NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

MEETING OF NATO MINISTERS OF DEFENCE

17-18 October 2024

Policy Brief

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MEETING OF NATO MINISTERS OF DEFENCE, 17-18 OCTOBER 2024: KEY TAKEAWAYS

NATO Ministers of Defence convened in Brussels on 17-18 October, marking **the first ministerial meeting following the Washington Summit** and **Mark Rutte's inaugural ministerial meeting** as NATO Secretary General.

- One session was held with **the defence ministers of New Zealand, Australia, Japan and the Republic of Korea**—participating for the first time in such a meeting—along with representatives from **the European Union**.
- A meeting of the **NATO-Ukraine Council in the Defense Ministers' Session** was held as well.

Focus of the Meetings
- **Allied deterrence and defence**
  - Implementation of NATO's defence plans
  - Strengthening of air and missile defence
  - Introduction of a new NATO initiative on standardisation
- **Progress on support for Ukraine**
  - Establishing NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU)
  - Fulfilling the agreed financial pledge for military assistance to support Ukraine's defence efforts
- **Deepening NATO's relations with Indo-Pacific partners**
- **Review of NATO operations in Iraq and Kosovo**

Additional notes
- NATO established **an initiative to foster secure data sharing**.
- Participating nations launched **five new multinational High Visibility Projects to enhance interoperability** and continued progress on two existing Projects.
- **A meeting of the force-contributing members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS** took place on the sidelines of the ministerial.

I.   ALLIED DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE

Implementation of NATO's new defence plans
- **Defence Ministers continued discussions on the implementation of NATO's defence plans**.
- **NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte emphasised that Allies need "to move further and faster to meet the growing threats we face,"** stating that "this requires more forces, capabilities, and investment to meet the ambitious targets set by our defence plans."
- **Mark Rutte identified expanded defence industrial capacity, more robust supply chains and the integration of new technologies as critical priorities** to ensure the Alliance's resilience across all domains. "We have already made progress across all these lines of effort, but more really needs to be done," he cautioned.

Strengthening air and missile defence
- **Russia's war against Ukraine has led to multiple violations of NATO airspace.** Mark Rutte cited an incident which occurred during the ministerial when a small flying object—likely a drone—had breached the country's airspace, penetrating up to 14km inland near Constanta. NATO Defence Ministers expressed solidarity with Romania and praised the Romanian authorities and SACEUR for their swift and effective response.
- **Defence Ministers agreed to continue increasing surveillance, sharing information, and coordinating individual and collective responses to such violations**.
- **NATO has significantly strengthened its presence and air policing mission on the eastern flank**. Allies plan to acquire thousands of air defence and artillery systems and hundreds of advanced combat aircraft. They are also replenishing stocks of missile defence systems, including with 1,000 Patriot missiles. Allies are also stepping up training and exercises, and the new Aegis Ashore missile defence base in Poland enhances the Alliance's ability to counter the global threat of ballistic missiles.

New NATO initiative on standardisation
- **Allied Defence Ministers agreed on a new NATO initiative focused on standardisation** to accelerate the development of NATO standards, improve their implementation and broaden their scope to include innovative military capabilities.
- Further announcements are expected at the February 2025 meeting of NATO Ministers of Defence.

II.   SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

- Having visited Kyiv on his first official trip as Secretary General just two weeks prior, **Mark Rutte reaffirmed NATO's unwavering support for Ukraine**, emphasising that the Alliance stands "shoulder-to-shoulder" with Ukraine now and in the future.

Establishment of a new NATO command to coordinate security assistance and training for Ukraine
- NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte confirmed that **progress is well underway in establishing the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU)**, a new NATO command dedicated to coordinating international security assistance and

training for Ukraine. He highlighted his recent visit to Wiesbaden, Germany, where the new command is being set up.

- **The command is expected to be fully operational in the coming months.** "This will enable Allies to provide more coordinated and consistent support for Ukraine, for the long term," he stated.

Financial pledge for military assistance

- The Secretary General emphasised that **Allies are firmly on course to fulfil their financial pledge of EUR 40 billion in security assistance to Ukraine**, as agreed at the Washington Summit.

- He stated that "**NATO Allies provided EUR 20.9 billion in military assistance to Ukraine during the first half of 2024, and Allies are on track to meet their commitments for the rest of the year**."

- **He also welcomed additional pledges made by Allies and partners** in the days leading up to the Ministerial meeting, highlighting specific contributions including:
  o the pledge announced by the **United States** on 16 October to provide USD 425 million in military assistance, including additional air-defence capability, air-to-ground munitions, armoured vehicles and critical munitions; and
  o **Australia's** decision to send 49 Abrams tanks under a USD 245 million military support package.

NATO-Ukraine Council meeting

- **NATO Defence Ministers convened with their Ukrainian counterpart**, Rustem Umerov, during a NATO-Ukraine Council meeting **to discuss the current battlefield situation and Ukraine's most pressing needs**, including equipment and training.

- **President Zelenskyy also addressed the Ministers**, expressing gratitude for NATO's ongoing support and emphasising Ukraine's most urgent requirements. The President provided an overview of his plan for ending the war.

