



Briefing Paper No.95

17 June 2022

Contact:

Dr. Ian Davis

Email: idavis@natowatch.org

www.natowatch.org

NATO Defence Ministers discuss further support for Ukraine and preparations for the Madrid Summit

Ian Davis

NATO Defence Ministers met in Brussels on 15-16 June to finalise preparations for the upcoming [Madrid Summit](#) (27-30 June). NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said the Summit would address key areas including strengthened deterrence and defence; support for Ukraine and other partners at risk; a new NATO Strategic Concept; better burden-sharing and resourcing; and Finland and Sweden's applications for membership.

President Zelensky has been invited to the NATO Summit in Madrid, although it is uncertain whether he will attend in person or via a video link. In addition, for the first time in NATO's history, the leaders from partners in the Asia Pacific (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea) will participate in the NATO Summit.

At his pre-ministerial [press conference](#) on 15 June Stoltenberg also indicated that the new Strategic Concept "will reflect the new security reality", including the fact that Russia was no longer a 'strategic partner' (as defined in the 2010 Strategic Concept) and the security consequences of China. On the delay to Finland and Sweden's membership application because of Turkish objections, Stoltenberg acknowledged that NATO had not anticipated that there would be a problem, and that it would now take

"some more time than we originally expected".

Support for Ukraine

On 15 June Ukrainian Defence Minister Oleksii Reznikov addressed the meeting to discuss Ukraine's continuing need for support, and there was also a meeting of the US-led Ukraine Support Contact Group. This coincided with an announcement by President Joe Biden to further increase US support for Ukraine by [another \\$1 billion in military assistance](#). The United States, NATO member states and partners have already provided Ukraine with billions of dollars' worth of military equipment, as well as economic and humanitarian aid. At the closing [press conference](#), Stoltenberg said: "Allies have announced additional assistance, including much needed heavy weapons and long-range systems", adding that NATO is preparing a "comprehensive assistance package for Ukraine" to be announced at the Madrid Summit, to help improve interoperability with NATO, transition from Soviet-era to modern NATO equipment, and further strengthen security institutions. Georgia, Finland, Sweden, and the European Union also joined the discussions.

Reinforcing Eastern Europe and the Baltics

In response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the number of NATO battlegroups has doubled to eight and more than 40,000 troops are now under direct NATO command. On 16 June the discussions focussed on the scale and design of NATO's future posture, which for Eastern Europe and the Baltics will contain three elements, more forward presence, more forward pre-positioned equipment, and pre-assigned forces with the responsibility for a specific territory. [According](#) to Stoltenberg, "This will mean more NATO forward deployed combat formations, to strengthen our battlegroups in the eastern part of our Alliance. More air, sea and cyber defences, as well as pre-positioned equipment and weapon stockpiles. And a new force model, with more forces at higher readiness, and specific forces pre-assigned to the defence of specific Allies, to enable much faster reinforcement".

Pre assigned forces are unlikely to be deployed permanently in Eastern and Baltic states but [according to Stoltenberg](#), "they will be earmarked pre-assigned for that specific territory, meaning that they will train, they will rotate in and out, they will know the country the territory they have worked together on interoperability working with the home defence forces and they have pre-designed tasks". So, for example, Germany has already [pledged](#) to bolster the existing international NATO battalion stationed in Lithuania to a brigade-size unit, and the UK is [committed](#) to doing the same in Estonia. Further commitments by other NATO member states are likely to follow.

Is the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act dead?

In terms of the impact of these proposed force posture changes on the

[1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act](#), which precludes "permanent stationing of substantial combat forces" on the territories of the former Warsaw Pact states, Stoltenberg [said](#) Russia had already "walked away" from it, not least in failing to respect the territorial integrity and sovereignty of all countries in Europe "and by invading Ukraine of course that's a blatant violation" of the Act. He added, "This Act doesn't limit our ability to increase our presence in the eastern part of the Alliance. And it doesn't limit our ability to strengthen our posture in general across the whole Alliance". Finally, Stoltenberg claimed that President Putin's goals went beyond Ukraine, citing "the so-called security treaties he proposed for the [United States](#) and [NATO](#) in December last year". He then elaborates on NATO's responses (which have not been made public):

"We actually had a meeting here at NATO in January where we sat down with Russia and tried to find diplomatic solution, and also where we provided our responses to those proposals from Russia. In those proposals, they, of course, threatened Ukraine, but also threatened NATO by saying that there should be no further NATO enlargement and they also wanted NATO to agree to remove all troops and all NATO infrastructure from NATO Allies that had joined after 1997. If we had accepted that, we would first of all have violated the fundamental principle of all countries to choose their own path including Finland and Sweden joining NATO. And, the Finnish president had said that it was actually when Russia wanted to close the door to NATO, that they realised that they had to move into NATO. And also the idea that we should remove all forces and infrastructure from the eastern part of the Alliance would actually mean that we were going to into some kind of first and

second class NATO membership. So we of course, didn't accept those proposals. But it demonstrates that President Putin's goals goes beyond Ukraine, and that's the reason why we need to both provide support to Ukraine as we do, but also strengthen our deterrence and defence not least in the eastern part of the Alliance."

Further excessive military spending

The Defence Ministers also discussed the importance of resourcing. Recalling that there had been seven consecutive years of rising defence investment by European allies and Canada, Stoltenberg [said](#): "Now is the time to keep up the momentum. So we can continue to preserve peace, prevent conflict, and protect our people". Global military expenditure has reached [record levels](#), increasing by 0.7% in real terms in 2021 to reach \$2113 billion. NATO states accounted for 55% (\$1157 billion). Russia increased its military spending by 2.9% in 2021 to \$65.9 billion. Hence, NATO already spends 17 x more than Russia. In his recent report, [Our Common Agenda](#), the UN Secretary-General, António Guterres, called for a New Agenda for Peace "to update our vision for disarmament so as to guarantee human, national and collective security", "reduce excessive military budgets and ensure adequate social spending", and "link disarmament to development opportunities". Rather than supporting this agenda, NATO continues to normalise excessive military spending.

In the margins of the meeting on 16 June, the Defence Ministers of France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom [agreed](#) to dedicate 26.7 million EUR to define the future of their helicopter fleets under NATO's Next Generation Rotorcraft Capability project. In cooperation with industry, the

participants will start from a clean sheet to explore how to match their needs with the latest technology on the market, looking at options such as hybrid and electric propulsion, and the delivery of radically improved flight characteristics.

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