



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

# NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING, 1-2 DECEMBER 2020

## Policy Brief

207 SPE 20 E | Original: English | December 2020

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**NATO FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING, 1-2 DECEMBER 2020:**  
**KEY TAKEAWAYS**

**Agenda**

- Afghanistan: international troop presence
- Russia's continuing challenge
- Black Sea security and support for Georgia and Ukraine
- NATO 2030 and continued NATO adaptation
- The rise of China

**Decisions**

- **Updated Substantial NATO-Georgia Package**
- **Comprehensive report on China**  
 (topics: military development, growing activity in NATO's neighbourhood, and implications for resilience)

**Other discussion themes**

- The situation in the Eastern Mediterranean

**Partner participation**

- Session on global shift in the balance of power with the rise of China: Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea as well as Finland, Sweden, and EU High Representative/Vice-President.
- Session on security in the Black Sea region: Georgia and Ukraine.

**I. AFGHANISTAN: INTERNATIONAL TROOP PRESENCE**

- **Ministers discussed** the future of the international troop presence in Afghanistan.
- **A decision** is expected at the NATO meeting of Defence Minister **in February 2021**.
- Allies will continue to assess their presence **based on conditions on the ground**.
- A key provision of the US-Taliban agreement foresees a withdrawal of all international troops by 1 May 2021, the NATO Secretary General expects **a difficult decision** between:
  - **staying** – because the Taliban have not lived up to commitments – and risking continued fighting and prolonged, long-term military presence and
  - **leaving** and risking Afghanistan becoming a safe haven for international terrorists once again.
- Allies agree **next steps must remain coordinated, deliberate, and orderly**.
- The **United States** confirmed that it **will continue to provide the enablers for the NATO mission**.

**BACKGROUND**

- On 2 December, **the Afghan government and the Taliban reached an agreement on rules and procedure which opens the way for substantive negotiations in the Afghan peace process**. The NATO Secretary General called it a "*breakthrough*".
- The Afghan peace process has allowed Allies to gradually adjust their presence in Afghanistan. It presents an historic but fragile opportunity for peace.
- **International troop levels** have fallen from 100,000+ a few years ago to **roughly 11,000** in the NATO-led Resolute Support train, assist and advise mission (50+% come from European Allies and partners).
- In November, the United States announced further reductions of its own contingent to **2,500 troops by mid-January**.

- Allies remain committed to provide **funding to the Afghan National Security Forces through 2024.**

## II. RUSSIA'S CONTINUING CHALLENGE

- **Ministers discussed** Russia's continuing challenge, incl.
  - **increased military deployments, presence, or activities** in NATO's neighbourhood, incl. in the High North, Belarus, Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, Syria, and Libya – often in violation of the wishes of governments or of international law;
  - **nuclear modernisation and deployment of new missiles**; and
  - **ongoing violations and actions undermining treaties.**
- **Ministers expressed support** for efforts to maintain the **arms control regime vis-à-vis Russia**. With the New START treaty set to expire in February 2021, this includes **limitations on nuclear warheads** as well as **a more comprehensive arms control regime**. *"We welcome the dialogue between the United States and Russia to find a way forward. Because we should not find ourselves in a situation where there is no agreement regulating the number of nuclear warheads,"* said NATO Secretary General.
- **Ministers discussed security in the Black Sea** (see next section).
- **Ministers discussed** developments in **Belarus**. The NATO Secretary General stressed that *"Both Minsk and Moscow must respect the right of the people of Belarus to determine their own future. Through an inclusive political dialogue."*
- **Ministers discussed** developments in **Nagorno-Karabakh**. The NATO Secretary General welcomed *"the cessation of hostilities in Nagorno-Karabakh. The full resolution of this conflict must be found through political and diplomatic ways."*

### **BACKGROUND**

- NATO continues **a dual-track approach** towards Russia by **adapting its deterrence posture** to address Russia's destabilising actions and **pursuing dialogue** with Russia.

## III. BLACK SEA SECURITY AND SUPPORT FOR GEORGIA AND UKRAINE

- **Ministers discussed, together with Georgia and Ukraine:**
  - the **security situation in the Black Sea region**;
  - **support for Georgia and Ukraine**; and
  - **Georgia and Ukraine's reform programmes.**
- **Allies and Georgia approved the updated Substantial NATO-Georgia Package.** Little detail has been released so far. Germany will lead a new Military Medical Capacity Development initiative.

