North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Monthly press briefing

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen
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ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): Good afternoon.

Syria is still a matter of concern. We are following the situation closely.

As you know, NATO's core business is security.

NATO is where North America and Europe come together every day to discuss the security issues which concern us. And NATO is where Europe and North America work together every day to find solutions.

In NATO, any Ally can bring any issue to the table at any time. That is what makes us strong. That is what makes us an Alliance.

That is why it is appropriate that Allies came together last week to discuss Syria's outrageous shooting down of a Turkish aircraft.

It is why we continue to follow developments very closely and with great concern. And why we remain actively engaged in political consultations.

This is a crisis which directly affects one of our Allies. And one of the gravest security challenges the world faces today.

We condemn Syria's shooting down of the Turkish aircraft in the strongest possible terms. And we condemn the escalating spiral of killing, destruction and human rights abuses in Syria.

The right response to this crisis remains a political response. And a concerted response by the international community against a regime that has lost all humanity and all legitimacy.

That is why I welcome the meeting of the Action Group on Syria in Geneva this weekend. The international community has come together. It has clearly endorsed a plan for a democratic transition to end the violence and answer the legitimate aspirations of the people of Syria.

Now it is vital to enforce that political plan. Every member of the international community should use its influence and spare no effort to bring an end to the bloodshed and move Syria forward. This conflict has already gone on for too long. It has cost too many lives, and put the

stability of the whole region at risk. The international community has a duty to put an end to it – and to do it now.

Let me turn to Afghanistan.

We are working toward our goal of putting the security of Afghanistan in the hands of the Afghans.

As we speak, half the Afghan population lives in areas where their own forces are in the lead for providing security. And over the coming weeks and months, that protection will extend to three quarters of the population.

That means that, later this summer, those Afghans living in areas protected by their own forces will become the clear majority.

This is a big step forward. A step towards our shared goal of seeing Afghan troops and police fully responsible for their country's security by the end of 2014.

It has been made possible thanks to the courage, skills and sacrifice of ISAF and our Afghan partners.

There are still challenges to face and hard fighting ahead. But Afghanistan is making headway.

Of course, security is just one of the challenges facing Afghanistan. And NATO is just one part of the solution. In the bigger picture of the future Afghanistan security, development and good governance all have to come together.

And together, the international community and the Afghan people are putting the pieces in place. Over the last few months, we have built a strong framework of partnership and mutual responsibility. On which Afghanistan can rely as it stands on its own two feet.

En mai, au sommet de Chicago, nous avons répondu aux préoccupations de sécurité en indiquant clairement que la nouvelle mission de l'OTAN sera de former, de conseiller et d'assister les forces de sécurité afghanes après 2014.

En juin, la conférence de Kaboul a envoyé un message clair de responsabilité régionale quant au soutien de l'Afghanistan par les pays d'Asie centrale et les pays voisins pendant une bonne partie de la prochaine décennie.

La semaine prochaine, la communauté internationale se rassemblera à Tokyo pour démontrer son engagement en faveur du développement économique à long terme de l'Afghanistan. La conférence de Tokyo sera une excellente occasion d'obtenir des promesses d'aide pour veiller à ce que l'Afghanistan poursuive son développement et préserve sa sécurité bien au-delà de 2014.

Because even when Afghanistan is fully in charge of its own security, it will still be one of the poorest countries in the world. And the best way to maintain its security, will be to help it face this challenge.

That is why the Tokyo conference is so important. The international community has laid the foundations for growth, by supporting Afghanistan in areas such as transport, communications, healthcare and education. The Afghan people need to see that the international community will continue to build on those gains.

At the same time, the international community needs to know that the Afghan authorities will live up to their commitments. President Karzai has already pledged to improve governance, and to fight corruption. To ensure the protection of human rights, including the rights of women.

Delivering on those pledges is vital.

We now have a once-in-a-generation chance to break the cycle of violence and extremism in Afghanistan. To build long-term security for Afghans, the wider region, and for ourselves. It’s a chance we must all seize.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): BBC.

Q: Secretary General, you talked about the need for good governance and development and responsibility on the part of the Afghan authorities, but I wonder...

OANA LUNGESCU: Christian, you'll need to take a microphone from next to your seat. If you open...

Q: (Inaudible...). 333

OANA LUNGESCU: Okay. Just pull that out and...

Q: Push (inaudible...), yeah. Secretary General, you talked about the need for...

Secretary General, you talked about the need for good governance and development on the part of the Afghan authorities, but I wonder with people looking on and the death of another three British soldiers, shot by an Afghan policeman, whether we can trust in that, if people are infiltrating the police force and able to turn their guns on NATO ISAF soldiers?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): First of all, let me take this opportunity to convey my heartfelt condolences to the families and loved ones of those who have lost their lives in this very tragic incident.

And let me add to that that ISAF is right now investigating this incident to determine the circumstances. At this stage we can't confirm that it actually was an Afghan policeman who turned his gun against the ISAF soldiers. We can confirm that it was a man wearing an Afghan police uniform.

