North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)

Monthly press briefing

by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen
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Good afternoon.

Next week, NATO Defence ministers and our partners will meet here in Brussels. We will have two major items on our agenda. Firstly, our missions in Afghanistan and Kosovo, and secondly, our Defence capabilities.

On Afghanistan, our goal is to hand over full responsibility for security to the Afghans by the end of 2014.

Our strategy is to build up the capacity of the Afghan security forces and gradually hand over to them lead responsibility for the security across the country. Soon we will have reached the goal of 352,000 Afghan security forces. And they are already taking lead responsibility in areas where 75% of the Afghan population live.

Our timeline is to complete this transition by the end of 2014. At that time, our current ISAF combat mission will end. From 2015 it will be followed by a NATO-led mission to train, advise and assist Afghan security forces.

The goal, the strategy and the timeline remain unchanged. And the commitment to the goal, the strategy and the timeline was reinforced in my meetings in New York last week - in particular during the transatlantic meeting of European and NATO Foreign Ministers. This commitment will be reaffirmed when Defence Ministers meet next week.

We are going through a challenging period, not least due to the occurrence of insider attacks. We look at these attacks with the utmost concern. We are determined to tackle those challenges. And we are working with our Afghan partners to do so.

The insurgents are trying to undermine our partnership and to drive a wedge between us. My message is very clear: we will not let them succeed. Because ISAF and the Afghan security forces face the same threats, and we have the same goal – a sovereign, stable and secure Afghanistan.

Let me update you on the current situation.

Right now, most ISAF units are conducting normal partnered operations. They are working with our Afghan partners and they are mentoring our Afghan partners.

The Afghan forces are already taking responsibility for large areas of the country. And the initial results are promising. They show that the Afghan forces are indeed able to maintain security. In the areas where they took the lead last year, the situation has remained stable. In some areas, security has actually improved.

For example, in the Regional Command for Kabul, which is already fully involved in the transition process, enemy-initiated attacks fell by 17% in the first eight months of this year, compared with the same period last year. And when the enemy did launch attacks, the Afghan forces took the lead in dealing with them.

So yes, we are facing challenges. But we will deal with them. And we will continue to put our strategy into effect.

Next week, I expect ministers to take a step forward in planning our next mission – to provide training, advice and assistance to the Afghan forces after the end of 2014, once they have full responsibility for their country's security.

We have already begun the planning process. And I expect ministers to conclude the first phase by approving the broad framework for the mission.

This will guide our military experts as they take the planning process ahead. My goal is for us to agree on a detailed outline early next year, and to finalise the plan well before the end of 2013. This will give us the time we need to make sure the transition to the new mission is seamless.

It will also mark our commitment to working with our partners.

Our partners share our interest in cooperative security. They share our commitment to stability. And they share the burden of our operations.

So it is only right that they should share the planning of operations to which they have committed. And I would expect the partners who have joined the planning process for the post-2014 mission to endorse the broad framework of the plan, alongside the 28 Allies, when we meet next week.

The second main item on the agenda for the Defence Ministers meeting will be our defence capabilities. We will make sure we keep up the momentum on Smart Defence, finding more ways

to become more efficient in the way we go about the business of security.

We are already moving forwards. At the Chicago Summit, we approved a list of 22 multinational projects which will give Allies more access to crucial capabilities, with less strain on their budgets. These cover areas such as clearing roadside bombs, sharing smart munitions, and pooling maritime patrol aircraft.

And smart defence has really got momentum. Since Chicago, we have already brought two more projects to a stage where Allies can put them into practice. I expect around 10 more to be added in the coming months. And there are around 100 other projects which are under consideration.

Ces travaux sont menés à l'échelle de l'OTAN. Tous les Alliés, de part et d'autre de l'Atlantique, sont parties prenantes. Et les pays européens jouent un rôle central : pour chacun des vingt-quatre projets sur la table, il y a une participation du côté européen ; environ deux tiers des projets sont pilotés par des Alliés européens ; et un tiers d'entre eux ont une participation strictement européenne.

Il est donc clair que nous maintenons la dynamique. À cet égard, je me réjouis de la nomination du général Jean-Paul Paloméros comme nouveau commandant suprême allié Transformation. Je l'ai rencontré vendredi dernier, à l'occasion de sa prise de commandement. J'ai décidé de faire du général Paloméros l'un de mes deux émissaires spéciaux pour la défense intelligente. Je suis convaincu qu'il fera progresser nos travaux au cours des mois à venir.

