North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press conference

with Chairman of the Military Committee General Petr Pavel, Supreme Allied Commander Europe General Curtis M. Scaparrotti and Supreme Allied Commander Transformation General Denis Mercier
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General Petr Pavel:Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. Let me begin this press conference by giving you an overview of the main outcomes of the last NATO Chiefs of Defence meeting before the Summit in Warsaw this July.

The CHODs reviewed the progress in the Implementation of the Readiness Action Plan and discussed ways to move forward with NATO's long term adaptation. What was clear from our Strategy session this morning is that it is paramount that NATO continues to have a full range of capabilities at its disposal in order to counter any threat from any direction in a 360° approach.

However, it is the balancing of these requirements that is fundamental. Balance in terms of how we assure our defence capabilities, not exclusively through enhanced forward presence, but mainly through ready and responsive follow-on forces.

Concerning threats from the South, the CHODs considered concrete military actions that NATO could undertake to project stability, in complementarity with existing bilateral and multilateral arrangements.

During our session on the Resolute Support Mission, the Allied Chiefs of Defence and their 13 Partners reaffirmed their enduring commitment to Afghanistan and to the Mission which provides critical training, advice and assistance to the Afghan security forces and institutions. The CHODs also re-emphasised the need to have a flexible, conditions based approach to the future parameters of the Mission.

Our afternoon sessions focused on Partners. During this session with our 25 Interoperability Platform Partners, the CHODs recognised the strengths and wealth of knowledge Partners bring to the Alliance – with a special focus on NATO-Partner cooperation in the area of Defence Capacity Building. Deploying Allied Forces is not always the answer to the problem. Local and regional actors have an equally important role to play in global security, therefore NATO is working with its Partners to give them the appropriate assistance and advice they require to secure and stabilise their territories and project stability from within.

We also discussed the importance of tailoring the support provided to Partners through the so-called Individually Tailored Roadmaps.

Meeting with Georgia, the Chiefs of Defence reviewed the progress in the implementation of the Substantial NATO-Georgia Package and Georgia's ongoing military reforms. The Allied Chiefs also noted the complex security situation in and around Georgia.

During the session with Ukraine, the Allied Chief of Defence reaffirmed their condemnation of Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and its continued active participation and support to the separatists in Eastern Ukraine. They welcomed the update on the progress of the Ukrainian Armed Forces Development, especially taking into consideration the security reality in Eastern Ukraine and along the country's eastern border.

Today's deliberations were very open and productive and I have no doubt the CHOD's advice will assist the Foreign Minister's tomorrow as well as the Defence Ministers next month in their discussions, as the Alliance moves towards the Summit.

With that said, I will now hand the floor to General Scaparrotti and General Mercier, who will brief you on Operational and Transformational issues, respectively.

Mike, the floor is yours.

General Curtis M. Scaparotti: Thank you Petr.

First, I would like to say it is an honour and privilege to be here today, serving as the 18th SACEUR in this great Alliance.

As Gen. Pavel mentioned, our military leaders discussed several important topics during today's session that will have great impact on shaping the Alliance as we move forward to the Warsaw Summit and beyond.

In moving forward, it is important to reflect on the progress the Alliance has made over the years.

Dr. Joseph Luns, the longest serving Secretary General and the person who this room is dedicated to, promoted a vision for the Alliance that holds true today – a Europe that is whole, free and at peace. His foresight of a democratically reunited Europe carried the Alliance through the Cold War and is the foundation in which we progress forward in today's ever-changing security environment.

Our Alliance has remained united through the decades, committed to our solemn pledge to defend each other.

The Wales Summit laid the foundation on the Readiness Action Plan to strengthen NATO's collective defence and to ensure the Alliance is robust and ready to deal with any challenge. I am amazed at what the Alliance and each nation has accomplished in the support of this effort.

Almost two years later, there has been significant progress across the readiness and responsiveness of the force because of the nature of the challenges we face but I would say there's much more work to be done.

The enhanced NATO Response Force, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and the establishment of Multinational Corps North East, Multinational Division Southeast and the Division Force Integration Units are all operational and part of the exercise programme to ensure the force remains trained and ready ensuring we have everything we need to protect our civilians and the territory.

To safeguard our security at home, we must also project stability beyond our borders because if our neighbours are stable, we are more secure.

On Afghanistan, we have a long-term commitment to Afghanistan's stability, in Kabul and across the nation. We will continue our mission to train, advise and assist the Afghan security forces allowing them to defend their country and to push back violent extremism.

We know we must meet these responsibilities together, taking important steps to modernize our collective defence and deterrence, so that we can respond to threats from any direction.

The world is changing and so must NATO but what remains unchanged is our unity and solemn commitment to each Ally to defend each one. I look forward to the future discussions at the Warsaw Summit.

And with that, I will turn it over to Gen. Mercier . . . Denis.

General Denis Mercier: Thank you and good evening, Ladies and Gentlemen. It is always a specific and very good moment for a Strategic Commander to be with all the Military Leaders of our Alliance.

