Questions and answers

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EVA SVOBODOVA (SPOKESPERSON FOR THE CHAIRMAN OF THE NATO MILITARY COMMITTEE): Thank you Generals. So, the Generals will now take questions from the audience. I see the first hand from Julian Barnes. If you could please state your name and affiliation, Julian.

JULIAN BARNES (WALL STREET JOURNAL): Julian Barnes, Wall Street Journal. General Breedlove, I wonder if you could tell us your current assessment of the situation in Ukraine in terms of what the level of violence and fighting is there now compared to recent assessments that you have and I wonder if you or General Pavel could address mil-to-mil dialogue between NATO and Russia right now. Where does that stand? What have you offered? What have they reciprocated?

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE (SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER EUROPE): I think I'll take the first question. I'll defer the second to the chairman. We see much of what we see you all reporting in the paper the same way. We see an increasing tempo of skirmishes along the line of contact. There seems to be a steady growth of these contacts over the past 2 weeks and once again, we see soldiers being injured and lost there and the good news I think is no huge exchanges of the more heavy calibre weapons but a lot of small arms contacts, RPG type of involvements.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL (CHAIRMAN OF THE MILITARY COMMITTEE): In terms of communication to Russia, it is widely recognized that we cannot avoid dialogue both at the political and military level if we want to avoid a strategic miscalculation or if we want to prevent from happening the incidents similar to bringing down the Russian airplane crossing the Turkish border. Unfortunately, there is a mismatch between press declaration on the Russian side and practical willingness to get in touch. Since I assumed my position in June, I made several efforts to use this channel of military communication and up to now, there was a lack of will on the Russian side to have that communication. However, it doesn't mean that the lines of communications are closed. Russians communicate at the bilateral basis with nations. So, there is some kind of communication.

ALIX RIJCKAERT (AGENCE FRANCE PRESSE): Good evening. I'm Alix Rijckaert. I work for Agence France-Presse, AFP. I would like to know what is your assessment of the situation now on the border between Syria and Turkey? Because you were just talking about the incident which has caused a lot of tension between, an Ally which is Turkey and Russia. How

is the situation now in the air? On the grounds between because we know there's a lot of activity going on the Russian side, of course. How do you assess? How would you describe it?

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE: So, let me address the air picture first. Of course, the coalition, not NATO, but the coalition that is addressing ISIL in Iraq and Syria has reached a series of technical agreements to be able to safely accomplish the mission in the air. Those agreements have held. We have not had any incidents in some time and the coalition forces and Russian-Syrian forces have remained in a safe condition ever since that set of agreements, safety agreements, was put in place. The nations talk regularly to address issues or as it relates to those safety agreements. The situation on the ground in what we call the Manbij pocket is very tough. There are numerous forces in the Manbij pocket. There are forces from the regime and many Russian air strikes in that area and that situation is a long way from being resolved and I think at that point it would be probably best asked to CENTCOM for the details but that 60 km or so pocket that we call the Manbij pocket remains a tough fighting area and confused by multiple ground forces that are involved there.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Question please.

ANA PISONIERO (EUROPA PRESS): Thank you. I'm Ana Pisoniero from the Spanish News Agency, Europa Press. To General Pavel, you mentioned that Chiefs of State, of Defence have mentioned the fact that the terrorist threat had to be contained. I wonder the discussion that took place with the military and the Mediterranean Dialogue partners. I mean, we're always talking about the need to beef up cooperation in this particularly important area for the southern countries. Is there any concrete cooperation, operational concrete examples that have been agreed and how we are going to take forward the whole consolidating third nation forces and if I may for General Breedlove, what are if you could let us know what kind of package are we going to present for the Warsaw summit to beef up the southern flank? I mean, we hear that we need much more special forces in the south, we need much more naval capabilities, we need much more intel recon capabilities but if you could elaborate a bit on that as well, I would greatly appreciate it. Thank you.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: I will start with the question of how NATO relates to the southern challenges. This is a subject of discussion and it will be subject of discussions what the NATO role could be in the future. NATO so far is supporting countries in the region through a defence capacity building. There is a package for Iraq, there is a package for Jordan, another one is under preparation for Tunisia and we will discuss other possible options for NATO support to the effort of coalition against ISIL and I think these options are open and we realize that the situation in the region has multiple effects on the security and it relates not only to NATO but also to the European Union. So, we'll have to discuss and coordinate the measures together.

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE: As it relates to what you described it as a package, we will deliver to the south. That sounds like a future thing. I would like to remind that we are already delivering assurance measures in the south, air capabilities into Turkey from NATO. We have increased naval presence and naval engagements in the eastern med and as you know, your nation is delivering Ballistic Missile Defence now in the Turkey areas. So, we are already delivering capabilities to our southern flank. You are right, we are working on those next recommendations that would be a continuation of what we're doing. It's not like it's something new in the future. We're already addressing this issue and I think you can understand that I need to allow the Ministers to look at the recommendation before I tell it to you to roll out in the press. So, just let me assure that we are continuing to work on this and we'll allow the ministers to look at our recommendations. Strong recommendation during this, or strong understanding and agreement during this meeting today as was described by the Chairman of our need to address these issues in the south.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Next question, gentleman in the back.

