



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

NATO DEFENCE MINISTERS' MEETING

11-12 October 2023

Policy Brief

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KEY TAKEAWAYS

NATO Defence Ministers met in Brussels on 11 and 12 October 2023 **in several sessions**. In addition to a session "Allies plus Invitee", the ministers also met in a session with their Israeli counterpart (joining online) as well as in a session including the European Union. The meeting was preceded by **a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group**, in the presence of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy. A meeting of the **NATO-Ukraine Council** also took place, for the first time at the level of Defence Ministers.

Agenda:

- **Support for Ukraine**
- **Solidarity with Israel**
- **Ongoing missions and operations**
- **Strengthening NATO's deterrence and defence**
- **Damaged Baltic Sea pipeline and communications cable**

I. SUPPORT FOR UKRAINE

Ministers discussed the situation in Ukraine and ways of strengthening Allied and NATO support.

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy made his first visit to NATO headquarters since Russia's 2022 invasion. He joined a meeting of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group, where over 50 nations discussed how to step up, sustain and coordinate military support for Ukraine.

Ahead of the Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting, the Secretary General underlined that **"we must continue to step up and sustain the steady flow of weapons and ammunitions to Ukraine. The stronger Ukraine is on the battlefield, the stronger they will be at the negotiating table, and the sooner this war will end. And we need to put in place a long-term framework that will ensure history does not repeat itself."**

Several Allies announced new packages ahead or at the Ukraine Defence Contact Group meeting, for example:

- **Belgium and Denmark** confirmed plans to **deliver F-16 jets.**
- **Germany** announced a **1 billion-euro package**, which focuses on **air defence** (including Patriot IRIS-T, Gepard systems), **weapons and ground vehicles.**
- **The United States** will provide **USD 200+ million in air defence, artillery and rocket ammunition.**
- **The United Kingdom** committed **EUR 100+ million for air defence and mine clearance equipment.**
- **Canada** committed to donating **winter clothing and equipment**, worth for about **CAD 25 million.**

Allies also discussed **how to significantly increase their stockpiles of a number of battle-decisive munitions** – not only to replenish their own stocks, but also to continue to support Ukraine. They continue ramping up through existing structures, platforms with industry as well as NATO's capability targets. Since the Vilnius Summit in July, **the NATO Support and Procurement Agency, for example, has framework contracts and orders worth an estimated EUR 2.4 billion** (EUR 1 billion in firm orders). Allies are also working on **joint efforts with Ukraine to produce more ammunition, including inside Ukraine.**

NATO Allies also agreed to step up support for the winter months, including through the provision of more cold weather clothing, demining capabilities, fuel, and medical equipment. As the Secretary General noted, "Russia is stepping up its attacks on Ukrainian infrastructure and is preparing again to use winter as a weapon of war."

On **sustaining NATO and Allied support to Ukraine**, the NATO Secretary General said: "I'm confident that NATO Allies will continue to do so not least because **it is in our security interest that Ukraine prevails. Their fight is our fight. Their security is our security. Their values are our values.**" Asked about how the terrorist attacks by Hamas and its affiliates could impact support to Ukraine, he stressed that "we have the capability, the strength to address different challenges at the same time. **We don't have the luxury of choosing only one set and one challenge.**"

The NATO-Ukraine Council met, for the first time in the format of Ministers of Defence, with Ukraine's new Defence Minister Rustem Umerov participating. The Council discussed **Ukraine's priorities on its path to NATO membership** and also focused on **long-term interoperability and defence procurement**.

During his press conference following the NATO-Ukraine Council meeting, **NATO Secretary General stressed defence and security governance reforms**: "A modernised defence and security sector will not only help Ukraine to prevail; It will also **ensure the Ukrainians can sustain peace and stability**. Allies commended Ukraine's continued fight against corruption, even in the midst of Russia's brutal war."

II. SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL

Allied Defence Ministers were briefed by their counterpart **Yoav Gallant** about Hamas' attack against Israel.

Allies strongly **condemned Hamas' indefensible attacks on civilians** and expressed solidarity with **Israel**, making clear that it has the **right to defend itself**. They called for Hamas to immediately release all hostages, and stressed that as the conflict unfolds, the protection of civilians is essential. Allies also made clear that **no nation or organisation hostile to Israel should neither seek to take advantage of the situation nor to escalate it**. In his replies to the media, the Secretary General mentioned Hezbollah and Iran in particular.

A number of NATO Allies made clear that they are providing practical support to Israel as it continues to respond to the situation.

III. ONGOING MISSIONS AND OPERATIONS

Defence ministers reviewed NATO's ongoing missions and operations.

In **Kosovo**, NATO has already deployed hundreds of additional reserves forces following recent tensions, as well as ordered more patrols in the north. [KFOR is expected to reach close to 4,700 personnel](#) by the end of October.

