

On Doorstep of Belarus, Russia: NATO Chief Speaks of Article 5, Nuclear Policy, Military Buildup Along Eastern Flank, Three Potential Casus Belli

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While in a nation that borders both Belarus and Russia, Stoltenberg twice mentions NATO’s Article 5 in his brief remarks and responses to questions by journalists.

As can be seen below he also:

- Commends NATO battle groups in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, all of which border Russian territory and three of which also border Belarus, and visits the NATO battle groups commanded by Canada and the U.S.
- Repeatedly stresses the unity of NATO and the European Union in the conflicts with Belarus and Russia
- When asked about NATO’s Nuclear Posture Review, he confirms that the U.S. “states that they will maintain this high level of US presence in Europe, and actually also some elements of further increase”
- Accuses Russia of a major military buildup near Ukraine, promising more assistance to the latter and apostrophizing Russia in the imperative mood (Russia needs to, they need to)
- Denounces Belarus for a litany of crimes, internal and as affect NATO’s Eastern Flank
- Threatens the Republika Srpska, reminding it that NATO has troops in Bosnia and Kosovo
- Applauds the decision by the new U.S. administration and its allies in Congress to effect the “lifting, removing the ceiling of the number of troops posted in Germany, and also actually establishing a new command in Germany”
- Emphasizes around-the-clock NATO air patrols over the Baltic and Black Seas (which frequently include U.S. strategic, nuclear-capable B-1, B-2 and B-52 bombers)

- Lauds the fact that NATO has tripled its Response Force to 40,000 troops

[Doorstep statement by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the Meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs, Riga](#)

Good afternoon,

It is great to be back in Riga, back in Latvia.

Latvia is a very staunch and committed NATO Ally.

It is great to be here at the Foreign Ministers Meeting that starts today and that will take place today and tomorrow.

The foreign ministers have a very full agenda.

They will address a wide range of different issues.

In particular the situation in and around Ukraine.

We see Russian military build-up, we see heavy armour, we see drones, and combat ready troops.

And we call on Russia to be transparent because this is unprovoked and unexplained.

So therefore, Russia needs to be transparent, and they need to reduce tensions, and de-escalate.

We will also of course address the situation on the border with Belarus, where we see the Lukashenko regime using vulnerable people to put pressure on neighbouring countries.

We stand in solidarity with all Allies affected.

And we also work very closely with the European Union.

Because neither the European Union nor NATO has all the tools in the toolbox.

But together we can provide a strong response to what we see.

And it was a great pleasure and a demonstration of this unity, NATO-EU, when I travelled together with the President of the European Commission to the region, to Lithuania and Latvia, on Sunday.

And it demonstrates that the two organisations stand together in solidarity with the Allies and the member states of the EU affected.

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Thomas Gutschker (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*):

Secretary General, the US has just concluded its Nuclear Posture Review. How do you assess that? Would you expect reinforcement at the Eastern Flank? Secretary Blinken has somewhat risen the expectations on that in a press conference he gave earlier today.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General:

So what we see is continued US commitment to European security. Over the last years the United States has increased their military presence in Europe with more troops, more preposition equipment, more exercises.

And just in this region, we have a US battlegroup in Poland, we have a new armoured brigade.

And the Posture Review, which has now been published, states that they will maintain this high level of US presence in Europe, and actually also some elements of further increase.

I welcome the strong commitment by the United States to European security, not only words but also in deeds.

And this is then confirmed in this posture review, including by lifting, removing the ceiling of the number of troops posted in Germany, and also actually establishing new command in Germany.

All of this fits into the broader picture of a strong US commitment, also with increased presence in Europe.



Teri Schultz (*Deutsche Welle*):

Hi. Mr. Secretary General, you continue saying that Russia will face costs and consequences if the aggression goes further. Without knowing yet what Allies might ask for, – I know what's under discussion here today-, what could NATO provide?

We've seen condemnation, we have the eFP [enhanced Forward Presence], we have the, you know, very high readiness force. What could you offer if they asked for more reassurance?

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General:

NATO is here to defend and protect all Allies against any threat.

And we demonstrate that commitment also by the presence of NATO troops and forces on Allied territory with the four battle groups in the Baltic countries.

I visited the battlegroup yesterday led by Canada. And then the battlegroup in Poland. And also with air policing, and also naval presence both in the Black Sea and in the

Baltic Sea.

