



NATO seeks faster military movement across Europe and two new military commands to counter Russian threat:

A review of the NATO Defence Ministers meeting, Brussels, 8-9 November 2017

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Key decisions taken:

- An outline decision was taken to adapt the NATO Command Structure, with two new commands—an Atlantic Command and a Logistics Command—to improve the movement of troops across the Atlantic and within Europe (final decisions are expected at the February 2018 ministerial).
- It was agreed to create a new Cyber Operations Centre as part of the outline design for the adapted NATO Command Structure.
- The number of NATO troops in Afghanistan will be increased from about 13,000 to 16,000 in 2018 to strengthen the Resolute Support Mission (to train, assist and advise Afghan Security Forces). It was also agreed to continue funding Afghan Security Forces until at least 2020.
- Finland, Hungary and the United Kingdom joined a long-standing multinational effort to acquire Air-to-Ground Precision Guided Munitions.

Summary of the Ministerial Meeting

The two-day Meeting agenda was focused on four main issues: an update on NATO's nuclear weapons policy (as part of a regular discussion held under the Nuclear Planning Group); a review of NATO's Command Structure and cyber defences; a discussion of global threats, including North Korea; and a review of the [mission in Afghanistan](#). There was also a side meeting of the [Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS](#) hosted by the US defence Secretary.

In advance of the ministerial meeting, a welcome briefing was given on 7 November by NATO's Deputy Spokesperson and the Head of Media Operations and later in the day, a pre-ministerial [press conference](#) was held by the NATO Secretary General. The day concluded with a media background briefing on NATO cyber security.

The first day of the ministerial meeting (8 November) began with a general [doorstep statement](#) by the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and this was followed by three bilateral meetings between Stoltenberg and the Defence Ministers of Turkey and Norway, and the US Defence Secretary. No details of the discussions were made public. In mid-afternoon, the NATO [Nuclear Planning Group](#) met in Defence Ministers' session, and as is the

convention for this Group, there was no information publicly available.

The defence ministers then switched hats to become the North Atlantic Council for the second substantive meeting of the day, which began at 15.45 and ended with an official portrait of the ministers at 18.00. Aside from a few [opening remarks](#) by the NATO Secretary General, that meeting was also a closed session. The day concluded with a [press conference](#) by the NATO Secretary General and a doorstep statement by the EU High Representative.

The second day of the ministerial began with a closed bilateral meeting between Stoltenberg and the new UK Defence Minister and was followed by a [signing ceremony](#) for new partners joining the Multinational Cooperation on Air-to-Ground Precision Guided Munitions.

At 9.30 the defence ministers once again met as the North Atlantic Council alongside their counterparts from Resolute Support operational partner nations. Again, outside of the Secretary General's [opening remarks](#), this was a closed

session. Four press conferences followed as a conclusion to the ministerial meeting: one each by the [NATO Secretary General](#), the US Secretary of Defense, the [Commander of the Resolute Support Mission](#) and the acting Afghan Minister of Defence. However, while not part of the official NATO programme, the defence ministers then took part in a Meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.

The following more detailed analysis of key aspects of the ministerial meeting draws on a combination of the above links, wider press reporting of the ministerial meeting and NATO Watch insights in attempt to fill the information gaps.

An adapted NATO Command Structure and improved cyber defences

At the Warsaw Summit in 2016, NATO leaders agreed to launch an assessment of the NATO command structure considering the changed security environment. At the end of the Cold War, there were 22,000 personnel working in the NATO command structure, with 33 different commands. NATO's Allied Command Atlantic (ACLANT) and Allied Command Europe (ACE) served as the sea and land operational commands, [but in 2002 these were broken up](#) as the alliance reduced its command structures and focused on functionality over geography. Currently, NATO has around 6,800 people working in the NATO command structure at seven commands, which partly reflects the post-Cold War focus on out-of-area expeditionary military operations. The aim of

the assessment was to seek to adapt the command structure to continue the focus on expeditionary operations while at the same increasing the focus on collective defence in Europe.



