North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Monthly press conference by the NATO Secretary General

Full transcript
2013-10-10

Good morning. Obviously you are following the news from Libya with great attention. So am I. However, what we can say at this moment is very limited.

I am watching developments very closely and with great concern. It is important that the situation is clarified as soon as possible. If it is confirmed that Prime Minister Zeidan has been abducted, I call for the Prime Minister's immediate release. Stability and rule of law are critically important.

Now, turning to NATO.

Next year, NATO heads of state and government will meet in the United Kingdom.

I warmly welcome the UK offer to host the Summit, which has been welcomed and accepted by Allies.

This will be a critical opportunity to take stock of our ongoing work, including in Afghanistan, and to look to the future.

2014 will be a turning-point, as we complete NATO's longest and biggest operation. At our last summit in Chicago, we agreed that this year we would reach a milestone when Afghan forces would take the lead across the country.

In June, I was in Kabul to mark that milestone. Since then, we have seen the resilience and the growing professionalism of Afghan forces. And by the end of 2014, Afghan soldiers and police will be fully in charge of securing their own country.

Thanks to the immense efforts and the solemn sacrifices of the troops and civilians from ISAF contributing nations, Afghanistan has come a long way in the past decade. The changes have been remarkable, and our investment in lives and resources has been unprecedented. Nobody can deny that. And this effort should be respected.

Afghanistan is now preparing to hold next year's elections, which will be fully Afghan-led and managed. The registration of candidates has just been completed. The presidential tickets are multi-ethnic. There's significant participation from women, as voters, election workers, and candidates. There's at least one woman candidate competing in each provincial council

election. And six months before the polls, preparations are more advanced than for any other elections in Afghanistan's modern history.

It is crucial that these elections are transparent, inclusive and credible. That their results are acceptable to the Afghan people. So that the political process provides the certainty and predictability that both Afghans and the international community expect.

Next year's NATO Summit will be an opportunity to review the progress made by the Afghan forces in preparing for their responsibilities. To reaffirm our commitment to an enduring partnership with Afghanistan, including through efforts to train, advise, and assist the Afghan forces after 2014. And to recognize, as I noted, the tremendous contributions and sacrifice of so many men and women from all ISAF contributing nations.

With over 20 years of operations experience, our forces are now the most capable and connected in NATO history. The summit will also ensure that we continue to build on the lessons we have learned, to strengthen the Alliance and keep it ready to deal with modern security challenges. It will reaffirm the vital transatlantic bond on which NATO was founded. And it will further enhance our partnerships, which are key to our future success in a world where risks cross borders and we are all interconnected.

As we prepare for the summit, we will have more to report on each of these areas. Today, I would like to focus on the last one I mentioned, NATO's partnerships.

Let me give you some recent examples how our partnerships produce real results. On operations. In training and exercises. And in the reform and management of democratic defence institutions.

In addition to the broad level of cooperation with partners NATO has benefitted from in Kosovo and Afghanistan, we continue to expand our efforts with partners in operational theatres.

Just today, a Ukrainian frigate is joining Operation Ocean Shield, fighting piracy off the Horn of Africa.

This is the first time any partner nation has joined this important mission. And I warmly welcome Ukraine's commitment. By working together, NATO and our partners are making a real contribution to dealing with today's security threats, including outside the Euro-Atlantic area. Recently, NATO Allies also approved an offer by the Republic of Moldova to join our mission in Kosovo.

And this is another first: the first time that Moldova has contributed any NATO-led operation.

Also last week, the countries in South Eastern Europe, both NATO Allies and partners, came together to work on an initiative, led by NATO, which aims at improving governance and democratic oversight in the defence sector.

NATO has immense experience in this field: promoting reforms and transparency. Making defence institutions more effective and better-run. And anchoring democratic standards.

And we have immense experience of working with partners. Indeed, right now, one partner, Austria, is co-leading the NATO project to support the defence education system in another partner, Serbia.

And looking ahead, our cooperation with partners continues to grow.

Next month, NATO will conduct a major exercise in Poland and the Baltic States, called Steadfast Jazz. The purpose of this exercise is to make sure that our rapid-reaction force, the NATO Response Force, is ready to defend any Ally, deploy anywhere and deal with any threat.

