



# NDC Research Report

*Research Division*  
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## **NATO's Special Meeting in Brussels Addressing Current Priorities and Restating Core Values**

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On 25 May 2017 the Heads of State and Government of NATO countries met in Brussels, reaffirming the Alliance's unity in dealing with common threats and maintaining peace.

*“The bond between NATO Allies has kept our people safe since the Alliance was founded almost seventy years ago. We are here today to strengthen that bond.”<sup>2</sup>*

*(Secretary General J. Stoltenberg, 25 May 2017, Brussels)*



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<sup>2</sup> NATO, "Opening remarks" by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the working dinner of the North Atlantic Council at the level of Heads of State and Government, 25 May 2017, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144096.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144096.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed May 2017).

The Special Meeting (unofficially known as the Brussels Summit) was characterised by a number of novelties. Not only was it the first NATO meeting of the newly elected U.S. President, Donald Trump; but the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Duško Marković also participated, given that his country was soon to become NATO's 29th member. Moreover, the Summit was held at the new NATO Headquarters in Brussels; the event, in fact, included a handover ceremony of the brand-new building from the Government of Belgium to the Alliance.

The top priorities on the Summit agenda were the Alliance's efforts in the fight against terrorism and fairer burden sharing among member states. Other topics discussed by NATO leaders were Russia's current military posture; the Russia-NATO relationship; projecting stability to the South; and the issue of migration. The following will be a brief overview of the major items covered and the decisions taken during the Brussels Summit.

### **NATO's role in the fight against terrorism**

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks against the United States, the Alliance, for the first time ever, invoked Article 5 of the Washington Treaty on collective defence and responded in several ways, including by sending NATO AWACS aircraft to support the air defense of North America. Thereafter, it launched NATO's largest-ever military operation in Afghanistan. While ISAF was not an Article 5 mission, it remains a core operation of the Alliance, which is still committed in the region through the concept of projecting stability. Under Operation Resolute Support, 13,000 NATO troops have been providing training and assistance to the Afghan security forces since 2015.<sup>3</sup> According to the Secretary General, Afghan forces – and their special operation forces in particular – are now better able to secure their country themselves.<sup>4</sup> During the Brussels Summit, NATO leaders reviewed the training mission and decided to maintain it, with some Allies declaring their willingness to even increase their troop contributions. The Resolute Support mission will continue improving Afghan forces' command and control, and help them develop their own air force with the aim of fighting the Taliban as well as the other terrorist groups present in the region.

As training is considered the most effective means of fighting terrorism, NATO is also involved in the training and capacity building of the Iraqi defence and security sectors. As the Secretary General said, *"In the long-run, it's much better that local forces, local institutions are able to take care of*

<sup>3</sup> NATO, "Resolute Support Mission in Afghanistan," 13 October 2016, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/topics\\_113694.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/in/natohq/topics_113694.htm) (accessed May 2017).

<sup>4</sup> NATO, "Doorstep statement," by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meeting of NATO Heads of State and/or Government, 25 May 2017, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144083.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144083.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed May 2017).

*the security, stability in their own country.*"<sup>5</sup> Allies decided to continue training Iraqi forces, helping them to improve their skills in preparation for the battle for Mosul. <sup>6</sup>

NATO AWACS surveillance planes have been providing information to the Global Coalition to defeat ISIS, in which all 28 NATO Allies are members. During the Summit, the Heads of State and Government of NATO countries agreed on an action plan to increase the Alliance's efforts in the fight against terrorism. Firstly, NATO will join the Global Coalition fighting ISIS. This will not only send a strong political message regarding the Alliance's commitment and unity in the fight against terrorism; it will also provide useful practical tools, such as the improvement of coordination efforts among the members of the Coalition; and it will allow the Alliance to take part in deliberations on training and capacity building. NATO will be able to deploy more training teams to unstable countries without, however, engaging in combat operations. Furthermore, NATO will enhance AWACS support to the Coalition by increasing flight-time and information sharing, and providing air-to-air refuelling as pledged by some member states. AWACS surveillance planes will also help the Coalition in terms of airspace management.

