North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation General Stéphane Abrial at the ACT Seminar
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OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Thanks for coming here. We'll start with short introductory remarks and then the Secretary General of NATO and the Supreme Allied Commander Transformation will be happy to take your questions. We'll start with the host, general.

GENERAL STÉPHANE ABRIAL (Supreme Allied Commander Transformation): Thank you very much Oana. And Ladies and Gentlemen, welcome... welcome and thank you for taking part in our SACT seminar.

As you know, Allied Command Transformation is the only NATO command based in America, in Norfolk, Virginia. And our seminar is one of our main recurring events as it gives the opportunity for NATO political and military representatives to meet and discuss the future of the Alliance. We'll organize it annually, as a thing between both sides of the Atlantic.

So this year, it's here in Washington D.C. with the active participation of European and American think-tankers, academics and representatives from the industry. The specific objective this year is for it to serve as a milestone on the homestretch to the Chicago Summit. We'll focus on improving NATO's capabilities.

During the past three months, acting as one of Secretary General Rasmussen's special representative for Smart Defence I have worked hard with the NATO nations and how to have them maintain and develop needed capabilities in times of austerity. And the result is fitting our discussions today. I want to thank the Secretary General for his leadership and the trust he has shown ACT on these issues, for his presence with us today at the seminar. And I'm happy to give him the floor so...

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): I am very glad to be back on this side of the Atlantic. And to be part of the regular seminar hosted by General Abrial and NATO’s Allied Command Transformation.

We are meeting at a time when we face many challenges -- and this is the time when we must show renewed resolve.

Afghanistan remains NATO's top operational priority and recent days have been challenging for all of us. For our commanders and our service men and women. For the 50 Allies and

partners who have committed troops and trainers to ISAF -- the biggest coalition in history. And for our partners in the Afghan security forces and the people of Afghanistan.

I deplore the violence we have seen during the last week. But across the country, ISAF troops are showing great restraint and professionalism. And Afghan security forces have shown considerable courage in their efforts to minimise the violence.

We will not allow the extremists to weaken our resolve. We will continue to stand shoulder to shoulder with our Afghan partners. And we will not lose sight of our shared goal. We are in Afghanistan to build stability and security for the Afghan people – which is in the interest of our own security. That is our commitment, and that commitment remains unchanged. And our Chicago summit in May will make clear that we stand firm on that commitment.

At Chicago, we will also build on what we discussed at this seminar -- how to sustain the operations of today and face the security challenges of tomorrow, by continuing to strengthen our core capabilities and to transform our forces.

We cannot tell how long this economic turmoil will last. But its consequences will be with us for a long time to come. And in good times and bad, NATO has been the best investment Allies have made. For over sixty years, it has successfully delivered security and stability. That’s why we need to continue investing in it – militarily, politically, and financially. So that, by the end of this decade and into the next, we emerge stronger as an Alliance, not weaker.

And the key is smart defence. Smart defence is about prioritization, specialization and cooperation. We all know that it will be increasingly difficult for individual allies to acquire expensive military equipment on their own. By by pooling and sharing resources, by multinational cooperation and by helping each other, they can better afford investments in the necessary military capabilities.

At our summit in Chicago, I expect all Allies to commit to long-term goals for the capabilities we need and for reinforcing the connection between our forces. And I expect them to back up that vision with concrete projects. So that, in a fast-changing world, we can do better with what we have. And stay lean, but strong.

That is our Chicago challenge: to lay the foundation of the NATO of the future – towards 2020 and beyond.

And I would like to thank General Abrial for all the effort that he and his team have put into making that happen.You have, as you mentioned, served as one of my special representatives on smart defence, travelling to capitals all over the Alliance. You have promoted the concept of smart defence, and achieved backing for a number of concrete projects, so I thank you very much for all the work you have done.

OANA LUNGESCU: We're open to questions. Please don't forget to introduce yourself, the media organization you represent and who your question is addressed to.

Q: Mr Secretary General I'm Bob Burns with Associated Press: Question for you regarding the recent violence in Afghanistan including of course the killing of the 2 officers in Kabul on Saturday, obviously this represents a breakdown in trust between ISAF and the Afghans how long will it take you to rebuild that trust and how can this not not affect the timeline for transition.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): First of all, I would like to stress it will not in any way affect the timeline of transition. We stick to the timeline we outlined in Lisbon in November 2010. That is transition will take place until the end of 2014. We have started the transition process. It will continue and by the end of 2014, we expect the Afghans to take full responsibility for the security all over Afghanistan. So that's my first point. The very tragic events will not in any way affect the timeline.