ROBIN EMMOTT (REUTERS): Hi, Robin Emmott from Reuters. When it comes to the posture in the east, what sort of advice will you give to Defence Ministers next month when it comes to, for instance, the discussion about permanent bases in the east? It's something that Poland is bringing up at the moment. Do you see that as a possibility, permanent bases or if not, what's your thinking at the moment about this persistence idea? Could you imagine say more command and control centres or more pre-positioning of equipment? Thank you.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: I will take the beginning and then, you can complement the question. First, I think we use a different terminology but we mean the same thing. Several people use the term permanent, other people use persistent, other people use rotational but in fact, we're talking about the same thing and it's within current assurance measures to our Eastern Allies. There is a certain number of troops rotating for the training provided by other Allies and these troops because they do the kind of forward presence, which is not only meant to assure our Allies at the eastern flank of NATO but at the same time, it is a sign of solidarity of other Allies which demonstrate that we are 28 for 28. So I think I would stay with that because this is what we are going to propose to the Ministers and that we need to keep proper balance between this kind of forward presence and ready and responsive forces in the remainder of the alliance.

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE: I would just echo what the Chairman said. There are a lot of words used to describe it. Every time I talk about it, I talk about persistent rotational forces. You use the word troops. I would like to emphasize that it's more than ground troops. We are describing and developing a continuation of the existing assurance measures where we try to have air, sea and land presence and so, it's important that we have an appropriate balance of air presence north, center and south, an appropriate naval presence north, you can't have a naval presence in the center but to the south and then, of course, the ground

presence and so, this is, as described, we would like to show a multinational persistent rotational force that demonstrates solidarity and our commitment to the defence of our Allies.

GENERAL DENIS MERCIER (SUPREME ALLIED COMMANDER TRANSFORMATION): If I may add something on this issue, in complementarity with what has been said is the exercise programme and we try to have the right balance between exercises related to Article 5 and Crisis Management. I recall that TRIDENT JUNCTURE 15 was an exercise focused on the southern threat and that's very important. We have increased considerably the number of exercises. That's very important that the exercise programme is a part of this overall posture and it's an area on which we are working a lot and we link more and more national exercises to this exercise programme in order to be sure that we have a comprehensive view of all the exercises conducted by NATO nations.

EVA SVOBODOVA: John, please.

JOHN-THOR DAHLBURG (ASSOCIATED PRESS): John Dahlburg from the Associated Press. Gentlemen, to the degree you can, can you give us a little more detail on what advice NATO's military leaders have given on what they think is necessary to take the adaptations forward, to focus on those essential measures that need to be taken for collected defence.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: As you certainly know, the long term adaptation runs in 3 major strengths, political, military and institutional adaptation. Within all these strengths, there is a number of tasks and measures and in terms of military, it's primarily RAP.

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE: Readiness Action Plan.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: Yes, Readiness Action Plan and within the readiness action plan, we can talk about doubling the size of NATO Response Force, about creation of a VJTF and a number of exercises, NFIUs located in the countries in the eastern flank, many coordination measures, studies on prepositioning and a rotational presence, all these are adding to the military adaptation. Then, there are many more long term adaptation measures which relate to the overall scope of training and exercising, it's an area which is under the responsibility of General Mercier, and I think, there is the whole range of measures within the military adaptation.

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE: I would just say, I completely agree with what the Chairman said. We've been saying all along in adaptation that two keys are readiness and responsiveness. We'll continue to work on those readiness and responsiveness issues that brings our force to a better position to be able to react to all challenges. North in the Arctic, east as you understand in Russia and south, the many different kind of challenges we'll face in the south. Additionally, we are working on both our military and political decision making, being able to decide at speed so that these new capabilities that we are developing can be brought to bear at speed and then, a pretty interesting conversation about how assurance relates to deterrence and what we will do in the future on that.

GENERAL DENIS MERCIER: And again, a point to stress, the capabilities we are developing now and we have a strong capability development process which is one of the many strengths of NATO. Those capabilities will remain operational in 2030, 2040 for many of them and this is why it's so important that whenever we have those shortfalls, we look at the present and we try to foresee what will be the future challenges as well, beyond 2030 because we know that the capabilities that are in the process right now that will remain operational in 30 years. So it's very important that we keep looking at the future as well.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Next question, please the gentleman over there.

WASEEM IBRAHIM (AS-SAFIR): Yes, my name is Waseem Ibrahim from As-Safir, Lebanese newspaper. For General Breedlove, you mentioned before, General, the Anti-access, Area-denial, which is the Russian system delivered or part of it delivered to Syria. What's the state of play concerning this system, especially you said before that it's challenging the NATO capabilities? Are you doing something? So, the state of play and what you are doing. The second part, it's for the gentlemen also, it's a bilateral between the U.S. and Turkey, they are talking about closed area in the north of Syria. It's about 90 km, maybe it's linked to what you said about the Manbij. Is it linked or not? I'm not quite sure but is it linked also to reassurance measures? Is NATO involved in this issue, in this closed area, free area from ISIL and the last point if I may, your goal also to contain the threat of terrorism. Is the Russian operations doing or bringing any contribution in this regard? Thank you.