Secondly, a new terrorism intelligence cell will be established at NATO Headquarters within the Intelligence Division. This novel arrangement will improve intelligence sharing in general, especially regarding foreign fighters. Also, Joint Force Command in Naples will host a Hub for the South aimed at monitoring regional threats coming from the Southern flank. Finally, the Secretary General will appoint a coordinator for supervising the implementation of the new action plan and NATO's efforts in the fight against terrorism.<sup>7</sup>

## **More equitable burden sharing within the Alliance**

During the Wales Summit of 2014, Allies agreed to spend more and better on defence by halting the decline in defence expenditure and moving towards meeting the goal of spending 2% of GDP on defence within a decade. Just one year later, an impressive step forward was taken: not only did defence spending in Allied countries not experience any cuts, but some states even increased their budgets. In fact, during the Warsaw Summit, it was confirmed that Allies' overall expenditure had increased for the first time since 2009 after a long period of decline, with billions of dollars more invested in the defence sector. This year the issue of defence spending has been seen as critical by the

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> NATO, "Press conference," by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of NATO Heads of State and/or Government in Brussels on 25 May, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144098.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144098.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed May 2017).

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* This role has meanwhile been assigned to the Deputy Secretary General.

US President Donald Trump, who has often stated the importance of sharing the burden of defence expenditure more fairly among Allies. At the Brussels Summit, President Trump affirmed that all NATO states have to meet their financial obligations, considering that the 2% of GDP contribution represents “the bare minimum for confronting today’s threats”.<sup>8</sup> On 25 May, Allies decided to develop annual national plans which set out how to meet the 2% pledge; how to invest in key military capabilities; and how to contribute to NATO operations. Those plans will be presented for review in December 2017. Mr Stoltenberg underlined that defence spending means contributing and increasing the effectiveness of NATO’s missions and engagements, with the aim of keeping Allies’ populations and territories safe in such an unstable world. In this regard several Allied countries observed that increasing defence expenditure means increasing security inside Europe.

### **Additional items on the agenda**

A number of other issues were covered during the meeting of Heads of State and Government, including Russia’s more aggressive posture and NATO’s consequent reaction. As the Secretary General stated in Brussels, the military presence of the Alliance on the Eastern flank sends a message of credible deterrence and defence.<sup>9</sup> The deployment of the four battlegroups to Eastern Europe as part of the NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence has been defined as defensive and proportionate to the Russian actions in Crimea. Nonetheless, NATO is maintaining a dual-track approach in which strong defence is combined with an open door for dialogue. After two years in which the NATO-Russia Council did not convene, in 2016 and 2017, several meetings have meanwhile taken place. These aimed at increasing transparency, reducing risk, and preventing conflict. A constant feature during the Summit was that Russia’s military buildup and readiness to use force against its neighbours has given the Alliance the strongest sense of unity and support for collective defence since the end of the Cold War.<sup>10</sup> NATO also maintains a close partnership with Ukraine, and provides practical and political support to that country.

Central to the talks in Brussels was also the continuing instability in Libya and the migration crisis affecting Europe. The Secretary General stated that he had recently met the Libyan Prime Minister for

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<sup>8</sup> NATO, “Remarks by Donald Trump President of the United States at the declaration of the 9/11-Article 5 Memorial,” 25 May 2017, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events\\_143956.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events_143956.htm) (accessed May 2017). President of the United States at the dedication of the 9/11-Article 5 Memorial Remarks by Donald Trump, President of the United States at the dedication of the 9/11-Article 5 Memorial Remarks by Donald Trump, President of the United States at the dedication of the 9/11-Article 5 Memorial

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> NATO, “Press conference,” by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg following the meeting of NATO Heads of State and/or Government in Brussels on 25 May, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144098.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144098.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed May 2017).

discussions on ways for NATO to support the country by building defence institutions and improving its national intelligence services. While Mr Stoltenberg underlined that dealing with the migration flow is not among NATO's core tasks, the Alliance is supporting the numerous NGOs and international organizations present in the Mediterranean area. NATO's deployment in the Aegean Sea and the launch in November of Operation Sea Guardian in the Central Mediterranean are supporting the European Union's efforts in dealing with the migration and refugee crisis. Furthermore, the Alliance will attempt to address the root causes of the crisis of stability to the South by helping Middle Eastern and North African countries become more stable.

