North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

NATO Secretary General's monthly press briefing

Full transcript
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Good afternoon, and welcome back to NATO.

Tomorrow marks the anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States. It is a moment to remember the citizens of 25 NATO and partner countries who died that day, and all the victims of terrorist atrocities around the Alliance and around the world, from Madrid and London, to Istanbul, Bali and beyond.

Le terrorisme ne peut jamais se justifier ni être toléré. Et l'OTAN est déterminée à jouer pleinement son rôle pour ce qui est de le combattre. C'est vital pour notre propre sécurité. Et c'est vital pour les valeurs et les principes du droit international que nous défendons.

Voilà pourquoi Alliés et partenaires travaillent sans relâche pour détecter et prévenir les actes de terrorisme.

Et voilà pourquoi nous avons plus de 120 000 (cent vingt mille) soldats en Afghanistan : pour faire en sorte que ce pays ne puisse plus jamais servir de sanctuaire permettant aux terroristes de planifier et de lancer des attaques contre nos pays. Et ce, en mettant en place des forces de sécurité afghanes solides et compétentes, qui pourront protéger l'Afghanistan lorsque notre mission actuelle prendra fin en 2014.

Voilà notre objectif, notre stratégie et notre calendrier en Afghanistan. Voilà notre mission. Une mission que nous mènerons jusqu'au bout.

It is a challenging mission. And every loss in Afghanistan is tragic. My thoughts are with the families and loved ones of those who have been killed and injured. And with their comrades in the field who continue to carry out their mission with such courage and commitment.

In the past few months, we have seen a number of insider attacks, which are of great concern to all of us. We are looking very carefully into each one. And we are doing everything we can, together with our Afghan partners, to reduce the risks as much as we can.

The vetting and screening of recruits is getting stronger. We are seeing better counter-intelligence efforts. ISAF and Afghan forces are getting more training to understand cultural differences. And we are constantly adapting the measures to protect our forces to the situation on the ground.

Last week, I discussed these attacks with President Karzai. We agreed that this is cause for very serious concern. And we agreed that we will do everything we can to tackle the problem.

Because we will simply not allow the enemies of Afghanistan to change our strategy. And we will not allow them to drive a wedge between us and our Afghan partners.

Every day, we see tens of thousands of ISAF and Afghan troops fighting together against the same threat and for the same goal. We know that despite these tragic incidents, the vast majority of our forces have a bond of trust with their Afghan comrades. And many Afghans have sacrificed their lives for ours.

There will be challenges and there will be setbacks. But they should not overshadow the significant progress we have made together and continue to make.

Afghan forces are getting more professional, more confident and better equipped. Within weeks, they will reach their full strength of 352,000.

The Afghan forces are genuinely moving into the lead. They are assuming more responsibility in the campaign. They are taking the lead for providing security for three quarters of the population. Every province is part of this process. And the insurgents are being pushed further back from the population. Currently, 80 % of their attacks take place in areas where just 20 % of the population lives.

Over the next 28 months we will continue to train and support the Afghan forces so that they assume full responsibility for security in their own country. This process of transition is unstoppable.

As Afghans step forward, ISAF is moving into a supporting role. You will see some of our troops redeploying, and some going home. This does not amount to a change in the timeline. It is the natural consequence of the progress of transition.

And make no mistake: NATO is committed to supporting Afghanistan, as part of the broader international community. Indeed, at the Chicago summit in May we agreed that after 2014, NATO will lead a new mission, to train, advise and assist Afghan security forces.

Planning for our new mission is already underway. And I expect the initial guidance to be completed in the next few weeks.

I will discuss our mission in Afghanistan, and other global security challenges, later this month in New York, when I attend the United Nations General Assembly. I will meet again with Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon, who took part in the summit in Chicago.

We all know the cost of our mission in Afghanistan, and the investment we have made over the years. So let me say this: we have an important goal and a mandate from the United Nations. Our strategy is set, our timeline is clear. And we will stay the course.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): And please don't forget to introduce yourselves and also announce what media outlet you represent. We'll start with Geo TV Pakistan.

Q: Khalid Hameed Farooqi from Geo Television Pakistan. Secretary General, in 28 months NATO force is going to depart from Afghanistan. The U.S. already banned Haqqani Network. There is no negotiation with Taliban so it means that you have given up completely on that very big group of Afghanistan, which will be part of any future settlement.

So after your departure these groups will be continuing their fight against the Karzai administration. It means Afghanistan conflict will continue in this particular scenario. Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): We will not depart from Afghanistan. We will continue a training mission. But much more importantly, when we complete the current ISAF mission, and establish the new training mission, very strong Afghan Security Forces will take over.

By the end of 2014, the Afghan Security Forces will take full responsibility for the security all over Afghanistan. So the enemies of Afghanistan will be faced with a very strong and very capable Afghan Security Force. The strength will be around 350,000 Afghan Security Forces. And they will be well-trained, well-educated, well-equipped to take on the enemies of Afghanistan. And that makes a clear difference.

