



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

30 Nov.–1 Dec. 2021

Policy Brief

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NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING, 30 NOV–1 DEC 2021:
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Agenda

- Russia: military build-up in and around Ukraine
- Ukraine and Georgia
- Belarus: use of migrants to pressure Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania
- NATO's role in support of arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation
- Strategic Concept 2022
- Afghanistan: lessons learned and supporting the fight against terrorism
- Western Balkans: focus on Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina

Additional notes

- Joint NATO-EU visit to Lithuania and Latvia on Sunday 28 November
- A session was held with Georgia and Ukraine's Foreign Ministers.
- NATO Partners Sweden and Finland, as well as EU High Representative attended the discussion on the Western Balkans.

I. RUSSIA: MILITARY BUILD-UP IN AND AROUND UKRAINE

- Ministers discussed **Russia's large and unusual concentration of combat-ready forces and military materiel in and around Ukraine** (incl. heavy equipment, armoured vehicles, tanks, unmanned aerial vehicles and electronic warfare systems). This is the second surge in 2021. In the spring, Moscow engaged in the largest massing of forces since 2014, leaving most of them in place. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stressed that the situation raises tensions, risks miscalculations and "remains fluid and unpredictable." **Russia's intentions are unclear, but the surge in forces and materiel is "unprovoked", "unjustified and unexplained"**, he said.
- Heightened aggressive rhetoric and disinformation from Moscow has accompanied this build-up, which "approach[es] levels last seen in the leadup to Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014," noted US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken during a press conference with Mr Stoltenberg. Secretary Blinken expressed deep concern regarding "**evidence that Russia has made plans for significant aggressive moves against Ukraine**", incl. destabilisation from within and large-scale military operations.
- **NATO's main goal is to deter further Russian aggression against Ukraine, while also remaining prepared to deal with the use of military force by Russia if need be.**
- Ministers called on Russia to **be transparent, de-escalate and reduce tensions**. Mr Stoltenberg made clear that "**Any future Russian aggression against Ukraine would come at a high price**. And have serious political and economic consequences for Russia." Asked about the type of measures Allies would envisage, Mr Stoltenberg listed "economic sanctions, financial sanctions, political reactions, but also as you have seen the readiness of NATO to protect and defend all Allies, as we have done with increased presence in eastern part of the Alliance."
- Ministers made clear that Russia must not misunderstand or miscalculate when it comes to **NATO's resolve to defend and protect all Allies**. "Allies agree that we need to have the plans in place to be sure that we are always able to protect all Allies against any potential threat", Mr Stoltenberg noted, adding "We can of course hope for the best, but we need to be prepared for the worst." To highlight this resolve, the NATO Secretary General **visited the NATO Multinational Battlegroup – Latvia** in Adazi, Latvia, together with Mélanie Joly, Foreign Minister of Canada, which serves as the framework nation for this battlegroup. The battlegroup is the largest of four,

established in 2016 under NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence to strengthen the defence and deterrence posture in the eastern part of the Alliance.

- Mr Stoltenberg made clear that even if Ukraine is not covered by the Alliance's Article 5 collective defence clause, NATO and individual Allies have means to support Ukraine, incl. through **political and practical support**, e.g. capacity building, training, provision of equipment and advice as well as information sharing. **Ministers commended Ukraine for the measured response** to Russia's continued provocations.
- **Allies reaffirmed their commitment to a dual-track approach to Russia**, i.e. maintaining strong defence and deterrence and remaining open for dialogue. **Over the last 18 months, Allies have repeatedly invited Russia to a NATO-Russia Council, but Moscow has yet to answer.** Mr Stoltenberg noted that "dialogue is vital. Unfortunately, Russia has recently decided to cut diplomatic ties with NATO. We call on Russia to reverse this decision. And to re-engage in the NATO-Russia Council."
- See President **Connolly's** statement on the issue [here](#).