During the Brussels Summit the Prime Minister of Montenegro, Duško Marković, was welcomed; his participation came in anticipation of his country's admittance to the Alliance. Montenegro started accession talks in December 2015 and a few months later, in May 2016, Allied foreign ministers signed the respective protocol. Montenegro became NATO's 29th member state on 5 June 2017. The Brussels Summit was the right moment to welcome the new member and to reaffirm the importance of its membership, for the Western Balkans and for the Alliance as a whole. Mr Stoltenberg reminded participants that NATO's door remains open to those countries which share the Alliance's core values and are ready to implement reforms, as Montenegro has successfully done.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

The Brussels Summit was also the occasion to welcome President Trump and assert the importance of the transatlantic bond, despite Mr. Trump's criticism of Allies' contributions to the defence budget and the general perception that the U.S. is moving away from Europe. Given his campaign rhetoric, one of the main questions leading up to the Summit was whether President Trump would publicly reiterate the American commitment to Article 5 and the defense of NATO. In the end he did not do so, leading to some consternation among allied leaders and the press.<sup>12</sup>

Finally, two memorials were unveiled in the new NATO headquarters, representing NATO's core values and historical events: a part of the Berlin Wall and the 9/11-Article 5 memorial. The fragment of the Berlin Wall now installed in Brussels symbolizes the importance of freedom and NATO's contribution to the end of the Cold War. As Secretary General Stoltenberg said:

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<sup>11</sup> NATO, "Doorstep statement," by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg ahead of the meeting of NATO Heads of State and/or Government, 25 May 2017, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144083.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144083.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed May 2017).

<sup>12</sup> Senior members of the US national security team made clear America's commitment to Article 5 in statements behind the scenes, both before and after the summit, and the President himself finally made the same commitment some two weeks later. Jeremy Herb, "Trump Commits to NATO's Article 5," CNN Politics, 9 June 2017, at <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/06/09/politics/trump-commits-to-natos-article-5/index.html>.

*“The Berlin Wall is a symbol of that past. It was built to divide Europe. To keep people in, and ideas out. In the face of division, NATO Allies stood united. In defence of freedom, democracy and human dignity.”*<sup>13</sup>

In her speech, German Chancellor Angela Merkel defined the memorial as a symbol of the past that recalls the Alliance’s achievements on which the future NATO has to build: cooperation, unity, solidarity and freedom. The Chancellor stated that Germany will never forget the efforts NATO made to make her country united and will, therefore, continue contributing to the Alliance.<sup>14</sup>

The 9/11-Article 5 memorial, made from a remnant of the Twin Towers, speaks for solidarity, the importance of collective defence, and NATO’s role in fighting terrorism. Both the Secretary General and the U.S. President defined the memorial as a symbol of the bond between North America and Europe and the Alliance’s commitment to the collective defence clause of the Washington Treaty.

The new NATO Headquarters is considered a symbol of a strong and adaptable Alliance; in the words of the Secretary General, the building is *“a 21st century headquarters for a 21st century Alliance.”*<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the Brussels Summit lacked any concrete decision on current security threats. The meeting mostly focused on reiterating NATO’s ongoing policies and missions. With two newly-elected core leaders in Alliance countries, expectations were high, but the Alliance was unable to take any further steps forward to fulfil them. The 2018 NATO Summit – which is likely to take place in the new headquarters in Brussels or in Istanbul following President Erdogan’s offer – will be a stress test for the future outlook of the Alliance.

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13 NATO, “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the dedication of the Berlin Wall Memorial,” 25 May 2017, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144088.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144088.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed May 2017).

14 Remarks by Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany at the dedication of the Berlin Wall Memorial NATO, “Remarks by Angela Merkel, Chancellor of Germany at the dedication of the Berlin Wall Memorial,” 25 May 2017, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events\\_143956.htm](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/events_143956.htm) (accessed May 2017).

15 NATO, “Remarks by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the new NATO headquarters handover ceremony,” 25 May 2017, available at: [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_144094.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_144094.htm?selectedLocale=en) (accessed May 2017).





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