



## **NATO confirms two new military commands and agrees a new training mission to Iraq, but burden sharing review fails transparency test:**

### **A review of the NATO Defence Ministers meeting, Brussels, 14-15 February 2018**

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#### **Key decisions taken:**

- A final decision was taken to adapt the NATO Command Structure, with two new commands: a Joint Force Command for the Atlantic, to help protect sea lines of communication between North America and Europe; and a Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) for logistics, reinforcement and military mobility (outline decisions to these ends were taken at the November 2017 ministerial).
- It was also agreed to create a new Cyber Operations Centre as part of the adapted NATO Command Structure (again, this was provisionally agreed in November).
- NATO will begin planning for a new training mission in Iraq at the request of both the Iraqi Government and the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS.
- Canada and Poland joined an ongoing multinational effort to develop a new generation of maritime multi-mission aircraft capabilities, while Belgium joined an ongoing multinational effort to acquire multirole tanker-transport aircraft.
- The first national annual reports on NATO's defence investment pledge were reviewed by ministers, but apparently not all member states submitted plans and none were made public.

#### **Summary of the Ministerial Meeting**

The two-day Meeting agenda was focused on five main issues: an update on NATO's nuclear weapons policy (as part of a regular discussion held under the Nuclear Planning Group); further discussions on adapting NATO's Command Structure and cyber defences; burden-sharing within the alliance, including a review of the first set of annual national plans for increasing resources, capabilities and mission contributions; NATO-EU cooperation; and NATO's role in projecting stability and fighting terrorism. All of these discussions took place in the context of ongoing preparations for the next NATO Summit in July.

In advance of the ministerial meeting, a welcome briefing was given on 13 February 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 first day of the ministerial meeting (14 February) 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 the UK, and the US Defence Secretary. No details of the discussions were made public. Later in the morning, the NATO [Nuclear Planning Group](#) met in Defence Ministers' session, and as is the

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

This was followed by another bilateral meeting between Stoltenberg and the Minister of Defence of Albania, as well as a media background briefing on 'NATO's adapted [Command Structure](#) and Military Mobility'. A [signing ceremony](#) for a new European member to the multi-role tanker transport aircraft programme, was followed by a 2-hour working lunch (for which there was no public or media access).

An official portrait of the ministers was taken mid-afternoon, and this was followed by a meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Defence Ministers Session. 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 closed working dinner.

The second day of the ministerial began with a [signature ceremony](#) for two new partners to the Multi-Maritime Mission Aircraft programme, and a closed bilateral meeting between Stoltenberg and the Greek Defence Minister. Then the defence ministers once again met as the North Atlantic Council, and again, outside of the Secretary General's [opening remarks](#), this was a closed session. Instead, the media was given a background briefing on 'NATO-Russia and NATO-Ukraine relations'. The ministerial meeting concluded with another [press conference](#) by the NATO Secretary General, and a final bilateral meeting between Stoltenberg and the Canadian Defence Minister.

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. A recurring theme at this ministerial meeting was the lack of transparency, both in terms of failing to

disclose the nature and substance of some of the discussions and the failure to make public the national spending and capability plans.

### **An adapted NATO Command Structure and improved cyber defences**

This issue was discussed at the November 2017 defence ministerial meeting (and reviewed in [NATO Watch Briefing No.58](#)), and was further [discussed by NATO Chiefs of Defence](#) in their January meeting. At this latest meeting, NATO defence ministers gave final approval 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 Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC), essentially a logistics command to improve the movement of troops and equipment within Europe.



General view of the meeting of the North Atlantic Council, 14 February 2018 – photo credit: NATO

While not explicitly stated, these changes are clearly designed to help protect Europe in the event of a conflict with Russia. For example,

NATO members are increasingly concerned about growing Russian submarine activity, particularly around vital undersea cables that provide Internet and telecommunications connections to Europe and North America. The United States is already preparing to spend \$14.4 million to [refurbish hangars at a Cold War-era base in Iceland](#) to allow more P-8 Poseidon reconnaissance aircraft to monitor Russian submarines.

Although it was anticipated that the location and cost of the two additional commands would also be agreed by ministers, those decisions will now be taken later in the year (probably at the June ministerial event). The United States has [offered](#) to host the Atlantic Command and Germany the JSEC.

