North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Monthly press briefing

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen
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Good afternoon. We have started the countdown to our Chicago summit. In just over six weeks from now, we will gather to renew the vital bond between European and North American Allies, and to strengthen the bonds with our partners across the globe. So I expect solidarity to be a key theme.

We will show solidarity in supporting Afghanistan through transition, as we agreed at our Libson summit, and beyond. Solidarity in providing the Alliance with the capabilities it needs even in tough times. And solidarity in addressing global security challenges with our partners around the world.

In two weeks time, NATO Foreign and Defence Ministers will meet in Brussels to review our Summit agenda.

Now, first on Afghanistan. We are on track to complete the transition to full Afghan security responsibility by the end of 2014, as we agreed at our Lisbon summit. Our goal remains unchanged. Our roadmap remains unchanged. And our determination remains unchanged.

Over the last 9 months, Afghan forces have been gradually taking the lead for security in areas where half the Afghan population lives. And I expect more provinces and districts to follow soon. At the same time, ISAF has gradually started moving into a supporting role. But we remain ready and able to conduct combat operations whenever and wherever needed.

Despite the challenges, we can see progress on the ground. Attacks initiated by the enemy in January and February were down by 22% compared to the same period last year. In fact, each month since May 2011 has had fewer enemy-initiated attacks than the previous months. This is the longest sustained downward trend recorded by ISAF.

Every day, the Afghan security forces are increasingly showing their ability. They are leading 28% of special operations, 42% of conventional operations, and they are carrying out 85% of the training. This shows transition is achievable, and it is sustainable.

In Chicago, we will map out how we are going to complete the transition, and how we will continue to support Afghanistan beyond 2014. We will agree what kind of mission NATO will have after 2014, to provide the training, assistance and support that Afghans will need. And

together with Afghanistan's international partners, we will show our commitment to playing our part in funding the future Afghan security forces.

Now the second item on the Summit agenda will be our Alliance's capabilities: the tools we have to overcome the challenges we face. This is a vital issue, not just for one summit, but for years ahead. And it is one which we have to tackle in a time when resources are tight.

In Chicago, we will adopt a package of new measures through Smart Defence. That will ensure we set the right priorities together; encourage Allies to specialise by design, not by default; and foster multinational cooperation so nations can have access to capabilities they cannot afford on their own.

This defence package will also see us adopt a number of multinational projects, each led by one Ally – ranging from pooling maritime patrol aircraft, to joint maintenance of deployed helicopters, to acquiring robots that will keep our soldiers safer from roadside bombs.

Smart Defence represents a renewed culture of cooperation. We are already seeing the benefits of this positive mindset.

A visible example of this is the development of an Alliance Ground Surveillance system, which gives our commanders a full and real-time picture of what is happening on the ground in our operations.

Importantly, we also are building on the experience of past and current operations to maintain the ability of our forces to work together.

So we can look to Chicago with confidence. But Chicago will not be the end of our efforts, only the start. We all have much work to do to ensure NATO remains strong and capable by 2020 and beyond.

Thirdly, in Chicago, I expect we will declare an interim missile defence capability. This is an important first step in bringing together national contributions to build an integrated defence against a real, and growing threat.

Quatrièmement, notre sommet sera aussi l'occasion d'aborder la question des partenariats. Si nous voulons nous acquitter de notre mission de sécurité dans le monde contemporain, nous devons continuer à investir dans des partenariats forts, avec des pays du monde entier. À Chicago, plus de cinquante dirigeants mondiaux devraient prendre part à la réunion qui sera consacrée à la FIAS. Nous réfléchirons à de nouvelles approches pour renforcer nos partenariats – pour faire de l'OTAN le pôle central d'un réseau de sécurité réunissant un grand nombre de pays et d'organisations des quatre coins du monde.

La Russie est, bien sûr, l'un de nos partenaires majeurs. Et je suis heureux de pouvoir dire que la semaine dernière a été particulièrement fructueuse pour la coopération OTAN-Russie.