There is still much to do. We need to discuss new ways to increase our cooperation – not just in terms of projects, but of long-term planning. We need to determine how NATO, as an Alliance, can best support the development of vital capabilities.

It is a complex challenge. But the goal is simple: to make sure NATO remains the most modern, most capable and most effective Alliance in the world.

With that, I am ready to take your questions.

OANA LUNGESCU (NATO Spokesperson): OK, we'll start with Georgian TV at the back.

Q: Not yet.

OANA LUNGESCU: I think there was a question over there. You just need to press... yes... the microphone next to your seat.

Q: Georgian Public Broadcaster, Mister Secretary General, we have Election Day in Georgia today. How close do you follow the process, I mean, the organization? And how important is this election for NATO for future cooperation? Thank you very much.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: The elections in Georgia are indeed very important for Georgia of course, first and foremost. But furthermore, the elections, the parliamentary elections this year as well as the presidential elections next year are a litmus test of the way democracy works in Georgia.

So Allies are following the elections very closely. I had an opportunity to discuss the elections with the Georgian political leadership when I visited Georgia some weeks ago. And I'm

impressed by the preparations of the elections. I'm sure that the Georgian authorities do all they can to make sure that the elections will be free, fair and transparent.

In that respect, I appreciate that the Georgian government has invited so many international monitors to.... observers to monitor the elections, including members of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly.

So we congratulate Georgia on the elections... Elections are, of course, an essential part of a well-functioning democracy. So today is really a day to celebrate.

OANA LUNGESCU: National Public Radio.

Q: Teri Schultz with NPR and CPS Sir. You took that most partnered operations have resumed in Afghanistan. So if you could give us any insight into what may have changed in between the partial suspension and now that allowed ISAF to resume any of those... those training procedures that were suspended.

And also, General Allen said in an interview disseminated by the Pentagon that the (Inaudible) had succeeded in created mistrust between the two sides. Hum, you don't seem to agree with that statement. I'd like... I'd like your thoughts on that and his additional comment that might change the way ISAF trains Afghans, thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I fully agree with General Allen. I have stated repeatedly that the "insider attacks" threaten to undermine trust and confidence between foreign troops and Afghan security forces.

Some weeks ago, our commanders in Afghanistan took prudent and temporary measures in order to prevent these "insider attacks". These measures included some restrictions on joint operations. It is for the commanders in the field to take such tactical decisions. It's their assessment whether the security situation allows to resume joint operations.

And I've taken note of the fact that it has now been decided to resume such joint operations and partners, almost, all partnered activities have now been resumed. And that reflects an assessment made by our commanders as regards the overall security situation.

Q: (inaudible) He says they have created mistrust. There's a difference: attack the "green on blue"...

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: No doubt, that "insider attacks" have undermined trust and confidence, absolutely. And it's understandable. I mean people ask, understandably, why is it that we send trainers to Afghanistan to help the Afghan Security Forces and then Afghan soldiers or policemen turn their weapons against the trainers who are there, in the first place, to help them. He said that people can't understand that, including our trainers on the ground. So obviously this strategy aims at undermining trust and confidence. And to a certain degree it has also succeeded in that.

And this is the reason why we have taken; and will continue to take preventive measures to avoid such insider attacks. We have strengthened vetting and recruitment procedures... strengthened counter-intelligence measures and taken other steps and these measures are regularly reviewed. And we will not hesitate to take further steps if necessary.

OANA LUNGESCU: Jane's.

Q: Yes, Brooks Tigner, Jane's Defence... Change of subject, the budgetary situation and the prospects of the future are getting so severe in Europe. And ideas are now being floated that were unthinkable even three or four years ago.

For instance, at a EU-Cyprus Presidency Conference in mid-September on pooling and sharing, it was suggested that each Member State might set aside or should set aside a portion of its national R&D budget to collectively fund PMS capability projects. My question to you: Is there any discussion within NATO along similar lines? Do you expect this from ministers next week? Or is there any possibility of loosening up the common fund to produce direct support for SMART Defence initiatives... thank you. ...Beyond what we have today?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I think it would be an excellent idea to focus on research and development. It will leave it to national governments to decide how they conduct their budgetary procedures. I may be that some countries will reserve a specific amount of money for specific projects. That's not for NATO to decide.