Finally, following steps last year to [recognise cyber as an operational domain](#) along with

land, sea and air, Ministers reconfirmed the decision taken in November 2017 to create a new Cyber Operations Centre at NATO's headquarters in SHAPE as part of the adapted NATO Command Structure.

### **Burden-sharing within the alliance: lack of transparency hinders understanding and compliance**

The issue of fair burden-sharing is one of the [longest running fault lines](#) within NATO, with accusations that Europe spends too little on defence and is being protected at US taxpayer expense. While the United States does pick up a disproportionate share of the NATO tab, the imbalance is not as great a sometimes suggested.

Nonetheless, NATO member states agreed in 2014 to move towards investing 2% of GDP on defence by 2024. They also agreed to invest more in key military capabilities and equipment, and to contribute personnel to NATO missions and operations. In 2017 NATO member states agreed to report annually on how they intend to make progress on all three commitments: more money, capabilities and contributions. This defence ministerial meeting was the first opportunity to review the plans and to take stock of progress.

[According to the Secretary General](#), the picture is one of substantial progress: "After years of decline, since 2014 we have seen three years of increasing defence spending across European allies and Canada. Amounting to an additional 46 billion US dollars. The national plans show that we can expect further increases".

He added: "In 2014, only 3 allies spent 2% of GDP or more on defence. This year we expect 8 allies to meet the target. And by 2024, we expect at least 15 allies will spend 2% of GDP or more on defence". Stoltenberg also outlined that spending on capabilities was also up—by 2024, 22 allies are expected to invest 20% or more of their defence budget on major capabilities—and that "almost all" member states intend to maintain or increase their contributions to NATO operations, missions and activities.

However, none of the national plans have been made public and it was reported by the [Wall Street Journal](#) on the 9 February that fewer than half of NATO's 29 member states actually submitted one. When pushed at the [final press conference](#) to name the countries (thought to be 13 in total) that have yet to come up with a national plan, the Secretary General simply stressed that "we will continue to urge those countries who have not yet provided plans, meeting the 2% target, to do so". Without giving any further details on the number of countries involved, he also confirmed that the "national plans are not going to be public, but figures on defence spending in each individual allies will be made public later on". (It is regular practice within NATO to produce an [annual compendium](#) of financial, personnel and economic data for all member countries).

One country that is known to be struggling to meet the defence investment pledge is Germany, which spent just 1.13 percent of its economic output on the military in 2017, well below the alliance's agreed 2% target. The lower 2017 figure was mainly due to stronger-than-expected economic growth, which lowered the percentage.

It is unclear if Germany submitted a national spending plan, but press reports in February suggest that the German military is struggling to meet its commitments to NATO. First, Germany's parliamentary commissioner for the armed forces [urged](#) the navy to stop deploying frigates to NATO, EU and UN missions because the military simply doesn't have enough ships. German vessels have played key roles in anti-smuggling and migrant rescue missions in the Mediterranean.

Second, the Bundeswehr is due to take over leadership of NATO's multinational Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) at the start of next year, but doesn't have enough tanks, [according to a leaked Defence Ministry document](#). Specifically, the Bundeswehr's ninth tank brigade in Münster only has nine operational Leopard 2 tanks—even though it promised to have 44 ready for the VJTF—and

only three of the promised 14 Marder armoured infantry vehicles. A lack of spare parts and the high cost and time needed to maintain the vehicles was given as the reason for the shortfall. German forces were also said to be lacking night-vision equipment, automatic grenade launchers, winter clothing and body armour.



2018 – photo credit: NATO

teams to train Iraqi forces in de-mining, countering home-made bombs and dealing with explosives. NATO has also trained Iraqi troops in neighbouring Jordan.

Press conference by NATO Secretary General, 15 February

### **Projecting stability and fighting terrorism: a new NATO training mission to Iraq, more of the same in Afghanistan and two NATO member states face-off in Syria**

At their January meeting, the NATO Chiefs of Defence discussed the ongoing security challenges in Europe's southern neighbourhood and the need to further increase cooperation and coordination of military activities between allies and partners in support of stability in the Middle East and North Africa. Similar discussions took place among the NATO defence ministers, and in particular, it was reported that they explored how NATO can contribute to the fight against terrorism and provide continued support to the [Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS](#). But again, specifics of what was actually discussed were thin on the ground. The Secretary General emphasised “enhanced planning and exercises”, as well as “building local capacity” in the fight against terrorism.

