North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Statement to the media

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen at the United Nations General Assembly
2012-09-25

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): I'm here to discuss the future of Afghanistan; how the international community can help Afghanistan also after 2014. As you know we—NATO, ISAF—operate in Afghanistan on the basis of a United Nations mandate. We have a clear goal, a clear strategy, and a clear timeline. Our goal is to see the Afghan Security Forces take full responsibility for the security all over Afghanistan in order to prevent the country from once again becoming a safe haven for terrorists.

Our strategy is to build up the capacity of the Afghan Security Forces and gradually hand over responsibility for the security province by province, and the timeline is to see this process completed by the end of 2014.

And we stick to the goal, the strategy and the timeline, and our current ISAF combat mission will end by the end of 2014. After 2014 we will continue with a supporting mission, a training mission, and see this through to a successful end.

Q: In the light of the green-on-blue attacks that we've had, Prime Minister (inaudible...) is going to perhaps encourage a speeding up of withdrawal plans. And, in fact, these attacks are taking place in training situations, doesn't that call into question the validity of all parts... of all the training programs?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: The insider attacks are, indeed, a matter of great concern, but they will not derail our strategy. We stick to the gradual handover of lead responsibility to the Afghans, and to that end we will also continue to train and educate, give advice and assistance to the Afghan Security Forces.

Our commanders in the field have taken some temporary measures to improve the security of our troops, but the basic strategy remains the same. And we continue to train and educate Afghan Security Forces.

Q: Do you have any indications at all from contributors to the mission that they would like to withdraw their troops earlier than planned, take out more (inaudible)... French levels …

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: No.

Q: ...change their minds?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: On the contrary. We have partners who have declared already that they will continue to contribute to a training mission after 2014, and you will see some redeployment, some withdrawal, some drawdowns from now until the end of 2014, but that's part of our strategy. As the Afghan Security Forces take more and more responsibility we can redeploy some of the international troops. So what you will see is an adaptation that takes place in a well-coordinated and pre-planned manner.

Q: Do you have a comment about Syria? The on-going conflict with Syria? Any comments at all, sir?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I think the United Nations have sent a very clear message to the Syrian leadership. That no regime can neglect the will of the people. The Syrian leadership must accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. What we need now is a strong and unified message from the international community. I think the right way forward is a political solution based on the elements in the so-called Annan Plan, and I urge all parties involved to work in that direction a transition to democracy in Syria.

Q: Can you envisage any NATO goal under any circumstances? For instance, if chemical weapons were used (inaudible...)?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: These questions are hypothetical questions, but I can assure you that we follow the situation closely and we stand ready, of course, to defend and protect our Ally, Turkey, a neighbouring country, if needed. But I do believe that the right way forward in Syria is a political solution.

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