



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING

15-16 June 2023

Policy Brief

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NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING,
15-16 JUNE 2023:

KEY TAKEAWAYS

NATO Defence Ministers met in Brussels on 15 and 16 June to prepare for the Vilnius Summit. The meeting was preceded by a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group and a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Commission at the level of Defence Ministers, also attended by the Swedish Defence Minister and the EU High Representative/Vice President. Ministers also held a meeting of the Nuclear Planning Group. In addition, they met for an informal exchange with representatives of defence industries from across the Alliance.

Agenda:

Stepping up and sustaining support to Ukraine

Strengthening NATO's Deterrence and Defence, including new regional plans, building up capabilities and production and a renewed Defence Investment Pledge

Nuclear aspects of the current security environment and the ongoing adaptation of NATO's nuclear deterrence

Decisions

NATO is working to establish a **NATO-Ukraine Council**, with a stated aim to hold the first meeting with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy at the Vilnius Summit

As part of the strengthening of deterrence and defence, **Ministers agreed a new rotational model for air and missile defence.**

They agreed **a substantial increase in capability targets for battle-decisive ammunition.**

They also agreed **the creation of a new NATO Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure** at Allied Maritime Command Northwood.

Additional notes:

In parallel to the ministerial, high-level representatives of Türkiye, Finland, Sweden and NATO were meeting in Ankara to take stock of progress regarding **Sweden's accession to NATO.**

Answering questions from journalists, Jens Stoltenberg reiterated he did not seek an extension of his term as **Secretary General.**

I. STEPPING UP AND SUSTAINING SUPPORT TO UKRAINE

The **NATO-Ukraine Commission (NUC) met on the first day** of the ministerial and addressed further steps to be taken at the Vilnius Summit to support Ukraine. The NUC meeting brought together Allied defence ministers with their Ukrainian counterpart as well as the Swedish defence minister and the EU High Representative/Vice President. It was preceded by a **meeting of the US-led Contact Group for Ukraine**.

Discussing **Ukraine's counteroffensive**, the Secretary General noted that "Ukrainian forces have stepped up operations along the front line, and are making progress – but they face tough terrain, dug-in Russian troops, and fierce fighting". He also highlighted that the support NATO Allies have been giving to Ukraine was making a difference on the battlefield and stressed that "the more gains Ukraine makes, the stronger their hand will be at the negotiating table. The more gains Ukraine makes, the more likely it will be that President Putin realises he cannot win on the battlefield but has to negotiate a just peace."

The Secretary General underlined that **increasing support for Ukraine remains crucial**. He welcomed new announcements from Allies, including the initiative led by the Netherlands and Denmark to start training Ukrainian pilots on F-16 fighter jets and, together with the United Kingdom and the United States, to deliver short- and medium-range air defence missiles.

Addressing NATO's own assistance, Secretary General Stoltenberg welcomed that Allies have so far made contributions and commitments amounting to EUR 500 million to **NATO's Comprehensive Assistance Package**. NATO is also working on a **multi-year package of support** with substantial funding to be adopted at the Summit. This package will help Ukraine to move from Soviet-era to NATO standards, doctrines, and equipment and to be fully interoperable with NATO.

Following up on the informal Foreign Ministers' meeting in Oslo earlier in June, NATO Defence Ministers also discussed **the way forward for Ukraine**. The Secretary General laid out three strands of discussions:

First, the Comprehensive Assistance Package and the multi-year programme help move Ukraine closer to NATO in practical military terms, he noted.

Second, Ministers also discussed new ways to **support Ukraine politically**: they agreed to finalise work to establish a **NATO-Ukraine Council**, where Ukraine and Allies will **consult and decide on security issues on an equal basis**. Explaining the difference between the current commission and a future council, the Secretary General noted: "a Commission, that's the Allies meeting one partner. So in the NATO-Ukraine Commission, we meet 31 Allies with Ukraine. We don't make decisions, we don't have structures. It's a platform to consult with a partner." The Council in turn "will be the 31 Allies and Ukraine sitting around the same table at equal terms. And it will be also a body that can make decisions and we can also have deeper structures under subcommittees and so on." The Secretary General noted that **Allies would work towards holding the first meeting of the new Council in Vilnius, with President Zelenskyy**.

As a third element, Ministers discussed the **issue of Ukraine's future membership**. Summarising Allied consensus, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg stated that: "We all agree that **Ukraine has already moved closer to NATO over the past decade**. We agree that **NATO's door is open**. That **Ukraine will become a member of the Alliance**. And that **it is a decision for Allies and Ukraine to make. Russia does not have a veto**." Answering questions from journalists, the NATO Secretary General noted: "we're not going to discuss an

invitation at the Vilnius Summit, but how we can move Ukraine closer to NATO. And I'm confident that we will find a good solution and consensus at the Vilnius Summit on how to be able to move Ukraine closer to NATO.”

Addressing the issue of **future security arrangements for Ukraine**, the NATO Secretary General stated: “We do not know when this war ends. But when it does, we need to put in place a framework that ensures Ukraine's future security. And make sure that history does not repeat itself.” He noted that **NATO’s multi-year assistance package**, which aimed to assist Ukraine to transition away from Soviet equipment and doctrine, **was one part of that effort**: “we need to fulfill or to implement this big transition and that's a task of NATO, pointing towards a future where we have a much stronger Ukraine.” **As a second layer, he noted “there are also individual NATO Allies, which are discussing bilateral arrangements with Ukraine** that will underpin this same goal, different types of security assurances, frameworks and also to ensure that Ukraine for a long term receives the weapons, the systems they need to defend themselves. And all of this is, of course, with a clear aim to prevent that when this war ends, that we do not only see that Russia rests, reconstitutes, reallocates and then again attacks Ukraine.”