I would say that beyond all initiatives this shows the main strengths of our Alliance continues to lie in the unity and combined efforts of our 28 Nations.

On ACT's perspective, we focused on two main points. First, an update of the NATO Defence Planning Process within the discussion on the Strategy and the NATO Defence Planning Process is aimed at developing capabilities and the capabilities required to meet NATO's level of ambition.

In March, this year ACT and ACO, we have completed our work to generate the 2016 Minimum Capability Requirements.

This document identifies the complete set of forces and capabilities necessary to meet the ambitions set out in the latest Political Guidance.

It describes what the Alliance needs to address to meet current challenges through a 360 degrees.

We also talked about partnerships. Enhancing our interoperability with Partners has really become crucial as it is difficult to imagine any NATO Operation without the involvement of Partner Nations.

We are working on new Individually Tailored Roadmaps, concept that is intended to simplify, optimize and synchronise NATO's partnership programmes through three pilot projects we are conducting with Finland, Georgia and Jordan.

It will help better meet the military objectives agreed with Partners, including enhancing their interoperability with NATO consistently, with the aim at better projecting stability.

Thank you.

EVA SVOBODOVA (SPOKESPERSON FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE): Thank you. The Chairman and the Supreme Commanders will now take several questions if you could please state your name and media outlet. Do we have a question? Okay, over there please.

QUESTION: Thank you. My name is Andrew Matechek, Slovakia Daily Pravda. I have two questions if I may? One about the operation in Aegean Sea.

Are you going to somehow discuss how this operation is going on and do we have any data about this operation because we see the decreasing number of migrants coming. So, do you have any data which would say that there is a correlation between less number of migrants coming and with the operation we have? And second question, if I may, about enhanced presence of NATO on the Eastern Flank. Maybe this is a question also for General Pavel? Visegrad countries might contribute to something, which we don't know what it will be at this moment. There are numbers like 150 soldiers from each country of Visegrad Four. Do you know something more about it? Have you been maybe discussing it also with your colleagues, military colleagues? Thank you.

GENERAL CURTIS SCAPARROTTI (SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER EUROPE): First I'll address the Aegean. As you know, our assistance there with the EU and their maritime operations has been predominately an information sharing and assistance in their direction. The reports that I've seen in the time I've been here tell us that it is having an effect. We're working closer with those forces including FRONTEX and the coordination there has improved and although I've seen various reports, data, on refugees and whether it's reduced or increased, most often it's shown a decrease but I'm still looking for the accuracy in those but I would say without a doubt that it's had an impact at this point.

In terms of the presence, enhanced presence, and I would just say that it was clear today with the CHODs that there is coherence among the CHODs on the basic framework for enhanced presence and the need for that along the eastern front as a part of the larger piece

of deterrence, although I won't go into the details, I think there is good coherence on that and we'll work that as we move forward into Warsaw and beyond.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL (CHAIRMAN, NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE): Probably just to add on Visegrad Four countries. There is no specific commitment made by these countries since the scope of the mission is not yet decided. So we have to remind that enhanced forward presence is one package of measures while right after the summit in Wales we have introduced a number of assurance measures to the countries to the East based on the rotational training presence of smaller units at the company level. So, probably V4 countries are part of this arrangement up to now but it's not about enhanced forward presence.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Next question. Over here please.

QUESTION: Thank you. My name is Nina Reena, Vedomosti, the Russian newspaper. I have two questions to you. First, NATO ground operations in Syria. Under which circumstances or what should happen so that it would start from NATO's side? And second question, Russian jets coming close to Baltic borders let's say or for example Russian-Turkish relations that are quite tense now. Both Turkey and Baltic States are NATO members, so at what point, what should happen so that Article 5 would come with the force? What would understand that now you should start acting? Thank you.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL (CHAIRMAN, NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE): Article 5 is defined in the NATO Treaty as an aggression against one or more countries of the Alliance and of course, to take violation of the airspace by one single aircraft is an aggression, it would be probably an exaggeration. So there is a number of these violations. Most of them are caused by technical problems or simply human factor, mistakes, rather than by intention. So, most of these violations are dealt with as within the Readiness measures, through Alpha scrambles by aircraft on duty and it is kind of a polite reminder that the aircraft committing the violation has made a mistake. So it's not a reason for invoking Article 5 and in terms of Syria, I did not take well the first part of the question.

QUESTION: Are there any plans, proposals now on the table? Any discussions to start that or what should happen when you say now we should action in Syria? So what are the factors?

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: You are aware that NATO as an Alliance is not involved in Syria while all of NATO Allies are part of a counter on ISIL coalition. So to a different degree, they are contributing to the overall effort against ISIL through aircraft up to logistic or even financial support. So it's a contribution in kind, not solely through military forces. And NATO does not plan any land operation in Syria as an Alliance.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Over here in the front, please.

QUESTION: We were already told about…

EVA SVOBODOVA: Sir, could you please state your outlet?