Having said that, let me strongly condemn of course violence we have seen. And nothing, nothing at all can justify these killings. How regrettable they are! We should also recall that they do not represent the daily picture of the cooperation between ISAF forces and the Afghan security forces. Let me remind you that 130,000 ISAF troops work on a daily basis together with more than 300,000 Afghan security forces. And the overall picture is a corporation characterized by trust and confidence.

Of course, we monitor the situation closely. We investigate these incidents in a very detailed manner to prevent such tragic incidents from happening in the future. But it would... it would actually be to fulfill the strongest wishes of the enemy if they succeeded in dividing us from our good partners in the Afghan security forces. And that will not happen.

OANA LUNGESCU: Would... eh...?

Q: (Inaudible)

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I do, definitely, not deny reality. I strongly regret what has happened. And of course, we have to take that into account in the way we organize our work in Afghanistan. But what I stress is that it does not represent the full picture of the daily cooperation between ISAF troops and Afghanistan security forces.

Actually, we have seen the Afghan security forces take a lead responsibility for the security in more and more areas of Afghanistan. And they have handled security also severe security challenges very professionally. So basically we do have confidence in the way the Afghan security forces handled the security situation and we do believe that they will be able to take over full responsibility for the security by the end of 2014 and on a daily basis we have cooperation with the Afghan security forces characterized by trust and confidence.

But obviously... obviously, we do take into account what we have seen. And our commanders on the ground take all necessary measures to prevent such incidents from happening again.

OANA LUNGESCU: Lady over there ....

Q: Mr Secretary General some references to some financial challenges (Inaudible) …. Member states ……

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Let me start by the latter. We have not yet made a decision on the long-term size of the Afghan security forces. We're in a process of consultation among Allies and partners and of course, also with the Afghan government. We will end up with an assessment of what is a long-term sustainable size of the Afghan security forces.

But whatever the exact figure might be, it goes without saying that the size of the Afghan security forces will go well beyond the financial capacity of the Afghan government which leads to the first part of your question. That is a responsibility for the whole of the international community. It's not only a NATO and ISAF responsibility. But a responsibility for the whole international community to ensure proper financing of the Afghan security forces in the future.

And you ask me whether I find it realistic to... to raise a sufficient amount of funds for that. I think for everybody it's a good deal to finance the Afghan security forces.

First and foremost, politically because it's better that the Afghans take full responsibility for the security of themselves, that we put a clear Afghan face on the defence of Afghanistan. That's a political aspect. But economically, it's also a good deal; because it's less expensive... it's less expensive to finance Afghan security forces than to deploy international troops in Afghanistan. So it's very easy for me to make the case that we should go down that road and let the international community finance the Afghan security forces.

Q: What steps specifically do you think might be necessary to return the coalition advisors to the ministry in Kabul in order to find the balance between their security and the ability to do the job you set out for them. What specific steps do you think are necessary and on the question of the Chicago summit. What do you see coming out of that related to the role of nuclear weapons in Nato going forward. How much will you be able to resolve by the Chicago Summit?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Firstly, on Afghanistan, you asked me about specific steps. And I will leave it to General Allen as commander of ISAF to decide which specific steps should be taken on the ground before our people can return to the ministries and other institutions in Afghanistan.

But I can assure you that it is a temporary measure that has been taken, of course, to protect our people. And they will return as soon as possible. Because the enemy of Afghanistan...the enemies of Afghanistan will not succeed in dividing us from our partners. We want to resume the close cooperation as soon as possible. But of course, we also have to take the necessary measures to ensure that our people can do their work in a secure environment. But I will leave it to COM-ISAF to make decisions on those specific steps.

As far as our nuclear policies are concerned, we will... I expect that we will adopt what we call a defence and deterrence posture review at our summit in Chicago. And that will include... that will include nuclear policies. It will be... the essence of that document will be to find the appropriate mix between nuclear forces, conventional forces and missile defence. But it will be premature for me to... to guess about the final outcome of discussions that have just started recently.

OANA LUNGESCU: Question in the back.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, I think it's important for me to stress that NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. Obviously, we monitor the situation closely, also because one of our allies is neighbouring Syria and may be affected by what is going on in Syria. But again, NATO has no intention to intervene in Syria.

