

It's getting chilly in Europe, politically. The Cold War seems to be blowing back in, in all but name.

NATO leaders gathered in Warsaw, Poland, in early July. While there, they warned openly about the threat posed by Russia, particularly the danger Moscow's aggressive actions present to former Soviet republics and old Warsaw Pact members.

The alliance has formally shifted its overall strategy—once characterized by “engagement” with Russia and then “reassurance” for those nations on Russia's western edge—toward “deterrence.”

The alliance is at a defining moment, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said on the first day of the two-day summit, faced with unpredictable threats on all its frontiers. The defensive actions recently taken by the 28 members are the “biggest since the end of the Cold War,” he said.

While “no one wants confrontation” with Russia, Stoltenberg asserted, NATO is fully within its rights to treat Vladimir Putin's regime as hostile. Prudent defensive measures cannot be viewed as provocative, he said. Nevertheless, it's essential that a dialogue be maintained with Russia, he added, and that it should not be isolated, lest there be “miscalculations and accidents.”

The partners announced plans for greater deterrent moves in Europe, more effort against ISIS, and continued opera-


tions in Afghanistan. The subject of NATO's nuclear posture was addressed only broadly—noting that alliance members enjoy the protections of the US, British, and French nuclear forces—but the allies did agree to step up their member-nation capabilities with regard to civil defense and preparedness. One US official said the nuclear posture might be a topic for the next summit.

ROTATING THROUGH EASTERN EUROPE

Though these meetings typically happen every other year, the situation is considered fluid enough to warrant a meeting in 2017. It will happen in Brussels. The next full-up meeting is slated for 2018 in Istanbul.

In its final communiqué after the meeting of member heads of state, NATO agreed to stand up by next year four new army battalions to rotate in and out of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. US diplomatic officials told reporters in background sessions that these forces are intended as a “trip wire,” and if Russia moved against the Baltic nations, NATO would unambiguously invoke Article 5 of its treaty: that an attack on one is an attack on all.

The officials said that though relatively small in size, the battalions will have the military capability to delay or stop a Russian advance in time for other NATO forces to arrive,



In 2010, British soldiers are inserted into an area in Helmand province previously under Taliban influence. It costs NATO partners \$5 billion a year to maintain operations in Afghanistan. The US will pay \$1 billion of that.



NATO'S New Reality

By John A. Tirpak, Editorial Director

An ominous Russian shadow spreads across Europe as ISIS and the Taliban also demand Alliance attention.



Airborne troops from Russia, Belarus, and Serbia during joint training for Slavic Brotherhood 2015, preparing troops to overcome domestic insurgencies.

especially since any such moves would likely be detected by intelligence before they began.

The 1,000-man battalions will be fielded by the US, Britain, Canada, and Germany. The US will position its troops in Poland, while Britain will place its battalion in Estonia. Canada will place a battalion in Latvia, and Germany will deploy its forces to Lithuania. The forces amount to 4,000 more troops.

Poland was a logical place for the US to deploy a battalion, one official said, because it offers good logistical infrastructure by rail, sea, and road for rapid reinforcement of the region, and the nation

shares a border with the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad. Poland operates US-made aircraft such as the F-16 and is eager to provide support and have the more direct backing of the US. A regional headquarters will also be set up in Poland.

Though most NATO countries are not yet living up to their commitments—agreed at the 2014 Wales Summit—to spend two percent of their GDP on defense, a number of countries are doing much better than that, notably the US, Britain, Estonia, Greece, and Poland, Stoltenberg said. He urged wealthier countries, like Germany, that have not met the goal, to do more.

An M1A2 Abrams main battle tank fires at targets during the NATO exercise Nordic Tank Challenge in May at Holstebro, Denmark.



Though “we still have a long way to go,” collectively, the alliance budgeted about \$8 billion more for defense in 2016 than in the previous year, he said. “We have turned a corner.” Stoltenberg said those NATO members without the resources to add substantially to collective forces can make contributions in other ways, such as by hosting people and offering basing.

