



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING,

23-24 MARCH 2021

Policy Brief

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NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS MEETING, 23-24 MARCH 2021:
KEY TAKEAWAYS

Agenda

- NATO 2030 proposals & preparations for the upcoming NATO Summit
- Russia, deterrence and defence & arms control
- NATO's Mission in Afghanistan
- Relations with the Middle East and North Africa

Decisions

- **Ministers adopted a statement (see annex) reaffirming their commitment to the transatlantic bond, collective defence and democratic values and previewing key themes for the upcoming NATO Summit.**
- **Ministers welcomed the recommendation to update NATO's Strategic Concept.**
- **Ministers deferred a decision on NATO's presence in Afghanistan.**
- **Ministers endorsed a report on NATO's approach to climate change.**

Additional notes

- First ministerial meeting with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken
- First in-person ministerial meeting in over a year

Partner participation

- The session dedicated to relations with the Russian Federation was held with partners Finland and Sweden as well as the European Union's High Representative

I. NATO 2030 PROPOSALS & PREPARATIONS FOR THE UPCOMING NATO SUMMIT

DISCUSSIONS

- After Defence Ministers in February, Foreign Affairs Ministers reviewed the Secretary General's proposals under the **NATO 2030 reflection process**. The NATO Secretary General **sensed strong support** among Allies for a bold and ambitious **NATO 2030** agenda.
- The key aim of NATO 2030 is to adapt the Alliance to the rapidly changing security environment, the rise of novel threats and systemic competition, and increasing challenges to the rules-based international order.
- The **main proposals** under discussion include:
 - **Updating NATO's Strategic Concept** in time for the 2022 Summit – **a recommendation Ministers welcomed**. In his remarks related to the Strategic Concept, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg defined the twin goals of this process as follows: "So that we jointly address the changing security environment. And recommit to our fundamental values."
 - Reaffirming the centrality of the **transatlantic relationship**
 - Strengthening **deterrence and defence**, including through a substantial increase in common funding
 - Strengthening NATO's role as the primary transatlantic **platform to discuss and coordinate on all issues that affect Allies' shared security**
 - Enhancing **resilience**, including in telecommunications and energy
 - Maintaining NATO's **technological edge** and fostering transatlantic cooperation on emerging and disruptive technologies (EDTs)
 - Enhancing NATO's focus on **climate change**
 - Adopting a **more global outlook and protecting the rules-based international order**, including through increased cooperation with like-minded partners and more training and support to partners

- The exchanges laid the groundwork and included preparations for the **upcoming NATO Summit** in Brussels (dates and format yet to be determined).

BACKGROUND

- The NATO 2030 initiative was an outcome of the 2019 NATO Leaders' Meeting in London. Leaders tasked the Secretary General to conduct a reflection process to further strengthen NATO's political dimension including consultation. Drawing on proposals put forward by the appointed independent expert group, the Secretary General gathered feedback in consultation with the capitals, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly and young leaders, among others. The **NATO PA** has been closely associated with the NATO 2030 reflection process and submitted its **recommendations** in [Declaration 460](#) adopted in November 2020.
- On this basis, the NATO Secretary General has proposed an ambitious and wide-ranging agenda for transatlantic security and defence. **The NATO 2030 initiative will be at the heart of the upcoming NATO Summit in Brussels later this year.**
- **The NATO Secretary General acknowledged the NATO PA's contribution** in one of his press conferences.

II. RUSSIA, DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE AND ARMS CONTROL

DISCUSSIONS

- Ministers held a discussion with Sweden and Finland and the EU High Representative on relations with Russia and arms control, which demonstrated a strong convergence of views.
- NATO remains committed to a **dual-track approach** to Russia, based on strong deterrence and defence as well as openness to meaningful dialogue.
- Allies agreed to continue to review and adapt **deterrence and defence**, including in light of the growing Russian missile threat.
- NATO will continue to **work with the EU and close partners** to respond to Russia's actions.
- NATO will **remain a nuclear alliance as long as nuclear weapons exists. At the same time, all Allies also remain fully committed to arms control.**
- In this regard, **Allies welcomed the recent decision by the United States and Russia to extend the New START agreement**, the only remaining remit limiting the number of nuclear warheads in the world. Allies expressed hope this extension would help to further strengthen international nuclear arms control. However, the Secretary General identified the modernisation of nuclear arsenals and development of new hypersonic weapons by China and Russia as a challenge. The arms control regime must take account of new realities, he stressed.
- **Allies and partners called for the immediate release of Alexei Navalny and other peaceful demonstrators** who have been arrested in Russia. They also **called out Russia's disinformation and propaganda and attempts to influence elections.**

BACKGROUND AND FURTHER NOTES

- NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg noted that "Despite years of pressure and efforts to engage in a meaningful dialogue, Russia has increased **its pattern of repressive behaviour at home and aggressive actions abroad**", including efforts to undermine and destabilise its neighbours Ukraine,

Georgia and the Republic of Moldova as well as supporting the crackdown in Belarus and attempts to interfere in the Western Balkans.

- In response to Russia's actions, **NATO has implemented the biggest reinforcement of collective defence** in a generation and has stepped up hybrid and cyber defences.
- The **NATO-Russia Council** has met ten times since the summer of 2016 but has not met since the summer of 2019 "because Russia has not responded positively to our invitation to convene the NATO-Russia Council", declared the NATO Secretary General.
- The NATO Secretary General acknowledged that the issue of **Nord Stream 2** had been raised during the meeting and that differences persisted among Allies on this issue.