Meeting between the NATO Secretary General and President Zelenskyy

- **The NATO Secretary General met with President Zelenskyy on the sidelines of the Defence Ministerial**.

- They discussed the current situation in Ukraine and the progress NATO has made on decisions taken at the Washington Summit.

- The Secretary General also briefed President Zelenskyy on "all the ongoing efforts to ensure that, for the long haul if necessary, we will keep supporting Ukraine."

- Mark Rutte reiterated that Ukraine's path to NATO membership is irreversible, emphasising that **"Ukraine will be member of NATO, there is no doubt about it, and until that happens we will make sure that Ukraine has everything it needs to prevail."**

III. DEEPENING NATO'S RELATIONS WITH INDO-PACIFIC PARTNERS

- **For the first time, representatives from New Zealand, Australia, Japan and the Republic of Korea participated in a Defence Ministerial meeting**, together with the European Union.

- **Ministers exchanged views on the current global security situation**, focusing on strengthening the relationship between NATO and these countries. Discussions centred

on **enhancing cyber defences, defence production, innovation, countering disinformation and leveraging new technologies**, including artificial intelligence.

- **Allied Ministers also discussed** with their New Zealand, Australian, Japanese and Korean counterparts **their cooperation to support Ukraine**.

- Secretary General **Mark Rutte emphasised the importance of the values shared** between NATO Allies and these four nations, stating that their presence "demonstrates our commitment to working with our like-minded partners to defend our values and interests." **He added, "We are determined to work ever more closely together to defend our democratic values and to promote a world based on the rule of law, not the rule of force."**

- Mark Rutte highlighted that "In a more interconnected world, it is vital that we tackle our shared security challenges together. **The growing alignment of authoritarian actors like China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran is undermining stability in the Euro-Atlantic and in the Indo-Pacific regions."**

- **The Secretary General underscored the global implications of instability in Europe**, stating, "The war in Ukraine has shown that instability in Europe can have far-reaching consequences across the world, and that countries thousands of miles away […] can become security spoilers in our own backyard. Our world is closely linked – and so is our security."

IV.   REVIEW OF NATO OPERATIONS IN IRAQ AND KOSOVO

- **Defence Ministers also reviewed the status of NATO's current operations and missions in Kosovo and Iraq.**

- **Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the Kosovo Force (KFOR)**, praising its vital role in maintaining a safe and secure environment for all people in Kosovo and ensuring freedom of movement.

- **The NATO Secretary General expressed concern about the situation in the Western Balkans**, noting, "The situation in the Western Balkans remains concerning, with secessionist threats in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a fragile security situation in Kosovo, and little progress made in the EU-facilitated Belgrade-Pristina dialogue," while highlighting Russia's attempts to undermine democracies in the region through hybrid tactics.

- **The discussion also included the work of the NATO Mission in Iraq**, which aims to promote security and stability in the country by supporting its security institutions at the request of the Iraqi authorities.

V.   ADDITIONAL NOTES

Creation of an initiative to foster secure data sharing

- **NATO established the Alliance Data Sharing Ecosystem (ADSE)** for defence and security, a key initiative supporting NATO's digital transformation and the rapid adoption of dual-use technologies. It aims to **ensure NATO maintains its technological edge and military effectiveness by securing access to AI-ready, high-quality data.**

- The ADSE will focus on four priority areas: securing critical undersea infrastructure, enhancing geospatial awareness, improving information environment assessment and strengthening maritime situational awareness.

Multinational High Visibility Projects

- **Five new multinational High Visibility Projects were launched, which will involve a total of 26 Allies** and will help deliver critical capabilities that will enhance interoperability among NATO forces:[1]
    - o **A project to accelerate the delivery of new generation Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems**.
    - o **A project to increase the interchangeability and interoperability of key Allied artillery munitions**.
    - o **The Distributed Synthetic Training Environment project to respond to the ever-growing demand for virtual training**.
    - o **The NORTHLINK project to explore the development of a secure, resilient, and reliable multinational Arctic satellite communications capability**.
    - o **The STARLIFT initiative to investigate ways to strengthen NATO's access to and use of space**.
- **Two existing projects were also advanced by participating nations**:
    - o **The Next Generation Rotorcraft Capability**, which seeks to replace medium multi-role capabilities ending their life cycle in 2035 and beyond.
    - o **NATO's cross-border airspace cooperation**, which aims to foster civil-military cooperation for NATO training, exercises and other activities.

Ministerial of the force contributing members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS

- On the sidelines of the Defence Ministerial, **contributing members of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS convened for their tenth anniversary meeting at NATO Headquarters.**
- During a press conference alongside US Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III, the **NATO Secretary General emphasised, "NATO is strongly committed to countering terrorism in all its forms and manifestations."**
- At the NATO Summit in Washington in July, Allied leaders agreed on a new action plan outlining NATO's role in the international community's fight against terrorism. Moreover, NATO appointed a Special Coordinator for Counter-Terrorism in 2023 and a Special Representative for the Southern Neighbourhood in 2024.

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[1]   For participating nations, please refer to the NATO press release.