

Nato annual report: Most member states have increased defence spending

Written by Martin Banks on 19 March 2018 in News
News

Nato Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has said that “in an unpredictable world, the alliance is stepping up to keep our nations safe”.



Nato emblem | *Photo credit: Press Association*

His comments come with publication of Nato’s annual report for 2017.

The report shows that, in 2017, European allies and Canada increased spending on defence by almost five per cent, meaning there have now been three consecutive years of growth since 2014.

Allies have also made progress on investing in new capabilities. In 2017, 26 allies spent more in real terms on major equipment than the year before.

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“All Nato members have pledged to continue to increase defence spending in real terms. The majority have already put in place plans on how to meet the two per cent guideline by 2024. And we expect others to follow”, the Secretary General said.

The report also shows that Nato allies are contributing more to operations and missions. At the end of 2017, there were over 23,000 troops serving in NATO deployments, up from just under 18,000 in 2014, before Russia’s illegal annexation of Crimea and the rise of Isis.

“This is an increase of around 30 per cent”, Stoltenberg said.

On spending, he said that European allies and Canada “are now really stepping up.”

At a news conference, he told reporters, “After years of decline in defence spending, we have seen for the first time in many years, three consecutive years of increases.

More countries will meet the two per cent target. Back in 2014, when we made the pledge, it was only three countries that met the two per cent guideline. This year, we expect eight Allies to meet the guideline.

“But perhaps as important as how many countries that will meet the guideline this year, is the fact that also those countries that have yet a way to go before they reach it, they are also increasing significantly.

“For instance, Germany increased defence spending last year by around six per cent in real terms, and that’s really a big increase and it adds to the European defence spending in a significant way.

“So Germany, as many other European allies, are now stepping up, investing more, providing more funding for military and defence purposes. Germany is also stepping up when it comes to contributions to NATO missions and operations.

“They have just announced they will increase their presence in Afghanistan, from around 1000 to 1300, adding 300 more troops. Germany has been there all the time, and I think this shows that European Allies and Canada are doing more, stepping up, contributing more to our shared security.”

Commenting on Nato’s Resolute Support training mission in Afghanistan, Stoltenberg said that with the alliance’s assistance, Afghan forces had increased military pressure on the Taliban in 2017, ensuring that they did not achieve their strategic objective of capturing a provincial capital.

“We strongly support an Afghan-led, Afghan-owned peace and reconciliation process. I commend President Ghani for his courageous leadership. His offer to the Taliban is the clearest invitation to peace yet. So I call on the Taliban to come to the negotiating table. There is an opportunity now to end the conflict”, he said.

The report also reveals that some countries, including Belgium, spend as much as 75 per cent of their entire defence budgets on personnel and pensions.

Speaking at Nato's Brussels HQ, Stoltenberg also addressed the recent use of a nerve agent in the UK, noting that this was "the first offensive use of a nerve agent on Alliance territory since Nato's foundation."

"All Allies agree that the attack was a clear breach of international norms and agreements," and they have "called on Russia to address the UK's questions", he said.

He said that the backdrop to the attack was "a reckless pattern of Russian behaviour over many years".

This behaviour includes "the illegal annexation of Crimea and military support to separatists in Eastern Ukraine. The military presence in Moldova and Georgia against these countries' will. Meddling in Montenegro and elsewhere in the Western Balkans. Attempts to subvert democratic elections and institutions. And the military build-up from the North of Europe to the Middle East."

He also warned that the "blurring of the line" between nuclear and conventional warfare "lowers the threshold for Russia's use of nuclear weapons".

Stoltenberg explained that Nato's approach to Russia "remains firm, defensive and proportionate" and that "Nato will not mirror Russia tank for tank, missile for missile or drone for drone."

He also said that the Alliance would continue to seek meaningful dialogue with Russia, which, while "difficult", was "vital to increase transparency and to reduce risk".

About the author

Martin Banks is a senior reporter for the Parliament Magazine

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