North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Press conference

by the Chairman of the Military Committee, General Knud Bartels at the end of the 168th Chiefs of Defence Meeting
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Thank you for being here today and I wish you all a happy New Year. Before starting to brief you on the outcome of the Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence format, I would like to reflect on the year just passed. As you know, I took up my post as Chairman of the NATO's Military Committee in January 2012. Since that time, NATO has been working on some crucial issues, the most substantial one being setting up the new Command Structure, which is designed to be robust, flexible and above all capable to face our future security challenges. Of course, this is linked to using assets and capabilities in an optimal manner. But I will come back to this later, and provide more details on our Transformation initiatives, which we are actively engaged in.

During the last two days, we have addressed a wide range of issues and have arrived at constructive military advice for the North Atlantic Council and some clear guidance for the NATO Military Authorities. In particular, we have focused on 3 key themes, that is to say, operations, partners and transformation.

On Afghanistan, nations have reaffirmed their commitment to support the Commander ISAF in achieving a successful transition of security to the Afghan forces over the next 2 years. We noted that we are close to the 2013 milestone, which we defined at the Chicago Summit last year. Concurrent with the announcement of the fifth and final tranche of Afghan provinces to enter the transition process, the mid-2013 milestone will mark the beginning of the Afghan National Security Forces' assumption of the lead for combat operations across the country. At this time, our main effort will shift from combat to supporting the Afghans, in preparation for conclusion of the transition process at the end of 2014.

We have also had frank discussions concerning the potential scope and challenges for the new NATO mission. I would like to use this occasion to reaffirm that NATO allies and partners are committed to training, advising and assisting the Afghan National Forces after 2014. The Military Committee is fully aware of the need to stay focused on our current operation, while at the same time planning for the new mission. In addition to that, we are engaged in transferring tasks to the Afghan authorities and redeploying material. Details on how we will conduct the post 2014 mission have not yet been finalised, but they will be discussed quite intensively over the coming weeks.

For Kosovo, there is reason to be optimistic now that tangible progress is being made in Belgrade/Pristina dialogue, and with the agreement on the integrated border management implementation. Our commitment to this operation also remains firm and we keep focused on ensuring the required force structure in order to fulfil our mission, which is to maintain a safe and secure environment.

On partnerships, NATO Chiefs of Defence met with the Mediterranean Dialogue countries and were updated on the security challenges in that region and the impact on Europe. There remain opportunities for NATO to work with partners in this area, particularly on the reduction of illicit small arms trafficking. In the Euro Atlantic Partners session, we concentrated specifically on those areas where we can increase transparency and develop mutually supporting capabilities.

Notably, we have agreed an ambitious programme of work for cooperation with Russia for 2013, which demonstrates our mutual commitment to strengthen our relationship. And let me tell you that we concluded with a high success rate – close to 90 percent - for initiatives undertaken in the 2012 NATO Russia work plan. This cooperation was particularly successful in the areas of counter terrorism, counter piracy and counter Improvised Explosive Devices. Where counter piracy is concerned, our joint efforts have been quite significant. Russian ships received training at the Centre of Excellence for Maritime Interdiction at Souda Bay in Crete, where both NATO and Russian crews exchanged experience and trained counter piracy tactics. And this year, our ability to cooperate will further improve through implementing a common secure communication system, which will enable Russian and NATO ships to communicate with each other over secure lines.

Finally, on transformation – as I alluded to my introduction - we have set out a vision for NATO Command and Force structures which - as I previously mentioned - must be capable, interoperable and also able to operate together with partners to meet the full spectrum of future challenges. To achieve this, we are undertaking a number of activities, including the development of a roadmap to transformation. For instance, we are considering ways to focus the NATO exercise programme on capability development. In preparation for this, we will adjust the exercises planned for 2014 to concentrate on the Connected Forces Initiative, so that is fully implemented by 2015. This is the initiative which will improve interoperability of our forces through military education and training, to include our partners.

In conclusion, NATO Chiefs of Defence have agreed on bringing transformation to the forefront of our focus. As we progressively change our operational tempo in Afghanistan – which is our current number 1 operation - we need to ensure that NATO’s military structures and capabilities stay fit for purpose and match to our core tasks, which are: 1) Collective Defence; 2) Crisis Management and 3) Cooperative Security.

I recognise that the global financial and economic crisis has limited our defence spending. Even more reason, therefore, to achieve the best results with what we have. And this is, of

course, the basic principle of NATO Smart Defence: working on multinational solutions to bring costs down, but keeping capabilities strong. Emerging security challenges have no boundaries and we need to be ready to deter and defend our countries against any threat. Revitalizing the NATO Response Force will be crucial to this endeavour.

The NATO Response Force, as you know, is a multinational readiness force - made up of land, air, maritime and Special Forces components - that the Alliance can deploy quickly to wherever it is needed. The NRF initiative was announced for the first time at the Prague Summit in November 2002 and became fully operational four years later. Today, it comprises of three parts: a command and control element from the NATO Command Structure; the Immediate Response Force - a joint force of about 11 000 troops provided by Allies; and a Response Forces Pool, which can supplement the Immediate Response Force, if required, with about 16 000 troops. A very visible part of the NRF is permanently deployed at sea, where the NATO Standing Maritime Groups provide support - on a rotational basis - to both Operation Ocean Shield and Operation Active Endeavour, which is NATO’s counter terrorism mission in the Mediterranean Sea.