(Signing ceremony: Air-to-Ground Precision Guided

Munitions Project – Jussi Niinisto (Minister of Defence, Finland); Claus Hjort Frederiksen (Minister of Defence, Denmark); NATO Deputy Secretary General Rose Gottemoeller; Istvan Simickso (Minister of Defence, Hungary); Gavin Williamson (UK Secretary of State for Defence); and Peter Dohmen (NSPA General Manager) – photo credit: NATO)

At the ministerial meeting, NATO defence ministers gave outline support for two new military headquarters: an Atlantic command to pursue maritime security and protect sea lanes from submarine threats to North American reinforcements of Europe; and a logistics command to improve the movement of troops and equipment within Europe. While not explicitly stated, these changes are clearly designed to help protect Europe in the event of a conflict with Russia. NATO has already put four battalion-size battle groups on rotation in

the Baltic states and Poland, strengthened its presence in the Black Sea and sought to modernize its forces. This latest decision potentially lays the groundwork for a further expansion of NATO in Europe.

(Jim Mattis, US Secretary of Defense, talking with Gavin Williamson, UK Minister of Defence, at the meeting of the NATO Defence Ministers during a North Atlantic Council session on 8 November 2017 – photo credit: NATO)



“This is vital for our transatlantic alliance,” NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said. “It is about how to move forces across the Atlantic and how to move forces across Europe”. Rather ironically, just as the barriers are going up to freedom of movement across Europe and ‘austerity economics’ rules the public purse in many European countries, NATO defence ministers are trying to remove national barriers to the movement of heavy military equipment across borders, as well as looking to improve civilian infrastructure, such as roads, bridges, railways, runways and ports. Since many of the means of transportation are in private hands, increased cooperation with private companies is envisaged. Increased coordination between the EU and NATO is also anticipated, with the Secretary General suggesting that “military mobility could become a real flagship of NATO-EU cooperation”. (Separately, 23 EU member states [agreed a new defence pact](#), known as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), on the 13 November, which is expected to strengthen military cooperation within the EU, especially in relation to military logistical resources and joint emergency response forces. The NATO Secretary General [welcomed](#) PESCO, while stressing the need for complementarity).

The proposed two additional commands will now be discussed in detail by military commanders, with further proposals (including their cost and location) to be put to ministers in February 2018. Germany is apparently eager to host the logistics command and the United

States seems the most likely location for the Atlantic command (although within the UK, [questions have been tabled](#) by the SNP as to whether Scotland is under consideration for the command). Aleksandr Grushko, Russia's envoy to NATO, [told Russian](#)

[news agencies](#) on 9 November that the new arrangements amount to a return to Cold War defences. "NATO members were apparently inspired by Cold War-era strategies," and have adopted "a copy of the structure which existed until 2002," Grushko was quoted as saying.

The US Commander of US Army Europe, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, has [repeatedly called](#) for European allies to establish a military zone that would enable convoys to cross national borders freely during peacetime. US forces on European training exercises complain, for example, of delays by various customs rules that they must comply with as they move between countries. A [NATO internal report](#) seen by German news outlet *Der Spiegel* in October concluded that NATO's ability to rapidly deploy throughout Europe had "atrophied since the end of the Cold War".

Finally, following steps last year to [recognise cyber as an operational domain](#) along with land, sea and air, Ministers endorsed a set of principles for how the alliance can integrate the cyber capabilities of its allies into NATO military operations, and agreed to create a new Cyber Operations Centre as part of the outline design for the adapted NATO Command Structure. "We must be just as effective in the cyber domain as we are on land, at sea, and in the air, with real-time understanding of the threats we face and the ability to respond however and whenever we choose," said Stoltenberg. While the NATO Secretary General stressed that the use of cyber capabilities would always adhere to international law, the “principles” agreed by Defence Ministers have not yet been made publicly available.

More troops to Afghanistan

According to NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, the meeting between NATO defence ministers and Resolute Support partners, together with Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Defence Bahrami, addressed four key issues: the troop level of the mission, funding for the Afghan forces, progress on reforms and reconciliation, and continued engagement with Pakistan. Currently, around 13,000 troops from 39 different countries serve in NATO's Resolute Support Mission, which commenced in January 2015. Ministers from the United Arab Emirates and Qatar also joined the meeting and are said to be seeking to contribute to the mission.

