North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the first meeting of Ministers of Defence
2012-10-09

Good afternoon.

We have just had constructive discussion on how to provide security in a time of economic austerity.

This is one of the most urgent challenges facing our Alliance today.

At the Chicago Summit, we took important decisions to improve our cooperation and strengthen the links between our forces – so that we all become more effective and more efficient.

Today, we took stock of the progress we have made. And we discussed the work which lies ahead.

In Chicago, we agreed on the principle of Smart Defence: countries working together to develop and maintain capabilities which they would not be able to afford alone.

At the same time, we put that principle into practice by approving a list of more than 20 multinational projects which will give Allies more capabilities, more effectively.

And since then, we have kept up the momentum. Allies have agreed on two more projects which they are ready to put into effect. Over the coming months, I would expect us to agree to around 10 more. Dozens more ideas are also under consideration, and should come to fruition in the years ahead.

This is an effort which reaches across the Alliance. It is one in which every Ally, large and small, is involved. And it is one in which European Allies are playing a central role.

European countries are involved in every one of the 24 projects we have set in motion so far. They are leading two-thirds of them. And one-third are purely European in terms of participation.

This is crucial. Because it shows that European Allies are aware of their responsibilities and are actively looking for ways to improve their capabilities, even in this time of economic austerity. I welcome this.

And let me be clear: we need smart spending. And even more, we need sufficient spending.

I know that, right now, the priority for many countries is to balance their budgets. That's understandable. It is necessary. And it is a vital part of maintaining a healthy and secure economy.

But we also need to prepare the ground for when our economics improve.

Because security is the basis of prosperity. And the only basis for a stable future.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen (NATO Secretary General): And with that, I'm ready to take your questions.

Oana Lungescu (NATO Spokesperson): And as ever, please don't forget to introduce yourselves and your outlets. Starting with Reuters.

Q: Adrian Croft from Reuters. On the possible uses of some of the money in the NATO central military budget, there seems to be some differences of opinion between the member states as to what uses this money might be put to in the future. Have any agreements been reached on that?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: First of all, let me stress that it was not the intention to take concrete decisions at our meeting today. But we've had a very fruitful discussion which will move the process forward. And so far, I have not witnessed any disagreement on the need for using our resources more efficiently and more effectively which also includes more multinational cooperation; also a better use of our common funding mechanisms.

Oana Lungescu: Associated Press.

Q: Secretary General, this morning, you said NATO has all the necessary plans in place to protect and defend Turkey if necessary. Can you tell us exactly what kind of action would be needed to trigger those plans? And also do they include no-fly zone over Syria?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: This is actually not about triggering anything; it's about first and foremost finding a political solution to the crisis in Syria. But let me stress that this is an alliance based on the principle of solidarity. And of course, Turkey can rely on Alliance solidarity. And this is the reason why we do have all plans in place to protect and defend Turkey. But for reasons you understand very well, we can't go into details on that. Furthermore, we hope that it won't be necessary to activate such plans. We do hope to see a political solution to the conflict in Syria. And once again, I have to say I do believe that the right way forward is to find a political solution. And to that end we need a strong and unified message from the international community to the leadership in Damascus that they accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Oana Lungescu: Die Welt.

Q: Stefanie Bolzen, German daily Die Welt, a follow-up on this question, you said this morning that plans are in place to defend and protect Turkey. But can you...? I mean this... as we understand it this in the context of contingency planning, how often are these contingency plans updated? And when was the last update for Turkey then?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Yes, but as you know, as a matter of principle, we never comment on contingency planning. But I think you would be surprised if a defence alliance as NATO didn't have in place necessary plans to defend and protect all our Allies. But it goes without saying that taking into account the situation at our south-eastern border we have taken the steps necessary to make sure that we have all plans in place to protect and defend Turkey. But I think you understand very well why we can't go into details when it comes to such plans. But obviously, Turkey can rely on Alliance solidary. But let me stress once again the focus of the international community should be to find a political solution to the conflict in Syria. It's absolutely outrageous what we are witnessing. And I understand very well people's frustration. But I also have to say that the Syrian society is very complex; the situation is very complex. And it may have repercussions in the whole region. So it is necessary to increase the pressure on the Syrian regime to initiate a process that leads to an accommodation of the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

Oana Lungescu: Europa Press.