It gives the defence of Afghanistan a very visible and clear Afghan face. So the Haqqani Network, the Taliban, other enemies of Afghanistan, will be faced with a formidable force, a formidable force that will do everything it takes to protect the Afghan population against attacks from the enemies of Afghanistan.

OANA LUNGESCU: National Public Radio.

Q: Mr. Secretary General, Teri Schultz with National Public Radio and CBS News. There's a new report from the Special Inspector General in Kabul that is very concerned about NATO's budget, about what it calls lax oversight of NATO's budget on fuel, $1.1 billion. And it recommends holding up some of the funding for this until there is more oversight. Is this something that's been brought to your attention yet, and are you concerned about it? And secondly, what do you make of the Taliban's threat to do everything possible to kill Prince Harry? Thanks.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: On the first part of your question, this has not been brought to my attention. I don't know anything about this so I don't have any comments on it. And the latter part...

Q: Harry... the Taliban has threatened to do everything possible to kill or kidnap Prince Harry, who's now serving in Afghanistan.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Yeah, well... (laughs), that's not a matter of concern. I mean, we do everything we can to protect all our troops deployed to Afghanistan, whatever might be their personal background.

OANA LUNGESCU: Over here.

Q: Monder Emery(ph) of Hayat TV. Je vais vous poser deux questions, Monsieur le Secrétaire Général. Alors, la première question, vu qu'il est impossible d'une intervention militaire en Syrie, est-ce que l'OTAN peut participer à des opérations humanitaires, vu qu'on a un nombre maintenant de 400,000 réfugiés et 35,000 morts? Deuxième question, c'est concernant l'Afghanistan. Est-il possible d'établir un bilan maintenant après 11 ans de... de présence en Afghanistan? C'est vrai on commémore demain les attaques du 11 septembre. Il y avait 3,000 morts aux États-Unis. Mais aujourd'hui, en Afghanistan, si on fait le total des morts, il y a presque 12,500 morts en Afghanistan. On a 100,000 morts en Irak. On a 35,000 morts en Syrie. Quel est le bilan aujourd'hui de l'OTAN avec une présence de 50,000 soldats comme vous le dites en Afghanistan? You can answer in English.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: En ce qui concerne la Syrie, comme vous le savez, nous n’avons aucune intention d’intervenir militairement en Syrie. En ce qui concerne l’Afghanistan, le but de notre opération en Afghanistan, est, et reste de prévenir ce pays d’être un sanctuaire pour les terroristes et à cet égard, nous avons réussi.

OANA LUNGESCU: KUNA News Agency there. First one.

Q: Kuwait News Agency. I think the question was asked in French, but I'll ask it in English. Has there been a revision, or a rethinking on NATO's position on Syria? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: No, that's exactly what I expressed in French; that our position remains the same. NATO has no intention to intervene militarily in Syria. We do believe that the rightful way forward is to find a political solution, and we urge the international community to send a strong and unified message to the Syrian leadership to accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

So our position remains unchanged.

OANA LUNGESCU: Turkish media, just behind.

Q: Sertaç Aktan from Turkish News Agency, IHA. Tomorrow you will be marking September 11th, the terrorist attacks on U.S. soil. As the terrorist attacks... as the terrorists take their logistic roots from Afghanistan and their support from the regime, Taliban regime, that's why today NATO is in Afghanistan. Today we are having this situation where Turkey is having terrorist attacks in its soil, where the root and the logistic root is coming from Syria and the

support is coming from the Syrian regime, Assad regime. How do you compare these situations? Do you think there are any similarities? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, let me stress that obviously we condemn all kinds of terrorism, whatever might be the background and the specific circumstances. Nothing can justify terrorism. Let me stress that as my first point.

Secondly, having said that, I think the situation in Turkey and Afghanistan are different. And once again, let me underline that as regards Syria we do believe that the right way forward is to find a political solution based on the elements in the Annan plan, which I still think constitutes the best framework for a transition to a democracy in Syria.

And I think the international community should send a very strong message to the Syrian regime that in the long run no regime can neglect the will of the people. So consequently the Syrian regime should accommodate the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

OANA LUNGESCU: Associated Press.

Q: The U.S. today handed over control of Bagram prison, the Parwan Detention Camp to the Afghan authorities. Are you concerned about the possible security implications for ISAF if some of these detainees, especially the high-value people, manage to set themselves free, as they did from other Afghan-run prisons in the past?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: This transfer is based on a bilateral agreement between the United States and the governments of Afghanistan. And I feel confident that the parties involved have taken, and will take, all necessary steps to avoid any security risks.

The transfer of detainees reflects the on-going transition process in Afghanistan during which we gradually hand over more and more responsibility to the Afghan authorities. And I take it for granted that the Afghan authorities will take all necessary measures to prevent security risks. That's also in their interest.

