



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

# NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING,

17-18 February 2021

## Policy Brief

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**NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING, 17-18 FEBRUARY 2021:**  
**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

Agenda

- Initial NATO2030 proposals by the NATO Secretary General
- Deterrence and Defence and burden-sharing
- NATO's mission in Afghanistan
- NATO's mission in Iraq

Decision

- **Ministers decided to expand NATO's training mission in Iraq from 500 personnel to around 4,000.**
- **Ministers deferred a decision on NATO's presence in Afghanistan.**

Additional notes

- First ministerial meeting with US Secretary of Defense Lloyd James Austin III
- Ahead of the meeting, Allied Ground Surveillance (AGS) achieved initial operating capability.

Partner participation

- Separate session on trans-Atlanticism, NATO-EU relations, resilience and emerging and disruptive technologies with partner countries Finland & Sweden and the European Union's High Representative/Vice-President

**I. INITIAL NATO2030 PROPOSALS BY THE NATO SECRETARY GENERAL**

**DISCUSSIONS**

- **Ministers held initial discussions on a set of proposals under the NATO 2030 initiative.**

**NATO 2030 PROPOSALS PREVIEWED**

- The NATO Secretary General for the first time previewed **concrete proposals centred on 8 themes:**
  1. **Increasing NATO's funding for deterrence and defence activities**
    - The NATO Secretary General proposes to **use NATO common funding to contribute to covering costs** when Allies deploy troops for defence and deterrence activities (e.g., for NATO forward presence, air policing, maritime deployments and exercises). Currently, deploying countries cover all associated costs.
    - He argues this would demonstrate the strength of NATO's **commitment to Article 5**; contribute to **fairer burden-sharing**; enhance **cohesion and political unity**; and **incentivise Allies to provide more of these capabilities**.
  2. **Enhancing Allied resilience**
    - The NATO Secretary General proposes to a) adopt **clearer and more measurable national resilience targets** to ensure a minimum resilience standard and b) to conduct **annual reviews of vulnerabilities in critical infrastructure and technologies**, including those stemming from foreign ownership and influence.
  3. **Preserving NATO's technological edge**
    - The NATO Secretary General proposes to launch a **NATO defence innovation initiative** to promote interoperability and set NATO standards and boost transatlantic cooperation on defence innovation.

- The initiative should spur Allies and NATO to **continue investing in disruptive and emerging technologies; prevent a technological gap between Allies; develop guideline standards on ethical aspects; and further help start-ups and work with the private sector.**
- 4. Increasing political coordination**
- The NATO Secretary General proposes ways to **increase political coordination between Allies.** He recommends having **more consultations on more issues**, including economic matters related to security, and organise **innovative meetings**, including with national security advisors or ministers for interior.
  - He argues the necessary **procedures are already in place**, but **Allies must demonstrate more political will** to use them.
- 5. Cooperating with like-minded partners**
- The NATO Secretary General proposes a **more global approach to deal with global challenges**, in particular to counter China's and Russia' authoritarian pushback against the rules-based international order.
  - He proposes **enhancing political dialogue and practical cooperation with like-minded partners** to promote Alliance values and protect its interests.
- 6. Strengthening training and capacity building for partners**
- The NATO Secretary General proposes **strengthening training and capacity building for partner countries in NATO's neighbourhood** "because prevention is better than intervention".
- 7. Adapting to climate change**
- The NATO Secretary General proposes that NATO addresses the **security implications of climate change as "a serious crisis multiplier"**.
  - NATO should set the 'gold standard' on **reducing vulnerabilities and emissions from the military sector** and **contribute to the goal of net zero carbon emissions**, including through **annual assessments of climate change impacts on troops and deployments.**
- 8. Updating NATO's Strategic Concept**
- The NATO Secretary General proposes to **update NATO's Strategic Concept** to jointly address a changing strategic environment, **to recommit to Alliance values and to reinforce the transatlantic bond.**
  - The NATO Secretary General noted that **the security environment has fundamentally changed**, pointing to the facts that the current 2010 Strategic Concept does not address the shifting balance of power and the security consequences of the rise of China, hardly mentions climate change, and was written before Russia's further aggressive actions against its neighbours, including the illegal annexation of Crimea.

## **BACKGROUND**

- **In 2021, NATO will hold a Summit in Brussels** (dates to be determined).
- The NATO Secretary General will propose **an ambitious agenda for transatlantic security and defence**, based upon his NATO 2030 initiative. The Summit "will be a unique opportunity to start a **new chapter for transatlantic relations**".
- The **NATO PA** has been closely associated with the NATO 2030 reflection process and submitted its **recommendations** in [Declaration 460](#) adopted in November 2020. These included several of the same points highlighted by the NATO Secretary General at the Defence Ministerial as well as other forward-looking proposals, e.g. on concrete ways to rededicate Allies to NATO's democratic foundations.

