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Defence Ministers Meeting - June 2013: Keeping NATO 'Capable'



Defence Ministers
Ministres de la défense
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By Nigel Chamberlain, NATO Watch

Day 1: Minding the capabilities gap and countering cyber threats worldwide

Opening the [Defence Ministers Meeting](#) on 4 June, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said that they would “discuss how we can keep NATO capable – making sure we have the capabilities we need to deal with the challenges we face”. He added that this would be the first ministerial discussion dedicated to cyber defence.

During Day 1, representatives of all 50 members of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) coalition met the Afghan Defence Minister to discuss their post-2014 plans. NATO also responded to the Libyan Government's request for advice in the security field. The Secretary General said:

We have already moved fast to respond. Allies yesterday decided to send an expert-level delegation to engage on the details of the request. The delegation will identify the areas in which NATO could add value and we are intent on coordinating closely with other national and international efforts. I expect the team to report back by the end of June, so we can decide on the way ahead.

Rasmussen then took two questions from journalists. He was asked for a guarantee that there will be no troop deployment on the ground in Libya. He stressed that this is “not about deploying troops to Libya, if we are to engage in training activities such activities could take place outside Libya”. He was then asked if this Ministerial would provide more details on the number

of troops that will be included in the NATO post-2014 Afghan mission. Rasmussen thought not, but expected the adoption of ‘a concept of operations’ that will shape the future Resolute Support mission from 2015.

In his opening remarks at the meeting of the [North Atlantic Council](#) in Defence Ministers session, the Secretary General urged his colleagues to “fill the key capability gaps that exist today”. He called for planning on defence expenditure, greater cooperation and more burden-sharing in order to maximize NATO's ‘Smart Defence’ initiative.

He also encouraged them to identify what more needs to be done to address emerging cyber threats and to consider what the Alliance can do to help those nations that request assistance in protecting their national networks against cyber attack. He closed the meeting to the press saying the purpose of today's discussion was to ‘Keep NATO capable’.

During the day there were also bilateral meetings between NATO-Italy, NATO-US and NATO-UK, but no details of these meetings were made available (although there are a few photographs on the NATO website - see below).

Centre left to right: Mario Mauro (Minister of Defence, Italy) in bilateral discussion with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen - photo credit: NATO



Opening his end-of-day [press conference](#), Rasmussen told journalists that “today we have agreed how we can move forward in cyber-defence as an Alliance” and, following a detailed report commissioned today, felt appropriate systems should be fully operational by the autumn. He said the

capabilities gap was addressed as “we must hold the line on defence spending”:

Defence budgets are falling, and the cost of modern capabilities is rising. There is an imbalance between what we have and what we need, with significant shortfalls in some areas, such as air-to-air refuelling and intelligence surveillance and reconnaissance. And there is an imbalance between the burden carried by individual Allies. And European countries must do more to relieve the unequal burden which is currently being carried by the United States.

Finally, the Secretary General said that Ministers welcomed the decision to send a delegation of experts to Libya to see how NATO could best advise the government on how to provide security. He added that: “We look forward to carefully consider the evaluation report of the delegation in the coming weeks”.

Edited highlights from the Q and A session:

Q1. Ben Farmer, The Telegraph: Why was an agreement not reached to allow cyber protection to Allies from the rapid reaction team in this meeting and what were the arguments against allowing that rapid reaction force to be shared around the Allies?

A1. Secretary General: We adopted the progress report today in which we agreed to establish rapid reaction teams that can help protect NATO's own systems. We will look into how the Alliance can respond to requests from Allies that come under cyber attack in the next phase, possibly using NATO's rapid reaction teams.

Q2: Kai Niklasch, German Television: The German Defence Minister de Maizière announced again that Germany has to bury the drone programme that is called Euro Hawk. Which impact, influence, does it have on the NATO program on the AGS?

A2. Secretary General: As I understand it, de Maizière has also declared that Germany stays committed to the AGS project. We intend to purchase what is called the Global Hawk, which is a different system, it's tested and tried and they're already flying.

Q3: Teri Schultz with NPR and CBS: What is your thinking on proposals that may be made by the United States to put what they're calling a bridging force in Afghanistan briefly after 2014 to transition into the post-combat operations era?