Ministers urged Belgrade and Pristina to behave responsibly, refrain from destabilising actions, and re-engage in the EU-facilitated dialogue as the only way to lasting peace in Kosovo.

In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, Allies expressed their ongoing support for the [EU-led Operation Althea](#), conducted under the Berlin plus Agreements.

In **Iraq**, NATO is expanding support for the Iraqi forces at their request, with a view to preventing the return of ISIS.

NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg also announced that Assistant Secretary General Tom Goffus would act as his **Special Counter-Terrorism Coordinator** – a position created as part of the agreement between NATO, Türkiye and Sweden at the Vilnius Summit in July.

IV. STRENGTHENING NATO'S DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE

Ministers took stock of the **work underway to resource and exercise the defence plans** that Allied leaders agreed at the Vilnius Summit.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg also emphasised the role of NATO's **nuclear weapons** in deterring aggression. He noted that NATO would hold its annual **Steadfast Noon exercise** the following week over Croatia, Italy and the Mediterranean Sea. Steadfast Noon is hosted by a different NATO Ally each year and helps ensure that the Alliance's nuclear deterrent remains safe, secure and effective.

Asked about Vladimir Putin's statement that Russia could consider withdrawing from the **Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT)**, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stressed that Russia's "nuclear rhetoric throughout this conflict has been, and continues to be, reckless and dangerous". He added that: "we continue to watch what Russia is doing very closely. So far, we haven't seen any changes in their nuclear posture that require any changes in our nuclear posture. But of course, Russia's announcement on revoking ratification of the comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, demonstrates Russia's lack of respect, and the continued disregard for its international commitments." He concluded: "We will continue to support Ukraine and will not allow President Putin to blackmail NATO Allies through his nuclear rhetoric".

On the margins of the Ministerial meeting, two groups of Allies signed initiatives to support Allied air power cooperation:

- Germany and the United Kingdom joined the **NATO Flight Training Europe (NFTE)** High Visibility Project, bringing the total number of participants to 12 (Belgium, Czechia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Romania, Spain, Türkiye, United Kingdom). NFTE aims to ensure that sufficient state-of-the-art pilot training is available around Europe in a cost-efficient and interoperable manner.
- Thirteen Allies (Albania, Bulgaria, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Türkiye) and invitee Sweden signed an agreement to cooperate on cross-border airspace. This reflects the participating nations' commitment to ensure that Allied civil and military authorities can collaborate on the use of air space for NATO training and exercises, and other air activities in several regions of Europe.

In addition, Defence Ministers from 10 NATO Allies signed a **memorandum of understanding to further develop the European Sky Shield Initiative**. Under Germany's leadership, the initiative aims to bolster European air and missile defence through the joint acquisition of air defence equipment and missiles by European nations. The 10 NATO Allies participating in the initiative are: Belgium, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Netherlands and Slovenia.

V. DAMAGE ON BALTIC SEA PIPELINE AND COMMUNICATIONS CABLE

Ministers discussed the recent **damage to undersea infrastructure between Estonia and Finland** and expressed their strong solidarity with both Allies as they work to establish the facts.

NATO stood ready to support this effort and the exchange of information. However, it was **too early to determine exactly what caused the damage** to the pipeline and the cable.

Ministers made clear, however, that, **if it is proven to be a deliberate attack on NATO critical infrastructure, this will be a serious incident and will be met by a united and determined response.**

The NATO Secretary General noted that since the Nord Stream sabotage a year ago, Allies had taken steps to strengthen the protection of undersea infrastructure, including through greater coordination with private operators. In particular, NATO established a Critical Undersea Infrastructure Coordination Cell at NATO Headquarters and was in the process of setting up a NATO Maritime Centre for the Security of Critical Undersea Infrastructure within MARCOM, the NATO Maritime Command in the UK.

At the same time, Mr Stoltenberg stressed that undersea infrastructure was inherently vulnerable. Therefore, it was important to share information, intelligence and best practices as well as enhance deterrence.

NATO PA President, Michal Szczerba, had expressed his concern about the damage to infrastructure in the Baltic Sea in a [statement issued on 10 October](#), while the day before, at the annual session in Copenhagen, the Assembly adopted in its plenary sitting a [resolution put forward by the Science and Technology Committee](#) on the need to further enhance the protection of undersea infrastructure.

VI. ADDITIONAL NOTES

Sweden's accession to NATO

The NATO Secretary General welcomed confirmation by the Turkish Minister of Defence that Türkiye stands by the agreement reached at the Vilnius Summit to finalise the accession of Sweden to the Alliance. Mr Stoltenberg noted he expected the Turkish government to now submit ratification to the Turkish parliament.
