NATO Council responds to Russian incursion into Estonian airspace

NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte speaking after today's NATO Council meeting.

On Friday, three Russian MiG-31 fighter jets flew into Estonian airspace "without permission and remained there for a total of 12 minutes," according to the Estonian government, prompting it to request, under Article 4 of the NATO Treaty, consultation in the NATO Council with the other members in regard to the intrusion. Article 4 provides for consultation in the Council with other members whenever, in the opinion of a member, its territorial integrity, political independence, or security is threatened. The Russian jets had filed no flight plans with Estonia, their transponders were off, and they had no radio contact with Estonia.

The North Atlantic Council met this morning in regard to the Estonian request, and following the meeting it issued this statement: "The North Atlantic Council met this morning at the request of Estonia, under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty, to consult and strongly condemn Russia's dangerous violation of Estonian airspace on 19 September. The Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) briefed the Council on this incident in which three armed Russian MiG-31 aircraft violated Estonian airspace for over ten minutes. NATO's response was quick and decisive. Allied aircraft were scrambled to intercept and escort them from Estonian airspace. This incursion is part of a wider pattern of increasingly irresponsible Russian behavior. This is the second time in two weeks that the North Atlantic Council has met under Article 4. On 10 September, the Council held consultations in response to the large-scale violation of Polish airspace by Russian drones. Several other Allies – including Finland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, and Romania – have also recently experienced airspace violations by Russia. We express our full solidarity with all Allies whose airspace has been breached. Russia bears full responsibility for these actions, which are escalatory, risk miscalculation and endanger lives. They must stop."

“NATO’s response to Russia's reckless actions will continue to be robust. On 12 September, we launched “Eastern Sentry” to bolster NATO’s posture along the entire Eastern flank. We will reinforce our capabilities and strengthen our deterrence and defence posture, including through effective air defence. Russia should be in no doubt: NATO and Allies will employ, in accordance with international law, all necessary military and non-military tools to defend ourselves and deter all threats from all directions. We will continue to respond in the manner, timing, and domain of our choosing. Our commitment to Article 5 is ironclad. Allies will not be deterred by these and other irresponsible acts by Russia from their enduring commitments to support Ukraine, whose security contributes to ours, in the exercise of its inherent right to self-defence against Russia’s brutal and unprovoked war of aggression.”

Following the meeting, NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte said, “This morning the North Atlantic Council held consultations under Article 4 of the Washington Treaty. This followed a request from Estonia after their airspace was violated by three armed MIG-31 fighter jets on Friday, where NATO responded quickly and decisively. Following the meeting, Allies issued a strong statement of solidarity and resolve. They condemned Russia’s reckless actions, which are escalatory, risk miscalculation and endanger lives. Allies affirmed yet again that our shared commitment to collective defense is unshakeable.”

“We do not want to see a continuation of this dangerous pattern by Russia – intentional or not. But we stand ready and willing to continue to defend every inch of Allied territory. Our posture – on land, at sea, and in the air – is serving us well. Our pilots are doing precisely what they are trained to do when there’s a potential risk of incursion. This is what we plan for. What we train for. And it works. General Grynkewich, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander, has the tools and authorities he needs to ensure our defence. And Eastern Sentry – which he and I launched earlier this month– adds further strength and flexibility to our posture along our eastern flank. And anywhere else we might need it.

Allies also continue to exercise to ensure that we are ready for whatever threats we might face. Even now, the largest aircraft carrier in the world – the USS Gerald R Ford is in the neighbourhood and exercising with Allies across the continent – reinforcing our ability to operate together across domains and over distances. This long-planned defensive exercise, unrelated to current events, is highly relevant to our availability and ability to do what NATO was founded for – to deter and defend.

That is what we will continue to do. With calm determination.”

David R. Cameron
September 23, 2025