North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the meeting of the NATO-Russia Council
2013-12-04

We have just had another productive meeting in the NATO-Russia Council.

We have taken a number of decisions which will strengthen our cooperation, and build further trust between us.

Today, we agreed to launch a project for the disposal of obsolete and dangerous ammunition in a safe, efficient and environmentally friendly way.

By doing so, we will make the environment safer for all those who live near these stocks of dangerous ammunition. And we will create the conditions for former military sites to be converted to civilian use.

We will start with a so-called pilot project in the Kaliningrad region of the Russian Federation. We will establish a trust fund. This will provide the equipment and expertise to dispose of tens of thousands of obsolete bombs and shells, safely. Our decision today launches the first phase of this pilot project.

We are also considering a second phase, which will allow us to dispose of tens of thousands of tons of obsolete ammunition in the same region, through a safe and environmentally friendly industrial process.

This is an area of cooperation which has great potential. So I look forward to further cooperation, and further developments.

Today, we also agreed an ambitious programme of cooperation activities for 2014. This sends the highest political signal of our shared commitment to working together.

We already cooperate on the fight against narcotics, terrorism and piracy.

We will continue our work in those areas.

And we will explore the potential for cooperation in new areas. Especially in mine disposal in Afghanistan, and in the fight against roadside bombs more generally. This will benefit our shared security. It will allow us to promote stability in Afghanistan, and thus in the Euro-Atlantic region. And it will allow us to improve the protection we give to our troops, our citizens and all those who are threatened by home-made bombs.

Finally, our discussions today have shown that the NATO-Russia Council remains the right forum to address pressing international issues, such as Syria and the challenge posed by its stocks of chemical weapons.

We welcome the work carried out so far by the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. We urge all parties to fully cooperate with the Joint Mission of the OPCW and the United Nations. We underscore the importance of the complete and verifiable elimination of all chemical weapons, material and equipment, in the safest manner.

The only solution to the current crisis in Syria is through an inclusive and Syrian-led political process based on the Geneva Communiqué. We welcome the decision to convene the International Conference on Syria in January.

We welcome all support provided by the member states of the NATO-Russia Council to the OPCW-UN Joint Mission and we stand ready to consider further assistance if requested.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Okay, Oh sorry, over there.

Q: Secretary General, Alexander Perturski(ph?) from Gazeta.ru Moscow. Was in any way the situation in Ukraine discussed with you and your counterpart Mr. Lavrov, and was his reaction over the statement you heard of? Thank you very much.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): Ukraine was not on the agenda of the NRC meeting. A couple of members of the Council mentioned Ukraine, but we didn't have a discussion on Ukraine. As you know, NATO Ministers discussed Ukraine yesterday and adopted a statement on Ukraine.

OANA LUNGESCU: Reuters.

Q: Adrian Croft from Reuters. I heard what you said about chemical weapons, but is there... do you believe there's any possibility of NATO or the NATO-Russia Council playing some kind of coordinating role, or a role in securing the chemical weapons coming out of Syria? Thanks.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: We didn't discuss that issue, but as I mentioned, we have stated that we stand ready to consider further assistance if requested, but so far we haven't received any request.

OANA LUNGESCU: Over there.

Q: Broadcasting Company (inaudible...) Tbilisi, Georgia. What's your view about the Georgian-Russia relations, current relations? And when we have the context, on the one hand here in the Karasin-Abashidze talks and on the other hand here is the continuing process of the installation of the fences and wires at the occupation border. Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Now, we're speaking about the NATO position. We have just had a NATO-Russia Council meeting. I'm here actually in my capacity as chairman of the NATO-Russia Council. But now let me change my hat to NATO Secretary General.

And NATO's position on the Russia-Georgia relation remains the same. As you know, we insist on full respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders. We are strongly opposed to building those fences. The time is not to build fences, but literally speaking, to build bridges, to engage in dialogue, to find constructive political solutions. The erection of fences is clearly against international rules and we urge Russia to comply with her international obligations.

OANA LUNGESCU: Moscow Times.

Q: Yes, my question is, was the missile defence issue raised here in discussion? And can this issue make NATO-Russian relations more intense after Iran nuclear deal and prevent cooperation between the two parties in different spheres, and in other spheres than missile defence?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Well, as you know, we have invited Russia to cooperate on missile defence. So far we haven't seen much progress in negotiations or talks on such missile defence cooperation. But actually, we also had an exchange of views today on that issue, and I hope the dialogue will continue.

OANA LUNGESCU: KUNA in the front row there.

Q: Nawab Khan from the Kuwait News Agency. So was there a new discussion on the Geneva agreement with Iran? As this issue has been raised in the region raising some questions on the effect this will have on the future development in the region. Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I heard a lot of appreciation expressed; appreciation for the interim agreement, which hopefully can pave the way for a more lasting agreement on Iran's nuclear program. I think all members of the NATO-Russia Council appreciates the agreement that was reached in Geneva and look very much forward to a continued political dialogue with a view to finding a lasting agreement.

OANA LUNGESCU: Front row.

Q: Elena Chernenko, (inaudible) Kommersant. (SPEAKING IN RUSSIAN...)

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, all members of the NATO-Russia Council appreciate the Russian offer to provide transit and also reverse transit. At the end of the day it is a national decision whether each individual member of the ISAF coalition wants to use this or that transit route. And basically it is also a commercial decision.

We have seen some challenges as regards the cost of using that specific transit facility. I think there are on-going efforts to overcome those problems and then it is for each individual nation to decide whether they will use that transit facility.

But I think all the transit facilities are still relevant. They can potentially be used pending practical circumstances, including, of course, the costs of using each individual transit route.

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. One last question over there.

Q: Thank you, Excellency. Mustafa Basherat from Radio Free Europe. Could you give us some more details about how NATO and Russia can fight against terrorism and narcotics in Afghanistan? Another question is, so far NATO and the United States bought helicopters and other airplanes for Afghanistan from Russia, is not functioning very well. You talk about this issue also?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Actually, that's included in our work program for 2014. You mentioned, first, counterterrorism activities; actually, in 2013 already we conducted a joint exercise on counterterrorism. We have jointly developed techniques to detect potential suicide bombers and that way also prevent terrorist attacks. We have conducted joint exercises to prevent hijacking of airplanes, just to mention a couple of examples. And no doubt that counterterrorism is an area with a potential for even stronger cooperation.

On Afghanistan, yes, we have, as you may know, a helicopter trust fund established within the framework of the NATO-Russia Council. That trust fund finances training and education of Afghan helicopter crews, as well as spare parts for Afghan helicopters. So this is definitely an area where we do have cooperation, and also foresee expanded cooperation in the future.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. Just to remind you the Secretary General will be back in about two hours after the ISAF session, and you can find the statement of the NATO-Russia Council on the OPCW both on our website, and I think it's going to be distributed outside.

Thank you.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2013/12/04/press-conference