Lundi dernier – ici-même, à Bruxelles –plus de soixante-dix diplomates et experts militaires et civils des pays de l'OTAN et de la Russie ont participé à un exercice conjoint sur les moyens de faire face à un incident terroriste en haute mer.

Ce fut un exercice très utile, qui nous a permis d'examiner comment nous serions amenés à opérer – et à coopérer – si un incident de ce type devait réellement se produire. Un exercice qui renforce encore la coopération que nous avons déjà engagée dans la lutte contre le terrorisme.

On the same day, NATO and Russia started an exercise on theatre missile defence in a test centre in Germany. This was a computer exercise – so we were not shooting any missiles. And it was based on a completely fictional scenario. But it was a good opportunity to develop, explore and assess various options for conducting missile defence in Europe – and I am extremely glad that it took place.

Counter-terrorism. Missile defence. Those are both areas where NATO and Russia have interests in common. And there are many others. This month I expect we will pass the milestone of having trained 2,000 counter-narcotics officers from Central Asia, under the NATO-Russia Council training programme.

This month, I also expect the opening of a training centre for Afghan army helicopter maintenance, funded by our NATO-Russia Council trust fund. The centre will be in Russia. It will be supported by all of us. And it will help the Afghan forces to fly and maintain their helicopter fleet as transition takes hold.

Finally, this month, I am looking forward to a meeting of all 29 foreign ministers of the NATO-Russia Council in the context of our joint ministerial session. Minister Lavrov has confirmed that he will be coming to Brussels for the meeting. And I am sure that our discussions will be intense, engaging, and fruitful.

Because our shared goal is to build a truly modernised strategic partnership. And the way to do that is through dialogue, and cooperation – just as we are doing.

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

Oana Lungescu (NATO Spokesperson): Okay, we'll go to Geo TV Pakistan here.

Please don't forget you've got the microphone next to your seat.

Q: (Inaudible) Khalid Hameed Farooqi from Pakistan, Geo Television Pakistan. Pakistani Parliament yesterday announced that restoration of NATO supply line from Pakistan into Afghanistan only for known weaponry stuff. There will be no weapons going through Pakistan and when ISAF forces will be withdrawn no weapon will be leaving Afghanistan through Pakistan.

Do you think that that kind of conditions, if you meet, will delay the departure of ISAF or NATO forces from Afghanistan?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen (NATO Secretary General): First of all, let me stress that, of course, we fully respect the integrity of the Pakistani Parliament and the autonomy of the Pakistani Parliament. We fully respect political decisions taken by the Pakistani Parliament.

But let me add to that, that I also think it is in Pakistan's strong interest to contribute to our operation in Afghanistan. It is in Pakistan's strong interest to see a peaceful and stable Afghanistan. And to that end we also need seamless cooperation on transits through Pakistan. So I hope that we can find a proper solution to that question.

In direct response to your question, let me stress that there will be no change in our timetable. We stick to the timetable outlined at our last Summit in Lisbon. That is, transition will continue and be completed by the end of 2014.

How we will manage that transition in details will be discussed at the Chicago Summit.

Oana Lungescu: Kuwaiti News Agency.

Q: Nawab Khan from the Kuwait News Agency, KUNA.

Mr. Secretary General, yesterday the Friends of Europe... Friends of Syria, sorry, met in Turkey yesterday. So any comments on the results of the meeting?
Anders Fogh Rasmussen: First of all, let me stress that NATO as an Alliance is not engaged directly in the Syria issue, but obviously we monitor the situation closely as one of our Allies is a neighbour of Syria and can also be impacted by what is going on in Syria.

I appreciate very much the efforts done by the group, Friends of Syria, to find a political and peaceful solution to the situation in Syria. I appreciate that the UN Special Envoy, Annan, has succeeded in achieving support from the whole UN Security Council to find solutions, peaceful solutions to some of the problems in Syria.