### **BACKGROUND**

- The Black Sea Region holds **strategic importance for NATO and all NATO Allies.**
- In recent years, **NATO has stepped up its presence** on land, at sea, and in the air as well as its **political and practical support to Georgia and Ukraine**
- **Russia** continues to violate the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia and Ukraine, with its illegal occupation of Crimea and parts of Georgia. It continues its military build-up in Crimea and increasingly deploys forces in the Black Sea region.

#### IV. NATO 2030 AND CONTINUED NATO ADAPTATION

- **Ministers were briefed** by Thomas de Maizière and Wess Mitchell, the co-chairs of the Group of Experts appointed by the NATO Secretary General to support his *NATO 2030* reflection process.
- **Ministers discussed** the Group's report *NATO 2030: United for a New Era* released on 1 December.
- For more information, **see separate briefing**.

#### **BACKGROUND**

- The NATO Secretary General will continue the *NATO 2030* process. *"The goal is to keep NATO as a strong military Alliance. Make it more united politically. And with a more global approach"*, he said.
- He will further consult with civil society, **parliamentarians**, young leaders, the private sector, and Allies.
- **He will prepare strategic-level recommendations for NATO Leaders for their meeting in 2021 (dates TBC)**. He has already made clear that one recommendation will be **an update of the Strategic Concept**.

#### V. THE RISE OF CHINA

- **Ministers assessed** the global shift in the balance of power with the rise of China, including in a joint session with Australia, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea as well as Finland, Sweden, and EU High Representative/Vice-President.
- **Ministers agreed** a comprehensive report on China, which assesses
  - **military developments**;
  - **growing activity in NATO's neighbourhood**; and
  - **implications for resilience**, incl. in terms of emerging technologies and critical infrastructure.
- China presents **important opportunities for Allies**, incl. on economic and trade relations, arms control, and climate change.
- But China, which does not share NATO values, also presents **challenges to Alliance security**, as it:
  - invests massively in military capabilities;
  - increases its role in areas close to Allied territory – from the Arctic to Africa;
  - invests heavily in infrastructure in Allied countries;
  - violates fundamental human rights; and
  - tries to intimidate other countries.
- *"Over the past year, we have seen a significant shift in our understanding of China. And an increasing convergence of views, both within NATO, and with our partners,"* said NATO Secretary General. *"China is not our adversary,"* he said, but argued it *"is increasingly engaging in a systemic competition with us."*
- NATO must address China's rise together as Allies and with a community of like-minded democracies by **consulting closely and cooperating**, where possible, to defend **shared values**, bolster **resilience** of societies, economies, and institutions, and upholding the **rules-based order**.
- China's challenges means NATO must take **a more global approach**, while remaining a regional Alliance, and **work with partners** on, e.g. **sharing information and insights**; **promoting common approaches**, including in cyberspace; and **strengthening global rules and norms**, for instance on arms control.
- NATO remains **prepared to continue to engage with China**.

## VI. THE SITUATION IN THE EASTERN MEDITERRANEAN

- **Ministers discussed** the situation in the Eastern Mediterranean.
- The NATO Secretary General remains committed to further strengthening the **military de-confliction mechanism** between Greece and Turkey and to build **more comprehensive confidence-building measures**. He has put forward **additional proposals**.

### **BACKGROUND**

- The recently developed **military de-confliction mechanism** between Greece and Turkey, facilitated by the NATO Secretary General, has opened communication lines to help to reduce risks of incidents and accidents, and, if they happen, to prevent them from spiralling out of control.
- Dialogue facilitated by the NATO Secretary General also led to the **cancellation of specific military exercises** on national days in Greece and Turkey.
- The NATO Secretary General noted that *“NATO is a platform where we can sit down and, in an open way, address differences, but also try to find positive steps in the right direction.”* He stressed that **NATO is not part of negotiations on the underlying problem** between the two Allies, but that efforts at NATO can help pave the way to address the problem, which ultimately requires political will to be resolved.