North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen after the first session of the North Atlantic Council in Heads of State and Government format
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Good afternoon.

NATO’s primary responsibility is to keep our people safe and our nations secure. We have done this for over 60 years by learning the lessons that need to be learned and getting ready to face the next challenge together.

At our last Summit in Lisbon 18 months ago, we set out an ambitious agenda. And here in Chicago, we are delivering.

In Lisbon, we agreed to create a NATO missile defence system. Today, in Chicago, we have declared that a reality.

We call this an Interim Capability. It is the first step towards our long-term goal of providing full coverage and protection for all NATO European populations, territory and forces. Our system will link together missile defence assets from different Allies – satellites, ships, radars and interceptors – under NATO command and control. It will allow us to defend against threats from outside the Euro-Atlantic area.

This is true trans-Atlantic teamwork: the United States and European Allies investing in our common security. And it is an excellent example of the renewed culture of cooperation which we call Smart Defence: countries working together to develop capabilities which they could not develop alone.

We already have some good examples. In the Baltic States, NATO Allies take it in turns to patrol the airspace. This means our Baltic allies can focus their resources in other critical areas, such as deployable forces for Afghanistan. This is why we have agreed that NATO will provide continuous air policing for the Baltic States.

We have also agreed to acquire an Alliance Ground Surveillance capability. During our operation to protect the people of Libya, we learned how important it is to have the best possible intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance. So we realised that we need more of this capability. We are now filling that gap. Today, a contract is signed to acquire five unarmed drones which will let our commanders identify threats, identify targets and see what is happening over the horizon, at any time.

So Smart Defence is a vital principle. And we have agreed to make it the new way NATO does business. And we are putting it into practice. Today, we approved a robust package of more than 20 multinational projects, to provide the capabilities we need, at a price we can afford.

For instance, in Afghanistan, we have learned how important it is to protect our forces against roadside bombs. So a number of Allies will jointly acquire remote-controlled robots which can clear such bombs – protecting our forces and civilians alike.

And we know from our operations over Libya and off the Horn of Africa how vital it is to keep watch on the sea. So a group of Allies agreed to pool their maritime patrol aircraft – providing more awareness, with more efficiency.

Smart Defence means spending smartly on what we need. And it also means not duplicating. That is why we welcome the efforts in the framework of the EU to address the European shortfall in air to air refueling.

Within NATO, we have also agreed that our forces will step up exercises, training, and education, including with our partners. So they can preserve the skills they've mastered in operations.

These decisions show that despite the economic challenges, Allies are committed to acquire, develop and maintain the capabilities and the skill we need to ensure that our Alliance remains fit for purpose and fit for the future.

Our goal is NATO Forces 2020 – an Alliance that deals with the economic challenges of today, and is prepared for the security challenges of the future.

Tomorrow, more than 60 world leaders will focus on the future of Afghanistan. That meeting will send a strong signal of commitment to the Afghan people.

We have taken important steps on the road to a stable and secure Afghanistan. As we agreed with President Karzai in Lisbon, our shared goal is for the Afghan forces to be fully responsible for their country's security by the end of 2014. And we are on track.

The Afghan forces are already in the lead for providing security for half the population. Soon, that will rise to over 75%.

By the middle of 2013, we expect the Afghan forces to be taking the lead for security right across the country. As they step forward, our focus will shift from combat to support - but we will remain combat-ready.

Once the Afghans have full responsibility by the end of 2014, our combat mission will come to an end. But we will not walk away. Once transition is completed, NATO will lead a new mission, to train, advise and support the Afghan security forces.

Tomorrow I look forward to a thorough discussion with ISAF and other partners to chart the way ahead. With that, I am ready to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu (NATO Spokesperson): Please introduce yourselves and your organizations. And I'll start over there.

Q: Thank you. Elise Labott with CNN. Mr. Secretary General, on the smart defence, on the drones that you agreed to purchase, where do you envision initially deploying such drones? Was there any talk of, at some point, producing man-armed drones?

And then on Syria, could you talk about to what extent the Allies talked today about Syria? As you talk about partnerships, I know there's a reluctance for NATO to get involved, but do you envision, if you were to have a larger coalition, that perhaps NATO would be willing to undertake a mission to help the people of Syria? Thank you.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen (Secretary General of NATO): First, on the drones, the unarmed drones, no, we have not had any discussion as to where they could possibly be deployed.

Secondly, on… on Syria, let me stress we are very much concerned about the situation in Syria. But NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria.

I do believe that the best way forward, the best platform for finding a solution in Syria is the Annan plan. We strongly regret that it seems that the Syrian leadership does not comply with the Annan plan.

We strongly condemn the behaviour of the Syrian security forces and their crackdowns on the civilian population, and we urge the Syrian leadership to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. But again, NATO has no intention to intervene in Syria.

Oana Lungescu: The lady over there.

