

Wary NATO Won't Be Dragged Into Confrontation with Russia

June 23, 2015



Units from NATO allied countries take part in the NATO Noble Jump 2015 exercises, part of testing and refinement of the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) in Swietoszow, Poland, June 18, 2015.

BRUSSELS — The head of NATO said on Wednesday the alliance would not be forced into a new arms race with Russia but that what he called Moscow's aggression in Ukraine had compelled it to strengthen its defenses.

The United States announced plans this week to station tanks and heavy weapons in NATO member states on Russia's border, shortly after President Vladimir Putin said Moscow would add 40 missiles to its nuclear arsenal.

"We will not be dragged into an arms race, but we must keep our countries safe," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters at the start of a meeting of alliance defense ministers.

A Russian official last week accused NATO of pushing Russia into an arms race by stepping up its military activity around its borders, not least in the formerly Soviet Baltic States.

U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter, attending his first NATO ministerial meeting, said on Tuesday the Baltic states — Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia — as well as Bulgaria, Romania and Poland had agreed to host the U.S. arms and heavy equipment.

It was one of a range of steps the United States and NATO are taking to reinforce allies in eastern Europe after Moscow's annexation of Ukraine's Crimea region last year and what NATO says is Russia's military support for separatists in eastern Ukraine.

Stoltenberg said the U.S. decision to store heavy weaponry in eastern Europe was a defensive measure and rejected suggestions that it could be a provocative step.

"This is ... a prudent and a necessary response to what we have seen from Russia over a long period of time," he said.

"What Russia has done in Ukraine is not defensive. To annex a part of another country is not defensive ... that is an act of aggression," he said.

"They are also using now nuclear rhetoric and more nuclear exercises as part of their defense posturing. All of this creates a new security environment," he said.

Asked if NATO and Russia were heading for a new Cold War, British Defense Secretary Michael Fallon told reporters: "There is saber rattling designed to provoke and intimidate but it is important also that the alliance ... continues to commit to the collective will to defend all its members."

Ministers are expected to agree to further increase the size of NATO's rapid response force to 40,000 personnel. They decided in February to more than double it to 30,000 soldiers, airmen and sailors from 13,000.

Within this force, NATO is to create a 5,000-strong "spearhead" force, part of which could move within 48 hours.

Original url:

<https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/06/23/wary-nato-wont-be-dragged-into-confrontation-with-russia-a47652>