North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the Defence Ministers meeting
2011-10-05

Anders Fogh Rasmussen(Secretary General of NATO): Good afternoon. I am very happy to hear that we have with us a group of journalists from the new independent Libyan media. Welcome to NATO.

We have just had a productive session reviewing several of our current operations: for Libya, in Kosovo and off the Horn of Africa.

Six months ago, we launched Operation Unified Protector to prevent threats against civilians in Libya. Today, ministers agreed that the operation has been a great success.

In Libya, NATO and our partners have made the difference. For countless civilians we have literally made the difference between life and death. We have fulfilled the mandate of the United Nations. And we are close to completing our mission. Tomorrow, when we meet with our partners in the operation, we will discuss the prospects for ending mission.

Today, we began discussing the lessons we should draw from this operation.

There are many things which we did right: we acted fast. We were flexible. We engaged with our partners. And together, we continue to be effective.

But we cannot be complacent. The operation also showed we lack certain critical capabilities, especially in Europe. European Allies and Canada took the lead. They provided most of the assets, but they had to rely on the United States to deploy critical enablers to get the job done. I'm talking about intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance and air-to-air refuelling.

NATO, as an Alliance, rose to the challenge. But if we are to respond to the challenges of tomorrow just as effectively, more Allies should make sure they obtain and maintain those kinds of critical capabilities. One is not enough.

Looking ahead, we also agreed that NATO should be ready to assist the new Libyan authorities with defence and security sector reforms, if they request our support.

NATO has long experience of supporting the move from dictatorship to democracy. And if asked, we would be happy to share that experience.

Nous avons aussi parlé des événements au Kosovo. Nous estimons que la KFOR a agi avec prudence, fermeté et impartialité, en respectant pleinement le mandat de l'ONU. Nous continuons d'attacher une grande importance à cette mission.

La KFOR est un bel exemple de réussite. Grâce à nous, un point chaud a pratiquement été pacifié en douze ans. Et nous ne laisserons pas la violence se réinstaller. La KFOR continuera de remplir son mandat en garantissant un environnement sûr et sécurisé, et en préservant la liberté de circulation.

Nous nous félicitons de la coopération étroite entre la KFOR et la mission EULEX de l'Union européenne sur le terrain. Elle est essentielle à notre réussite commune. Mais de nouveaux progrès sont nécessaires sur le plan politique. Le calme, la modération et le dialogue sont indispensables à la sortie de crise. Le dialogue politique entre Belgrade et Pristina, sous les auspices de l'UE, est la seule solution pour tous les habitants du Kosovo, quelle que soit leur origine ethnique.

Finally, we discussed the challenge of piracy. International efforts to combat piracy off the coast of Somalia are having an effect. Overall, the number of successful pirate attacks is down. And in the Gulf of Aden, there has not been a single successful attack since the start of the year.

But challenges remain and the solution will take an international effort. NATO is an integral part of that international effort. We agreed that Operation Ocean Shield makes an important contribution. And that we will continue the mission with the commitment, and the capabilities, which our commanders need to undertake their role.

And with that, I am ready to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu: Washington Post.

Q: Secretary General, Craig Whitlock with the Washington Post. In your meeting so far has a consensus formed, or do you see one forming about what specific conditions would have to be met in Libya in order for the Alliance to end military operations there? And could you foresee those operations ending as long as Colonel Qadhafi remains at large?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: First of all, let me stress that the termination of the operation is not dependent on Colonel Qadhafi. Actually, he is not a target of our operation. The decisive factor will be the protection of the civilian population.

So when we are going to make the decision to terminate our operation we will carefully assess the security situation, and in particular of course, take into account the capability of the National Transitional Council to protect the civilian population effectively, and we will coordinate our decision with the United Nations and of course the new authorities in Libya.

So the key will be the protection of the civilian population. So when no threat exists against the civilian population the time has come to terminate our operation. But on the other hand we are prepared to continue as long as necessary to protect the civilian population effectively.

Oana Lungescu: Al Arabia.

Q: Noureddine Fridhi, Al Arabiya News Centre. Mr. Secretary General, I have a couple of questions, first on Libya. There is some credible information about a big amount of portable missiles which are missed in Libya. Some are talking... the Libyan authorities are talking about 5,000, some others who are speaking about 10,000 portable missiles, some seven. Do you have an idea what is the destination of these missiles?

And until now did the Libyan authorities ask you to help them how to collect all these arms available in the street in Tripoli and elsewhere?

And if you don't mind, I have a question on Syria. What is your comment after the Russian and Chinese veto last night against the European Union and the United States resolution draft, and are you concerned? How far are you concerned by what's going on in Syria?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: On your first question, obviously it is a matter of concern if weapons are not monitored and controlled appropriately. And this is, first of all, a responsibility for the National Transitional Council. The United Nations Security Council has also called on the new authorities in Libya to take necessary steps to make sure that no proliferation, dissemination of weapons will take place.

