North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Monthly press conference

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen
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Good morning.

I have just returned from a visit to Japan and the Republic of Korea. This was the first ever trip by a NATO Secretary General to the Republic of Korea. And I met with President Park, ministers and members of parliament. I also visited the Korean Demilitarised Zone, where I was briefed on the current state of affairs by the United Nations Command.

In Japan, I signed the first NATO-Japan joint political declaration with Prime Minister Abe, a declaration which will chart the future course of our partnership. And I also met members of the government and of parliament.

Japan and the Republic of Korea are important partners for NATO. We may be separated by geography, but we are united by much more. We share fundamental values, such as individual liberty, democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We share the need to face common security challenges that go well beyond borders. And we share the determination to play an active role in promoting that security and stability.

Understandably, a major concern in both countries was the statements and actions of North Korea. I recalled NATO's strong condemnation of North Korea's missile launches and nuclear tests, which pose a serious threat to regional and international peace, security and stability. I urged North Korea to refrain from any further provocations and to fulfil its international obligations to fully implement all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions. And I commended all efforts to seek peaceful solutions through dialogue.

Let me stress that NATO's global perspective does not mean that we seek a presence in the Asia-Pacific region. What it does mean is that we seek to engage with the Asia-Pacific region.

And we are already doing much valuable work together. In Afghanistan, hundreds of troops from the Republic of Korea serve alongside their partners in ISAF in the east of the country. Japan has given great support to the Afghan forces, and has led the way in key areas such as literacy and education. And we are also working together to counter the threat of piracy in the Gulf of Aden.

I thanked the leaders of both countries for all they are doing. And we also looked at what more we can do together in the future. We discussed areas such as counter-terrorism,

counter-piracy, non-proliferation, disaster relief and cyber defence. All these are challenges which reach across borders, and we can deal with them much more effectively if we do it together.

La question de nos partenariats sera également au cœur des débats la semaine prochaine, à l'occasion de la réunion des ministres des Affaires étrangères de l'OTAN qui se tiendra mardi, ici à Bruxelles.

Ce sera une journée bien remplie. D'abord, nous examinerons l'évolution de la situation au Moyen-Orient et en Afrique du Nord, ainsi que ses incidences sur la sécurité et la stabilité pour la région et pour l'OTAN. Nous ferons le point sur le déploiement de nos missiles PATRIOT en Turquie, alors que la situation en Syrie continue de présenter un grave risque de débordement régional.

En outre, nous tiendrons une réunion du Conseil OTAN Russie avec Monsieur Lavrov. Ce sera l'occasion d'approfondir le dialogue politique et d'avoir une discussion franche et ouverte sur des questions d'intérêt commun, notamment l'Afghanistan, la Corée du Nord et la défense antimissile.

Je compte bien que nous lancerons la deuxième phase du fonds d'affectation spéciale du Conseil OTAN Russie pour la maintenance des hélicoptères en Afghanistan. Par cette décision, nous allons accroître le nombre des activités qui contribueront à rendre l'Armée de l'air afghane performante et autonome. Ces activités pourraient comprendre le développement de capacités d'évacuation sanitaire, qui sont d'une importance capitale pour les forces afghanes.

We will also meet with the foreign ministers of the 22 non-NATO countries which contribute to ISAF. Later this year, we will reach a significant milestone, as the Afghan forces take the lead for security across the country. At the same time, ISAF’s main effort will shift from combat to support. The milestone will mark the progress we have made. By the end of 2014, the Afghan forces will be fully responsible for security in their country. But our commitment to support them will continue to the end of 2014 and beyond.

At this meeting, I also expect we will reach agreement on the means to ensure transparency and accountability in the way our future financing for the Afghan security forces is managed. This will be a significant step in sustaining the strength of the Afghan forces, as well as the public support in donor countries for this vital effort.

So as you see, we’ll have a full agenda in front of us.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Start with DPA, over there.

Q: Dieter Eberling with DPA, the German Press Agency.