President Barack Obama, at the close of the summit, said the partners had a “very candid conversation” about partner defense spending.

“There’s a recognition that, given the threats that we face and the capabilities that we need, everybody has got to step up and everybody has got to do better,” Obama said.

CYBER WARFARE

Stoltenberg noted that NATO’s rapid response forces are “three times bigger” now than they were at the Wales meeting, and the alliance is moving to bolster its activities and capabilities in a number of other areas.

The partners agreed to collectively increase their individual and alliance capabilities in cyber warfare, and recognize—as the US Air Force has done for many years—that cyberspace is a combat domain all its own. Stoltenberg said Russia’s “hybrid” warfare, as seen in Georgia and Ukraine, has been preceded and accompanied by heavy use of cyber attacks.

NATO declared its ballistic missile defense systems operational, reiterating that the system is limited and protective—and oriented toward rogue nations like Syria and Iran. Though Moscow continues to complain bitterly that the system is an illegal defense against its ballistic missiles, alliance officials repeatedly explained the system isn’t physically oriented toward Russia and would be ineffective against



The view from a Portuguese F-16 shows another NATO aircraft banking away during Ramstein Alloy 2, an exercise designed to test the alliance's quick reaction techniques, tactics, and procedures.

a large-scale Russian ballistic missile strike.

Ukraine is not yet being considered for NATO membership and has no Article 5 protection, but the alliance accepted and endorsed a Ukrainian plan for bringing its internal democratic and human rights policies in line with those required by NATO for membership. The partners agreed to continue a package of nonlethal support for Ukraine in its conflict with Russia. This package helps Ukraine with logistics, cyber defenses, and aid for wounded soldiers.

Stoltenberg said future assistance will help Ukraine in detecting and disarming mines and improvised explosive devices and defend against other forms of hybrid warfare.

The partners said they won't recognize Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea.

Russia has claimed that NATO's rules prevent countries involved in a civil war—read Ukraine or Georgia—from member-

ship consideration, but Stoltenberg said Russia can't veto the membership process by instigating such a conflict.

"The door is open" to new applicants, Stoltenberg said, noting that Montenegro was on the cusp of formal NATO membership to become the alliance's 29th member.

There will be an increase in NATO forces stationed in Romania, a member since 2004, and there will be cooperative exercises with two nations involved in active territorial disputes with Russia—Ukraine and Georgia. NATO will move to increase its presence in the Black Sea, as well, to counter a Russian naval buildup in the region.

The alliance said it will continue Operation Resolute Support in Afghanistan "beyond 2016," but said it had secured member funding for the mission into 2020. The US will provide \$1 billion a year of the \$5 billion a year it costs to maintain the NATO effort in Afghanistan.

"We are committed to the long haul," Stoltenberg said, as long as Afghanistan keeps its end of the deal by continuing to respect human rights and the rights of women and fight government corruption. Though the Taliban is still a threat, he warned that some elements of the Taliban are rebranding themselves as franchises of ISIS and said NATO will work more closely with nongovernmental organizations such as the Red Cross to improve their security in the country.

US diplomats said it's important to keep supporting Afghanistan because there is a historical lesson to learn from the Soviet Union's experience there. Russia, one official said, stopped providing support for Kabul's security forces just two years after the Soviet occupation ended. Those security forces collapsed without funding and support, creating the environment that allowed the rise of the Taliban and al Qaeda in Afghanistan.



A Russian Sukhoi Su-24 makes a low pass over USS Donald Cook in April. The Arleigh Burke-class guided missile destroyer was conducting a routine patrol when it was dangerously and repeatedly buzzed by the Russian jet.



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg (l) and President Barack Obama on July 6 at the NATO summit in Warsaw. NATO has formally shifted toward a strategy of “deterrence” toward Russia.

“We don’t want to repeat that,” he said.

