

Address

NATO's mission: more essential than ever

Jens Stoltenberg

It is a distinct honor to contribute the one thousandth article to *Atlantisch Perspectief*. To do so during the Netherlands Atlantic Association's 65th anniversary year is an even greater privilege. I congratulate the NAA on reaching both of these important milestones. I also thank you for your association's long-standing and effective work in promoting close ties of friendship and understanding between North America and Europe and keeping the Dutch public informed about key foreign and security policy issues.

A strong transatlantic bond has always been — and continues to be — critically important in protecting the safety and security of the NATO Allies' nearly one billion citizens. The Netherlands was one of the original twelve Allies in 1949, and your country has been a committed Ally throughout NATO's history. I would like to provide a few examples of the Netherlands' recent contributions.

The Netherlands is once again leading NATO's Baltic Air Policing mission to help protect our Baltic Allies: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Netherlands still contributes about 100 personnel to our Resolute Support mission in Afghanistan. Another example is the Netherlands' leadership role, together with Belgium and Denmark, in coordinating certain Special Operations Forces task groups. In addition, under the umbrella of NATO's Science for Peace and Security programme, the Netherlands is cooperating with NATO partner countries in clearing unexploded ordnance and countering terrorism. For all that your country has done and continues to do for our collective security, I want to express my deepest gratitude.

NATO is the most successful alliance in history because we have been able to adapt as the world has changed. For our first four decades, our Alliance focused on collective defence. After the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent dissolution of the Soviet Union, our focus shifted to include the management of crises beyond our borders. NATO intervened to stop the bloodshed and keep the peace in the Balkans during the 1990s, and later conducted our largest combat operation to fight terrorism in Afghanistan.

Since 2014 — a watershed year in the history of our Alliance — NATO has adapted once again. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and the destabilization of East Ukraine have challenged the rules-based international order on which we have all come to rely. The rise of ISIL and the arc of turmoil in the Middle East and North Africa have also had very real implications for our security. As a consequence of these two very different challenges, NATO has had to increase our collective defence capabilities in Europe while managing crises and projecting stability beyond our borders.

Over the past three years, Allies have implemented the largest reinforcement of our collective defence in a generation — tripling the size of the NATO Response Force (NRF) to 40,000 troops, creating a 5,000 strong Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, and establishing eight small headquarters in the eastern part of our Alliance to aid planning and

reinforcement, if needed. The German-Dutch Army Corps continues to play a leading role in setting up and testing this Spearhead Force within the NRF.

We are currently deploying four multinational battlegroups to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, with contributions from 17 different Allied countries. Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States — two Allies from North America and two from Europe — are leading these battalions. The Netherlands is contributing to the German-led battlegroup in Lithuania. This cooperation is a clear demonstration of the enduring strength of the transatlantic bond. NATO is also increasing our presence in the southeast of the Alliance, centered on a multinational brigade in Romania. And we have stepped up air policing over the Baltic and Black Sea areas.

NATO is also projecting stability beyond our borders in response to terrorism and turmoil in North Africa and the Middle East. This includes a broad effort to train local forces to stabilise their own countries and to fight terrorism. In Afghanistan, we have moved from a large combat operation to a training mission aimed at helping to ensure that country never again becomes a safe haven for international terrorists. Building on a training programme we have been running for Iraqi officers inside Jordan, we have established a programme inside Iraq itself. A new regional centre in Kuwait is enhancing our ability to work with our partners in the Gulf, while a series of mobile training courses are helping to train troops in Egypt, Jordan, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia.

Another key focus is in strengthening our ties with international partners, first and foremost the European Union. The Joint Declaration I signed with Presidents Tusk and Juncker in Warsaw in July 2016 raised our cooperation to a new level. Last December, we agreed on 42 different measures to implement that agreement, including cyber defence, maritime security, and countering hybrid threats. As we move forward in this area, it is essential that the two organisations complement one another and avoid competition. Neither NATO nor the EU can tackle the challenges we face in our shared neighbourhood alone.

NATO has enhanced our collective defence and worked to project stability in our neighbourhood. But, of course, none of this would be possible without the capabilities we need to do the job — and this is where additional defence investments play such a crucial role. At NATO's Wales Summit in 2014, Allies pledged to stop the cuts in defence spending which had characterised the post-Cold War years, and to gradually increase spending towards 2% of GDP within a decade. The first year after we made that pledge, we stopped the cuts, and in 2015, European Allies and Canada increased defence spending for the first time in many years. Last year, that trend continued with spending by European NATO members and Canada up by 3.8% — the equivalent of roughly US\$10 billion.

Of course, effective defence investment is not just about spending more, it is also about spending better. That's why the 2014 pledge also included a commitment to invest 20% of all defence spending in major equipment and related research.

For nearly 70 years, NATO has helped to keep the peace in Europe. We have forged a rock-solid bond between Allies on both sides of the Atlantic. The Netherlands, together with all Allies, should be proud of this record. But we cannot afford to rest on our laurels. NATO's mission is more essential than ever. We must continue to adapt to changing security

challenges, uphold our shared values of democracy, individual liberty and the rule of law, and work together to preserve peace and security for our future generations.

Jens Stoltenberg is Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.