Secretary General, it looks as if the European Union, as well as Serbia and Kosovo, want NATO and perhaps KFOR to play a role in case there is an agreement between Serbia and Kosovo, particularly about the north of Kosovo. I assume that there is planning underway at NATO for this case. To what extent is NATO ready to provide guarantees for both parties there to ensure the implementation of an agreement that yet has to be reached? And the second question, if I may, a very brief one: NATO-Russia, wouldn't it be a good sign if NATO and Russia could find a joint position towards the North Korean question?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): First, on the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. I really welcome all the efforts to find a political solution. I would like to commend the European Union and High Representative Ashton for all the efforts to facilitate that dialogue between Pristina and Belgrade. And I can assure you that NATO fully supports that dialogue.

And we are also prepared to play our role if we can contribute to finding final solutions. We are prepared to do that, and I am in continuous contact with High Representative Ashton. We ensure a very close cooperation and coordination between the EU and NATO in this critical phase of negotiations. And we stand ready to make our contribution, if needed, to make sure that this... that these negotiations can conclude with a positive result, which I hope to see very soon.

Q: Russia and North Korea?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: On Russia and North Korea and the upcoming meeting in the NATO-Russia Council I would expect North Korea to be discussed at the NATO-Russia Council meeting. I appreciate that the international community, including Russia, has sent a very clear message to the North Korean leadership to refrain from provocations, to comply with all relevant United Nations Security Council resolutions and to pursue dialogue with a view to finding peaceful solutions to the conflicts in the Korean Peninsula.

So basically I think there is a common view as regards the way forward with the aim to resume a political dialogue in the Korean Peninsula.

OANA LUNGESCU: Reuters.

Q: Adrian Croft from Reuters. Secretary General, are you optimistic that in the talks next week with Foreign Minister Lavrov that there could progress or an agreement on the missile defence question now? And I had a second question that involves Syria. On Admiral Stavridis' blog last week he said that NATO should be prepared to undertake further missions as agreed by the 28 nations of NATO on the Turkish-Syria border. Can you tell me what mission he might have had in mind there? Is a No-Fly Zone again under consideration? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: On the latter, I consider it just quite normal that our Supreme Allied Commander expresses the intention to stand ready to take all necessary measures to ensure effective defence and protection of our Ally Turkey. We don't have such concrete plans, but obviously if the situation evolves it is our obligation, as a military Alliance, to ensure such effective defence and protection of our Ally and that's the essence of what Admiral Stavridis has expressed.

Now, on missile defence, I wouldn't expect a breakthrough in talks on missile defence in our... during our meeting next week, but I would expect the issue to be raised and discussed. As you know, our invitation to Russia to cooperate on missile defence still stands. We hope that invitation will be considered positively in Moscow. Very much, of course, will depend on progress in the bilateral track between the United States and Russia. And I hope, I could add I would also expect, a dialogue between the U.S. and Russia to be resumed during 2013, and hopefully that could also pave the way for some progress when it comes to missile defence.

OANA LUNGESCU: KUNA.

Q: Nawab Khan from the Kuwait News Agency KUNA. Mr. Secretary General, last week the UAE opened an office here at the NATO Headquarters. And yesterday there was a high-ranking delegation of NATO in Kuwait. So does these two developments point that the Alliance is going to intensify installations and cooperation with the ICI countries?

And my second question is on Syria. You said that Foreign Ministers next week will discuss Syria. Perhaps they will reassess the current position of NATO on Syria? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, let me stress that I do not expect a change of the current NATO position. As you know, we consider it our core task to ensure effective defence and protection of our Allies—in this case Turkey—and this is the reason why Patriot missiles have been deployed to Turkey and we will take stock of that deployment. But I wouldn't expect any change of our general position on Syria. We do believe that the right way forward is a political solution to the conflict in Syria.

Now, on our partnership with the Gulf States within the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, I warmly welcome the opening of an UAE mission here at NATO Headquarters. It is a significant step in strengthening the bond between NATO and our partners and more generally I would expect such steps forward in our relationship with our partners within the ICI in the coming years. And I would definitely welcome that.

OANA LUNGESCU: Wall Street Journal.

Q: Stephen Fidler from the Wall Street Journal. A question about Afghanistan. I know that next week is not going to be a troop-pledging conference, but we have had an announcement from Germany about the post-2015 [sic] contribution that they expect to make. Should we

expect, or would we expect a more concrete idea of the shape of NATO Forces post-2015 during or as a result of this conference?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: As you indicated, this is not intended to be a force generation conference, so the goal is not to encourage concrete contributions to be announced at the meeting next week. But having said that, obviously I warmly welcome the German announcement of an intention to contribute in such a significant way to the post-2014 mission. Obviously for planning reasons it is a very good thing that nations come forward with their announcements in due time. I also think the German announcement serves as a good example, and possibly an encouragement for other potential contributors.