II. UKRAINE AND GEORGIA

- On 1 December, **ministers discussed Black Sea security and Russian regional aggression** in a meeting with Foreign Ministers David Zalkaliani of Georgia and Dmytro Kuleba of Ukraine. Both are long-standing and close NATO partners aspiring for membership.
- **Ministers stressed their unwavering support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and Ukraine and the need to remain vigilant to Russia's continued aggressive and destabilising actions** against its neighbours. Again, ministers made clear that Russian aggression would come at a high price, with serious political and economic consequences.
- **Ministers also expressed their continued commitment to enhance their political and practical support** to these NATO Enhanced Opportunity Partners. Allies are, *inter alia*, strengthening their capabilities to defend themselves, increasing training and exercising with NATO, providing maritime support, and sharing information.
- **NATO ministers made clear they stand by their decisions on future membership**, made at the 2008 Summit in Bucharest.
- **Ministers also voiced the importance of further reforms in both countries** to strengthen the rule of law and democracy, fight corruption and transform the defence and security sector.

III. BELARUS: USE OF MIGRANTS TO PRESSURE POLAND, LATVIA, AND LITHUANIA

- Ministers addressed **the Lukashenko regime's hybrid campaign of exploiting vulnerable people to put pressure on Poland, Latvia and Lithuania through forced migration**. Mr Stoltenberg called Lukashenko's actions "cynical" and "inhumane".
- Ministers made clear that **they stand in full solidarity with the Allies affected**. "No Ally stands alone," Mr Stoltenberg underlined. Notably, NATO recently deployed a counter-hybrid team of experts to Lithuania to share information, analysis and experience.
- On this issue, **NATO cooperates closely with the European Union (EU)**, as the crisis affects both organisations and its members. Ahead of the ministerial meeting, Mr Stoltenberg visited Vilnius and Riga, together with Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission. Mr Stoltenberg noted they discussed "how we could

step up our joint work, incl. through a joint NATO-EU declaration, because we are stronger and safer when we work together.”

- Ahead of the ministerial meeting, Mr Stoltenberg discussed the issue with Poland’s President Andrzej Duda.
- In November 2021, Allies suspended all practical civilian and military cooperation with Belarus, but NATO maintains dialogue as necessary.
- See President **Connolly’s** statement on the issue [here](#).

IV. NATO’S ROLE IN SUPPORT OF ARMS CONTROL, DISARMAMENT AND NON-PROLIFERATION

- Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation remain a NATO priority. Allies support the goal of a world without nuclear weapons. However, Allies maintain their position that **“as long as nuclear weapons exist, NATO will remain a nuclear alliance”**.
- The ministers noted their concern about **worrying trends**, such as Russia and China’s efforts to expand their nuclear arsenals, efforts to undermine or abrogate long-standing treaties as well as emerging and disruptive technologies changing the nature of conflict.
- Ministers voiced their determination to **lead a renewed effort to strengthen arms control**, incl. on disruptive technologies and in dialogue with China, because “in a more dangerous world, we need more predictability and more transparency”, Mr Stoltenberg stated.
- Asked by the press about the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) and Germany and Norway’s consideration of attending as observers, Mr Stoltenberg reiterated that all NATO Allies agree not to become parties to the TPNW, because they believe in “balanced, verifiable arms control, not unilateral arms control”. He welcomed the incoming German government’s intention to continue to consult with other Allies on the TPNW.

V. STRATEGIC CONCEPT 2022

- For the first time, Mr Stoltenberg shared his ideas for NATO’s next [Strategic Concept](#). He outlined [five essential elements](#) at the Riga Public Diplomacy Conference just prior to the ministerial meetings.
1. **Protecting our values:** Mr Stoltenberg listed the defence of democratic values as the first priority. His statements on this issue were the strongest so far and very much echoed the NATO PA’s own analysis: “NATO was created to defend democracy, freedom, and the rule of law. These values define who we are. They are not optional [...]. These values are under pressure. Both from outside our Alliance and from within our own nations [...]. So more than ever, we need to demonstrate the strength of our democratic model. And protect our values. Abroad and at home.”
 2. **Reinforcing our military power:** “we must continue to **strengthen and modernise** our deterrence and defence. We need to ensure our militaries are ready and prepared for any threat. With the right equipment. The right training. And the right skills.”
 3. **Strengthening our societies** (societal resilience): “our people and our institutions must be able to better resist and bounce back from attacks. Our infrastructure must be more resilient. And our supply chains more diverse and secure. [...] this must be a collective effort [...] Because we are only as strong as our weakest link.”
 4. **Taking a global outlook:** “NATO is, and will remain, an alliance of Europe and North America. But our region faces global security challenges. They require global awareness and global reach.” To address them, Mr Stoltenberg advocated intensifying