QUESTION: I'm sorry. Marek Jurowski, Rzeczpopolita Daily from Poland. We were already told about the possibility of plans on stationing additional battalions on the Eastern Flank within the framework of enhanced forward presence. Will these troops be available or will take part in military exercises with local armed forces?

GENERAL CURTIS SCAPARROTTI: First of all, as you know, we're still in development of the concept for enhanced forward presence but in terms of the actual contribution of the troops, the size of the force, etc but yes, they would take part in exercises along the front. They would take part in capacity building in the countries that they're stationed in, build interoperability capability as a part of a forward presence and a posture that we need to set conditions for deterrence. They're one part of that deterrence, there's many others to include the forces that we have in response, the work that we're going to do here in the future to Warsaw and beyond that will fill out a deterrence concept here for NATO.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Question over here, the gentleman in the blue shirt.

QUESTION: A question for General Pavel. I'm Alexander Bersherski, Gazeta.ru from Moscow. Despite difficult relationship trouble, relationships between NATO and Russia, do you see a possibility of some cooperation even in the military sphere is possible in Afghanistan? I'm talking about before, we used to have a good cooperation, we were supplying helicopters to Afghans. Is it possible to continue that on some level and do you see Russians, your counterparts talking about that? Thank you.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: Thank you for that question. I'm glad you asked. We are open to communication and it's not just a cliché as I'm repeatedly accused by some Russian web portals including Foreign Ministry but it's true, we would welcome any constructive dialogue. And I've personally offered our Russian counterparts here in Brussels direct communication between myself and General Gerasimov on a number of issues. Unfortunately, these offers were not answered in a positive way. So, wherever there is a serious will to have a meaningful dialogue, we can start even tomorrow because the channels are open and we have expressed the will to communicate many times. And of course, Afghanistan, terrorism in general, Syria and other issues like risk reduction and transparency measures would come to my mind immediately.

EVA SVOBODOVA: The lady in the red please.

QUESTION: Thank you for doing this. Carla Babb with Voice of America. What insight did General Nicholson give you on Afghanistan and the recommendation for troop levels and also, would NATO's European Allies be prepared to provide more troops if the U.S. were to reduce its levels as the current plan stands and then finally, what have you identified or have you identified any capabilities such as helping with the drug trade, the fight against the drug trade or helping with pilot training that you have considered indispensable if there is a troop drawdown?

GENERAL CURTIS SCAPARROTTI: First of all, it was very helpful and important to have General Nicholson present today with the CHODs and what he provided was a personal commander's assessment of what he's seen in time that he's been there. The threat itself, some of the nuances of that threat, the capability of the Afghan forces today and what areas we need to sustain and his recommendation for the way ahead. I'll leave that to him to discuss but I would just say that from my point of view and having listened to General Nicholson that I maintain that a conditions approach in Afghanistan is absolutely correct, it's the one that we need to stay on. That the recommendation for force structure to maintain spokes conditionally until such time that they're a self-sustaining force in each of those areas is important because it's the means to realize our objective of a stable and secure Afghanistan that is not a haven for terrorists any longer. So I think that's what I took away from General Nicholson's report and I think it's so it's important that the CHODs also heard today.

EVA SVOBODOVA: We have time for one last question. The gentleman in the blue shirt, red tie.

QUESTION: Carla Babb - Just back to my second part of the question, whether would NATO's European Allies be prepared to provide more troops if the U.S. were to reduce its levels as the current plan stands ?

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: There is a general acknowledgement by most of the NATO Allies who were willing to share that view that they are going to keep the same level of participation in Afghanistan because they believe that the conditions were not yet met for us to withdraw but we'll see more after the Force Generation conference and after further assessment.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Okay now back to the last question, please.

QUESTION: Thank you very much. I'm Agaton Kozinski, Polska Times Daily. As you said, it's hard to treat a violation of NATO broadly by one plane as an aggression but Russia is still repeating it's, let's call it mistake. How do you interpret it? How to understand this series of mistakes by Russian planes? And I will refer to a book just published by General Alexander Richard Shirreff, the book called "2017 War with Russia". He said using a model, I'm quoting an article in Guardian, on war gaming future conflict, the programme used by NATO and he suggests there will be a war, NATO-Russia, it will start next year, the first country attacked by Russia will be Latvia. It's a very strong thesis just published by General Shirreff.

GENERAL CURTIS SCAPARROTTI: Well, I would just say that first of all, our mission here in NATO is a collective defensive of Europe and the countries and our intent is to deter. I don't believe there'll be a conflict as a result of that. I think that Russia does, they are assertive and they are pressing their periphery deliberately so and in that regard: one, we need to be consistent and clear in what expect in terms of the sovereignty of our nations, their air space, their territory and then secondly is what we're doing today, the CHOD's met today. We have consensus on the way ahead, we're studying the strategic environment and I think we're

making good progress on what things we need to do to change our posture, our responsiveness, our force structure and the future to address a more assertive Russia.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Thank you very much Ladies and Gentlemen. This concludes today's MCCS press conference. Thank you very much.

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