As part of its [new South Asia Strategy](#) announced in August, the US troop contribution has already increased and according to the NATO Secretary General, 27 other nations have also committed to increase troop numbers in the coming months. Turkey, for example, is [reportedly](#) sending 50 additional troops to serve as advisers at Afghan military training centres and 47 for a 'quick-reaction' rescue based at the airport in Kabul. Additional Turkish police trainers and troops who maintain aircraft may also be added.

(Press conference by General John Nicholson, Commander Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan – photo credit: NATO)

Although many nations that offered additional troops in Brussels still have to go through their own national approval processes, the size of the Resolute Support Mission is expected to increase, from around 13,000 to around 16,000 troops (roughly half from the United States and half from NATO and partner countries). Welcoming the strengthened support, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg said, "This year, the Afghan security forces have denied the Taliban their strategic objective of capturing a

provincial capital. They have kept up the pressure on insurgents across the country and NATO remains committed to supporting them, as they develop their capabilities, strengthen command and control, and prepare the next generation of military leaders".

Stoltenberg added that NATO remained committed to funding the Afghan security forces until at least 2020. In addition to the significant US contribution, other NATO allies and partners will continue to provide almost a billion US dollars each year to the Afghan defence and security forces. NATO also continues to support "a peace and reconciliation process that is Afghan-led and Afghan-owned".

The bottom line, [according to Commander of the Resolute Support Mission](#), General John W. Nicholson, is that despite "some local tactical successes in places like Helmand, Kandahar, Urozgan, and Kunduz", "the Taliban cannot win. They must reconcile". He argued that the Taliban's shift to suicide attacks "is a sign of failure".



He also sees the combination of the new US South Asia policy—including the separate and long-standing US counterterrorism mission, [Freedom's Sentinel](#)

(previously Operation

Enduring Freedom, 2001-2014), which operates alongside the NATO mission—the Warsaw Summit commitments, the increasing capabilities of the Afghan Security Forces, the partnership with the Afghan Government and renewed pressure on "external enablement" (i.e. Pakistan) as "extremely encouraging" and likely to "move us in the right direction, which is a peace process to bring about a political solution to this conflict". In responding to a journalist's question, he summed up the Taliban's choices in the 16-year-old war as "either reconcile or face irrelevance or death". With increases in key areas of the Afghan

military, especially special forces and the Air Force, and with the addition of more US and NATO advisors, Gen. Nicholson expects the Afghan Security Forces to expand their control of the country to 80 per cent over the next two years.



(Press conference by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, Brussels, 9 November 2017 – press credit: NATO)

However, two factors suggest that the Taliban is unlikely to be defeated any time soon. First, an increase in civilian casualties from coalition and Afghan air strikes is likely to undercut the NATO narrative that the violence is almost entirely the result of Taliban and other extremists' activities. The latest [report](#) from the congressionally-mandated Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction states that the Afghan government is losing control of more and more territory to the Taliban, and that civilian casualties from coalition and Afghan air strikes spiked by 52% in the first nine months of 2017 compared with 2016. Second, the [failure to reduce Afghan opium production](#) is likely to ensure a continuing income for the Taliban to fight an endless war.

Global threats and North Korea

While NATO defence ministers reportedly discussed North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear programmes few details of the discussions have emerged. The NATO Secretary General had already [indicated that North Korea is a threat to NATO allies and partners](#), and to the international non-proliferation regime, during his recent visit to East Asia. The main thrust of the Secretary General's argument was that global threats require a global response, and that NATO maintains a strong deterrence posture with the capabilities and resolve to respond to any aggression.

The Nuclear Planning Group

Similarly, with one exception (discussed below), there have been no announcements as to the scope and nature of the discussions in the Nuclear Planning Group. In addition to

concerns about North Korea's nuclear programme, potential other items that were (or should have been) discussed include: NATO's [reaction to the new UN treaty on the elimination of nuclear weapons](#); NATO's [nuclear deterrence](#) posture in relation to Russia, including its annual [Steadfast Noon nuclear strike exercise](#) that took place in October; the results from [initial flight tests](#) to qualify a new nuclear gravity bomb, the B61-12, for US and NATO aircraft; and recent concerns (expressed by US lawmakers and [reportedly](#) by at least one NATO ally) about President Trump's command of the US nuclear launch system.