cooperation with NATO's Asia-Pacific partners (Australia, Japan, South Korea and New Zealand); engaging more with other countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America; and further strengthening cooperation with the EU and NATO's partners in Europe.

5. **Building NATO as the institutional link between Europe and North America:** Allies must continue to invest in NATO politically, militarily and financially. "NATO is a powerful idea. [...] But NATO is more than an idea. It is an idea nested in a strong institution."
 - Ministers held a working dinner on 30 November to discuss NATO's key challenges.
 - **A first working draft of the new Strategic Concept is expected in the spring of 2022. NATO Heads of State and Government will endorse the new document at the Madrid Summit in June 2022.**

VI. AFGHANISTAN: LESSONS LEARNED REPORT AND SUPPORTING THE FIGHT AGAINST TERROR

- Following the rapid collapse of the Afghan government and forces in August, a comprehensive political and military assessment was conducted, with the active involvement of Allies and outside experts.
- The assessment's [key recommendations and conclusions](#) should inform NATO's political and military leaders if and when they consider and direct future crisis management operations:
 1. In an increasingly complex security environment, **crisis management should remain a core task for NATO**. Mr Stoltenberg noted the Alliance cannot rule out that similar large military operations will be needed in the future again and should be prepared.
 2. The international community's level of ambition in Afghanistan ultimately extended far beyond degrading terrorist safe havens. In the future, Allies should continuously assess strategic interests, set achievable goals and **remain aware of the dangers of mission creep**.
 3. NATO should ensure training efforts create more **self-sustaining local forces**.
 4. On **consultation**, Mr Stoltenberg welcomed the consultations this year and the joint decision to end the NATO mission, but noted "we would have benefitted from more meaningful discussions on the negotiations of the US-Taliban agreement concluded in February last year."
 5. Based on the experience of the Kabul airlift, NATO should explore how to strengthen its ability to conduct **short-notice, large scale non-combatant evacuation efforts**, either through the NATO Response Force or as a stand-alone force.
 6. Additional recommendations include **maintaining interoperability with partners and greater consideration of political and cultural norms of host nations**, in addition to their **ability to absorb capacity-building and training**.
- NATO achieved its main goal – to prevent Afghanistan from again becoming a safe haven for international terrorist organisations – aims to preserve this gain, by holding the Taliban accountable and being ready to strike from distance, over the horizon.
- NATO ministers agreed to maintain efforts to fight terrorism, incl. through increased efforts on partner training and capacity building, e.g. in Iraq, Jordan and Tunisia.

VII. WESTERN BALKANS: FOCUS ON KOSOVO AND BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

- Ministers discussed security and stability in the Western Balkans, with a focus on the **recent rise in tensions in Kosovo and Bosnia and Herzegovina**, which has been exacerbated by the increase in aggressive rhetoric, stalled reforms and external interference.

- **Ministers noted their resolve to continue to promote regional stability, security, and cooperation.** Further, ministers agreed on the importance of maintaining a strong presence, incl. through NATO's KFOR mission in Kosovo and its offices in Belgrade and Sarajevo.
 - Mr Stoltenberg stressed Allies' strong support for the integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina and concern about Milorad Dodik's "inflammatory rhetoric", which "is just undermining the Dayton Agreement and the efforts to build a stable, multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina".
 - NATO's cooperation in the region with the EU remains essential. Both organisations will continue to hone their abilities to work together to preserve stability and support necessary reforms.
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