And then we can also quickly reinforce if needed. We have tripled the size of the NATO Response Force over the last years to around 40,000 troops.

And all of this demonstrates our ability to defend all Allies against any threat.

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It was actually the increased presence of NATO troops in this Eastern part of the Alliance, in the Black Sea region, and in the Baltic region was triggered by Russia's use of force against Ukraine back in 2014, with the illegal annexation of Crimea, and with the continued destabilization of Donbas, Eastern Ukraine....

I think it is important to distinguish between NATO Allies and partner Ukraine. NATO Allies, there we provide [Article 5] guarantees, collective defence guarantees, and we will defend and protect all Allies.

Ukraine is a partner, a highly valued partner. We provide support, political, practical support. Allies provide training, capacity building, equipment and I am absolutely certain that Allies will recommit and reconfirm their strong support to Ukraine also during the meeting today.

But as I said there's a difference between a partner Ukraine and an Ally like for instance Latvia.

Nadina Maličbegović (*Al Jazeera Balkans*):

Mr. Secretary General, if I may ask you about the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina. What can we expect? You know about the separatists rhetoric which is coming from Republika Srpska on one side. On the other side, we know that withdrawal from the armed forces couldn't be without war. The situation is very tense. Okay, for NATO, what would be the red line? I mean, what should happen for you to intervene in that case? Because we are not a member state.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General:

...We have a significant presence in Kosovo with the KFOR and also in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Of course, we are concerned about the increased tensions we see. Therefore we welcome that NATO and the European Union are working very closely together in the region, both in Kosovo but also in Bosnia Herzegovina. Our concern in Bosnia Herzegovina is of course, any attempt to undermine the multi ethnic institutions and especially the armed forces....NATO has been important in helping to build the armed forces of Bosnia Herzegovina into a strong multi ethnic institution. Therefore we are concerned about the inflammatory rhetoric of Mr. Dodik and the Republika Srpska, we continue to support all efforts to reduce tensions and to continue to provide support, capacity building for Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Aliaksandr Papko (*Belsat TV*):

Dear Secretary General, Aliaksandr Papko, Belsat TV. Yesterday, Alexander Lukashenko said – I will quote that: “Belarusian army is ready to react at any NATO movement” and

if the West start the war in Ukraine he will support Russia. So, today we'll discuss Belarus. Probably this migration crisis is not the first hybrid attack Lukashenko regime will inflict on the EU. So what message would you deliver to Mr. Lukashenko today? What will be your response to any new hybrid attack and what message will you deliver to Belarusian people, which is largely opposed to Lukashenko regime? Thank you.

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General:

Mr. Lukashenko should stop using vulnerable people as pawns in a political game....And that is the clear message from all NATO allies, from both President von der Leyen and me when we visited Lithuania and Latvia on Sunday. And NATO has also provided some support to Lithuania that was directly affected by this a few weeks ago, and also we have been in contact with some partner nations, nations of origin for the migrants and also some other nations to prevent them from becoming transit nations to help to reduce the pressure when it comes to the number of migrants coming to Minsk and to the border of Belarus. Mr. Lukashenko should stop cracking down on peaceful protests in Belarus and release all political prisoners and allow democratic processes and respected democratic rights of the people of Belarus to decide their own future....NATO's presence in this region...was triggered by the aggressive actions of Russia back in 2014....And as I have stated several times now, there will be a high price to pay for Russia, if they once again use force against the independence sovereign nation, Ukraine. We have demonstrated our ability to impose costs, economic, political actions. And also, over the years also increased our military presence in this region, just to make sure that all allies are totally defended and protected against any Russian aggressive actions.

Julia Rech (*Zweites Deutsches Fernsehen*):

What is this high price you're talking about? What exactly is that high price and do you exclude the military intervention there?

Jens Stoltenberg, NATO Secretary General:

So we have different options and we have demonstrated over the years in reactions to Russia's previous use of military force against Ukraine that we can sustain heavy economic and financial sanctions, political sanctions. And also the fact that we have increased our presence there in the region, both in the Black Sea region but also in the Baltic region, in the air, on land and at sea.... Again, I think we need to understand the difference between a NATO Ally, Latvia, other Baltic countries, Poland, Romania, and a close and highly valued partner, Ukraine. We provide support to Ukraine, we help Allies provide training, capacity, equipment. For the NATO Allies, we have the security guarantees, Article 5 and we have the military presence to remove any room for miscalculation, about our ability to defend and protect all Allies.

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