But there is an obvious need for a focussed effort on research and development. Basically a risk that investments in research and development are squeezed under the current budgetary pressure! And research and investment in research and development is really an investment in the future.

I would expect that to be part of the discussions defence ministers will have next week. But again I think it is a national decision how defence budgets are arranged in details.

OANA LUNGESCU: Aviation Weekly, over there. Nick

Q: (Inaudible)

OANA LUNGESCU: Yes, you have a microphone next to your seat, Nick. So if you just lift the flap, take out the microphone and press on the button on the microphone, that should activate it.

Q: Is that working out? Yes. You mentioned two new defence... SMART Defence projects. What are those? And then you also mentioned ten upcoming ones. Maybe you could name one or two good examples. And then the second question, you've said in the past that NATO will not intervene in Syria. But there were reports last week of parts of their chemical

weapons arsenal moving around. I mean, do you still stick by your position of non-intervention?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First, on SMART Defence projects. As I told you, they are in the pipeline. So I'm not in a position to go into too many details. But I can indicate that we have projects in the pipeline concerning cyber-security and also further projects on countering roadside bombs and other improvised explosive devices. So they're highly... highly relevant projects.

On Syria, of course, we monitor the situation closely. The issue of chemical weapons is of course a matter of great concern. But our position remains the same as it has been; we have no discussions on military options. We do believe that the right way forward as regards Syria is a political solution.

OANA LUNGESCU: Japanese media.

Q: Hi, my name is Takasha (?) with NHK Broadcasting Corporation. You just mentioned: in order to number to reduce the number of "insider attacks" NATO is ready to take necessary measures. Does that include any extension of your timeframe of existing strategy of Afghanistan? And if not, why do you stick to... do you have to stick to that timetable to get out of Afghanistan by the end of 2014? Thanks.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: We stick to the timeline to hand over full responsibility to the Afghans by the end of 2014 first and foremost because we think it's a realistic timeline. We do believe that the Afghan security forces will be able to take full responsibility by that time.

And I think there's also a strong dynamic within that roadmap. Because everybody including the Afghan security forces and the Afghan authorities know that we have to be ready by the end of 2014. So actually it puts a lot of pressure on the whole process.

And as we have seen steady improvements as we have handed over provinces to lead Afghan responsibility, there's no reason for changing the timeline. So the brief answer is: "We stick to the timeline. By the end of 2014, the ISAF combat mission will end. The Afghans will take full responsibility. And we will continue a training mission."

OANA LUNGESCU: Reuters.

Q: (Inaudible).. Reuters, Secretary General. Could you tell us how many countries have so far said they are prepared to participate in the post-2014 training mission? Roughly how many personnel do you think this mission will require? And whether any decisions have been taken yet on its budget?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: First, six countries or six partners have so far announced that they are prepared to contribute to a training mission after 2014.

Second, on the number of trainers, we have not made any decision yet. We are in the initial phases of planning the post-2014 mission. Decisions on the exact numbers will be taken at the latest date. And for the same reason we have not prepared a budget yet. That will be part of the last phases of our planning.

OANA LUNGESCU: Nawab.

Q: Nawab Khan from the Kuwait News Agency. Mister Secretary General, will there be a new discussion on the situation in the Middle East, in particular in Syria or Libya, during the meeting of the defence ministers next week?

And secondly, have you invited any defence ministers through all the region, I mean from the Arab world? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: On the latter, I can answer yes because we have countries from the region, contributing to our missions in Kosovo and Afghanistan.

And defence ministers from troop contributing countries, that is countries that contribute to our operations in Kosovo and Afghanistan, will be invited to the meeting with NATO defence ministers next week. So we will have representatives from countries in North Africa and the Middle East and the Gulf Region.

And the first part of your question was...?

Q: Discuss the situation...

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Yes, yes, No, we have not planned a discussion on Syria and Libya. But of course, ministers are free to raise whichever questions they might wish to discuss.

OANA LUNGESCU: El País, at the back.