But obviously, we strongly condemn what we see in Syria, the crackdowns on demonstrators are outrageous. And the only way forward in Syria is to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people and introduce freedom and democracy. Obviously what is going on in Syria may have an impact on the regional stability.

OANA LUNGESCU: Question next to you...

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: The reason is that Allies find that a regional solution to the problems in Syria is the best way forward. Very often, I get the question: "Why could you intervene in Libya but not in Syria?" But in Libya we had a very clear United Nations mandate and we had active support from a number of countries in the region. None of these conditions are fulfilled in Syria.

OANA LUNGESCU: (Inaudible)

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I have a very positive assessment of the French reintegration, a full reintegration in our structures. And one of the visible examples of that is standing here, right beside me, General Abrial. For the first time ever, a French general has taken command of... Allied Command Transformation. General Abrial is in the lead of very important part of NATO policies: the transformation and modernization of our Alliance. And in very concrete terms, as I mentioned now, in the lead of our project Smart Defence. So that's an example. That's a very concrete example of French reintegration in our structure that a French general has taken command in one of our major commands.

More generally speaking, it goes without saying that when a country is fully integrated in our structures, the weight of the voice of that country will also increase. And that has actually happened. So France plays a very constructive and very active role within our Alliance. And yet another very visible sign of that, I think, was the Libya operation. As you know, it started... it started as a coalition of the willing. But soon it became a NATO operation and a very

successful NATO operation. And I think part of the explanation that it became a NATO operation is the fact that France in the meantime had been fully integrated in our structures.

OANA LUNGESCU: (Inaudible) ... in front.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Let me start with the latter. No, I don't think a military intervention is the right way forward. I do hope that the international political and diplomatic efforts will be a fruit and lead to a solution to that very unfortunate problem. Let me also stress that NATO as an alliance is not engaged in the Iran question. Individual allies are of course. And we support their political and diplomatic efforts to find a solution. We urge the Iranian leadership to comply with the international obligations, including relevant United Nations resolutions. But NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Firstly, please remark that I had two elements in my answer on Syria. The one was the one you mentioned: the lack of a United Nations mandate. But the other one is equally important that Syria is different from Libya. And I do believe that as far as Syria is concerned, the best way forward would be a regional solution. I commend the Arab League for their efforts to find a solution. So far it's not been successful. But I do believe that countries in the region should engage actively in finding a solution. As far as Syria is concerned, I think that's the right way forward.

Q: What about arming the opposition ?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: NATO is not involved in arming anyone except our Allies. And definitely... We are not.... As I told you, NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. And that also includes arming the opposition.

Now, on al-Qaeda, I do believe overall that al-Qaeda has been weakened significantly. Of course, we are aware of cells here and there that operate. But I think that from an overall perspective we have succeeded in weakening al-Qaeda significantly and that also goes as far as North Africa is concerned.

Q: Do you see any chance for the next meeting Nato-Russia Council in Chicago (Inaudible)

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: To be honest with you we have not seen much progress in our negotiations on... on missile defence. I'm not going to guess about the probability of having a NATO-Russia summit meeting in Chicago. But it would be my assessment that if we haven't reached a kind of agreement on missile defence, then there won't be a meeting in Chicago. But let me also add to that... that Chicago is obviously not the end of life. I mean our negotiations with Russia can and will continue also beyond Chicago. But what will happen in Chicago is that NATO will declare an interim capability of the NATO missile defence system. Because that decision has been taken in Lisbon, at our last summit, that we will build a NATO missile defence system to protect our populations against a real threat. And that's a fact that will be built.

And I hope Russia in a not too distant future will realize that it's also in Russia's interest to cooperate with us on missile defence. Because Russia is faced with the same missile threat. And we could make the whole system much more efficient if we cooperate, including exchange data, we could prepare a joint threat assessment. We could prepare joint exercises. We could have a Russian system and a NATO system; but they could cooperate. And I think that would be in Russia's interest as well. But as I said, so far we have not seen much progress. And if we don't see more progress before May then we will not have a meeting probably.

Q: Lady over there waiting very patiently ……

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Well, of course, it plays a role. We're speaking about the lack of progress in our missile defence negotiations that Russia has been in an election period for quite some months. First, we had the parliamentary election in December. And now we have presidential elections in March. And during that whole period it's been my assessment that we wouldn't receive new signals from Russia until after the elections. So obviously, the weeks after the presidential elections in Russia may be decisive as regards possible further progress in missile defence negotiations and the possibility of having a NATO-Russia summit in Chicago.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much indeed for your questions and for your patience.

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