And I hope, based on that, that we will see progress, that we will see reforms in Syria. The only way forward in Syria, like in other countries, is to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and initiate a process that will lead to freedom and democracy and I hope that an increased international pressure on the Syrian regime will succeed in promoting such a process. And to that end I think the meeting of Friends of Syria has been helpful.

Oana Lungescu: National Public Radio.

Q: Mr. Secretary, Teri Schultz, National Public Radio and CBS Radio.

When you say that enemy-initiated attacks are down it begs the question for me about Ally-initiated attacks, and this is something that we end up having to ask you over and over

because in between each of our news conferences more and more of them happen. An Afghan killed nine of his colleagues, again, Afghan National Police, I believe it was. What... can you say anything other than that you continue to be concerned and that transition remains on track, because isn't that exactly what the Taliban is counting on, that transition remains on track and even though things are happening within the ranks that could give pause, they're not, and the troops will be out as soon as the schedule was set in advance? Thank you.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: It would, indeed, be a serious misunderstanding if the Taliban think they can just wait us out, and wait to see what will happen when international troops withdraw from Afghanistan. What they... if they think in that direction. What they don't take into account is the fact that we will leave behind a very strong Afghan Security Force.

Right now we have around 330,000 Afghan Security Forces soldiers and police. A Security Force that is increasingly capable to take on security responsibilities. The figures I mentioned in my introduction are a testament to that. The fact that the Afghan Security Forces take actively part in the huge majority of security operations, and that they handled these operations very skilfully, will... is a clear indication that once we have withdrawn international troops from Afghanistan the enemies of Afghanistan will be confronted with a strong and capable Afghan Security Force.

So this is the reason why I'm confident that we can fulfil the objectives we presented in Lisbon and also complete the transition by the end of 2014.

Let me add to that: We will not abandon Afghanistan. We will stay also beyond 2014, but only in a supportive role. We will continue our training mission with a view to training, assisting and advising the Afghan Security Forces.

Q: (Inaudible...).

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Yes, but we have already introduced a package of measures with a view to preventing such unfortunate incidents. A package of measures that include strengthened measures as regards vetting, scrutiny, intelligence, and other measures that can prevent such incidents.
Oana Lungescu: Georgian TV.

Q: Sophiko Zurabiani, Georgian TV company Imedi.

I would like to ask you about meeting with President Saakashvili, scheduled tomorrow. Could you give us some details as to what's on the agenda?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: At the meeting tomorrow, with President Saakashvili, we will discuss the progress Georgia has achieved within the cooperation programmes with NATO. It's a meeting of the NATO-Georgia Commission, which is the framework for our cooperation. So we will take stock of the progress achieved within that cooperation framework. We will

discuss the regional security situation. And finally, we will discuss the upcoming Chicago Summit.

I'm sure that Allies will express their very strong appreciation of the significant Georgian contribution to our operation in Libya... in Afghanistan. Georgia is already one of the largest contributors and Georgia has decided to double its contribution, which will bring Georgia to becoming the largest non-NATO contributor to our operation in Afghanistan.

And of course, all Allies strongly appreciate that. It's a very strong testament to the Georgian commitment to the transatlantic Alliance.

So these will be the main topics, and obviously we will reiterate what we decided already in 2008 at the NATO Summit in Bucharest, that Georgia will become a member of NATO, provided, of course, that Georgia fulfils the necessary criteria.

Oana Lungescu: We've got about ten more minutes. I already have about four questions here. Just to let you know. Jane's.

Q: Yes, Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence Weekly.

I want to come back to capability development. Secretary General, you mentioned AGS as an example of that, but as we all know this took 25 years to get off the ground, despite the fact that defence budgets throughout this whole time, since the fall of the Berlin Wall, have declined steeply anyway. So that means we can't really point necessarily only to the financial crisis to speed this whole process up.