NATO's partners, Ukraine and Finland, have offered to join the exercise, and been accepted by Allies. Others have also shown active interest in taking part. So they will train alongside us – and will then have met the requirements to deploy with next year's NATO Response Force.

Moreover, another partner, Georgia, has offered to join the Response Force in the future, and been accepted. I would therefore anticipate that Georgian troops would be made available for the force as of 2015.

This, again, would be a first: the first time Georgia has joined NATO's rapid-reaction team.

So this shows that our partnerships are already diverse. And they are already delivering.

Next year we mark a number of significant anniversaries. It will be twenty years since we founded the Partnership for Peace, to strengthen security and cooperation across the Euro-Atlantic area. Twenty years since we initiated the Mediterranean Dialogue, forging ties with countries around the Mediterranean. And ten years since we launched the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, opening up to the countries of the Gulf region.

All these initiatives have borne fruit. But there is more that they can do.

So I will look to our next summit to take the next step. To build greater cooperation with partners on operations. On exercises. And on the reform and reinforcement of democratic, accountable and transparent security institutions.

So that we all work together to build security for the future.

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

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Reuters.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): Thanks, Secretary General. I wonder if I could get your reaction to President Karzai's interview with the BBC this week in

which he said that the entire NATO exercise is one that caused Afghans a lot of suffering, a lot of loss of life and no gains because the country is not secure. Thanks.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: When we take a look at the development in Afghanistan, progress is remarkable. Progress achieved during many years of operation in Afghanistan, progress is remarkable and it cannot be denied. And whenever I meet Afghans they express their appreciation for our presence, for all we have done.

While we have worked hard to ensure the sovereignty of the Afghan state, we have built up a very strong Afghan Security Force now at a level of around 350,000, with the aim to make sure that the Afghans can take full responsibility for the security of their own country by the end of 2014 and we are on track and I'm confident that the Afghan Security Forces will be able to take full responsibility by the end of 2014, as planned.

We have sacrificed much in blood and treasure to assist the Afghan people and I have noted the satisfaction that whenever I meet Afghans they express appreciation for that.

OANA LUNGESCU: KUNA.

Q: Nawab Khan from the Kuwait News Agency. Sir, how do you see the situation developing in Syria now, after the start of the destruction of its chemical weapons arsenal? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, I welcome the adoption of a UN Security Council resolution which creates the framework for the elimination of Syrian chemical weapons. This is a huge step forward and I urge the Syrian authorities, as well as other parties involved, to do all they can to assist the United Nations and the OPCW in carrying out their important task to ensure full elimination of all chemical weapons in Syria, within the timeframe that has been outlined in the UN Security Council resolution.

Having said that, it is, of course, a matter of concern to see that fighting continues in Syria. It is, of course, a matter of concern to see that fighting continues in Syria. It is, of course, a matter of concern that maybe more than 100,000 people have been killed in Syria. I urge all parties to stop violence, stop the killings and initiate a political process that can lead to a political settlement. There is no military solution to the conflict in Syria. We need a political settlement, and I hope it will be possible to organize an international conference next month that could hopefully pave the way for such a sustainable political solution.

OANA LUNGESCU: We go to NPR right here.

Q: Teri Schultz with NPR and CBS. Mr. Secretary General, the Libyan Government has asked NATO for help in reinforcing its security structures and NATO was looking at what it could do. And do you think perhaps something should have been done more quickly when you see what happened today?

And secondly, I know the U.S. mission has had to furlough a few employees because of the shutdown. How concerned are you that the U.S. Government shutdown will soon be impacting American contributions to NATO?

Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First, on Libya, I can confirm that the Libyan authorities have requested NATO assistance to build or reform the security sector. We have been exploring that request for quite some time and we're still looking into it.

You ask me whether we should have acted more rapidly, but let me remind you that Libya is an independent sovereign state, and obviously it's for the Libyan authorities to decide whether they want external assistance to help build a credible security sector in Libya.

Obviously there are problems in Libya when it comes to security. But still, it is for the Libyan authorities to forward requests for external assistance. We have told the Libyan authorities right from the outset that we stand ready to provide assistance if so requested. And we received a request from the Libyan authorities in May this year and we acted swiftly. Soon after we sent a team of experts to Tripoli to look closer into that request and we're now considering the request and, of course, we'll also have to take into account recent developments when we're going to respond to that.

