North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press conference

with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkey, Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu - Secretary General's opening remarks
2016-09-09

(As delivered)

Thank you so much, Minister Cavusoglu, it is great to see you again, Mevlut, and I think that you and I, we have developed a strong partnership, excellent cooperation and a very good friendship. So it’s good to see you again and it’s good to be back in Ankara. And one of the very first countries I visited after becoming NATO Secretary General was Turkey and this is my fifth visit to Turkey.

And my many visits to Turkey reflect the essential role your country plays in the Alliance.

Turkey has a strategic location. It is facing challenges from many different directions: from the Black Sea and also from the Middle East bordering Syria and Iraq.

Turkey is and will remain a strong and highly valued member of NATO.

A democratic, strong and stable Turkey is important for our shared security.

This is why the coup attempt was not only a trauma for Turkey and for your democracy, but it was also an attack on the core values on which NATO is based.

And Mevlut, we spoke in the early hours of the failed coup and I expressed my solidarity and the strong condemnation of the coup attempt and I also spoke with President Erdogan soon afterwards.

If the coup had succeeded, it would have been a disaster not only for Turkey, but also for the whole NATO Alliance.

Any attempt to undermine or attack democracy, in any of our countries, is an attack on the very foundation of our Alliance.

And I salute the courage of the Turkish people.

Who took to the streets, often at great personal risk, to defend their democracy.

And I offer my deepest condolences to the innocent people who lost their lives during that tragic night.

I appreciate the opportunity I had earlier today to visit the Parliament and to meet with all the parties in the Parliament.

And it was very touching to see the damage, to see the effects of the airstrikes against the Parliament that took place during the attempted coup. To bomb a national Parliament while the parliamentarians are there is an attack on innocent people but it's also an attack on what of the strongest symbols and institutions in a democratic society

Those involved in the coup attempt should face due legal process and be brought to justice.

And Minister Cavusoglu I'm very glad that you and other leaders in Turkey have underlined the importance that this process will be in full compliance with Turkey's international obligations.

And I am confident that Turkey will keep its commitment to the rule of law and the democratic values at the heart of our Alliance.

I would also like to thank Turkey for your contribution to many different NATO operations and activities. You have contributed to our efforts to fight international terrorism. You do so in Afghanistan and I welcome also that you are stepping up your efforts to fight Daesh and other terrorist organisations because we have to stand together in the fight against international terrorism.

And I also appreciate the way you have supported and facilitated the NATO presence in the Aegean Sea, cutting the lines of illegal trafficking and human smuggling in the Aegean.

And just as you stand with NATO, NATO stands with Turkey and we have increased our military presence in Turkey with more assets in the air, naval assets. And also defensive missile defence systems deployed in Turkey.

So I look forward to continue to work with you and to develop further our strong partnership. And also to develop further the very important work we do together with Turkey inside NATO and I'll be back in Turkey in November, so I'm a frequent visitor of this very beautiful and very important NATO Ally.

So thank you once again.

MODERATOR: Yes we are going to take two questions. One from [inaudible][speaker does not have microphone].

Q: It is [inaudible] from TRT World. It is a question about Syria, a few questions actually for both Mr. Stoltenberg and our Minister Mr. Cavusoglu. Were wondering first of all if in your discussions you spoke about a no fly zone in Syria, particularly in the northern strip, the Turkey, Turkish operation cleared from Daesh forces. Secondly about the prospects of this operation. You recommended earlier today in your interviews that they should train troops on

the ground, if you can give more details about that location, exact numbers et cetera? And the prospects of an operation possibly towards Raqqa and Mosul. What should be the role of NATO and Turkey? Are we speaking of just air support or actual troops on the ground? And lastly is there any developments regarding a potential ceasefire in Aleppo that I think our President is also trying to broker for the upcoming Eid holiday next week?

JENS STOLTENBERG (NATO Secretary General): First of all I would like to underline that NATO plays a key role in the fight against terrorism but of course NATO is not the only answer. We need police, we need intelligence, we need many kinds of civilian tools in the fight against terrorism and Daesh but we also need a military alliance as NATO. And I think it is important to remember that our biggest military operation ever, our presence in Afghanistan, is about fighting terrorism. Its about preventing Afghanistan from becoming a safe haven for international terrorism and we have been successful in building a strong Afghan National Army. NATO has started to train Iraqi officers to enable them to fight ISIL and to stabilise their own country and we are also working with other countries in the region like for instance Jordan and Tunisia because we believe its extremely important to help and support those countries, the countries in the region which are stable and to support them now while they still are stable to avoid them experiencing some of the same kind of problems that we have seen in other countries in the region. The reason why I am underlining the importance of training local forces is that I believe that in the long run it is better to train local forces enabling them to fight terrorism, enabling them to stabilize their own country instead of NATO deploying large number of combat troops in combat operations. And thats exactly what we have done in Afghanistan, we have ended our combat operations, we have now moving to a train and assist operation. What we do in in Iraq and also work with Jordan and Tunisia. All NATO allies are part of the coalition fighting ISIL also in Syria, I welcome the increased efforts of Turkey but also other allies in fighting ISIL in Syria, Daesh, and I also there believe that the key is to train local forces. It is a very complex and very difficult situation in Syria but there is no alternative to just stay outside, we have to try to find a solution and also to fight ISIL in Syria. NATO provides support to the coalition in different ways, we will provide surveillance flights with our AWACS planes and of course were also present in Turkey augmenting their air defences, missile defence, naval presence and, and in different areas more air presence, all of this is something we do to also help protect our ally Syria against threats and attacks coming from Syria. So, so it is important that the efforts to fight Daesh, ISIL, has been stepped up and we support those efforts in different ways.

