North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the meeting of NATO Ministers of Foreign Affairs with non NATO-ISAF contributing nations
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Good afternoon. This has been an important two weeks for Afghanistan.

Last week, President Karzai released the second group of provinces and districts to make the transition to Afghan security lead. On Monday, the international community met in Bonn to renew its long-term commitment to the country. And today, the foreign ministers of the ISAF nations made clear our determination to support Afghanistan's security through the transition process and beyond.

Afghanistan is moving in the right direction. In the first group of provinces and districts to enter transition, we can already see promising evidence of progress.

The Afghan National Police have stopped several significant attacks without any direct ISAF assistance. Across Helmand Province, attacks are down significantly. And security is improving in Herat City.

Afghan forces are growing in strength. And the insurgents are growing weaker. Monthly attacks have been down every month since May, compared with last year. Over the last three months, attacks have been down by 24 per cent.

And by the end of this year, as transition continues to take hold, more than half the Afghan population will be looking to their own government as the main provider of their security. That is a great achievement for our Afghan partners, and I welcome it.

We have the momentum. To keep it will demand continued commitment and continued support. And that is what we are determined to provide.

Transition is on track to be completed by the end of 2014. That means that, over the next three years, our role will progressively evolve from combat to training and support. That will allow us to continue changing our force structure. And ministers emphasised today that we will do so in a coordinated and responsible way.

But our commitment does not end with transition. Last year, at the Lisbon summit, we agreed on an Enduring Partnership with Afghanistan. At our next summit, in Chicago, we will set out how that will work by agreeing a package of concrete assistance measures.

NATO and our ISAF partners will not leave the task undone. We will not let Afghanistan slip back into the hands of militants, which the vast majority of Afghans utterly reject. We will finish the job to help create a secure Afghanistan – for our shared security.

That is ISAF's commitment. But the whole international community has a stake in a stable and secure Afghanistan. And the whole international community must help achieve it.

That is why I welcome the conference in Bonn. This was an important meeting with an important message: the international community will play its full part. ISAF's combat mission will end – but international support for Afghanistan will not.

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

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): We'll start with Europa Press.

Q: Thank you, Secretary General. Ana Pisonero from the Spanish News Agency Europa Press. I don't know if you can tell us, what is the figure that's estimated that will be needed to sustain, in the long run, the Afghan Security Forces? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (Secretary General of NATO): It's much too early to present any exact figure. At the end of the day that will very much depend on the situation on the ground because it will be the situation on the ground that will determine the future and long-term size of the Afghan Security Forces. And obviously the long-term size of the Afghan Security Forces will be a very important factor when we are calculating the total cost of sustaining the Afghan Security Forces.

So, it's much too early. We will, of course, have to look at that in much more detail.

OANA LUNGESCU: Tolo TV.

Q: Secretary General, (inaudible...) Israel. NATO has set certain conditions for intervening in Syria. Conditions which have not been met up to now. But what happens if Turkey, a major member of NATO, becomes involved in a conflagration with Syria? Will NATO also intervene if Turkey so requests?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Actually we have not set conditions for an intervention in Syria because we have no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria. I have stated that on several occasions and I would like to repeat that. NATO has no intention whatsoever to intervene in Syria.

Q: If Turkey becomes involved? If Turkey becomes involved with Syria?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: We have no intention to intervene in Syria.

OANA LUNGESCU: Tolo TV, please.

Q: Mr. Secretary General, the growth of the Afghan National Army is a concern for some of Afghanistan's neighbours, questioning whether Afghanistan really needs such an army. How NATO can guarantee Afghanistan's neighbour that this is... the Afghan army won't be a threat to its neighbour? And second, what is the NATO plan for sustainability of the Afghan army beyond 2014?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Let me take the latter first. I would like to stress that it is not only a responsibility for NATO or for ISAF to finance the Afghan Security Forces after 2014. Actually, we see it as a responsibility for the whole international community. That's a very important point.

Secondly, we consider the Afghan Security Forces a defensive force, a force that is necessary to protect and secure the Afghan people and the Afghan society. As we have clearly stated, we will stay committed to Afghanistan and by that also be part of an assurance in the region that we will not leave behind a security vacuum. We will not allow instability to take place in Afghanistan or in the region. I think that's the best guarantee we can provide.

OANA LUNGESCU: The lady over there.

Q: With regard to last night, what was discussed with regards to the Arab Spring and what were the reflections made on the current situation in Libya?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, on Libya there was broad agreement that Operation Unified Protector, a NATO-led operation, with participation of partners, mainly from the region, that operation has been a great success, because we prevented a massacre on the Libyan people, we implemented a United Nations mandate to protect the civilian population. We did so in a very careful manner, so that we have no confirmed civilian casualties caused by NATO operations, and we have minimized collateral damage in Libya, which makes it easier for Libya to start reconstruction after the conflict.

So all in all it's been a very successful operation, and that was, of course, the first point on which we agreed last night.

Secondly, on our partnerships with countries in the region in the wake of the Arab Spring, there is an agreement that we are prepared to enhance our partnerships with countries in the region, including Libya, if the countries so wish. I want to stress that it has to be driven by demand from the countries themselves, but if countries in the region request our assistance in their transformation from autocratic systems into democracies then we stand ready to assist in areas where we can add value. And I would point to one specific area where I think we have an expertise that could be to the benefit of countries in the region, and that is reforms of the defence and security sector.

It is, of course, essential in the transformation from an autocratic system into democracy that defence and the security sector is also put under democratic control. And we have a lot of

expertise when it comes to defence reforms, and we stand ready to offer that expertise if so requested.

OANA LUNGESCU: We have time for one last question. National Public Radio.

Q: Thank you. Teri Schultz with National Public Radio. Mr. Secretary General, if we could talk about the situation with Pakistan. How concerned are you that a closure of the border has now moved into a record number of days, 13 days I believe? And where is the investigation? Do you have an understanding yet of where the breakdown happened in the conveying of information? And how concerned are you that Pakistan is not cooperating with this investigation?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Obviously the closure of border crossings is a matter of concern. And we hope that a solution to that can be found in the not- too-distant future.

We have launched an investigation of that very tragic incident, partly because we want to know exactly what happened, and partly because it's also important to learn a lesson from that to prevent such security incidents to happen in the future.

We have invited Pakistan to take part in that investigation. From our side we have a strong wish to see full transparency. We understand very well the Pakistani concerns, and this is the reason why we have invited Pakistan to take active part in that investigation.

And I think the right response to a security incident, such a tragic accident, that the right response to that is to strengthen our cooperation. It's not less cooperation, it is more cooperation, to prevent such incidents from happening in the future.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. This concludes this press conference. However, please remain seated as the Secretary General will be back in a moment with Secretary Clinton to unveil the logo for the Chicago Summit. And of course, Secretary Clinton will then proceed with her press conference. Thank you.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2011/12/08/press-conference