So in all these respects, I really welcome the German announcement. We will not be in a position next week to make final decisions on the future post-2014 mission. We are still in the planning phases and I would expect more detailed decisions to be made later this year.

OANA LUNGESCU: NPR.

Q: Teri Schultz with NPR and CBS. Germany did note in making this announcement, though, that it obviously depends on an agreement being reached on status of forces, which as we know is in the works. Can you give us an update on how that's going and also reports that the large civilian casualty incident earlier this month may put a hitch in that, where a dozen kids were killed, and also if you have any update on ISAF's investigation into what happened there.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I don't have new updates on this very tragic event. As you know, we do all we can to avoid and minimize civilian casualties, so I don't think that tragic event will have an impact on the deliberations on a Status of Forces Agreement. Obviously it is a prerequisite for deploying foreign troops in Afghanistan that we reach an agreement with the Afghan Government on the status of forces. That goes without saying.

Currently, the Afghans are negotiating a bilateral agreement with the United States and I do believe that a possible agreement between Afghanistan and the United States will provide guidelines for the conclusion of a status of forces agreement between NATO and Afghanistan.

So we follow these negotiations closely. Of course, they will pave the way for a NATO-Afghan agreement on the status of forces. Let me repeat that if we can't reach an agreement of status of forces it will be impossible for Allies and partners to deploy troops and trainers to Afghanistan. But having said that, I'm optimistic that we will reach conclusions on such status... as such a Status of Forces Agreement. I discussed that matter with President Karzai during my recent visit to Kabul, and that conversation gives me reason to believe that we will be able to reach a conclusion.

OANA LUNGESCU: (Inaudible...), over here.

Q: Thank you, Secretary General. I have two questions. First of all, two years after the NATO intervention, the situation in Libya continues to be difficult. How do you see the development in Libya and have you sent... and where is a leader, and are you ready to play a role to improve the situation in Libya?

And secondly, also in Libya there are some reports about contact between political leaders Libyan and NATO like Mr. Mahmoud Jabril who was in Brussels last week. Do you confirm that?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, yes, we have had... we have contact with the new administration in Libya. As regards to the overall situation, I think we shouldn't be surprised that Libya is going through a very complicated transition process. We shouldn't forget that the new leadership in Libya has to build a society, so to speak, from scratch, because after more than 40 years of brutal dictatorship all organized structures had collapsed, so the new responsible leaders would have to build new institutions right from scratch. It will take time. And sometimes the development will even be a bit turbulent. And we shouldn't be surprised that this is the case.

Then you asked me whether we would be able to help in that transition process, and my answer is, yes, upon request we will be able to assist within areas where we can add value, within areas where we have specific expertise. And one of these areas is within the security sector. If requested by the new Libyan authorities, we stand ready to help Libya build a security sector that is compatible with a democratic society. We can help Libya in different ways when it comes to the construction of and reform of their security sector.

But of course, it has to be demand driven. It has to take place upon request of the Libya authorities. If we receive such a request I'm sure it will be considered positively by our Allies.

OANA LUNGESCU: NTV Turkey.

Q: Secretary General, (inaudible) from NTV Turkey. Since Israel and Turkey have resumed its talks on relations I was wondering whether there is a more positive atmosphere in terms of cooperation with NATO and Israel and whether this will be... I know that it won't be officially on the agenda of the Foreign Ministers, but whether now cooperation is resuming again? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, let me stress that I really consider it positive news that the Israeli Government and the Turkish Government have established such contacts, initiated such exchange of views after a long period of some political tensions.

I really welcome that because I think that could also pave the way for a solution to a number of problems that have arisen in the wake of that dispute between Israel and Turkey.

Having said that, I also think we have to realize that this is a gradual process, so I think we will see positive results, also in an Alliance context, step-by-step, down the road. But

definitely what has happened will facilitate such progress, without any doubt.

OANA LUNGESCU: That's all we have time for right now, but of course we hope to see you all bright and early on Tuesday morning for the ministerial. Thank you very much.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2013/04/19/monthly-press-conference