



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING

28-29 November 2023

Policy Brief

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NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING,
28-29 NOVEMBER 2023:
KEY TAKEAWAYS

NATO Foreign Ministers met in Brussels from 28 to 29 November to discuss the further strengthening of **NATO's defence and deterrence**, to advance Allied **support for Ukraine**, to assess the impact of **the war in the Middle East** as well as to exchange on priorities for **the upcoming NATO Summit** in Washington, D.C. in July 2024. On 28 November, NATO Foreign ministers held a joint session with the **European Union's High Representative** for Foreign and Security Policy to discuss the situation in **the Western Balkans**. The **NATO-Ukraine Council (NUC)** met for the first time at Foreign ministers' level on 29 November and issued a [joint statement](#).

Agenda

- **Enhancing Ukraine's military capabilities and supporting reforms**
- **Strengthening defence and deterrence**
- **Challenges emanating from the southern neighbourhood and the situation in the Middle East**
- **China's challenge to Allied security and values**
- **Situation in the Western Balkans**
- **Swedish membership in NATO**

Additional issue

- **Russia's use of migration against Finland**

Decisions

- **Ministers endorsed the NUC substructure and an ambitious work programme with Ukraine for 2024. Allies provided Ukraine with recommendations for priority reforms.**
- **Allies approved NATO's first-ever quantum strategy aiming to strengthen NATO cyber security.**
- **It was announced that Allies recently decided to upgrade NATO's AWACS fleet – one of the Alliance's biggest-ever capability purchases.**

I. SUPPORTING UKRAINE'S DEFENCE EFFORT AND REFORMS

- The NATO-Ukraine Council, meeting for the first time at Foreign Ministers' level on 29 November, adopted a [statement](#) reaffirming Allies and Ukraine's determination to "act together to further deepen the NATO-Ukraine relationship".
- Foreign Ministers reiterated their steadfast commitment to supporting Ukraine "**for as long as it takes**", as Ukraine fights for its sovereignty and "territorial integrity within its **internationally recognised borders**".
- Ministers took stock of the implementation of the expanded **support package** agreed at the Vilnius Summit. They endorsed the **NUC substructure** and an ambitious work programme for 2024, noting that within NUC, Allies and Ukraine are already taking decisions together **as equals**.
- More specifically, within the NUC, Allies and Ukraine are working "on a broad range of issues, including **interoperability, energy security, innovation, cyber defence, and**

resilience.” The NUC is also being used as a **crisis consultation mechanism.** The Alliance is committed to continue providing **non-lethal support** to Ukraine.

- As agreed in Vilnius, work is underway to transform the **Comprehensive Assistance Package into a multi-year programme** to support the Ukrainian security and defence sector in the long term. This includes developing a **roadmap for Ukraine’s transition to full interoperability with NATO.** Allies are also developing **new projects on humanitarian demining, medical rehabilitation, and Ukraine’s defence industrial capacity.**
- **Individual NATO Allies** continue providing unprecedented support to Ukraine’s defence effort. Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg singled out **the recent decisions by Germany and The Netherlands to pledge 8 and 2 billion euros respectively in support for Ukraine in 2024.** He also highlighted the opening of an **F-16 training centre for Ukrainian pilots in Romania,** the deliveries of **additional air defences and ammunition** from Allies including the US and Finland, as well as the establishment of an **air defence coalition for Ukraine,** which includes 20 Allies.
- With regard to **Ukraine’s NATO integration,** Allies reiterated support for Ukraine as it conducts reforms “on its path **towards future membership in NATO**”. Ministers welcomed the presentation of Ukraine’s **adapted Annual National Programme for 2024** and committed to **regularly assess progress** in implementing it.
- Importantly, Allies have provided Ukraine with **recommendations for priority reforms,** including fighting corruption, strengthening the rule of law, human rights and minority rights. This echoes the text of [Resolution 487](#), **adopted at the recent NATO PA Annual session** in Copenhagen, urging Allies, inter alia, to “**define clearly the reforms to be implemented** by Ukraine to meet the conditions for NATO membership referred to in the Vilnius Summit Communiqué” as well as to “**pro-actively use NATO-Ukraine partnership mechanisms,** including the NATO-Ukraine Council, to help Ukraine meet the conditions for membership as soon as possible”. The Secretary General said he was **impressed by Ukraine’s ability to conduct reforms,** including on anti-corruption, despite the war.
- It is notable that, during his statements, **the Secretary General** repeatedly stressed that **Ukraine “prevailed as a sovereign independent nation”**, it was able to liberate 50% of the territories seized by Russia and is inflicting “major losses on Russia”. He contrasted this with Russia’s failures, and noted that **Russia “is now weaker politically, militarily, and economically”**, as it lost “a substantial part of its conventional forces” and sustained “more than 300,000 casualties”. Russia is also losing its global and regional influence, it is increasingly dependent on China, its oil and gas revenues are dropping and some 1.3 million people left Russia last year. Yet, the Secretary General cautioned not to underestimate the Russian threat as “**Russia’s economy is on a war footing**” and “**Putin has a high tolerance for casualties**”. Russia has **amassed a large missile stockpile** and is bound to **strike Ukraine’s energy infrastructure this winter,** he warned.

II. NATO DEFENCE AND DETERRENCE

- Foreign Ministers addressed the importance of **technological innovation** and approved **NATO’s first-ever quantum strategy.** The Secretary General stressed that quantum technologies can strengthen Allied cyber security, but they can also be misused by malign actors. The new NATO strategy aims to help Allies to **seize the opportunities presented by these technologies,** “**while preventing competitors from using these technologies against us**”, Mr Stoltenberg said.
- The Secretary General also announced that, earlier this month, Allies agreed to **upgrade NATO’s AWACS fleet** with six new Boeing E-7A Wedgetail aircraft, expected

to be produced and enter service by 2031. This project is **one of NATO's biggest-ever capability purchases** and it will contribute substantially to Allied integrated air and missile defence. Mr Stoltenberg stressed that this project **“shows the strength of transatlantic defence cooperation”** as well as **“demonstrates how NATO adds value by pooling resources** to deliver major new capabilities for our security”.