## II. DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE AND BURDEN-SHARING

### DISCUSSIONS

- **Ministers reviewed progress toward strengthening deterrence and defence and toward fairer burden-sharing.**

### KEY POINTS

- 2021 will be the 7<sup>th</sup> consecutive year of increased defence spending.
- Since 2014, European Allies and Canada have contributed a cumulative extra of USD 190 billion.
- **9 Allies** are expected to spend 2 % of GDP on defence.
- **24 Allies** are expected to spend at least 20 % of investment in equipment.

## III. NATO'S MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

### DISCUSSIONS

- **Minister discussed the situation in Afghanistan** but made **no final decision on the future of the international troop presence in Afghanistan.**
- **Allies will continue to assess together the conditions on the ground and closely consult and coordinate in the coming weeks** – with the option of convening a short-notice online ministerial meeting if need be.
- The immediate focus should be on the **peace process**. Allies believe that there is still time to reach a political agreement to see progress before the 1 May deadline set in the US-Taliban agreement.

### KEY MESSAGES

- As a key contribution to the fight against international terrorism, Allies and NATO remain **committed to the 10,000-strong Resolute Support mission**, with training and funding for the Afghan national security forces secured until 2024.
- Allies want to ensure Afghanistan **never again serves as a haven for terrorists** to attack the Alliance and avoid jeopardising the **significant social and economic progress in Afghanistan**.
- Allies **strongly support the Afghan-owned, Afghan-led peace process**, including through previous significant troop reductions, as the best chance to end years of suffering and violence and bring a lasting political solution and peace.
- **Peace talks are fragile, and progress is slow.** All sides must seize this historic opportunity for a peaceful settlement and re-energise the peace process.
- **The US-Taliban agreement foresees a withdrawal of all international troops by 1 May 2021.** Under the agreement, the Taliban must negotiate in good faith, reduce the high level of violence and live up to their commitment to stop cooperating with international terrorist groups. However, the **level of violence remains unacceptably high, including through Taliban attacks on civilians. The Taliban must also “do more when it comes to delivering on [...] the commitment to break ties, to not provide any support for terrorist organisations that can plan, organise, attacks against us”.**
- **Allied presence remains conditions based.** No Ally wants to stay in Afghanistan longer than necessary, but NATO will not leave before the time is right.
- **The protection of Allied troops remains paramount, and Allies will take all necessary measures to keep them safe.**

#### IV. NATO'S MISSION IN IRAQ

##### DECISION

- **Ministers decided to expand NATO's training mission in Iraq.**

##### KEY POINTS

- The training mission is another **key contribution to the fight against international terrorism**, as NATO support the Iraqi forces in their fight against terrorism and ensure Daesh does not return.
- **Allies will incrementally increase troop numbers from 500 personnel to around 4,000.**
- Training activities will now include **more Iraqi security institutions and areas beyond Baghdad.**
- Allied presence is **conditions-based.**
- The NATO mission is **at the explicit request of the Iraqi government, carried out with full respect for Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity and closely coordinated with the Global Coalition.**

##### ADDITIONAL NOTE

- The NATO Secretary General condemned the rocket attack against coalition forces in Erbil and noted several Allies will support an investigation. He also condemned the killing of Turkish citizens in a separate attack in northern Iraq. Ministers expressed their solidarity with Turkey.

#### V. ADDITIONAL NOTES

##### NATO SECRETARY GENERAL ON THE NEW US ADMINISTRATION

- This was the **first NATO ministerial meeting with the new Biden administration**, represented by **US Secretary of Defense Lloyd James Austin III.**
- The NATO Secretary General underlined the new Biden administration is **“strongly committed to the transatlantic bond, to NATO, to Europe and North America working together.”**
- The NATO Secretary General has already had two remote conversations with President Biden since the elections, where **President Biden “has been very strong, very clear on the importance of rebuilding alliances and further strengthening NATO.”**
- This message was echoed in remote conversations with Secretary Austin and Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken, the NATO Secretary General noted.

##### ALLIED GROUND SURVEILLANCE

- Two days before the meeting, the NATO-owned and operated **Allied Ground Surveillance (AGS) achieved initial operating capability**, providing world-class **intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance** from their base at Sigonella, Italy.
- The AGS remotely piloted aircraft can **cover the whole Euro-Atlantic area.**
- **Two regions can be monitored around the clock.**
- **Allies will determine AGS missions**, but most flights are expected to be along the Alliance's eastern and southern borders.