A3. Secretary General: Tomorrow I would expect Ministers to adopt what we call the concept of operations, which will create the framework for further planning of NATO's training mission 'Resolute Support'. In parallel, individual nations

may plan their own bilateral arrangements with the Afghan government.

Q4: Adrian Croft, Reuters: The French Foreign Minister is saying that France is now certain that the nerve gas sarin has been used in Syria on several occasions. In view of your past comments that you would expect an immediate reaction from the international community if chemical weapons' use was proven, what reaction can we now expect from NATO or the rest of the international community?

A4. Secretary General: There is not, so far, much clarity about detailed circumstances. But obviously we strongly condemn any use of chemical weapons.

Q5. Japanese Media Magazine: I presume cooperation on cyber defence with the information technology industry would be indispensable. Would you like to explain what kind of cooperation would it be possible with the IT industries as far as the cyber defence concerns? What kind of cooperation do you have in your mind with the EU in order to avoid duplication?



A5. Secretary General: Cyber security is part of the on-going dialogue between NATO and the European Union. Cooperation with private business is important. Cyber security is first and foremost a national responsibility. It is a responsibility for each individual nation to do her utmost to protect information and communication systems. And in that respect cooperation between governments and the private sector is crucial.

Q6. Georgian Broadcasting Company: What can you say about Georgia's role in the new phase of the ISAF mission? What can you say about Dimitri Medvedev comments that Russia has to react to the membership of its neighbours into NATO and that enlargement changes the distribution of power?

A6. Secretary General: Georgia has already announced that it intends to contribute to the Resolute Support mission after 2014 and this is the reason why Georgia is already now included in decision-making processes when it comes to the planning of that future mission. Now, let me stress that it is not for third countries to interfere with NATO decisions on future memberships, enlargement, open door policy.

Q7. Albanian Agon Channel: Can you comment on the situation in Albania and the conflict over the NATO report into the country's military command structure?

A7. Secretary General: We are confident that Albania will live up to all her obligations within NATO.

Q8: Jamey Keaten, Associated Press: Are there the equivalent of Patriot missiles that could be deployed in cyber space? What kinds of responses are possible in case of an attack?

A8. Secretary General: I can't go into details on that. What we have discussed today is at a political strategic level, how the Alliance as such can respond to possible requests from individual Allies if they come under attack. We didn't discuss technical details about how exactly to react if an Ally is subject to a cyber attack.

Day 2: Georgia joining NATO and Afghanistan transition

In his opening remarks at the meeting of the [NATO-Georgia Commission](#), the Secretary General thanked Georgia for its active support for ISAF operations in Afghanistan and noted that Georgia currently leads defence sector reforms. He said that NATO follows, with great interest, the developments and challenges facing Georgia within its borders and reiterated NATO's continued support for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia within its internationally recognized borders.

Rasmussen said that a stable and democratic Georgia "has a place in the Euro-Atlantic community. And I look forward to a future in which Georgia will be part of the Alliance. Georgia will become a NATO member provided it meets the criteria for membership".

In his opening remarks at the meeting of [NATO Defence Ministers with non-NATO ISAF Contributing Nations](#) (see photo), the Secretary General said that in a few weeks time Afghan Security Forces would be taking lead responsibility for security across the country. He hoped that Ministers would endorse the post-2014 Concept of Operations and initiate more detailed work on the Operations Plan.

In his [closing press conference](#), the Secretary General said there had been "a productive discussion on our mission in Afghanistan" and that the next step was taken by endorsing the detailed concept of the non-combat mission in Afghanistan referred to as 'Resolute Support'.



It will be based on a limited regional approach based on five locations in Kabul and in the North, West, South and East. And it will focus on the national institutions, such as the security ministries, and the corps levels of army and police command.

He said that Georgia is a committed partner to NATO and a country which aspires to join the Alliance. Ministers expressed their appreciation for all Georgia has done to support its common goals.

Edited highlights of the Q & A session with journalists:

Q1. Imedi TV, Georgia: What is your position on Russia's new demarcation and building in Georgia's conflict region?

A1. Secretary General: Building such fences is a violation of international law, and of the 2008 agreement. Building fences impedes freedom of movement. It can further inflame tensions. It is simply not acceptable. And we urge Russia to live up to her international obligations.

Q2. Koba Likikadze, Radio Free Europe, Radio Liberty, Georgian Service: Can you comment on the prosecution of political rebels, political opponents in Georgia?

