North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Secretary General’s Monthly Press Conference and launch of the Annual Report for 2012

Opening remarks and Q&A
2013-01-31

Good morning.

We have started this New Year with a strong signal of solidarity with Turkey.

In December, NATO responded to Turkey’s request. And over the past few weeks we’ve seen Patriot batteries deployed along the Alliance’s south-eastern border. To protect and defend over three and a half million people.

This shows NATO’s steadfast commitment to the security of Allies.

And it shows why defence matters.

Comme vous pourrez le constater dans le rapport annuel que nous publions aujourd’hui, c’est un message que nous devons tous prendre au sérieux.

Le rapport montre où l’OTAN se situe aujourd’hui. Et il expose clairement les défis auxquels nous devrons faire face cette année et dans les années à venir.

La bonne nouvelle, c’est que, aujourd’hui, les capacités et la flexibilité de l’OTAN sont plus grandes que jamais. L’OTAN interagit davantage avec ses partenaires. Et l’OTAN est mieux préparée à faire face à des menaces imprévisibles.

Most Allies have significantly improved their ability to deploy and sustain forces in recent years. Overall, NATO investment in major modern equipment has risen. And despite the worst economic crisis in a generation, our commitment to key missions and key capabilities stays strong.

NATO remains the most important military power in the world. And our 28 Allies continue to account for over half of global defence spending.

However, defence spending among Allies is increasingly uneven. Not just between North America and Europe, but also among European Allies. And while total defence spending by the Allies in recent years has been going down, the defence spending of emerging powers has been going up.

If these trends continue, we will face serious gaps that would place NATO's military capacity and political credibility at risk.

First, we could see a gap between the ability of different European Allies to deal effectively with crises on their door-step.

Second, the transatlantic gap would limit Europe's ability to work with North America and weaken political support for our Alliance in the United States.

And finally, the rise of emerging powers could create a growing gap between the capacity of those nations to exert influence in the world and our own ability to do so.

Of course, governments must reduce deficits and borrowing. Sound fiscal policy is also sound security policy. Our security rests on our prosperity: you can't be safe if you're broke.

But in turn, our prosperity rests on our security. And we have to invest to keep our societies safe. Because security threats won't go away while we focus on fixing our economies.

So this year, we face three tasks.

The first is to hold the line on defence investment. There is a lower limit of how little we can spend on defence, while living up to our responsibilities.

The second is to start closing the gaps, as our economies start to recover.

And the third is to build our strength in depth. This is an opportunity for all Allies to work more closely together to develop the capabilities we need. And for European Allies to do more to close capability gaps.

The decisions we take today on our defence spending will have an impact on the security of the next generation.

It is true that there is a price to pay for security. But the cost of insecurity is unacceptable. And as an Alliance we need to recognize this.

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

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Please wait for the microphone to get to you. And don't forget to introduce yourself. Reuters.

Q: Adrian Croft from Reuters. Secretary General, can I ask you about an incident in Syria yesterday and an Israeli attack in Syria. There seems to be lack of clarity about what happened. Can you throw any light on what happened there? And secondly, has anything happened in Syria recently to give you any more concerns about chemical weapons going astray?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I don't have detailed information about the recent incident. And we have no indication of such activity in the area relevant to the deployment of NATO Patriots. And I have no new information about chemical weapons.

OANA LUNGESCU: ITAR-TASS?

Q: ITAR-TASS News Agency (inaudible). Secretary General, do you expect in 2013 any breakthrough in the talks with Russia, especially on the anti-missile defence taking into the consideration that the political cycles have changed in Russia and United States. We have now a new ambassador. Do you expect any good news? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Definitely, I expect good news in 2013, not least because we have adopted a NATO-Russia Council work programme, a comprehensive work programme with a lot of new elements in our practical cooperation. So in that respect I clearly expect good news in 2013.

You ask me about missile defence. Well, I don't know. But I hope we will see some progress also when it comes to missile defence. I hope that the clarification of the political situation both in Russia and in the United States will pave the way for some progress. Our invitation to Russia to cooperate on missile defence still stands.

We invited Russia to cooperate when we met in Lisbon in 2010. I hope to see progress. I do believe it's in our mutual interest to embark on cooperation to the benefit of people in Russia and people in NATO countries.

OANA LUNGESCU: We have two questions over here; start with German Television in the second row.

Q: Secretary General, Kai Niklaush, German Television ZDF. A follow up to the question of the colleague of Reuters, the hit of Israel in Syria: Does it mean... does it have any impact on the security situation of the NATO mission along the border, the Turkish-Syrian border? Is there a certain step of alarm? We have now... How would you describe the situation? Has it changed?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: As I mentioned, we have no indication of such activity in the area relevant to the deployment of NATO Patriots. Obviously, we are monitoring the situation closely. And we will continue to do so. But I can tell you that we are, first and foremost, focussed on our defensive deployment to protect the population and territory of Turkey.

OANA LUNGESCU: Japanese Media.