Q: Pacific (inaudible) Journal. Ema Stellsden (ph) (inaudible) Latvia.

I would like to ask you, on missile defence, since you declared the… the launch of a missile defence system, how do you see how that still might affect Russia? And are you willing with this declaration not to continue further discussions with Russia? And if yes, which would be the next steps?

And also, on air policing in Baltic states, how long time for how long future NATO is willing to continue this air policing? Thank you.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: First, on air policing, we have decided to continue air policing without fixing or setting a date. Of course such arrangement can always be reviewed. But I think the important thing here is that, as… as part of our defence package, as part of the concept of smart defence, Allies have agreed that it is a better use of resources that Allies that have at their disposal the necessary aircrafts can do the air policing, while the Baltic

states can then focus on investments in deployable forces to participate in the international operations.

So we will continue the air policing of the Baltic states.

On missile defence, we will continue our dialogue with Russia. We have decided to develop a NATO missile defence system because we consider the missile threat a real threat. And against a real threat, we need a real defence to protect our populations effectively.

And of course that cannot be blocked by Russia. It's a NATO decision.

But having said that, we have invited Russia to cooperate on missile defence, and… and this invitation still stands. And we will continue our dialogue with Russia, and I hope at a certain stage Russia will realize that it is in our common interest to cooperate on missile defence.

Oana Lungescu: The lady over there, red top, please. Front row.

Q: Rachel Oswald, Global Security Newswire.

On the Russia missile defence issue, as a means of assuaging Russia's concerns, is there any discussion at this point with the NATO and the US about signalling to Russia that you would be willing to mutually assess intelligence on Iran's development of long-range ballistic missiles so that if, in a certain number of years, the mutual conclusion is that Iran is nowhere close to building an ICBM, the United States would decide to slow down development of the SM3 Block 2B interceptor, which Russia fears will affect its own ICBMs?
Anders Fogh Rasmussen: I would definitely appreciate if… if a joint threat analysis could be elaborated and if we could achieve an agreement on what is the real threat. Because I… I do believe that the Russians would then realize that the Russian population is also threatened by potential missile attacks.

As regards the second part of… of your question, yes, the development of the NATO missile defence system will be what we call a phased, adaptive approach, which means that of course we can adapt to the evolving security situation and take into account the development of threats and… and where do the threats originate.

And… and that's actually the flexibility that is built in the gradual development of the NATO missile defence system over the next eight to ten years.

Oana Lungescu: Question over there, gentleman in the blue shirt.

Q: Colin Clark, AOL Defence. Mr. Secretary General, the United States supplies 75 percent of NATO's funding. The Pentagon budget's going to start going down.

Have you received strong commitments from the Americans that they will continue at the same high level of spending, or have you received indications that that will decline?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Yes, indeed we have received strong commitments from the American side to continue the development of a strong trans-Atlantic alliance.

I also have to add that we are in the process of reforming our Alliance to make more efficient use of our… our resources. We are in the process of modernizing and streamlining our military command structure. We will reduce the number of headquarters from 11 to seven, reduce the number of posts within the military command structure by more than 30 percent. We'll reduce the number of agencies from 14 to three. We are in the process of rationalizing our headquarters in Brussels.

So yes, a strong commitment to continue financing an Alliance which is actually the … the… the best value for money you… you can imagine. NATO in itself is smart defence because it is about helping each other instead of re-nationalizing defence. And that's actually the way forward, to help each other, to go for multinational solutions.

And ultimately, NATO is such a multinational solution, and this is the reason why not only the United States but all Allies have committed themselves to further developing this strong, trans-Atlantic Alliance.

Oana Lungescu: One last question over there. The gentleman over there, second row.

Q: Thank you. Yacob Lezen (ph), Politiken (ph) Denmark.

Secretary General, could you give us an idea of what you expect in terms of funding for the Afghan Security Forces after this summit, and also an idea of the date when you expect to have the full funding in place, the expected $4 billion as I understand it? Thank you.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: This summit is not a pledging conference. So you… you can't expect an… an exact figure from… from this summit. It's not been our intention to make it a pledging conference.

But nevertheless, a number of Allies and partners have announced concrete financial contributions for the Afghan Security Forces after 2014. And based on these announcements - and more will come, I'm sure - based on these announcement, I'm optimistic about reaching the overall goal of finding around four billion US dollars a year to finance the Afghan Security Forces in the future.

Let me stress that the four billion dollars a year is not the responsibility for NATO and ISAF alone. It is an responsibility for the whole of the international community. But I'm sure that NATO Allies and ISAF partners will pay a fair share of this overall bill.

But exact fig-- you… you can't expect exact figures from… from this summit, but I can tell you that we are on the right track.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much. I know there are many, many questions that we have to leave unanswered tonight. But the Secretary General will be back tomorrow. Many thanks.

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