#### *Iraq*

The headline announcement was that the ministers agreed to start planning for a new NATO training mission in Iraq, with the aim of launching it at the July Summit. The mission is based on a request from both the Iraqi Prime Minister al-Abadi and the US-led Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS. The US Secretary of Defense Jim Mattis [sent a letter to NATO headquarters in January](#) calling for a formal NATO mission to Iraq with a semi-permanent or permanent command to train Iraqi forces.

NATO already has a small team of military and civilian personnel in Iraq and uses mobile

While the scope and size of the new mission has yet to be determined, according to the Secretary General the aim is to “professionalise the Iraqi forces to help them build defence institutions, military academies, and also to help them, for instance, with counter-IED, and other areas where we can provide training”.

#### *Afghanistan*

Afghanistan was served up as a model for the Iraqi mission. According to the Secretary General, “Years of experience from Afghanistan have taught us that strengthening local forces is one of our best tools in the fight against terrorism”. NATO's commitment to Afghan's security was endorsed with reconfirmation of the increased troop contributions to NATO's training mission in Afghanistan. At the previous Defence ministerial meeting it had been agreed to increase the size of the Resolute Support Mission from around 13,000 to around 16,000 troops (roughly half from the United States and half from NATO and partner countries).

However, the news from Afghanistan continues to reveal a landscape that is anything but stable, with [escalating levels of violence](#). As Ivo Daalder, the former US Ambassador to NATO [says](#), an average of some 60 security incidents—armed clashes, roadside bombs, targeted killings, abductions, suicide attacks, and the like—are reported each day in Afghanistan, and the Taliban are no nearer to defeat today than they were a decade ago. Indeed, [the Taliban are currently openly active](#) in about 70% of Afghanistan's districts.

#### *The US and Turkey in northern Syria*

While not, strictly speaking, an issue for NATO, the situation in [northern Syria](#), where two



NATO allies—the United States and Turkey—are in confrontation, would undoubtedly have been a topic of conversation in the sidelines of the ministerial meeting. When asked about the issue during his press conference, Stoltenberg said: “Turkey has briefed NATO on the Operation Olive Branch. They did so last week and I have been in regular contact with the Turkish leadership, including with President Erdogan.... I expect Turkey to continue to brief allies. Turkey has legitimate security concerns and no NATO ally has suffered more terrorist attacks than Turkey and of course they have the right to address these security concerns, but they should do that in a proportionate and measured way”.

Stoltenberg added, “I welcome that there are contacts, talks between Turkey and the United States to address the issues on the ground in northern Syria”. Indeed, those talks resulted in the United States and Turkey agreeing on 16 February to [initiate a formal dialogue](#) mechanism that would meet in mid-March and a possible joint deployment of forces in Manbij.

Turkey’s initial aim was to seize control of the Afrin enclave held by Syrian Kurdish militia the YPG, an offshoot of the Kurdistan Workers’ party (PKK). Both the United States and Turkey designate the PKK as a terrorist organisation, but the US has been equipping and training the YPG for the fight against the Islamic State. Turkey has said that the military operation is to be extended to Manbij and possibly further east towards Rojava, both Syrian Kurdish cantons under YPG control, and which are used by more than 2,000 US military personnel and special forces. The possibility of a military confrontation between Turkish soldiers and US troops on Syrian soil remains a real possibility.

### **The Nuclear Planning Group**

There have been no announcements as to the scope and nature of the discussions in the Nuclear Planning Group. In addition to ongoing 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; the [uncertain future of the INF Treaty](#) and the new [US nuclear posture review](#) (NPR).

The NPR was released on 2 February 2018 and confirms a hard-hitting and expansive approach to nuclear weapons policy under President Trump. It seeks to expand the scenarios for the possible use of nuclear weapons against non-nuclear threats, including cyber threats, and calls for the development of new “low-yield” warheads for its submarine-launched ballistic missiles and new ground-launched cruise missiles. These changes have potentially serious implications for NATO nuclear policy, as set out in this [Policy Brief](#) by the Clingendael Institute. These include the end of the INF Treaty, the potential return to Europe of the class of land-based nuclear weapons with a 500 to 5,500 km range, and more US political pressure on European allies operating Dual Capable Aircraft (Belgium, Germany, Italy, Netherlands, Turkey) to continue their nuclear role.