Q: Japanese Steiri Minichi (?). If you see the hostage-taking in Algeria, where the civilians of your member states killed, as well as Japanese are killed, how do you evaluate security threat, especially by Islamic terrorist from Africa, from north African regions?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, I condemn in the strongest possible terms the terrorist attack in Algeria. And express my sympathy with the families affected by this tragic attack and express my solidarity with the countries that have been involved. It... this attack reflects the insecure situation in the Sahel region and in Northern Africa. Obviously, this is a matter of great concern. And it... what we have seen emphasizes the need for strong international cooperation when it comes to the fight against terrorism.

OANA LUNGESCU: Jane's.

Q: Yes, Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence. I want to come back to your opening remarks about the economic implications for NATO. It's pretty clear that defence budgets are still sliding. And they're going to continue to slide for the foreseeable future in many of the Allies. So I'm wondering: should NATO's defence planning take that into account? After all, it would be irresponsible for the Alliance not to do contingency planning, based on reduced capabilities in the future. Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Obviously, realities when it comes to defence budgets will be included in our defence planning. Our defence planning is about ensuring that overall we have the capacities we need to address the security challenges of today and live up to our level of ambition. So we will take into account the decreasing defence budgets. And we have taken action to address this challenge. We have launched the concept of SMART defence which is about more efficient use of our resources through more multinational cooperation. And I think it becomes increasingly clear that the only way we can ensure the necessary military capabilities in the future will be through enhanced multinational cooperation.

Only a very few, at the end of the day maybe only one Ally, will be able to acquire advanced and very expensive military equipment on their own. But through multinational cooperation, through collective efforts we will be able to field the gaps; build up the capacity when it comes to air-to-air refuelling in particular among European Allies; strengthen our capacity when it comes to intelligence surveillance reconnaissance; strengthen our airlift capacity. All that is extremely expensive. And for many Allies it is out of the question to acquire such capabilities on their own. But in a collective effort, through SMART defence projects we can. So this is not just about how much we spend on defence but it is also about how we spend. We have to spend it in a smarter way. But I have taken the opportunity in this year's annual report to also convey the message that while we can achieve a lot through multinational cooperation and more efficient use of resources, we also need a sufficient input, a sufficient investment in the much- needed military capabilities. There is a lower limit as to how little we can spend on defence and still live up to our obligations.

OANA LUNGESCU: Agence France Presse.

Q: Yes, a follow-up question on Mali, Sahel. Do you see any role for NATO in this region? And do you consider that the situation is quite similar to Afghanistan?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, let me take this opportunity to commend the French Government for having taking swift and effective action in Mali. It was high time to stop terrorist groups from advancing in Mali. It was high time to take action to pave the way for what the United Nations Security Council has decided to establish an African-led stabilization force in Mali.

I also appreciate that a number of NATO Allies have decided to assist France in this much-needed operation. And I hope that an African-led force will soon be fully operational and be able to fulfil the United Nations mandate.

The United Nations Security Council has decided that it should be an African-led mission. And this is also a reason why I don't see a role for NATO as an organization in Mali or in the region. But obviously, I welcome that individual NATO Allies have taken action and decided to support the French operation in Mali.

OANA LUNGESCU: Over there at the centre.

Q: Oui, bonjour, Monsieur le Secrétaire Général, pour la Radio Algérienne, j'aimerais revenir sur le Mali. Sur la situation du terrorisme dans la région. Est-ce que vous allez... est-ce que vous avez envisagé une coopération plus étroite avec l'Algérie en ce qui concerne le terrorisme, vu ce qui s'est passé dans l'Est de l'Algérie à In Amenas dernièrement et donc le condamner fermement cette attaque terroriste, s'il-vous-plaît?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Nous avons déjà, en partenariat avec l'Algérie, au sein du Dialogue méditerranéen... et nous sommes en train de renforcer cette relation entre l'OTAN et l'Algérie. Et j'envisage de développer ce partenariat pour les années à venir.

OANA LUNGESCU: Geo TV, Pakistan.

Q: Khaled Faroukhi from Geo Television. Secretary General, a month ago, Pakistan has announced that it would release all Afghan Taliban fighters from Pakistani jail. Is this happening with your understanding? And what is your comment on that? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: It's a national decision. We don't interfere with such national decisions. We take it for granted that Pakistan will live up to her international obligations and take all necessary steps to prevent terrorism and violence in the border region between Pakistan and Afghanistan and contribute in a positive way to stability, peace and security in Afghanistan and in the region.

OANA LUNGESCU: The Romanian Radio.

Q: Radio Romania. Secretary General, what are your intentions this year on Kosovo. I'm asking; because recently a European official said that EULEX would prefer KFOR to stay on the ground because he said that: "For the moment, the security situation is stable. But we don't know what will happen tomorrow." I quoted him.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): For the time being the KFOR troop level will remain as it is; that is around 5,000 troops, a bit more than 5,000 troops. As you know, we have the long-term goal to further reduce the number of KFOR troops, but because of the volatile situation, in particular in the North, we have postponed any decision to reduce further our presence in Kosovo.