UNIDENTIFIED FEMALE: [Speaking foreign language].

MEVLUT CAVUSOGLU (Turkish Minister of Foreign Affairs): [Speaking with interpreter]. Thank you very much. Well Justice if there is a case in [inaudible], in Raqqa and in Mosul as well it is very much important to train the local forces against Daesh, against ISIS in Syria for instance in a place which is in a state which is not really ruled, not really governed and in countries such as Libya and Iraq in which governments are having difficult times in ruling the country. But in this framework NATOs role is also essential. Training and equipping local

forces is also important in the sense of ensuring security, protecting the security which is already in place right after the operations, in the aftermath of the operations which are carried out against Daesh and against terrorism. The people who saved actually the Jerablus and the region are the peoples are the forces from that region. Life is actually going back to normal in Jerablus, in these places and in addition to that there are also certain people returning back to Jerablus from Turkey. After this region is secured, after this region is cleansed if this de facto security situation will be supported, will be enhanced with a no fly zone it is going to be a very good opportunity for migrants to go back to their regions, to go back to their homes. Definitely it is not possible to force anyone to go back to their homes, it is very much important to respect their voluntary action. For instance in Mosul if [inaudible] had the local forces instead of the Shia forces that was, that were organized by [inaudible] then the region would not be surrendered towards the Daesh forces. The successful operation, the success of the operation in Jerablus actually is increasing the courage of the forces in Raqqa and in Mosul. After [inaudible] is provision of the support by the other countries within the coalition actually it was quite indicative that the Free Syrian Army could do certain things in order to secure the region. With a better strategy it is going to be and with the support, with the air support and with the support of coalition countries, it is going to be possible to secure the regions in Raqqa, in Mosul and to cleanse the area from terrorist organizations. Well of course local forces should not, should not support their own agenda by just supporting [inaudible] and PKK such terrorist organizations, this is not possible anyway. Rather than forcing people to migrate or rather than carrying out an ethnic cleansing they have to ensure security for the people who have a prospective approach to live in that region. Did I answer your question? No fly zone. I already mentioned my support and I already mentioned that no fly zone is necessary, it is required, but of course this is not something only just to be done by NATO. United Nations Security Council action decision is also necessary in order for people to go back to their homes not only land action will be sufficient, we should also prevent the air attacks as well.

MODERATOR: Last question.

Q: [Inaudible], from ARD German Television. I have two questions, one for Mr. Stoltenberg and one for Mr. Cavusoglu. Starting with Mr. Stoltenberg, yesterday Turkey declared that German parliamentarians can visit Incirlik again, the German soldiers on the Incirlik Air Base. What do you think about this development regarding the, the common goals of the NATO and that they are both NATO partners? And to you Mr. Cavusoglu, what do you think, you said that Germany did what Turkey expected and what was that and what will it mean to the relationship of both countries? Thank you.

JENS STOLTENBERG: The issue related to the Incirlik base and visits of German parliamentarians has been a bilateral issue between Germany and Turkey and it is an issue that has created some problems so therefore Im very glad that this issue now seems to be solved. And both the Foreign Minister and also the President yesterday confirmed that this issue was now solved and Im very glad and I welcome that because I think that all efforts

should be focused on fighting Daesh ISIL and the German presence at the Incirlik base is part of the German contribution to the fight against ISIL and I think it is important to be able to not have any obstacles in those efforts. So Im glad that this issue has been solved and I welcome the solution and, and the constructive approach by two NATO allies, Turkey and Germany.

MEVLUT CAVUSOGLU: [Speaking with interpreter]. It was the, it was due to the ridiculous decision taken by the German Federal Assembly regarding 1915 events, that is why actually we prevented the visit of German parliamentarians to the Incirlik base. We talked after upon the application of [inaudible], Chancellor Merkel and German Minister of Foreign Affairs towards us in order to make this visit to Incirlik base, we told them clearly, that we informed them clearly that if they take distance towards this ridiculous decision taken by the parliament, if they clearly state that it is not a binding decision and the government, it is not also binding for the government, we will be able to allow their visits to the base. That is what we mentioned, we expected them to come up with such a statement and it is actually what we have done to Germany, Luxembourg with the, actually this is what we have observed. Actually the statement made by the German Government was very much important, it was an exemplary declaration to the world and actually everybody should take a lesson out of these statements. In this statement the relevant declaration the German Government mentioned that in order for genocide to have a meaning to, in order to declare that an event is a genocide you should have a legal decision in order to support that with evidence. And because this declaration satisfied us we informed the German Government that we are going to allow the visit of the council members who will be visiting the base in the beginning of October. As I mentioned in my declarations yesterday some of the western countries as well as Germany should give up their approach thinking that I can do everything, I can get away with everything and I can take everything. This understanding is not actually progressing is not valid for Turkey, Turkey is not going to support or is not going to accept such kind of an understanding at all.

MODERATOR: Thank you so much.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2016/09/09/joint-press-conference