So my question to you is: What's going to make future capability development qualitatively different, and in terms of time, different from NATO's past sluggish performance? Is it going to be mandatory NATO technical standards? Will it be the use of a new security label to promote standardized equipment? What will it be? Thank you.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Well, I think there are two elements that will facilitate further development of joint capabilities. The first is lessons learned from operations. Our operation in Afghanistan, obviously, but also the recent operation in Libya.

And focusing on the Libya operation, overall a great success, but it also revealed some capability shortfalls; in particular, on the European side. And I think it has become obvious to everybody that we need to fill these shortfalls. So the one thing that will facilitate such a development of new, modern, advanced, military capabilities, the one thing is lessons learned.

Now the next, paradoxically, is the financial constraints, and that's actually an example that a crisis also provides some opportunities. And during a period of economic austerity it has become obvious that nations need to cooperate if they are to afford the acquisition of advanced systems. And together, in multinational programmes, you are actually able to do

more than you are on a national basis. At least for a majority of the Allies. In particular, for smaller and medium-sized Allies.

So I think the concept of Smart Defence, will facilitate the development of capabilities we wouldn't otherwise have seen. So this is the reason why I'm quite optimistic about the defence package we are going to adopt in Chicago. And Smart Defence will be about how to acquire the capabilities, and in addition to that, we have a Connected Forces initiative which will be about how to make these capabilities work together. And, of course, that also includes technical standardization and other measures that make it possible for troops and military equipment to work better together.

Oana Lungescu: Please.

Q: Hi, my name is Takashi(SP?), I'm with NHK Japan Broadcasting Corporation.

In regards to the situation in Afghanistan, it seems you've emphasized a lot about your plan has not changed, but apparently the other side, Afghan side, doesn't share that view. And even the President said... or indicated, that they want to see NATO forces out earlier than the end of 2014. How do you respond to that?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: But actually there's nothing new in all this, but maybe it's necessary to clarify these timelines, because sometimes they are mixed up in a way that creates some confusion.

Let me stress, we will stick to the Lisbon Road Map and complete transition by the end of 2014. That road map is actually based on a timeline outlined by President Karzai himself before the Lisbon Summit. He presented the goal to see the Afghan Security Forces take full responsibility for the security by the end of 2014. And we stick to that.

However, in order to actually complete transition by the end of 2014, we need to hand over the last provinces and districts to lead Afghan responsibility at a certain time in 2013. Because based on experience it takes between 12 and 18 months to actually fully implement a transition.

So if the whole of the transition is to be completed by the end of 2014 we'll have to hand over the last provinces to lead Afghan responsibility by mid-2013, or at the latest in the second half of 2013. That's why the year 2013 has suddenly been mentioned. It's not about accelerating the transition process, but it's actually in order to stick to the Lisbon Road Map that we have to take 2013 into account.

And from the time when we have handed over all provinces to lead Afghan responsibility, we will, of course, gradually change the role of our forces from combat to support, but we will continue our combat operations and be prepared to conduct combat operations until the end of 2014. That is throughout the whole transition period.

I hope this explanation clarifies the confusion that sometimes has been created about the year 2013, 2014. This discussion does not change the overall road map as it was outlined in Lisbon. We stick to the Lisbon Road Map.

Oana Lungescu: Reuters.

Q: (Inaudible...), Reuters. Just changing the subject briefly. There was a discussion at the Council of Europe last week about the accident with the migrant boat from Libya in which 63 people have died. And the Council of Europe has asked NATO to release the satellite imagery of the area during the accident. Is NATO considering doing so?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: First of all, let me stress that it's clearly in the interest of NATO to provide all the information we can, and we have actually cooperated closely with the Council of Europe to provide relevant information for the investigation that has taken place.

And we will, of course, consider carefully all requests for further information. We have nothing to hide. Let me stress that last year during our operation to enforce the United Nations arms embargo on Libya, NATO rescued over 600 of migrants in distress in the Mediterranean. And now a question has been raised about one specific incident and to help determine what happened with this particular boat NATO has provided a significant amount of information to the Council of Europe and we will, of course, consider carefully any new request for information.

