Greece and Turkey using NATO’s secure communication systems.
- **The 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security**
 - Ministers discussed the 20th anniversary of the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.
 - Ministers assessed what NATO has done to put this agenda into practice and what more need to be done.