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE: I can talk to the first two and I'll allow either of my colleagues to talk to the third one. Anti-access, Area-denial, A2/AD as we call it, is really a new way to use old tools. A2/AD is a combination of using surface-to-air missile defence to preclude aircraft entering into an area, combined with coastal defence cruise missiles to prevent ships from coming into an area, combined with land attack cruise missiles to be able to strike land forces or to strike airports of debarkation or seaports of debarkation to try to deny. So these three tools have been in the military inventory for a while but the new approach is to use them in conjunction with each other to create an area which makes it very tough for a military force to enter and then employ. We have seen this A2/AD grow in Kaliningrad, we've seen this A2/AD grow very dense in Crimea and the Black Sea, we see a certain amount of it along the border traces of Belarus and other places but as you point out, we now see a growing density of this A2/AD capability in the eastern Mediterranean, centered around the Russian airfields and the Port of Latakia. That is not a very mature system yet but we are concerned at how it's growing and this is a capability that any force that wanted to enter that area would have to deal with. Of course, as I mentioned before, at the moment, the Russian forces and the coalition forces have a safety technical agreement which allows passage of aircraft and others in this area. So while there is an A2/AD capability there, our agreements are allowing both forces to action into the area. I must tell you that I listened closely about what you talked about on the closure area and I am not aware of what you're talking about. There are a lot of concerns, as we said, about the Manbij pocket, the ability for

both forces to be able to employ in that area but I am not aware of a U.S.-Turkey closed area. I'm not tracking that.

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: I don't want to guess but when you used the figure 90 km, it reminds me that there is a gap of a 90 km border where ISIL forces reach Turkish borders. So, that's probably the area you had in mind but to close this gap, it's not the effort by U.S. or Turkey, it's the opposite. The effort of Syrian troops, from one side supported by Russian Air Force from the outside, from the Kurds. So in fact this area would be closed and the whole border between Syria and Turkey would then be held by other forces than ISIL.

EVA SVOBODOVA: And we'll take last question please.

WASEEM IBRAHIM: Sorry but it's not over. The third is about terrorism and what the Russians are doing?

GENERAL PETR PAVEL: Okay, okay, yep. Up to this point, it is well known that Russia is mostly attacking opposition forces instead of the forces of ISIL or other forces which are considered to be either extremists or terrorists. The proportion is roughly 70-30%, some figures show even higher proportion of Russian forces attacking opposition rather than ISIL. In that sense, of course, there might be much better effect when Russian Air Force increases the ratio of attacks against ISIL. Up to now, it is rather a matter of complication because we have to de-conflict a lot of activities instead of working in coordination.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Now the last question, please.

ROB OLVER (BRITISH FORCES BROADCASTING SERVICE): Rob Olver, British Forces Broadcasting Service. A question for General Breedlove. How concerned are you about apparent advances of the Taliban in places like Sangin in Afghanistan and should NATO now send more troops back to Afghanistan?

GENERAL PHILIP M. BREEDLOVE: So, Rob, thanks for the question. I just returned from Afghanistan less than a week ago. I was able to visit pretty much the entire country except for the north. I was in the north the last time that I was there. What I would say to you is that this has been a tough year for the ANDSF. We believe they've sort of fought to a draw with the Taliban in this year, and none of us, to include them, believe a draw is where we need to be but we have to remember that this is the first year that they have been completely on their own and where they have not had that close air support, the medical support, the ISR that we have been providing for them in the past. What we have seen is some fairly spectacular quick wins by the Taliban and those are well reported but we have also seen is that every case, the ANDSF have put together a plan and retaken the territory. Clearly Musa Qala and Kunduz were tough, but in the end they have retaken this land and moved forward. The good news is this is a tough, courageous force that very much feel like they own the fight. My staff and I changed our itinerary during this last visit to make an unplanned visit to Helmand and we sat there in the field and met with 215th Core Commander and his senior enlisted man about

their fight and how it was going and I think the words they used were very instructive, very insightful. They said “we have this fight, we just need a little help but we have this fight”. So the Afghans are fighting for their country, there’s no lack of will or fight in them and I think what we’re going to learn from this year is, have we taken the appropriate path at the appropriate speed to completely divorce ourselves from them and we will making some recommendations to our political leadership about our train, advise, assist mission, not a combat mission, but how we might adapt our train, advise, assist mission to help them through next year, watching how this year went. I remain a glass half full on this because, again meeting and talking to these leaders, it’s all about leadership and we’re beginning to see the right kind of leadership take the field. There are still challenges we need to work through. We knew a long time ago it was going to take a long time to put the Afghan Air Force to a position where it could support its fielded forces. We now see that playing out. They are getting better but it will take time. We knew that there were going to be issues on fire support, logistics and other things. The Afghans are incrementally getting better at this and I think that we will make some recommendations about how possibly to adjust our train, advise, assist mission, again not a combat mission.

EVA SVOBODOVA: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. This concludes today’s press conference. Thank you very much for coming.

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