A different path is possible, however, in which the focus shifts to the reduction in the risk of nuclear use. Given that forward-deployed US nuclear weapons in Europe increase the risk of accidents, blunders, or catastrophic terrorism and invite pre-emption, there is a strong case for their removal back to the United States – as set out in this report by the Nuclear Threat Initiative [Building a Safe, Secure, and Credible NATO Nuclear Posture](#).

### **NATO-EU cooperation**

While NATO defence ministers reportedly discussed the EU’s latest plans on defence—a programme launched in November 2017 called the [Permanent Structured Cooperation on Security and Defence](#) (PESCO)—and NATO-EU cooperation, with the EU’S High Representative/Vice President Federica Mogherini, as well as the Defence Ministers from Sweden and Finland, few details of the discussions have emerged. The main issue to emerge from the press briefings was the need for EU defence cooperation to be complementary and not an alternative to NATO. In particular, it was stressed that the EU should avoid duplicating NATO’s command structure, “avoid new barriers inside NATO”,

and ensure coherence in capability developments. Beyond these vague general principles, little of substance has been made public, which may suggest that little of substance was actually discussed.

Stoltenberg also highlighted that NATO would welcome a more competitive defence industry, and he hoped that one outcome from EU defence cooperation would be to “address the fragmentation of the European defence industry” which he said reduces its competitiveness.

However, since the ministerial meeting it has been [reported](#) that US officials are concerned that these European defence plans could weaken NATO and cut out US military manufacturers from bidding on certain European projects.

### **Joint procurement of military aircraft capabilities**

During the Defence ministerial meeting two multinational procurement projects were expanded with new participants. First, Canada and Poland joined the ongoing multinational effort to develop a new generation of maritime multi-mission aircraft capabilities. The initiative was launched in June 2017 by France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain and Turkey and is designed to provide NATO with a new maritime patrol aircraft that can deliver several tasks, including intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and anti-submarine warfare.

Second, Belgium joined an ongoing multinational effort to create and operate a new fleet of A330 multi-role air-to-air refuelling aircraft. The programme was initiated in February 2017 and expanded last summer and now involves five states (the others being Germany, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Norway), as well as the NATO Support and Procurement Agency, the European Defence Agency and the *Organisation Conjointe de Coopération en Matière d'Armement* (OCCAR). Air-to-air refuelling is considered a crucial capability for NATO, and with Belgium's membership of the consortium, the multinational fleet will now

expand to eight aircraft, with delivery expected between 2020 and 2024.

Since NATO owns few military assets, aside from a 16-strong fleet of E-3A AWACS surveillance aircraft, both programmes are expected to strengthen NATO's indigenous air capability.

### **Blocking of the NATO-Ukraine Commission by Hungary**

One final item that came up in the opening press conference was the continued blocking by Hungary of the NATO-Ukraine Commission. Hungary has been blocking Ukraine's bid for closer cooperation both with NATO and the EU due to the minority language law, which Ukraine passed in September 2017. Under the law, minorities—including the children of the 140,000 ethnic Hungarians living in Ukraine—will not be able to receive schooling in their mother tongue beyond primary school. The law is seen as mostly an effort to reduce Russian influence in Ukraine, with Russian the most commonly spoken second language there.

"We should not be unable to have a NATO-Ukraine Council, because it is an important NATO effort to try to keep the boundaries of Ukraine and to allow them to hopefully be able to have a stable government and a place where they are not encroached on by Russian intervention," US Ambassador to NATO Kay Bailey Hutchison [said](#) on 13 February. She added that she hoped Hungary and Ukraine would "sit down under the rules of international law" and "work something out that is in their interest".

Similarly, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg, [said](#) that he had urged both sides to try and find a solution to this issue, adding that "There is a proposal now on the table from the [Venice Commission](#). I welcome the opinion and the recommendations from the Venice Commission, and I encourage Ukraine to closely look at the recommendations because they outline the way to try to solve this issue between Ukraine and Hungary".