North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press point

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen following the joint North Atlantic Council meeting in Foreign Affairs and Defence Ministers session
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Good evening.

Today, NATO foreign and defence ministers discussed how NATO can continue to provide support after the ISAF mission is complete in Afghanistan in 2014.

I see emerging agreement for NATO to take on a new mission in Afghanistan after transition to full Afghan security responsibility is complete.

It will be a new mission and a new role for NATO. And together with the rest of the international community, we will play our part and pay our share in sustaining Afghan security forces at the right level in the years to come. So they can keep their country strong and secure in the future. And so that we maintain the gains we have made over so many years, and with so much investment in lives and resources.

Tomorrow, we meet with our ISAF partners to shape together the decisions we will take at the Chicago summit in just a month’s time.

Every day, we see Afghan security forces growing stronger and more capable. They are in the lead for over 40 percent of conventional operations across the country. They have the security lead for areas where 50 percent of Afghans live. And I expect that we will soon see them take the lead for more districts and provinces.

And I am very pleased that a number of allies today announced concrete financial contributions to the Afghan security forces in the future and other allies announced that they will be able to announce concrete contributions at a later stage. And I see that as a clear commitment to sustaining the Afghan security forces in the future.

NATO’s firm goal is to complete the transition to full Afghan security responsibility by the end of 2014, within the timetable we all agreed. And NATO’s firm intention is to continue supporting Afghanistan after 2014. Because our partnership with the Afghan people is for the long term.

Our commitment is to continue building the capacity of the Afghan security forces beyond 2014.

And we will discuss all this tomorrow with our ISAF partners, and together with the Afghan foreign and defence ministers. We will pave the way for our summit in Chicago. There, we will decide what our new mission will look like, and how it will work to support Afghanistan, so that it does not become a safe haven for terrorists ever again.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): Tolo TV.

Q: Mr. Secretary General, if you've decided, or you will decide that the number of Afghan forces after 2014 would be reduced to 230,000, don't you think that's good news for the Taliban who can now fight more than 300,000 Afghan Forces in addition to nearly a 150,000 international forces who are both very professional? What is the guarantee that the situation will be much better after 2014 so the Afghan Forces can maintain security?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): First of all, let me stress that we will now increase the number of Afghan Security Forces. In fact, we are now building up the capacity of the Afghan Security Forces.

By the end of 2014, when we have completed the transition to lead Afghan responsibility, that is, when we hand over full responsibility to the Afghan Security Forces, at that time we will have around 350,000 Afghan Security Forces.

Now, I think you are indicating that after that it may be that we will reduce the number of Afghan Security Forces. That will, of course, very much depend on the security situation on the ground. But as a planning assumption, the Afghan authorities, as well as the international community, have recently agreed that a long-term sustainable size of the Afghan Security Forces may be around 230,000 Afghan Security Forces.

But let me remind you that as that happens we will also see a significant improvement of the capability of the Afghan Security Forces. So what will happen is that we will gradually strengthen the Afghan Security Forces, and that may well lead to the conclusion that in a longer term perspective we don't need 350,000, but less can do the job.

That will be decided in the years to come. So the first step will be to build up the Afghan Security Forces, and that is a reassurance to the Afghan people. It's also a reassurance that we will stay committed beyond 2014 and continue to train, assist, advise the Afghan Security Forces.

OANA LUNGESCU: Associated Press.

Q: Are you concerned about the possible spillover effect of the latest photos which were published which show... which appear to show U.S. troops posing with the bodies of dead Afghan insurgents, because similar incidents in the past have triggered revenge killings of NATO troops?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, I strongly condemn these photos and, of course, these acts. Let me stress that they don't, in any way, represent the principles and values that are the basis for our mission in Afghanistan. On the contrary.

These events took place, apparently, a couple of years ago. And I consider them an isolated event. So obviously I hope that there will be no spillover. This event will be thoroughly investigated, and of course there will be taken necessary and appropriate steps to hold people to account.

But let me stress that such very unfortunate incidents do not, in any way, define our relationship with the Afghan people and our relationship with the Afghan Security Forces.

Let me remind you that on a daily basis 130,000 international troops work together with 330,000 Afghan Security Forces and their daily cooperation is based on trust and confidence.

Q: Secretary General, Benjamin Dierks from the FT Deutschland. You've said that a number of Allies have announced concrete contributions to financing the Afghan Security Forces. I was wondering if you could be a bit more precise on this. Who did this and how much they would contribute?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Well, actually I think it's for each individual Ally to decide if they want to make it public and when. I took note of the announcements in a closed meeting. But I think we will see public announcements from now until the Chicago Summit, and maybe also after the Chicago Summit, and I'm very pleased to note the strong commitment to the sustainment of the Afghan Security Forces.

OANA LUNGESCU: CNN, last question.

Q: Thank you, Mr. Secretary General. Elise Labott with CNN. I'd like to ask you about Syria. There has been some talk, obviously, by Turkey, a NATO Ally, about a buffer zone, or humanitarian corridor to combat shelling by Syrian forces across the border and refugees continuing to flow across their borders and the ceasefire in Syria, while fragile, seems to be holding, although there is a lot of continued shelling by Syrian forces in the country.

I'm wondering if you have talked about Syria today? Do you anticipate this to be an issue tomorrow for the NAC? And do you think that... what would you do if Turkey asked for Article 5 considerations? Thank you. Or Article 4 even. Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, let me say that obviously the situation in Syria is a matter of concern. We strongly regret the bloodshed in Syria. We strongly condemn the crackdowns on civilians in Syria.

It's also a matter of concern because one of our Allies, Turkey, is a neighbour, and may very well be affected by what is going on in Syria. So obviously we monitor the situation closely.

But we have no intention to intervene in Syria. We're not considering taking action. As regards your concrete question, if there is a request from any Ally to consult on a security situation we have the very clear rule, it's also clearly stated in our Strategic Concept, that we are prepared to consult on any issue that may be raised by any Ally.

But so far we have not received a request. But obviously we monitor and we follow the situation closely.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. Good evening.

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