During the press conference with the Secretary General on the 8 November, it became clear that the US did raise allegations about Russian INF Treaty violations and that "NATO allies stressed, just as they did at the Warsaw Summit in 2016, that the INF Treaty is very important and that a strong and viable INF Treaty is a pillar for European security". Stoltenberg also said that they will "follow this very closely".

Similarly, US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis [said](#) that the NATO defence ministers' discussion included consideration of Russia's "violation" of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) and "our collective efforts to bring Russia back to compliance". The US Defence Secretary added that "many" NATO member states also have their own evidence that Russia is violating the treaty.

Signed in 1987, the INF Treaty, eliminated an entire class of cruise and ballistic missiles in

Europe and is considered a bedrock treaty for US-Russian arms control. The US asserts that Russia has developed a ground-launched cruise missile in [violation of the treaty](#). Moscow rejects the US accusations and says the United States' deployment of antimissile systems in Romania and Poland contradicts the treaty provisions—something Washington denies.

Joint procurement of Precision Guided Munitions

During the Defence ministerial meeting, Finland, Hungary and the United Kingdom [formally joined](#) a long-standing multinational effort to acquire Air-to-Ground Precision Guided Munitions. During a signing ceremony, the Defence Minister of Denmark and his counterparts from the new participants signed an amendment to the existing Memorandum of Understanding to mark their official accession. This project was launched by six NATO Defence Ministers through a Letter of Intent during the Wales Summit in 2014. The first multinational order is being executed by the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) on behalf of the participants with delivery of munitions to nations scheduled for 2018.

The Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS

Immediately following the ministerial meeting, US Defence Secretary Jim Mattis hosted a separate meeting of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. With the Islamic State now defeated from most of their strongholds in Iraq and Syria, NATO's future role in the Global Coalition is uncertain. NATO is already helping to stabilize Iraq through some relatively modest training and capacity building activities on countering improvised explosive devices, maintenance of equipment, military medicine and modernizing their security and defence institutions. According to the Secretary General, many NATO allies argued during the meeting in favour of scaling up those training and capacity-building activities. Mattis [told reporters](#) that coalition partners are looking to the United States for a clear plan about what follows the physical defeat of ISIS. Whether such a plan was articulated is not immediately clear.

(Screen shot – Global Coalition website, 15 November 2017)

The screenshot shows the website for the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. At the top, there is a green navigation bar with the coalition's logo and name in Arabic and English, and a menu with items like HOME, NEWS, OPINION, MISSION, MOBILE UPDATE, MAPS & STATS, PARTNERS, and MEDIA. Below the navigation bar is a large banner for 'MAPS & STATS' featuring a map of Syria and Iraq, with the text 'The latest statistics, maps and figures on the fight against Daesh from the Coalition and its partners.' Below the banner is a horizontal menu with buttons for 'All', 'Communications', 'Planning And Funding', 'Foreign Fighters', 'Maps', 'Military Progress', 'Mand', and 'Stabilisation'. The main content area is titled 'Most recent' and displays five news cards:

- 6.6 MILLION PEOPLE FREED**: FROM DAESH IN IRAQ AND SYRIA. October 13, 2017. 92. Read
- 61 SCHOOLS HAVE REOPENED IN ANBAR**: GIVING AN EDUCATION TO 18,000 STUDENTS. September 13, 2017. 82. Read
- OUR PARTNER FRANCE HAVE BUILT TWO SCHOOLS IN BARDARASH CAMP**: GIVING 1000+ IRAQI CHILDREN ACCESS TO EDUCATION. September 13, 2017. 84. Read
- 250,000 VULNERABLE CHILDREN IN IRAQ ARE ACCESSING NUTRITION SERVICES**. September 13, 2017. 74. Read
- \$2.8M FUNDING FOR CIVIC AND COMMUNITY BASED RECONCILIATION IN IRAQ**. August 29, 2017. 79. Read