II. STRENGTHENING NATO’S DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE

In response to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Allies decided to **reinforce the four existing multinational battlegroups in the eastern part of the Alliance and add four more**. Allies are also working to **preposition more arms and equipment**, as well as **step up readiness and exercises**, to remain prepared for any potential threat.

At the Vilnius Summit, **Allies are expected to take steps to further strengthen deterrence and defence**.

Ministers reviewed **new regional plans for NATO** which are expected to be agreed at the Vilnius Summit. These introduce changes in NATO’s planning not seen since the Cold War. The Secretary General explained the new plans as follows: “We will have specific forces linked to specific tasks. They will exercise more focussed to protect specific territories of NATO, so there will be a much closer link between plans, capabilities and exercises and dedicated forces to fulfil specific tasks in our collective defence. And, of course, it will require more forces on high readiness, and also therefore more resources.” “As a result, NATO will have over 300,000 troops on high readiness, backed by substantial air and maritime capabilities to defend every inch of Allied territory against any threat”, Mr Stoltenberg added.

Ministers further agreed a **new rotational model for air and missile defence** that will ensure that resources are used in the most effective way and that the Alliance can transition smoothly from air policing to air defence.

Capability needs and the need to ramp up the production of equipment were other key topics. Defence Ministers held an informal exchange with representatives of defence companies from across the Alliance to discuss shortages in ammunition and weapons supplies and how to increase production, secure supply chains and remove barriers to cooperation.

Ministers also reviewed a **new NATO Defence Production Action Plan** to be agreed at the Vilnius Summit. The plan aims to rapidly address shortfalls in Allied stocks with concrete measures to aggregate demand, boost capacity and increase interoperability and interchangeability. It will also enhance the interoperability of Allied ammunition and equipment and support the transatlantic defence and industrial base. The Action Plan builds on USD 1 billion in joint procurement just for 155mm ammunition underway this year by the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA).

Following an exceptional review, Ministers also agreed to substantially **increase capability targets for battle-decisive ammunition** for both Allied needs and assistance to Ukraine, as well as to **step up work on standardisation**.

Regarding **defence spending**, Allies are in the process of agreeing on a **renewed Defence Investment Pledge** for the Vilnius Summit, the Secretary General noted. He expected Allied leaders to agree for the 2% of GDP target to become a floor, not a ceiling and for the new pledge to be stronger, enduring and to come into effect immediately.

Defence Ministers agreed to establish a **new NATO Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure within MARCOM**, the NATO Maritime Command in the UK. "The Centre will increase our situational awareness and enhance maritime presence for deterrence and defence," Stoltenberg said. It will "bring together different Allies to share information, share best practices, and to be able to react if something abnormal happens and then also to ensure that the private sector and the government, the nations are working together", he noted.

During the Ministerial meeting, **Bulgaria, Denmark, Germany and Luxembourg joined NATO's Multinational Ammunition Warehousing Initiative (MAWI)**. This brings the list of MAWI participants to 23 Allies, together with invitee Sweden, as well as the NATO Support and Procurement Agency. MAWI plays a key role for enabling the pre-positioning of adequate munition stockpiles in support of NATO's multinational battlegroups on the Alliance's eastern flank.

Nuclear aspects of the current security environment and the ongoing adaptation of NATO's nuclear deterrence

In the context of the Ministerial meeting, the Nuclear Planning Group discussed how to continue to ensure that NATO's nuclear deterrence remains safe, secure and effective in a more dangerous world.

Secretary General Stoltenberg noted that "Russia has continued its reckless nuclear rhetoric as part of its war against Ukraine. It has suspended the implementation of the New START Treaty. And has announced its intention to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus." In addition, "Iran and North Korea continue their nuclear and missile development programmes (...) At the same time, China continues its rapid and opaque nuclear expansion." "These challenges are of great concern to NATO", Stoltenberg said, adding that NATO continued to adapt its nuclear deterrence to the changing security environment.

Asked repeatedly about **Russia's plans to deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus**, the Secretary General noted that "we take it seriously when Russia has announced they will deploy nuclear weapons to Belarus. We have seen some preparations going on. We will monitor closely what they are doing and we will remain vigilant." He also noted this was part of a broader pattern of nuclear messaging, modernisation and posturing by Russia over a longer period. At the same time, he stressed that: "So far, we haven't seen any changes in the Russian nuclear posture, deployments, which requires any changes in our posture, but we will constantly assess what to do, and this was also one of the issues discussed in the Nuclear Planning Group today".

III. ADDITIONAL NOTES

Sweden's accession to NATO

At the same time as the ministerial meeting, high-level officials of **Türkiye, Sweden, Finland and NATO met in Ankara in the framework of the Permanent Joint Mechanism**. Asked about the outcome of this meeting, the Secretary General noted that it “did not, of course, solve all the remaining issues, but it happened and was conducted in a constructive atmosphere.” He reiterated his view that “actually Sweden has delivered. And that's also the message from Allies, most Allies in the meeting today, that Sweden is ready to be ratified”, while noting that “we need to realize that Türkiye has some legitimate security concerns. No other NATO Ally has suffered more terrorist attacks.” The Secretary General concluded that: “It is possible to get Sweden in by the Vilnius Summit. I cannot guarantee you that that will happen. But I'm still working hard to ensure the accession of Sweden as soon as possible.”

NATO Secretary General

Asked repeatedly by journalists whether he would consider staying beyond the planned end of his mandate, Jens Stoltenberg reiterated that “I have stated again and again that I don't seek extension and there are no other plans than to end my work and my tenure ends this Fall”.

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