OANA LUNGESCU: Reuters.

Q: Thank you. Adrian Croft from Reuters. Secretary General, on Syria, could I ask you, if President Assad's forces use chemical weapons would that justify a military intervention in Syria by NATO, in that case, in your view?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Actually, that's a hypothetical question. Yet we haven't seen steps in that direction. And as a golden rule I never comment on hypothetical situations and questions.

OANA LUNGESCU: At the back.

Q: Rika Josefiak(ph), Radio Free Europe. I know that you've already commented on the case of Ramil Safarov, the Azeri officer who was released to Azerbaijan when you were in the

region last week. But I wonder is there something else NATO can do to lower the tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan which this release has triggered?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, I would like to reiterate that the Azerbaijani decision to pardon army officer Safarov is, indeed, a matter of concern, because it damages trust and it does not contribute to the peace process in the region. And I conveyed that message to both sides during my visit to the region last week.

And I encouraged all parties in the region to do what they can to promote cooperation and reconciliation, and make sure that we don't return to conflict.

As regards NATO's role, as you know, NATO as an organization is not directly involved in finding a solution to the very unfortunate Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. We expressed our position at the NATO Summit in Chicago and we support the Minsk Group process with the aim to find a peaceful solution to that conflict.

Obviously we have partnerships with all countries in the region and within that framework we can have a dialogue with countries, but I think the right framework for finding a solution to the conflict is still the Minsk Group.

OANA LUNGESCU: Egyptian TV.

Q: Thank you very much. Magdy Youssef(ph) from Niles News, Egyptian Television. If I understand correctly, I believe that you are very convinced that the Afghan troops, the 352 will be able to win against the enemy. How can I believe that those Afghans will win against the enemy, whereas NATO did not manage to win against those enemies, the Taliban?

And secondly, according to some news, there is more than 250 families who are fighting against NATO troops in Afghanistan. They left last week to Syria. Do you have any comment to Syria? Do you have any comment to say about this? Do you have any news about it? And is it a reason to go behind them in Syria?

Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: On the latter I don't have any information and no comment. On the first part, actually, I do believe that it makes a big difference that the face of the defence of Afghanistan in the future will be a very visible Afghan face.

Which means that the enemies of Afghanistan will now be faced with their compatriots in the fighting. Which will also make it much more difficult for the Taliban and others to claim that this is a fight against foreign invaders, which is one of their most popular propaganda claims.

So they will be faced in direct fighting with their compatriots. Already now it's clear that the Taliban can't prevail on the battlefield. And this is the reason why the Taliban, and others, resort to cowardly attacks against civilians, including children, as we have seen recently.

And this is also the reason why there is a growing strong opposition in Afghanistan against the Taliban and other enemies of Afghanistan, because people see with their own eyes the cruelty and the inhumanity of the Taliban and other enemies of Afghanistan.

So this combination of increasingly capable Afghan Security Forces and a strong will of the Afghan people to preserve the rights and the progress they have achieved in recent years, this combination will make sure that the Afghans can take full responsibility for the destiny of their own country.

So I feel confident that by the end of 2014 the Afghan Security Forces can take full responsibility for the security all over Afghanistan.

OANA LUNGESCU: We have time for just two more questions, so we'll go over there.

Q: (inaudible) Renier, Journal le Soir. Sur l'Afghanistan, quelle est la stratégie qui est mise en œuvre pour faire face à la prolifération récente d'attaques de l'intérieur des forces afghanes qui retournent leurs armes contre les forces de l'OTAN? Et peut-être une question complémentaire sur le Kosovo. Aujourd'hui, le Bureau international civil ferme ses portes. Est-ce que ça a une conséquence sur le déploiement de la KFOR au Kosovo?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: En ce qui concerne le Kosovo, notre stratégie reste la même. Et nous n'avons une intention de changer le nombre des troupes déployées au Kosovo.

En ce qui concerne l'Afghanistan, qu'ils appellent les attaques infiltrées, c'est vraiment un sujet de préoccupation. Et nous avons pris plusieurs mesures pour prévenir ces attaques. Premièrement, la procédure de sélection des recrues est renforcée. Deuxièmement, la contre-ingérence s'améliore. Et troisièmement, nous avons mis en œuvre davantage de formation pour mieux comprendre les différences culturelles.

OANA LUNGESCU: Final question there.

Q: (inaudible...), correspondent for Jang Group of Pakistan. Would you like to comment on current NATO and Pakistan relations, please?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: As you all know we have been through a very difficult period, including the problem stemming from the blockage of transit routes. But recently we have seen improvements and I do hope to see further progress, because despite all challenges, the bottom line is very clear. If we are to ensure long-term peace and stability, not only in Afghanistan, but in the whole region, we need a positive engagement of Pakistan. So that's my clear view; that we should do our utmost to ensure further progress in the relationship with Pakistan.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. Have a good afternoon.

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