Q: Thank you Secretary General, Ana Pisonero from the Spanish News Agency Europa Press. Can we say that Allies have agreed to use common funding for financing multinational projects that are seen as a priority, an absolute priority in terms of NATO maintaining critical capabilities for the future? Or is it still too early to say this? And what are the main obstacles? Thank you.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: As I stressed, the intention of the meeting was not to take concrete decisions. But we've had a very useful discussion. And the discussion will continue tonight. Based on previous discussion and also what I've heard today, I think there's an agreement within our Alliance that we should make efficient use of our common funding to promote the development of multinational capabilities; to promote what we call interoperability, that is the ability to work together; that our military equipment as well as our personnel can work effectively together. Maybe also when it comes to intensified training and exercise activity, all these areas are candidates for the use of common funding. We have not made concrete decisions yet. But the fact is that common funding actually serves as what I would call a force multiplier within NATO. We can do things together that we couldn't do individually. So we are now looking closer into how we can make some more efficient use of our common funding to the benefit of individual Allies.

Oana Lungescu: Gentleman over there who had a question some time, yes. Slovak Media, I think, yes.

Q: Thank you. Andrej Matisak, Slovak Daily Pravda. You just said that the world should increase the pressure on the Syrian regime. Can NATO be part of this increased pressure? And how, if yes?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: I think first and foremost it is a responsibility for the international community as such, embodied in the United Nations Security Council. The United Nations Security Council is the primary responsible body for international peace and security. So in my opinion it is for the United Nations Security Council to send this very strong, unified message to the Syrian leadership: stop violence; engage in a political process leading to the accommodation of the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people. I strongly regret that so far the Security Council has failed in finding an agreement on a legally-binding resolution that could send such a strong message to the Syrian leadership. And I do believe that this failure to find an agreement within the UN Security Council has sent the wrong and very unfortunate signal to the Syrian leadership. If we are to facilitate a political solution, we need a much stronger pressure from the international community on the Syrian leadership.

Oana Lungescu: Can I ask you for any questions related to today's discussions by NATO defence ministers? Over there, Japanese Media.

Q: Suvaria (sp?)... A simple question. Could you share some of the discussions made in terms of the situation in Syria? Because you didn't tell us what kinds of discussions were made, especially... including how Turkey presented its own problems.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Yes, but... that's an interesting question because actually we didn't discuss Syria today. But of course, I don't blame you that you ask questions about Syria because that is obviously the news of the day. But I have to tell you that we have not had Syria on our agenda and we have not had a discussion on Syria today. As you know, the NATO Council discussed Syria a few days ago on the request of Turkey.

Oana Lungescu: Lady over there, last question.

Q: Annette Young for France 24 Television. I'm sorry, Secretary General, I'm not going to move away from that topic of Syria and Turkey. If indeed Article 5 was to be invoked, how quickly would NATO react and would this be a test of NATO's credibility?

Anders Fogh Rasmussen: Yes, but that's indeed a hypothetical question. We've had what we call an Article 4 consultation recently on the request of Turkey. And that's quite natural. Turkey is an Ally. Turkey is a neighbour of Syria. And on the request of Turkey, we have had a consultation. And in conclusion we also expressed our strong solidarity with Turkey. Having said that, let me repeat that we do believe that the right way forward in Syria is to find a political solution. And I have outlined how I think a strengthened pressure from the international community is the way to facilitate such a political solution. I have added to that that obviously though we do want a political solution, obviously we have all plans in place to protect and defend Turkey. But we do hope that it will not be necessary. We do hope that all

parties involved will do their utmost to avoid an escalation of the crisis and focus on finding a political solution to the country.

Oana Lungescu: Thank you very much. We will see you tomorrow.

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