



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# Stoltenberg's plan for long-term NATO support for Ukraine is not easy to dismiss



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's leaving his position will have a lasting effect if he succeeds in realising the plan for stable financing of Ukrainian defence with more than \$100 billion in the next 5 years.

Whether the Norwegian diplomat will leave a lasting legacy upon leaving his position will be revealed at the NATO summit in Washington next July. This would **provide Ukraine** with significant assurances regarding its ability to defend itself against Russian aggression and, more importantly, its ability to be at ease in the event of any future attempts at occupation.

However, until then, there are still many obstacles and question marks before Mr Stoltenberg's plan to create a NATO fund of \$100 billion to support the Ukrainian defence, which he presented to the ministers of the Alliance.

Stoltenberg's plan is part of the **promise** made to Ukraine during last year's NATO summit in Lithuania, when the Ukrainians reluctantly accepted the decision that they would not be admitted to the Alliance.

However, the comforting decision regarded the long-term NATO security guarantees so that Ukraine could reject the Russian invasion attempt and, even more so, be able to discourage any possible future attempt by Russia to repeat the aggression.

These promises included military and financial support, the exchange of intelligence data, and immediate steps in case, after defending the country, Russia tries to attack Ukraine again.

"Our support will last long into the future", US President Joe Biden said at the time, standing alongside Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and G7 leaders.

## Prevention in case of Trump's return

Stoltenberg's package is also motivated by the

current blockade of the US aid package to Ukraine of around \$60 billion, which has been waiting for approval for 6 months due to the opposition of conservative Republicans in the US Congress.

Even though House Speaker Mike Johnson **hinted at concessions** and search for a solution regarding the unblocking of the aid package to Ukraine, the idea of the NATO Secretary General was to avoid such situations in the future. However, it was more than that.

Stoltenberg's proposal was designed primarily as a mechanism that would be immune to the expected obstructions of NATO's plans and actions, which would come from the US with the return of Donald Trump to the White House.

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From this point of view, it seems that Stoltenberg's plan for long-term and generous financing of Ukrainian defence is supported by, above all, the European NATO member states.

They do not want to find themselves in the situation they were in from 2016 until 2020, when the leader of the largest NATO member talked about the withdrawal of the US from the Alliance and about reducing and even cancelling the costs of the American military presence in Europe.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine improved cohesion within NATO and completely healed the cracks created by the previous US president. However, Trump's prospect of returning to the White House forces Europeans to act pre-emptively and rapidly.

## Who are Stoltenberg's allies?

That is why Stoltenberg's initiative does not at all seem like a personal attempt to leave a mark at the end of his mandate with his otherwise strong advocacy for maximum allied support for Ukraine.

He came to the ministers with a very serious proposal, a move that would mean "crossing the Rubicon" for NATO, as one Alliance **diplomat said**, according to The Financial Times.

It only means that the Secretary-General has previously received the support of at least some influential NATO member states, and this makes his proposal difficult to circumvent.

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There is a suggestion that one of the sponsors of Stoltenberg's proposal could be France, given the hawkish attitudes of President Emmanuel Macron lately, including his willingness to send his soldiers to Ukraine.

However, of all the obstacles that are already standing in the way of Stoltenberg's initiative, the most significant is the one arising from Washington's uncertainty regarding this ambitious plan.

## Washington between for and against

The administration's reservations are somewhat understandable because the initiative is tailored to cause not only tests for the current US position towards allies and joint support for Ukraine but also some very tangible benefits for the US.

According to this model, the US should allocate less money to support Ukraine than before because, together with its 31 partners in NATO, it should provide an average of \$20 billion per year.

It would not limit its bilateral support to Kyiv, but the financing mechanism through NATO would guarantee permanence and stability, which provides a solution to the problem that the administration of President Biden now has with the blockade of the Ukrainian fund in Congress.



*The US must calculate how this new model would affect its leadership in the current mechanism of allied aid to Ukraine - Antony Blinken*

However, the US must calculate how this new model would affect its leadership in the current mechanism of allied aid to Ukraine. If Stoltenberg's model were to be accepted, NATO would take over the role that until now was played by the coalition of 50 allies gathered in the so-called Ramstein Group, under the leadership of the US.

Over the past 2 years, close to \$90 billion in military aid has been channelled through this coalition to Ukraine, which is the same amount that NATO would provide in 5 years. However, the NATO Secretary General emphasised that 99% of that aid came from the members of the Alliance.

Leaving aside doubts about the criteria by which NATO members would participate in the joint support package for Ukraine as a more or less technical problem, the answer to a significant political question lies before the US, but also other members of the Alliance.

Creating funding for military support in Ukraine would be a major political step forward for NATO, which until now has provided only non-military aid to Kyiv. Would that legitimise NATO as a direct participant in the conflict, even though the vast majority of its members are individual military donors?

Given that it is a major political decision, it will undoubtedly cause opposition, for example, from Hungary, perhaps Slovakia, and some other members of the Alliance who insist on individual and not collective support for Ukraine.

It will be difficult for NATO to reach a consensus on Jens Stoltenberg's proposal. But even if it does not achieve it, the direction given by it has already created pressure for NATO to step more decisively in the direction of fulfilling its promise to Ukraine of long-term and strong support for its defence against Russian aggression.