I stress these aspects because I believe the NATO Response Force is the perfect platform to develop and refine common doctrines and bring transformation forward. It plays two important roles: firstly, it provides us with a strong and flexible force; and secondly, it gives vital training in operating and working together. And here I think we have very good opportunities to enhance connectivity within the Alliance and with those partners who want to participate. And in this regard, we welcome Sweden’s consideration to join the NATO Response Force as a way to maintain their interoperability. Sweden is a highly capable and committed partner, and I am sure they could make a valuable contribution to the NATO Response Force.

To summarise, this has been a very productive two days and we will reassess these deliverables at the next Military Committee in Chiefs of Defence session, which takes place in about mid-May.

Once again, thank you for your attention. I am ready now to take your questions.

CAPTAIN DAN TERMANSEN (Spokesperson for the Chairman of the Military Committee): Before we do that, can I just ask you to state your name and the agency you represent when asking the question. Thank you.

Q: Rob Oliver from BFBS, British Forces Broadcasting. General, I appreciate that this has not been on the agenda, but could you give us any indication of the Military Committee's reaction to today's fast-changing situation in Algeria? And how likely do you think it is, at all, that NATO would be involved in that?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS (Chairman, NATO Military Committee): We have not discussed the situation in Algeria as such, but we have been briefed by the French Chief of Defence on

the issue of the situation in Mali and the French forces intervention in Mali, but this has not led to a specific discussion as such. And as to the possible use of NATO as to those issues I will refer you to the Secretary General's views on this issue.

Q: If I can ask another question?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Please, go ahead, by all means.

Q: Thank you very much, yes. You have been discussing Afghanistan and the situation after 2014 when the training mission it's hope to come into effect. The United States has indicated that it would not stay on if its troops are not given immunity from Afghan prosecution and the Afghan government in turn has said that this matter is something that tribal elders and a national committee would have to decide.

How optimistic are you that this post-2014 situation, training mission, in view of this, will still go ahead?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: I am optimistic as to the post-2014 mission going ahead, and the issue you're referring to, according to the press report, has been discussed by President Obama and President Karzai during President Karzai's visit to Washington last week. And I'm optimistic in a solution being found on this issue, and thus opening up for settling, shall we say, the framework for the post-2014 NATO presence in Afghanistan.

Yes, please.

Q: (Inaudible...), Serbian Beta News Agency, on Kosovo situation. What is your assessment on the general security situation in Kosovo, having in mind that the dialogue on political level between Belgrade and Pristina, and do you think that KFOR needs any more, some troops, Austrian and German reserve, or do you think that this is not any more necessary to have out there?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: First, let me once again commend the on-going negotiations between Belgrade and Pristina, led by the European Union... or supported by the European Union. It's very positive news.

As to KFOR, KFOR is maintaining a safe and secure environment in close cooperation with the European Union presence, EULEX, and will continue to do so in accordance with the mandate which has been given to it by the United Nations.

And I am, as I mentioned in my presentation to you, or my, shall we say, my review of the meeting to you, I'm optimistic as to the way ahead relating to relations between Kosovo and Serbia.

Q: And can you just explain what are the relations between KFOR and the Serbian military and the police?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Sorry, the KFOR...?

Q: The KFOR and the Serbian military and the police.

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Well, there is a professional relation which is based upon the 1999 Military Technical Agreement. And the reporting I get from both the NATO military authorities and from the Serbian military authorities is that they have a good cooperation.

CAPTAIN DAN TERMANSEN: Any further questions?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Please.

Q: (Inaudible...), China TV. I want to ask about, could you give me some detail about the post-2014 training and operations in Afghanistan.

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: In the review of the meeting which I gave you, I highlighted that this issue is being discussed at this very moment and will be discussed in the coming weeks. And therefore I cannot give you any details as to where we are going, but it will be assisting, training and supporting the Afghan National Security Forces. But the responsibility for the security of Afghanistan will be in the hands of the Afghan National Security Forces post-2014. That's quite clear. And that is the common understanding between the Afghan political authorities and the Alliance.

Q: One more question?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Yes, please.

Q: Has this Committee talked about the Syria situation now?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Of the what?

Q: The Syria situation.

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Ah, the situation in Syria. Yes, we are monitoring the situation in Syria, but I can only, here again, refer you to what the Secretary General said that there is no operation planning relating to Syria. And of course, we were updated on the deployment of Patriot missiles from the United States, The Netherlands and Germany in support of the defence of Turkey.

Q: Okay, and one more question with that.

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Yes.

Q: I noticed that some media said the Japanese Prime Minister gave a letter to the Secretary General to talk about the cooperation with NATO and Japan to deal with China. Do you hear about that?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: If it's a letter which has been addressed to the Secretary General I suggest you to ask the Secretary General.

Q: Okay, thank you.

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Well, I can only say thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen... Oh, I'm sorry. My apologies. Here.

Q: Yes, just one more. I appreciate you mentioned that you've had a briefing on the situation in Mali and we understand as well that until there is a French request for help that NATO won't be involved there, but has there been any indication at all of any request for French help?

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Well, the French are in bilateral talks with a number of nations, which also have expressed both at Minister of Defence and Chief of Defence level and of course we were informed about that, but as such a discussion has not taken place and there are no sort of any kind of operation planning from NATO side as to the situation in Mali.

CAPTAIN DAN TERMANSEN: Right. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for coming. Thank you for your questions. I will stay a couple of more minutes if you have some further questions that you want to broach. Then we can handle it from there.

GENERAL KNUD BARTELS: Yes. Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen, and have a good afternoon.

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