So we will maintain the current level of troops in Kosovo as long as necessary to ensure that we can fully live up to the United Nations mandate to ensure security and freedom of movement for all people in Kosovo.

OANA LUNGESCU: Ukrainian Media, there.

Q: News Agency Interfax Ukraine, (inaudible...). Secretary General, I'm interested in what do you see... how do you see the cooperation... cooperation with partnership [inaudible] our country, for this year? Has NATO something new to offer? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, let me stress that we attach great importance to our partnership with Ukraine and we appreciate that the Ukrainian political leadership has clearly expressed its ambition to develop its partnership with NATO within the current framework.

As you know, we have established a NATO-Ukraine Commission and our political dialogue and practical cooperation with Ukraine take place within that framework – the NATO-Ukraine Commission. And as one example of a step I can mention that we plan a NATO-Ukraine Commission meeting at the level of Defence Ministers when NATO Defence Ministers meet in February.

So this is an example that despite certain political problems we will continue a high-level political dialogue with Ukraine.

OANA LUNGESCU: We have time for just two more questions. ANSA.

Q: Marco Galdi, ANSA. Mr. Secretary General, in Italy there are many political sides, political parties that are discussing the big expenses needed for switching to F-35 in the air force and what is your assessment of the need of this renewal of air capability in Italy in light of your SMART defence principle?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: NATO as an organization, as an Alliance, doesn't interfere with national decisions when it comes to renewal of military equipment. It is, and it will remain, a national decision and we respect fully national decisions.

At the same time, of course, we take for granted that Allies take decisions within the framework of the NATO defence planning process with a view to ensuring that overall the Alliance has the capacity that is needed to address the security challenges of today.

But let me, in more general terms, stress the need for multinational cooperation also when it comes to acquisition of new military equipment. It goes without saying that you can achieve what economists call ‘economies of scale’ if you join efforts in the acquisition process. So when Allies are going to take decisions in the coming years on acquisition of new military equipment I think they should also consider how that could be done in an efficient manner through joint efforts through multinational cooperation.

OANA LUNGESCU: Last question, the Wall Street Journal.

Q: Stephen Fidler from Wall Street Journal. Two questions, one on Mali and what that says... what the operation so far says, in your view, about the capabilities of some of the western Allies and whether it shows any lack of capability or capabilities that they need to make up. I know it's not a NATO mission, but to give some indication about the capabilities of the western Allies.

The other thing you said earlier is there is a lower limit to the amount of spending that Allies can make. Do you think any Allies... well, what is that lower limit, are we even close to it or even below it in the case of some Allies? Have some Allies, have they gone too far already?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Let me start with the latter. I think the good news is that despite the economic challenges, and despite the declining defence budgets, we have seen all Allies stay committed to NATO-led international operations.

It's quite an effort to deploy troops, for instance, in Afghanistan. And we shouldn't underestimate these deployments as a very strong driving force for reform and transformation, modernization of our arms forces during recent years. So even nations that have made very deep cuts in defence budgets have preserved their ability to deploy armed forces in NATO-led international operations.

So I will resist temptation to enter that slippery slope, to name and shame individual nations because overall we have really seen a strong commitment to participation in international military operations. And if I have specific messages and encouragement to individual governments I will deliver it directly in the meeting room with the political leadership.

So my message is really a balanced message. On the one hand I caution against too deep cuts in defence budgets. On the other hand, I also emphasize the positive news that despite the economic austerity, nations have stayed committed to deployment in international operations, stayed committed to reforms and transformation of their armed forces, and we have overall seen more deployability, more flexibility, more mobility of NATO nations' armed forces.

Now, as regard your first question about capabilities in relation to the operation in Mali, again let me start with the positive news. Again, we have seen European Allies take the lead. France has reacted swiftly, and effectively, as I said. I appreciate that.

Other European Allies have decided to assist France in different ways. The United States and Canada have also decided to assist France. And it points to the strength of being an Alliance. I mean, even if NATO doesn't have a role as an Alliance, the fact that we are an Alliance, the fact that individual Allies are able to cooperate and operate together is due to the framework we do have as an Alliance. We're used to work together, our military equipment can operate together, our personnel can operate together, because they know each other.

So it's an example that even in the case that the Alliance, as such, doesn't have a role, indirectly it contributes to making such an operation a success, because individual Allies are used to work together.

But having said that, of course the operation also illustrates that European Allies still need strong support from the United States in their endeavours to carry out such an operation. So I think the Mali operation, once again, points to the need for increased European efforts to fill the gaps when it comes to essential military capabilities such as intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance.

OANA LUNGESCU: And with that, I know that you have many more questions. Of course, you can read all about it in the Secretary General's Annual Report, but we conclude here this formal press event and the live transmission, and we'll proceed to the next part, which is actually the New Year's Reception and an opportunity for you to mingle and have an informal chat, off the record, with the Secretary General.

Thank you very much.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2013/01/31/secretary-generals-monthly-press-conference-and-launch-of-the-annual-report-for-2012