Let me stress that it's very clear that the enemies of Afghanistan do all they can to undermine confidence and trust of the Afghan Security Forces, because they know that we are building up the capacity of the Afghan Security Forces to take full responsibility by the end of 2014.

So the Taliban has clearly laid out strategy to undermine the confidence of... in the Afghan Security Forces, but let me also stress that they can't derail our strategy. Our strategy is to gradually hand over full responsibility for the security to the Afghans and that process will continue and be completed by the end of 2014.

And this is the reason why it is an essential part of our mission in Afghanistan to train and educate Afghan Security Forces to build up their capability, to take that full responsibility, and these training efforts will continue.

Q: The French carried out their own review of security last year, I think in October, when some of their soldiers were shot, I mean, taking that... this incident apart. What was learnt from that incident? Is there anything you can do to stop someone doing something like this?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I can assure you that based on lessons learned from these tragic incidents ISAF, in cooperation with the Afghan Security Forces, have taken a number of measures to prevent such tragic incidents, the so-called green-on-blue attacks. For obvious reasons I can't go into details about these concrete measures, but obviously they include strengthened screening processes, but also education, both education of Afghan Security Forces and ISAF troops, with a view to prevent such incidents in the future.

OANA LUNGESCU: KUNA.

Q: Mr. Secretary General, on Syria, you spoke today again of calling for a political solution, but do you think that it is time for the international community to put a time limit to find a political solution? And think of other means if that fails? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: My first point is that it is a matter of urgency so the sooner a political solution can be found the better. And I urge all international actors who have an influence on the machine in Damascus, to do all they can to facilitate a peaceful and political solution.

Actually, I don't think that it would be helpful in that process to set a fixed date as a deadline, but it is a matter of urgency to put an end to the violence and the bloodshed in Syria. And it is the responsibility for the whole international community to facilitate that process.

OANA LUNGESCU: Turkish media.

Q: Sertaç Aktan. Mr. Secretary General, Wall Street Journal has put a story saying that the Turkish jet was actually shot down in Syrian territory, while Turkey says it was shot down in international territory. Does NATO have any information as to where the Turkish it was shot down?

And secondly, they're also reporting in the international press claiming that there could be a possible Russian involvement in shooting down the Turkish jet. Does NATO have any information on this? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: As you know, we had a meeting in the NATO Council last week on the request of Turkey and the Turkish authorities provided us with a briefing and concrete information about this incident. But as a matter of principle we never comment on such briefings and such meetings in the NATO Council. But the outcome of the Council was very clear; that the Allies expressed unanimously strong support for and solidarity with Turkey and that's telling, I think. And furthermore, in any case, it is, of course, inacceptable and in contradiction with all international norms to shoot down an aircraft without any warning.

Q: Russian... on the second question of Russian involvement?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Yes, but as I told you, we do not comment on such briefings and such meetings in the NATO Council.

OANA LUNGESCU: The lady over there.

Q: FRENCH Q: Saïda Ahmed(ph), l'Agence de presse Mena. Je voudrais revenir sur la Syrie. Maintenant, la communauté internationale a reconnu qu'il y avait deux acteurs sur le terrain. Il y a les forces syriennes et les groupes armées. Alors, ne voyez-vous pas que pour aboutir à une solution politique il s'agit d'exercer des pressions autant sur le régime que sur les pays qui financent et qui arment ces groupes se trouvant sur le terrain?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Comment?

Q: Il y a les groupes armés qui sont financés en armes et en fonds par d'autres pays. Alors, pour parvenir à une solution politique, n'est-ce pas, il faut exercer aussi des pressions sur ces pays-là qui financent ces groupes sur le terrain en Syrie?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Oui, comme déjà dit, il faut trouver une solution politique. Et évidemment, il n'était pas un processus politique de délivrer des armes pour des groupes différents en Syrie.

OANA LUNGESCU: The Turkish News Agency.

Q: Sertaç Aktan from IHA News Agency. Mr. Secretary General, you just said that without any warning the Turkish jet was shot down, so it's unacceptable. Does that mean that even

though other data are shown and that it becomes clear that Turkish jet was on the Syrian air space that Turkey will stand in the same position as it was mentioned last Tuesday?

One more question. I asked last Tuesday after the Summit that if there were any challenges to the arguments of Turkey and there was said that there were no questions asked, everybody appreciated the briefing. But then we saw the Telegraph story, newspaper story, which says Turkey asked for a No-Fly Zone and everybody was surprised by it. Then we see... which was denied by the Turkish authorities. Then we now see the Wall Street Journal's news, which, again, makes reference to American authorities about the jet being on Syrian air space.

How should we read this nothing being said on the briefings, on the meetings, but then afterwards these are coming up all from American authorities that the press is referencing? How should we read this? Thank you very much.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: My answer to that question is very brief, with all respect. I think the main lesson you can learn from that is that you shouldn't rely on anonymous sources.

OANA LUNGESCU: (Inaudible).