NATO agreed to step up its training of Iraqi troops inside Iraq. This training had been done in Jordan, but there is a need for increasing both the number of troops trained and the pace of the training because much of the effort is focused on detecting and destroying improvised explosive devices. As Iraqi forces struggle to retake territory held by ISIS, they are encountering a massive amount of mines and booby traps. This is slowing the pace of clearing cities and repatriating refugees.

The alliance-owned E-3 AWACS aircraft that are permanently based in Germany are being deployed for the US-led coalition fighting ISIS. They will operate from member nation Turkey, and officials said they will be there to maintain close watch on Russia’s air strikes in Syria and to watch for violations of Turkish airspace.

No change in these plans was announced when, a week after the summit, Turkey went through a short-lived attempted military coup d’état.

To better manage the migrant crisis, in which thousands of refugees are pouring into Europe from Syria and Libya, NATO will deploy more naval forces to the central Mediterranean to interdict human trafficking.

NATO also agreed to increase its cooperation with the military branch of the European Union, which has a somewhat different set of members from NATO. This agreement was in part to reassure members of both organizations against the backdrop

of Britain’s vote to depart the EU. The agreement calls for greater cooperation on countering cyber and hybrid warfare and more naval cooperation. In background briefings, senior NATO officials said the interoperability of NATO and EU forces—when they are not one and the same—is “robust,” thanks to shared equipment and efforts at building more inclusive networks.

CONSIDERING LIBYA

The alliance didn’t state any plans for further involvement in Libya, where it forced former dictator Muammar Qaddafi from power in 2011. One senior US defense official told reporters on background that the alliance has a standing offer of technical advice and support on establishing a civilian-controlled military—but not weaponry—to the nascent Libyan government. There is real hope that Libya will establish a “well-functioning security apparatus,” but it’s not there yet. As to the offer of assistance, he said, “They’re considering it. And there will be no decisions here.”

The NATO meeting didn’t openly discuss the role of airpower in the new, deterrence-focused posture of the alliance. A senior US defense official noted, however, that airpower is inherently the most flexible of capabilities and can be put into position most rapidly in a crisis—in most cases, “within 72 hours.” He said there have been increasing deployments of F-22 fighters to Europe, an uptick in bomber rotations from the US, and an extension of the F-15C presence in the UK.

Though the last decade has seen a number of closures of Air Force bases in Europe, he said there’s an “ample” number of European bases that could host US-based aircraft if needed.

Stoltenberg, during a think-tank symposium taking place adjacent to the NATO event, was asked about the prospect of other nations, particularly Finland or Sweden, formally joining the alliance. He responded that NATO, by policy, only extends invitations to countries that ask to join, and in the case of Finland or Sweden, it hasn’t happened yet.

Moreover, “as a Norwegian, I know better” than to suggest other countries enter the alliance—because it rarely works out when “people outside your country tell you what you should do.” Membership is “for them to decide.”

That said, the two European Union countries maintain military forces described by one diplomat as “fully interoperable” with NATO, and both have long since maintained NATO-required standards of human rights, so their membership could be accommodated quickly. The diplomat said if a conflict between NATO and Russia erupted, it would be impossible for the Scandinavian countries to “step aside” and let it happen around them.

Stoltenberg concluded the summit by saying there’s work to do on improving alliance capabilities in many areas. The potential topics for Brussels next year and Istanbul in 2018 include streamlining the ability of alliance ground forces to move through each other’s territory and bolstering NATO’s integrated air defense system, potentially establishing an impenetrable anti-access, area-denial system as robust as Russia’s.

There will be more attention paid to upgrading NATO’s electronic warfare-electronic attack capabilities. Russia has “world-class” capacity in this area, one diplomat acknowledged.

Obama said that the US has “delivered on [our] promise” to strengthen its alliances around the world. The US has increased its presence in Europe, he said, and the imminent inclusion of Montenegro is an indication that “the door to NATO membership remains open to nations that can meet our high standards.” The alliance is “as strong, as nimble, and as ready as ever,” and “nobody should ever doubt the resolve” of NATO “to stay united and focused on the future.” ★