Q: It's in relation with the news that we've got... we read this morning about Libya and Muammar Qadhafi being killed by an operation, an undercover operation of one of the leading countries in the NATO-led operation in Libya. Do you know anything about that? Do your services have anything to say about it? Or is this the first news you get? Thank you.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: I have no information whatsoever about that story. And I'm not going to speculate in any way on that. And let me remind you that NATO didn't have troops on the ground during our Libya operation.

OANA LUNGESCU: Over there.

Q: Saleem Badawi (?) France 24 et RFI, une question en français s'il-vous-plaît. Finalement, peut-être je reviens sur la question des armes chimiques en Syrie, plus globalement. Il n'y a

pas une ligne rouge pour l'OTAN concernant les deux dossiers: nucléaire en Iran et chimique en Syrie?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: As I told you, we are very much concerned about chemical weapons and weapons of mass destruction in general of course. But our bottom-line is as it has been: that we don't see a military solution to the problems in Syria. We do believe that the right way forward is a political solution.

OANA LUNGESCU: We'll go... sorry we'll go over there.

Q: Oui, Secretary General, Richard Werly from the Swiss daily Le Temps. We know that there is already a candidate for your succession Mr. Frattini. And there are.... (Silence). That you may ask for one more year. Could you comment on that?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: You know the rules. The mandate of Secretary General is four years with the possibility to prolong for a further one year. And it's for Allies to decide on that.

For my part, I'm focussed on my job at hand and in particular our operation in Afghanistan to make sure that the transition process will continue with the aim to hand over full responsibility to the Afghans by the end of 2014. That's my focus.

OANA LUNGESCU: We have time for just two more questions. We'll take the lady over here.

Q: J'ai deux questions, excusez-moi, Saïda Ahmed Lamena (?). La première question lors des dernières assises de l'Assemblée nationale des Nations-Unies, le Mali avait sollicité l'aide de la communauté internationale. Même M. Didier Reynders avait proposé d'envoyer des troupes pour la formation des forces maliennes.

Alors, la première question: "Dans quelle mesure l'OTAN pourrait intervenir pour aider le Mali à faire face à cette instabilité?" Et la deuxième question: "Quels sont les ministres des pays arabes qui seront... de défense... qui participeront à la prochaine réunion?" Merci.

On dit qu'il y aurait des ministres de défense représentant certains pays arabes. Alors, j'aimerais savoir si c'est possible, quels sont ces ministres arabes?

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Tout d'abord, en ce qui concerne le Mali, l'OTAN comme organisation n'a pas une intention d'intervenir au Mali. Nous poursuivons la situation étroitement naturellement. Mais nous n'avons pas une intention d'intervenir au Mali.

En ce qui concerne la participation des ministres de défense de la région, comme exemple, je pourrais mentionner que le Maroc contribue à notre opération au Kosovo; la Jordanie contribue à notre opération en Afghanistan comme exemple. Mais il y a des autres...

OANA LUNGESCU: And final question to Imedi, Georgia.

Q: Thank you so much. You mentioned the importance of that election and the situation inside is very polarized now in Georgia. But the Government of Georgia, several times, stressed the concern connected to Russian military exercises near the border of Georgia. Do you have some latest information about security situation in the region? And how would you comment on that? Thank you so much.

ANDERS FOGH RASMUSSEN: Overall, I do believe that the security situation remains stable, definitely not satisfactory but stable. And I don't think the conduct of military operations in the neighbourhood changes that. Actually, I had an opportunity to exchange views with Foreign Minister Lavrov, the Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov when I met him in New York, last week. And we discussed the issue of military operations and agreed that the right way forward is to ensure a maximum of transparency. So we know what is going on. We have strongly committed to such transparency. I hope the Russians similarly are committed to such transparency.

OANA LUNGESCU: Thank you very much. And we hope to see you at the Defence Ministers' Meeting next week at NATO Headquarters. Thank you.

For instance, at a EU-Cyprus Presidency Conference in mid-September on pooling and sharing, it was suggested that each Member State might set aside or should set aside a portion of its national R&D budget to collectively fund PMS capability projects. My question to you: Is there any discussion within NATO along similar lines? Do you expect this from ministers next week? Or is there any possibility of loosening up the common fund to produce direct support for SMART Defence initiatives... thank you. ...Beyond what we have today?

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