

# INTERVIEW WITH JENS STOLTENBERG: NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS & REGIONAL INSTABILITY

*In an exclusive interview with TPQ, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg elaborates on a range of issues related to the Alliance's adaptability to the changing security environment, from tensions with Russia and the situation in Ukraine to combating hybrid warfare. Commenting on Russia's entry into the Syrian conflict, Stoltenberg emphasizes that this move increases instability in the region and adversely affects the fight against ISIL. While NATO is focusing much of its efforts on bolstering its defense capabilities with a Readiness Action Plan, Stoltenberg concludes by stating that the Alliance is strongly committed to the values of Euro-Atlantic integration and thus, enlargement remains a priority.*

Jens Stoltenberg\*



\*Jens Stoltenberg is the Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO).

**G**iven that NATO has been bolstering its defenses along its eastern frontier and Russia has similarly ramped up its military exercises, what is the risk of provoking tensions that could threaten European security?

Russia has used force to change borders in Europe, destabilized eastern Ukraine, and it violated agreements that have underpinned our security since the end of the Cold War. We do not seek confrontation with Russia. But we must adapt to the security environment created by Russia's actions. All our measures are defensive, proportionate, and in line with our international commitments.



We continue to strive for a more cooperative relationship. But cooperation can only be based on respect for borders, rules, and agreements. At the same time, we will keep the channels of communication open with Russia – both military-to-military and diplomatic.

### **What do you see as the best outcome in Ukraine?**

Russia's illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea marked the first time since the Second World War that one European nation took part of another by force. In doing so, Russia has undermined decades of work by the international community to create a Europe that is whole, free, and at peace.

The full implementation of the Minsk Agreements represents the best hope for peace, and I urge all parties to do everything in their power to meet their commitments.<sup>1</sup> Russia is a party to the Minsk Agreements, and has a significant responsibility in this regard.

Ukraine is an important NATO partner and we are providing support to help Ukraine along its reform path. At our NATO Summit in Wales last year, we agreed to create

<sup>1</sup> On 11 February 2015, the leaders of Ukraine, Russia, France and Germany agreed upon a package of measures (referred to as Minsk II) to alleviate the ongoing war in the Donbass region of Ukraine. Overseen by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the talks were organized in response to the collapse of the Minsk Protocol ceasefire and intended to revive the Protocol.

five Trust Funds to support Ukraine in areas like command and control, cyber defense, logistics, and military medical rehabilitation. Our advisors are working with the Ministry of Defense, the General Staff, the Security Service of Ukraine, and others to develop projects under the Trust Funds. They are looking at what further reforms and support could help Ukraine to improve its own security. We have also reinforced the NATO Liaison Office in Kyiv with extra staff and advisors.

*“Russia’s illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea marked the first time since the Second World War that one European nation took part of another by force.”*

With sustained efforts to complete necessary reforms – political, economic, and defense – and with the support of the international community, Ukraine will be able to chart a clear course towards a better future. Ukraine can count on NATO’s support in these efforts.

**The Readiness Action Plan agreed upon at the 2014 Wales Summit was presented as the “biggest reinforcement” of NATO’s collective defense. Besides strengthening its conventional capabilities, what types of measures does the Alliance need to take to combat hybrid warfare?**

The Alliance stands ready to defend all Allies against any threat, including hybrid warfare.

Hybrid warfare includes the simultaneous use of political, diplomatic, economic, cyber, and military means. A key element of hybrid attacks is that they are unclear and ambiguous. They blur the distinction between war and peace – for example, soldiers without insignia.

In response, we are improving our situational awareness and intelligence, and speeding up our decision-making. We are deepening our intelligence-sharing and enhancing our cyber defense. And we are increasing our education, training, and exercises in demanding hybrid scenarios. No nation or international organization has all the levers to counter hybrid attacks, so cooperation across the international community is essential. For NATO, effective cooperation with the European Union is particularly important.

**What is your position on Russia's recent military foray into Syria? Does Russia's enhanced role collide with the efforts of the coalition against ISIL?**

Russia's build-up of significant forces in the Mediterranean and in Syria is of great concern. It has created a more unstable situation in the Mediterranean region.

We have seen airstrikes, strikes from cruise missiles, and incursions into Turkish airspace. We are closely monitoring these developments and have expressed our concerns, including during the meeting of NATO Ministers of Defense a few weeks ago.

I remain concerned that the Russians have targeted Syrian opposition groups and that they are supporting President Bashar al-Assad's regime. I call on Russia to play a constructive and cooperative role in the fight against ISIL. Supporting the Assad regime is not a constructive contribution. At the same time, I welcome the renewed diplomatic efforts, including the recent meetings in Vienna, to find a political solution to the crisis in Syria.



**What is NATO's current stance on enlargement? What are the prospects for NATO aspirant countries – namely, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Macedonia, and Montenegro?**

NATO enlargement has been a historic success. It has increased stability and prosperity in Europe.

NATO's door remains open to all European democracies that share the values of our Alliance, that are willing and able to share the responsibilities and obligations of membership, and whose inclusion can contribute to our common security and stability. Euro-Atlantic integration is a process based on individual performance. Each country is judged on its own merit.

In the Alliance's first expansion into eastern Europe since 2009, NATO Foreign Ministers issued an invitation to Montenegro to begin accession talks on December 2nd.<sup>2</sup> This is a historic decision, which will further reinforce the security and stability of the Western-Balkans and contribute to our vision of a Europe whole, free and at peace. In the next few months, Allies will also assess the performance of other aspirant countries such as Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, and Georgia. However, I am not going to prejudge these assessments. NATO remains committed to supporting these nations in their efforts toward integration in Euro-Atlantic institutions.

---

<sup>2</sup> Press Conference given by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and Minister of Foreign Affairs of Montenegro Igor Lukšić on 2 December 2015, Brussels, Belgium, [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions\\_125570.htm?selectedLocale=en](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_125570.htm?selectedLocale=en)