Q: Hello, my name is Takashi(ph). I'm with NHK Japan Broadcasting. The question is about the Syria. You emphasized the importance of a political solution at this juncture, but what would be the criteria for NATO to intervene militarily in the situation in Syria? Are you waiting for the UN resolutions?

But the second question is about Afghanistan. You emphasize the importance of the meeting in Tokyo in the coming week, but I understand you are not going? What will be the reason for that? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: The last question?

Q: I understand you're not going to Tokyo for the meeting. Why is that? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First, on Syria. As I have stressed on several occasions, NATO has no intention to intervene in Syria. And as I have stressed today I think the right way forward is to find a political solution. And to that end we need the international community to speak with one voice, and I think it would be helpful if the UN Security Council in particular could speak with one voice with the aim to put pressure on the Syrian regime to stop the crackdowns on the civilian population in Syria. And live up to what was the clear outcome of the contract group meeting in Geneva. That is, to initiate a democratic transition in Syria.

So, again, we have no intention to intervene militarily because we do believe that a political solution is the adequate solution.

On Tokyo, yes, it is an important conference. For calendar reasons I can't attend the conference myself, but of course NATO will be represented, and I would expect my Senior Civilian Representative in Kabul to represent NATO at the Tokyo conference.

OANA LUNGESCU: German Radio.

Q: (Inaudible...), German Radio. Secretary General, you told us that NATO is actively engaged in the political consultations on Syria. Could you tell us more details? To whom do you speak and when?

And a second question, if I may? Could you please tell us more about the situation at the Turkish and Syrian border? What do your Turkish Allies tell you about this, about the refugees and so on?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First, again, for reasons I think you understand and appreciate, we don't comment on details in such consultations, including when and how they take place. But we have a continuous dialogue with Turkey and among all Allies. We have not yet received updated information about the situation along the Turkish-Syrian border, so compared to what we heard last week I can't provide you with new information as of today, but I expect Allies to receive updated information this week.

OANA LUNGESCU: Jane's.

Q: Yes, Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence. I'm not asking for any details, but just two simple yes-no questions, both on Syria. One, has NATO received any formal request or informal indication so far from Turkey for the deployment or use of AWACS in support of Turkish air forces? And secondly, you say the right response at this point to the situation with Syria is political; thus is NATO in direct contact or indirect consultative contact via the individual Allies with any Syrian opposition groups? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: No, NATO has not received requests for deployment of military assets. And no, NATO has no... NATO as an Alliance has no dialogue with opposition groups in Syria.

OANA LUNGESCU: Reuters.

Q: Adrian Croft from Reuters. Secretary General, how concerned are you by reports of a Turkish military build-up along the Syrian border? Is there any danger that could lead to a confrontation between Syria and Turkey, do you think?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: No, on the contrary I commend Turkey for having shown restraint, despite the very tragic aircraft incident. I find it quite normal that Turkey takes necessary steps to protect its population and its territory.

OANA LUNGESCU: Two last questions. Pakistani media, please.

Q: Khalid Hameed Farooqi from Geo Television Pakistan. Secretary General, there's deadlock for such a long time on the supply route from Pakistan into Afghanistan for NATO, but I would like to know that beyond this many people think this is the only connection between Pakistan and NATO, but there are beyond that that NATO in the past offered a lot of training, and Pakistan also request training for soldiers and anti-terrorism training for Pakistan officers.

Are these programs continuing as usual and business as usual despite all the deadlock and efforts being failed on supply route? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Two points. Firstly, I still hope that we will see a reopening of the transit routes in the not-too-distant future. And secondly, no it's not business as usual. We have seen a decline in cooperation activities during recent months, which I strongly regret because I think it's of mutual interest to have close cooperation between Pakistan and NATO. So, also in that respect I hope to see resumption of such cooperation activities in the not-too-distant future.

OANA LUNGESCU: Agence Europe.

Q: Yes, Jan Kordys, Agence Europe. Secretary General, can you confirm that an agreement was signed by the Prime Minister Medvedev about a new way of deriving weapons and supplies to and from Afghanistan by NATO? And could you be precise about what kind of... what is the nature of this agreement? Is this also for weapons, what kind of supplies? Is it concerning also soldiers and by which means? Land-based transport, air transport and how long it will last, this agreement? And are you satisfied? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First of all, I think it's important to correct a misunderstanding. It's definitely not about weapons. We're speaking about transit and transport of what is called non-lethal goods. That's my first point.

Secondly, as you know, we have been talking with the Russians for quite some time to further expand our transit arrangement with Russia. What I can say about that is that we expect these negotiations to be concluded very soon. And let me conclude by saying that we really appreciate the transit arrangements we have with Russia. Russia and ISAF nations share a common interest in seeing success in Afghanistan because failure in Afghanistan would also have a negative impact on Russia. The Russians know that from experience. So it's in their interest and it's in our interest to also expand the transit arrangement and I hope the talks on this expansion of the transit arrangement can be concluded very soon.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much.

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