North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Joint press point

with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen and Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Mark Rutte
2012-12-13

Good afternoon. It is indeed a great pleasure to welcome Prime Minister Rutte back to NATO headquarters.

The Netherlands is a strong and reliable Ally. And I would like to thank you, to thank your country for your staunch support of NATO's missions and operations.

We welcome your intention to contribute two batteries to the expected deployment of Patriot missiles to Turkey. This is a strong signal of Allied solidarity. The deployment will be defensive only. It will in no way support a no-fly zone or any offensive operation. Its aim is to deter any threats to Turkey, and to defend Turkey's population and territory on NATO's south-eastern border. Because the ultimate task of our Alliance is the protection and defence of our members.

In Afghanistan, your police training mission does great work in the Kunduz province. Your jets provide necessary air cover for ISAF troops. Your naval forces have just ended a successful rotation in our anti-piracy mission off the coast of Somalia. And you contribute to our efforts to provide a safe and secure environment for all the people of Kosovo.

This shows the value and importance the Netherlands places on its membership in NATO. And we are very grateful for all your contributions. We know they are made despite difficult economic times.

In fact, the Netherlands is leading the way on Smart Defence. This enables you to use your defence budget more efficiently. Of the 22 multinational projects which we approved at the Chicago Summit this year, you participate in no less than 17. That is remarkable and we are very grateful for that.

You are also working closely with Belgium and Luxembourg to make your maritime command and other capabilities more effective. This is collective security at its best.

So once again, let me thank you for your country's commitment to NATO. I look forward to continuing our close cooperation in the future.

MARK RUTTE (Prime Minister of the Netherlands): Thank you so much. Secretary General Rasmussen and I have had a productive discussion. First of all, I congratulated him on the North Atlantic Council's decision to extend his mandate until the summer of 2014. We fully

supported this decision as the Secretary General has shown strong leadership in his years in office. He has been instrumental in moving forward the transatlantic agenda. So he has earned our strong support.

Last week's decision by NATO to boost Turkish air defence by deploying Patriots sent a strong message of solidarity with our Turkish Ally. I informed the Secretary General today of our government's intention to deploy two of our Patriot missile batteries for an initial period of one year. We are working closely with the United States, Germany and Turkey so that deployment can take place as soon as possible.

We also touched on the situation in Afghanistan. I reaffirmed the Netherland's commitment to continue our integrated police training mission in Kunduz. Our commitment goes beyond 2014, when NATO's ISAF mission comes to an end. We will not abandon Afghanistan. We will continue to contribute 30 million euros a year to help make the Afghan police and army stronger, and we will continue our programs to rebuild Afghanistan and promote its socio-economic development.

We also discussed the issue of NATO's military capabilities. We are facing huge challenges in maintaining and enhancing NATO's capacity in these times of austerity. The Smart Defence Initiative that Mr. Rasmussen launched last year resulted in a well-designed defence package that we endorsed at the Chicago Summit in May. The Netherlands will, indeed, play its part in developing new, vital capabilities in fields like missile defence and cyber security. In a sense, as you mentioned, Secretary General, the Netherlands' naval and army cooperation with Allies like Belgium and Germany has made us a frontrunner.

And can I say, in closing, that the visit today underlines the importance the Netherlands attaches to the Alliance as a whole.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): We'll go to a couple of questions. Please introduce yourselves and say who the question is for. We'll go over there.

Q: Hi, Robert Blumen of the Dutch Press Agency. It's a question about deployment of the Patriots and I guess it's perhaps for both of you. Has already a date been discussed or set for the deployment, and the location of the Patriots?

MARK RUTTE: We expect them to be operational by the end of January. We are now working closely with our Turkish, American and German Allies to ensure that the Patriots are deployed as soon as possible. The location will be decided with our Allies and several matters still need to be sorted out before the Patriots can be deployed.

But again, we expect them to be operational by the end of January.

OANA LUNGESCU: AP.

Q: Secretary General, a question about these reports of Syrians firing tactical missiles at the opposition. Could you tell us... could you expand on that a little bit and could you tell us how NATO arrived by that information?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN (NATO Secretary General): On the latter, as you know, we never comment on intelligence reporting, but I can tell you that we detected the launch of a number of unguided, short-range missiles inside Syria earlier this week. The missiles were fired from inside Syria and they impacted inside Syria, so in other words, no missiles hit neighbouring territory.

We can't confirm details of the missiles, but some of the information indicates they were Scud-type missiles. The use of such indiscriminate weapons shows utter disregard for the lives of the Syrian people. It is reckless and I strongly condemn it.

OANA LUNGESCU: Reuters.

Q: Yes, Secretary General, I wonder if you can tell us what you think the reason might be why President Assad is resorting to use of Scuds at this time? And whether you think there's any kind of a turning point reached in the Syrian war with the rebels gaining the upper hand now?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: No, I'm not going to guess about the reasons behind this act. But in general I think the regime in Damascus is approaching collapse. I think now it's only a question of time. I urge the regime to stop the violence, to realize what is the actual situation, and initiate a process that leads to the accommodation of the legitimate aspirations of the Syrian people.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much.

Source: https://www.nato.int/en/news-and-events/events/transcripts/2012/12/13/joint-press-point