Oana Lungescu: At the back, I think Kosovar Media.

Q: Yes, (inaudible...) from Kosovo Television.

Mr. Rasmussen, on Saturday two Kosovar policemen were caught, arrested, or kidnapped as Kosovar government would say, by Serbian police. Having in mind that everything happened in the border between Serbia and Kosovo and having in mind that KFOR is in charge of controlling that part of Kosovar territory, do you have any in-depth data of what exactly happened?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: No, actually we don't have a full picture of what has happened. Obviously, NATO is concerned about the latest development, but we are confident that responsible parties will be able to resolve the matter.

Oana Lungescu: There's one there from Arabic media, and then one last question.

Q: Monsieur le Secrétaire général, (inaudible...), TV.

Vous allez bientôt rencontrer le président de la Commission tout à l'heure, Monsieur Barroso. Et un des points on a attendu à discuter est la Syrie. Ma question en deux parties sur la Syrie. Est-ce que l'OTAN... les forces de l'OTAN sont prêtes à intervenir en Syrie si le conseil

de sécurité l'approuve? Ou bien est-ce que... ou bien elle va réfléchir encore deux fois selon le cas de la Libye?

Et deuxième partie de la question: Si la communauté internationale demande à aider à armer l'opposition syrienne, est-ce que l'OTAN est prêt aussi à y participer?
Anders Fogh Rasmussen: As I have stated on several occasions, NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. As I mentioned previously, we monitor the situation closely. It's absolutely outrageous what we have witnessed in Syria. I strongly condemn the crackdowns on the civilian population, and once again, I urge the Syrian leadership to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

I don't think the right way forward would be to provide any group with weapons. I do hope that a political solution and diplomatic solution can be found on the basis of the work that has now started under the leadership of the UN Special Envoy Annan.

There's a clear risk that the provision of arms to any group in Syria would also lead to a potentially dangerous proliferation of weapons in the region. So, again, I do hope that a peaceful and political solution can be found.

Oana Lungescu: One last question, German Press Agency.

Q: (Inaudible...), German Public Radio.

One follow-up on exit strategy in Afghanistan, if I may? After President Karzai said that he wants the international troops to leave early in 2013 I spoke with Afghans, and they say we are scared, we don't know why is he saying this, maybe this will be an excuse for the international community to leave us alone and, of course, the Afghan Security Forces are not ready at all. What is your... I'm sorry, what's your reaction? Astonishing, or was it scar... maybe scared as well? Sorry.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: I understand the concerns, but let make two points. Firstly, obviously we can't stay in Afghanistan for ever. ISAF is not an occupation force. We are there to help the Afghan people to shape their own future. But eventually it must be for the Afghan people to take full responsibility for their own country.

So this is the reason why we have outlined a clear road map for this transition to full Afghan responsibility. So that's my first point. We are there to help, not as an occupation force, so one day it must come to an end.

My second point is, we are not just leaving Afghanistan behind. We're not just abandoning Afghanistan. On the contrary. We have trained and educated a very strong and increasingly capable Afghan Security Force to take on the responsibility for the security beyond 2014. And I feel confident that this very strong Afghan Security Force will be able to protect the Afghan people against enemy attacks.

We will stay committed beyond 2014 in a supportive role, continue to train and educate, give advice to the Afghan Security Forces so we make sure that they maintain the capability to take full responsibility for the security.

So this is my answer to the Afghan people that eventually they must take responsibility for their own country. We will help them on the road to that end state, and we won't abandon Afghanistan. We want Afghanistan to be able to stand on its own feet, but not alone. That's the essence of our strategy.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much. Sorry we couldn't take all the questions, but hopefully we'll see as many of you as possible in two weeks' time for the meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2012/04/02/monthly-press-briefing