But I think it's clear to everybody that something needs to be done to ensure stability in Libya. So I have to stress that we acted swiftly, after having received the request from the Libyans, but still it's for the Libyans to decide whether they want external assistance. When we received a request we acted swiftly.

Q: The Americans?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Next question was about the so-called shutdown in the U.S. What I have noted... first of all, let me stress that obviously I'm not going to interfere with a domestic political debate neither in the U.S. nor in other Allied countries.

Having said that, I have noted with satisfaction that it seems that U.S. Armed Forces are exempt from that shutdown and so far we haven't seen any negative impact on U.S. contributions to NATO-led operations.

OANA LUNGESCU: Berlingske.

Q: Morten Crone, Berlingske. Ahead of the EU Eastern Partnership Summit a lot of pressure is building on countries like Ukraine. But in a NATO context, where do you see countries like Ukraine when they are actually saying... yesterday there was a message that we're Europeans no matter what, there's no turning back. Do you see Ukraine as a future NATO member?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, the fundamental principle is that we fully respect that each and every nation has the right to choose its partners and alliances freely. As you will recall we made an important decision at the NATO Summit in 2008. At the NATO Summit in 2008 in Bucharest we stated that Ukraine will become a member of NATO, of course, provided the Ukraine so wishes and provided that Ukraine fulfils the necessary criteria.

Since then the new political leadership in Ukraine has stated that Ukraine will pursue a non-bloc policy when it comes to security and foreign policy. We fully respect that. But at the same time Ukraine has stated that Ukraine wants to continue its partnership with NATO within the NATO-Ukraine Commission.

And furthermore, as I indicated in today's introduction, Ukraine has decided to contribute to Operation Ocean Shield for the first time and across the board we have seen Ukrainian contributions to NATO-led operations and also to the NATO Response Force.

So Ukraine is actually a very active partner of NATO. We appreciate that and I had a meeting with President Yanukovych recently and he confirmed, reconfirmed, Ukrainian interest in continuing and further developing that partnership with NATO.

In conclusion, let me stress that I have no doubt that the future of Ukraine lies within a Euro-Atlantic cooperation. Again, of course, it's for Ukraine to decide, but I hope the door remains open for a closer Ukrainian relationship with the EU, as well as NATO.

OANA LUNGESCU: A question at the back.

Q: ANSA News Agency. I will know your reaction to the kidnap of the Libyan Prime Minister.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Yes, as I said in my introduction, what we can say at this moment is very limited. But if it's confirmed that Prime Minister Zeidan has been abducted I call for his immediate release. It is of utmost importance that stability and rule of law is fully respected in Libya.

OANA LUNGESCU: Jane's.

Q: Yes, Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence. Again, on Libya, setting aside the kidnapping thing, when you say you have to take into account recent developments in Libya, do you mean that you need to reflect those developments in your offer to Libya, or is that a reference to NATO's willingness to offer its aid to the country? And I don't quite understand what the status is right now. You've made your offer, you're waiting a response from Libya, or you don't know who your interlocutors are, or they haven't made up their mind, or what? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: The status is very clear. We have received a request, we sent an expert team to Tripoli. We are now considering the request as to how we could possibly assist in a way that adds value. In that respect, we also have to coordinate closely with other actors. There are many actors in Libya. National actors as well as other

international organizations like the United Nations, the EU and we have to make sure that we do not duplicate work and do not waste resources. NATO... any NATO assistance should add value.

Of course, I also refer to the security situation, so when I refer to recent developments it is, of course, also some considerations as to how the security situation will impact on any possible NATO assistance.

OANA LUNGESCU: AFP.

Q: Are you still concerned by Turkey's decision to buy a missile defence system from a Chinese firm? And have you been in contact with Ankara on this issue recently?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, let me stress, once again, that it is a national decision to acquire military equipment. That's a fundamental principle within our Alliance, that these decisions are national decisions. But, having said that, it is, of course, also of utmost importance within an Alliance that not only our armed forces, but also our military equipment can work and operate together. And I'm confident that the Turkish authorities are aware of that.

I have noted the statement by the Turkish president that no decision, no final decision has been made yet. And as regards consultations I can only refer to the fact that within an alliance, as NATO, we have continuous consultations with all Allies.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. We'll see you at the ministerial soon.

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