NATO has not received any request as regards assistance in that respect. It is, first and foremost, a responsibility for the new authorities in Libya.

On Syria, as I have stated on several occasions, NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. We strongly condemn the crackdowns on protesters in Syria. I do believe that the only way forward in Syria, like in other countries, is to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. I'm not going to interfere with deliberations in the UN Security Council, but resolution or no resolution I think the bottom line is the same; that the only way forward in Syria is to accommodate the Syrian people's desire for freedom and democracy.

Oana Lungescu: Libyan media.

Q: (Inaudible) from Arabs Today. Secretary General, when you talk about the lessons learned from Libya how far we can say that ministers today have agreed to cooperate in order to fill the gaps in terms of intelligence gathering information or trying to assist each other so future challenges can be faced?

The other thing is one Barcelona meeting... sorry, Lisbon meeting took place there was like no sign of a preparation or expectation that the Arab Spring will take place. So what kind of

challenges NATO is trying to take into consideration in the future? Are you monitoring specific areas of the world after NATO Summit, looking at any future reference expected?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Firstly, on capabilities. Yes, in principle ministers agree that we have to focus on more multinational cooperation in order to make more efficient use of our resources. This is also the reason why some time ago we asked our Allied Command Transformation, as it's called, to prepare a report on a number of areas that could be subject to multinational cooperation. And our Allied Command Transformation has now finalized that first report and ministers will discuss the report later today and I will expect them to agree that we should build on that report, and maybe also continue to develop new projects that could be subject to multinational cooperation. It's about acquisition of expensive military equipment, but it's also about bringing down running costs when it comes to training, education, logistics, maintenance of military equipment.

So there is really a broad range of areas within which we can make more efficient use of resources if we help each other, if we go for collective and multinational solutions.

So overall there is a political agreement this it the way forward. The challenge, of course, would be to translate that political will into some concrete proposals, and my road map is to prepare a package for the Summit in Chicago. So you will not see a final list when we conclude the meeting tomorrow. We will start work today and tomorrow and continue with a view to the upcoming NATO Summit in Chicago.

On the Arab Spring, a very concrete... I think a very concrete follow-up on the Arab Spring as such will be an attempt to revitalize and put new dynamics into our partnerships with countries in North Africa and the Middle East. And it may also be an item on the agenda of the Summit in Chicago.

And in general, our new strategic concept provides the framework for a NATO that engages with partners across the globe and I think that's the best way to address new developments that may have an impact on the security situation in allied nations.

Oana Lungescu: We have time for only two more questions. I have Europa Press in the front.

Q: Thank you. Thank you so much, Secretary General. On missile defence, do we have a date for when the NATO system will reach full operational capability? And my second question is, given that we already know some countries like Poland, Romania, Turkey and more recently we hear today Spain will be hoping to announce that we will host some U.S. cruisers, part of this system, do we have any other European Allies that are going to put equipment, as such, with Aegis or other systems? I mean, not just hosting elements of the U.S. missile defence system, but a real own NATO capability?

Thank you.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Yes. On the operational capability, as you know it's our intention to declare an interim operational capability when we meet in Chicago in May next year. As regards a full operational capability, very much will of course depend on further development. As you know, it is a so-called phased adaptive approach, which means that we can continuously adapt the system to the evolving security situation.

But as things stand today, and as we can envisage the development as of today, we would expect it to be fully operational in 2018.

As regards input from individual Allies, I think missile defence is an excellent example of what I call smart defence, that we cooperate on a multinational basis. The United States provides a significant input to a NATO-based missile defence system, but other Allies contribute as well. As you already mentioned, Turkey, Poland, Romania have announced that they are ready to host certain missile defence facilities. Later today I hope that we can announce yet another initiative, and I would not be surprised if we will see further announcements in the coming weeks and months as regards new input to a NATO-based missile defence system.

So it's really a success story of smart defence, but most importantly, of course, it will provide better security for the populations in NATO countries.

Oana Lungescu: One final question from the Serbian News Agency Beta.

Q: Yes, (inaudible...), Beta News Agency. Secretary General, you just said, il faut un nouveau progrès sur la plan politique à Kosovo, et que seulement le calme, la modération et le dialogue peuvent sortir... trouver un sortie de la situation là-bas.

So what do you think, what new political progress, at the level of the national com... international community, international actors and Pristina and Belgrade, or only through the dialogue?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Yes, but I'm actually thinking about the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. That's what I'm hinting at. I do believe that the only way forward is to engage in that dialogue and during my recent visit to Pristina I talked with the political leadership there. In a number of conversations with President Tadić of Serbia I have conveyed exactly the same message, and urged all parties to engage constructively in this process.

I would very much like to see all countries and communities in the Western Balkans move forward in their relationship with the Euro-Atlantic structures, the European Union and NATO, and to that end we need a constructive political dialogue and that's what I mentioned in my introduction.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much. The Secretary General will be back, together with the Prime Minister of Spain and U.S. Secretary of Defense at around 19:00. Thank you.

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