A2. Secretary General: We are following these developments with great concern. In today's meeting with the Georgian Minister of Defence, I made clear, and Ministers made clear, that we take it for granted that the Georgian authorities will fully respect the fundamental principles of rule of law and will guarantee due process.

Q3. TOLO TV, Afghanistan: The people of Afghanistan are worried about their security when the Afghan Forces are in control and about governance, rule of law and accountability.

A3. Secretary General: Let me assure you that Afghanistan will not stand alone. We will still be there to train, advise, assist the Afghan Security Forces. I feel confident that by the end of 2014 the Afghan Security Forces will be able to take full responsibility for security and provide a secure environment that is essential for further economic and social development in Afghanistan. To build trust we need a reinforced fight against corruption, against drugs production and drugs trade. We need to see human rights, including, of course, women's rights, full respected. All these elements are essential if we are to enjoy long-term peace and stability in Afghanistan.

Q4. Kabul News TV, Afghanistan: If Afghanistan and the US could reach a bilateral security agreement, will it affect the NATO new mission in Afghanistan after 2014?

A4. Secretary General: Yes, it's essential that the US and Afghanistan reach a bilateral security agreement. That will be followed by an agreement between the Afghan government and NATO on a status of forces agreement. That will provide the legal framework for our presence in Afghanistan. Without such a security agreement we can't deploy troops and trainers to Afghanistan.

Q5. Dieter Eberling, DPA, the German Press Agency: I understand that CONOP will be a much smaller mission and it will be a training mission. Who is going to protect them? The Afghan Security Forces? A joint protection force? Will everybody have to take care of his or her own protection?

A5. Secretary General: Obviously, we will ensure that our trainers are well protected so that they can conduct their activities in a secure environment. It will be an integrated part of the Resolute Support mission, in collaboration with the Afghan Security Forces.

Q6. Dutch Television: Are you confident that you will have enough contributions of other countries to build the new mission? And will a contribution from the Netherlands be appreciated?

A6. Secretary General: Yes, to both questions. I would appreciate concrete contributions from all Allies and partners who want to contribute to the Resolute Support training mission and I feel confident that they will be sufficient to ensure that it will be fully manned.

A subsequent press conference by the US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel (as covered in some agency reports) revealed more of the Ministerial discussions. [Associated Press reported](#) that Germany and Italy will join the United States as 'lead nations' in regions of Afghanistan post-2014. The US Defense Secretary didn't indicate how many troops will remain in Afghanistan but he did say that "the United States has committed to being the largest single contributor to this mission" and that Turkey was "favourably considering" a role as "framework nation" in Kabul.

It has been suggested that a residual force of 8,000 to 12,000 may not be large enough to support the Afghan Security Forces after the transition while key figures in the United States have urged the White House to adopt and announce its post-2014 plans as soon as possible. In light of this pressure, Hagel reiterated that: "We intend to be there for the long haul, and I made that commitment very clear today — as well as financial assistance".

[Reuters reported](#) that ISAF Commander General Dunford as saying that specific troop numbers were not discussed, but: "Now, over the next several months, and we believe in early fall, we will come back with a detailed operational plan that will talk about the specific resources required to execute the plan". One NATO official apparently acknowledged there was some impatience among allies to hear what Washington will contribute before they decide on their own individual contributions.

[Voice of America reported](#) that Brussels was the Defense Secretary's last stop in a round-the-world trip aimed at reassuring partners, boosting cyber security, and charting a way forward in Afghanistan. Hagel said:

I assured my fellow ministers that the United States is not considering any reductions that will affect NATO's ability to fulfill its core tasks of collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. Our commitment to NATO remains iron clad.

Not formally on the table in Brussels, but clearly of great concern, are developments in Syria. Hagel said "we didn't get into any additional war plans regarding Syria".

The full transcript of Defense Secretary Hagel's statement and the following Q & A session with journalists was published by the [US Department of Defense](#).

Finally, Day 2 ended with one further bilateral meeting: between NATO and Tonga (see photo). Again, there are no details as to what was discussed.

Left to right: Lord Tu'iavakano (Minister of Defence, Tonga) shaking hands with Ambassador Alexander Vershbow (NATO Deputy Secretary General) - photo credit: NATO