III. NATO'S MISSION IN AFGHANISTAN

- Ministers **made no final decision** on the future of the international troop presence in Afghanistan. They expressed firm commitment to take the necessary measures and keep the troops safe. Ministers underscored support to all efforts to reinvigorate the peace process.
- **Allies would continue to assess together the conditions on the ground, in close consultation, and coordinate in the coming days and weeks.**
- Allies strongly support a **negotiated solution as the only way to achieve a sustainable peace and ensure that Afghanistan never becomes a platform for international terrorism.**
- The Secretary General underscored there were no guarantees that the fragile peace talks would succeed. All sides must **seize this historic opportunity without further delay and negotiate in good faith**, and **all regional and international actors must play their part** to support a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. He underlined the critical importance to see a reduction of violence and for the Taliban to stop their support for "international terrorists, including Al Qaeda."
- Allies understand that there is **"no easy solution"** in Afghanistan nor a **"risk-free path ahead"** and emphasise the need to "prepare for all options."
- NATO remains **committed to the funding** for the Afghan national security forces secured until 2024.

IV. RELATIONS WITH THE MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

- **Ministers had a discussion on the Middle East and North Africa**, including NATO's mission in Iraq and support for partners in the region.
- The NATO training and assistance mission in **Iraq** is based on the requests from the government of Iraq. NATO will gradually increase its presence, in full coordination with the government of Iraq.
- Ministers also reviewed partnerships with **Jordan and Tunisia**.
- Ministers discussed whether NATO can do more in the **Sahel** region.
- On **Libya**, NATO welcomes the progress over the last two months in the UN-led peace efforts and supports the Berlin process. NATO also stands ready to provide support with capacity building when the conditions on the ground permit.

V. ADDITIONAL NOTES

CLIMATE CHANGE

- **Ministers endorsed a report on NATO's approach to climate change.** The report would increase the Alliance's ability to understand, adapt and mitigate the security impact of climate change.
- **The Secretary General expressed confidence that the Alliance could play a leading role** in this field and contribute to the objective of reaching Net Zero.

NEW CHAPTER FOR TRANSATLANTIC RELATIONS

- This was the **first meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers with the new US Secretary of State Antony Blinken**.
- As Defence Secretary Lloyd Austin had done in February, Secretary of State Blinken **reiterated the US steadfast commitment to the Alliance**, as a cornerstone of peace, prosperity and stability for the transatlantic community for more than 70 years. He framed his trip to Brussels as an expression of the US pledge to rebuild partnerships, first and foremost with NATO Allies, in an effort to revitalise the Alliance.
- In their statement, Ministers hailed the next NATO Summit as an opportunity to **open a new chapter in transatlantic relations as well as to set the future direction of the Alliance**. They defined NATO's enduring strength and purpose as follows: "NATO is the strongest alliance in history, guaranteeing the freedom of a billion people, the integrity of our territory, and the protection of our values."

CHINA:

- Asked about China, the NATO Secretary General elaborated on the **challenges related to China's rise**: "We don't regard China as an adversary. But of course the rise of China has direct consequences to our security. They will soon have the biggest economy in the world, they already have the second largest defense budget, they are investing heavily in new modern military capabilities, including nuclear capabilities, they are modernizing their armed forces, and we also see that China is a country which used coercion against the neighbors in the region, we see their behavior in the, in the South China Sea. And perhaps most importantly, China is a country that doesn't share our values. We see that in the way they deal with democratic protests in Hong Kong, how they suppress minorities in their own country, the Uighurs, and also how they actually try to undermine the international rules-based order. So, one of the challenges we face as we now have this forward-looking process with NATO 2030 is how to strengthen and how to work more closely together as allies, responding to the rise of China."

Annex 1: NATO Foreign Ministerial Statement, 23-24 March 2021

1. We are meeting in Brussels to reaffirm the enduring transatlantic bond between Europe and North America, with NATO at its heart. We are bound together by our shared democratic values, and by our adherence to the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter. NATO is the foundation of our collective defence: together we reaffirm our solemn commitment to the Washington Treaty, including that an attack against one Ally shall be considered an attack against us all, as enshrined in Article 5.
2. NATO is the strongest alliance in history, guaranteeing the freedom of a billion people, the integrity of our territory, and the protection of our values. NATO is a defensive Alliance and poses no threat to any country. In response to a more dangerous and unpredictable security environment, we are considerably strengthening NATO's deterrence and defence capabilities, posture and resilience, underpinned by seven consecutive years of rising defence spending, more capable and ready forces, significant deployments in missions and operations, and deeper engagement with partners. We are making good progress on fairer transatlantic burden sharing; we welcome the efforts made by all Allies in Europe and North America that contribute to our indivisible security. We must and will do more.
3. NATO will continue to adapt. We face rising threats and systemic competition. Russia's aggressive actions constitute a threat to Euro-Atlantic security; terrorism in all its forms and manifestations remains a persistent threat to us all. Assertive and authoritarian powers, and non-state actors, challenge the rules-based international order, including through hybrid and cyber threats, the malicious use of new technologies, as well as other asymmetric threats. The Covid-19 pandemic once again illustrates that we face constantly evolving challenges; we will continue to ensure our defence and operational effectiveness throughout this crisis. We pay tribute to all those who combat this pandemic in all our countries and around the world.
4. The transatlantic partnership remains the cornerstone of our collective defence, central to our political cohesion, and an essential pillar of the rules-based international order. The upcoming NATO Summit will open a new chapter in transatlantic relations and set the direction for the future of our Alliance to 2030 and beyond. In line with the decision by our Leaders in London in December 2019, we will further strengthen NATO's political dimension, including consultation. We welcome the reflection process, including the recommendation to update NATO's Strategic Concept. We will further reinforce NATO's resilience, military strength and global outlook, connecting more closely with other nations and international organisations that share our goals. We will continue to stand together and to work together, to guarantee our security, prosperity, democracy and freedoms.