- Ahead of the meeting for Foreign ministers, **US Secretary of State Antony Blinken** said that Allied representatives **“will be looking to the summit next year in Washington** to celebrate the 75th anniversary of NATO,” but also **“to carry the Alliance forward,** including with the commitments that its members are making to our collective defence.”

III. THREATS AND CHALLENGES FROM THE SOUTH – SITUATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

- Foreign ministers discussed **challenges emanating from NATO's southern neighbourhood**. The Secretary General stressed that he has appointed **[an independent group of experts](#)** to review **NATO's approach** to southern partners. They will submit **recommendations by next spring**, focusing on what more NATO can do to prevent crises, fight terrorism, and enhance stability in the southern neighbourhood.
- Allies expressed concern about the **war in the Middle East**. The Secretary General **welcomed the extension of the pause** in hostilities between Israel and Hamas, which has allowed the release of more hostages, and the delivery of more humanitarian aid to Gaza. He called for a **further extension of the pause**.
- The Secretary General stressed that **NATO as an organisation does not play a direct role in the Israel-Palestine conflict**, but some Allies are active in different ways. However, **NATO is present in the wider Middle East region**, including through a training mission in Iraq and close partnerships with many countries in the MENA and Gulf regions. He emphasised NATO's message that **this conflict should not escalate to a bigger regional conflict** and **urged Iran to “rein in its proxies”** after a series of strikes against US forces in Iraq and Syria.

IV. RESPONDING TO CHALLENGES POSED BY CHINA

- **Foreign Ministers also addressed the challenges that China presents to Euro-Atlantic security**. The Secretary General stressed that **“China is not our adversary”**, and **welcomed the recent discussions with Beijing on issues of mutual concern**, including climate change and arms control.
- However, the Secretary General noted that **Beijing's actions challenge Allied security**. He expressed concern that **“China is heavily modernizing their armed forces”**, **coerces neighbours, collaborates with Russia, invests heavily in new disruptive technologies and demonstrates disregard for human rights**. He stressed that Allies **“must work together to respond”** and noted as an example NATO's efforts over the last years to **maintain its technological edge**, including through a new innovation fund and a network of centres to develop technology. He expected the

Alliance's **China strategy to be further elaborated at the upcoming summit** in Washington, D.C.

- Mr Stoltenberg stressed the need to **work more closely with partners the Indo-Pacific**, particularly Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the Republic of Korea, “to stand up for our values and interests”.

V. THE WESTERN BALKANS

- **Foreign Ministers discussed the evolving security situation in the Western Balkans in a joint meeting with the EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell.**
- The Secretary General condemned the **acts of violence in Kosovo** earlier this year. He highlighted the **importance for all sides to de-escalate** and to refrain from inflammatory rhetoric. The Secretary General stressed that he repeated this message during his recent meetings in Pristina and in Belgrade, calling both sides to **engage in good faith in the EU-facilitated dialogue.**
- Mr Stoltenberg and Mr Borrell stressed the importance of the **cooperation between the European Union and NATO in Kosovo**, including the north of Kosovo. The EU is in charge of the diplomatic efforts, while NATO has increased its presence by adding some 1,000 troops to **KFOR**, which is now **roughly 5,000-strong**. According to the Secretary General, NATO is “**examining a more enduring increase of our peacekeeping contingent**” in Kosovo.
- The Secretary General also expressed concern about **divisive and secessionist rhetoric in Bosnia and Herzegovina**. He stressed that “**we cannot allow a security vacuum in Bosnia and Herzegovina**”, and reiterated **NATO’s commitment to support the EU’s EUFOR Althea mission**, including through NATO’s military headquarters in Bosnia and Herzegovina. He welcomed the renewal of the UN mandate for EUFOR Althea.

VI. SWEDEN’S ACCESSION PROCESS

- **Swedish Foreign Minister Tobias Billström participated in the NATO Foreign ministerial as an Invitee.**
- The Secretary General said that Allied ministers “had a good discussion” on the Swedish accession process that they **supported the finalisation of ratification “as soon as possible”**. He welcomed that **President Erdoğan has submitted the papers for ratification to the Turkish parliament**, and that the parliamentary foreign relations committee has started the deliberations on that document. He noted that the very fact that President Erdoğan submitted the necessary papers for ratification, as agreed in Vilnius, implied that “he actually recommended ratification”.
- The Secretary General reiterated that **Türkiye has legitimate security concerns** that need to be addressed. But he also stressed that **Sweden has delivered on what it promised**, including stepping up intelligence cooperation with Türkiye and removing restrictions on arms exports. He emphasised that **Sweden’s membership “will be good for all NATO Allies”**.

VII. RUSSIA’S USE OF MIGRANTS AGAINST FINLAND

- Ahead of the ministerial, the Secretary General denounced Russia’s attempts “to destabilise our democracies, with cyber-attacks, disinformation, energy blackmail, and

even migration". He **condemned Moscow's actions facilitating the arrival of migrants at Finland's border** with Russia, thus **using migration as a tool** to put pressure on a NATO Ally. He stressed that **"NATO stands in solidarity with our Ally Finland."** He said he was in close contact with the Finnish government, and **NATO is following the situation very closely**, but he noted that Helsinki has so far not requested NATO's involvement in the situation. The Secretary General was confident that the Finnish authorities are able to deal with this situation themselves, **with the support of the EU Border Agency, Frontex.**

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