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NATO Meeting Heralds More Troops for Afghanistan

Day two of NATO's Defense Ministers' meeting in Bratislava, Slovakia, continued on October 23, with NATO Secretary General Anders Rasmussen, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates, and ISAF commander U.S. General Stanley McChrystal all urging stronger support for the war in Afghanistan.

During his address to the ministerial meeting on the previous day, entitled "[New Challenges — Better Capabilities](#)," Rasmussen described Afghanistan as "the most complex challenge which NATO has ever undertaken."



Leading off the morning session, Rasmussen set the day's agenda by proposing that those assembled in Bratislava work towards reaching a "shared view on three key questions":

First: Do we believe that the approach set out by General McChrystal in his assessment is generally the right one? Second: Do we believe that we need to accelerate the process of transition to Afghan lead? And third: How do we best pursue our priorities?

During a press conference following the October 23 mid-day meeting, Rasmussen explained NATO's plan for "progressively handing over lead security responsibility to the Afghan Army and Afghan Police." As he explained:

We have not agreed to start handing over the lead. The conditions are not yet right. The Afghan Security Forces are not yet strong enough. And I must also stress that transition, when it happens, *doesn't mean NATO forces leave*. It means they go into a supporting role.

But transition will happen, district by district, when conditions are right. And it should. We cannot and should not be in the lead in Afghanistan forever. No one wants that. But what we've agreed today allows the military to scope out what needs to be done to get us closer to the point where transition can begin.

But this won't happen just because of a good plan. It will also need resources — *people and money*. [Emphasis added.]

From what Rasmussen said, therefore, NATO has not even begun to hand over lead military responsibility to the Afghans, pending the expenditure of more people and more money, and even after that transition happens, NATO forces have no plans to leave Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. As to when NATO troops will come home (if ever), Rasmussen answers: "Our mission will end when the Afghans are able to take responsibility of their own country."

During the question-and-answer portion of the [press conference](#), several journalists asked about General McChrystal's report, in which he has asked for as many as 40,000 additional troops.

Lorne Cook from AFP asked: "Can you tell me in terms of the McChrystal report how many nations were



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fully or substantially behind the report and its recommendations? And specifically on the recommendations from General McChrystal and from General Formica, on building the forces up to the 400,000 figure you're going to need a lot of trainers. Is there support for that idea?"

Rasmussen replied: "We didn't discuss exact figures today. Of course, we have taken note of the recommendations from General McChrystal, also as far as resources are concerned, but the purpose of today's meeting was not to make any decision on figures. So we have not discussed the exact figures. What we did today was to discuss McChrystal's overall assessment, his overall approach and I have noted a broad support for all Ministers of this overall counterinsurgency approach."

Nick Giles from the BBC asked: "I'm struggling a little bit with your terminology in terms of the consensus, or otherwise, around the table. You talk about broad support for General McChrystal's overall strategy, and a general shared view.... Could you just give me a little bit more detail on what that actually means in terms of support?"

Rasmussen replied: "I always try to explain myself in very clear and exact language and what I have said actually reflects the facts from the meeting that there is the support of this counterinsurgency strategy, which means that Ministers agreeing that [it does not solve the problems in Afghanistan just to hunt down and kill individual terrorists. What we need is a much broader strategy which stabilizes the whole Afghan society.] And this is the essence in the recommendations presented by General McChrystal, that we should reinforce the interaction between our military efforts and civil reconstruction and development." (Emphasis added.)

By his answer, Rasmussen indicated that the consensus of opinion at NATO supports the strategy advocated not only by McChrystal, but also by Secretary of State Clinton and special Afghan and Pakistan envoy Richard Holbrooke. Vice President Joe Biden, in contrast, has been reluctant to support sending more troops, favoring a strategy that directly targets al-Qaeda fighters who are believed to be hiding in Pakistan.

CNN and the *New York Times* reported that McChrystal arrived in Bratislava on October 23 and was to address NATO defense ministers about his views for the war's strategy. Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates arrived in the Slovakian capital for the meeting, but declined to give specific commentary about his views. "For this meeting, I am here mainly in listening mode," Gates told reporters. He did acknowledge, though, that "many allies spoke positively about General McChrystal's assessment."

Both Gates and McChrystal are members of the internationalist Council on Foreign Relations, whose members within the U.S. government have long advocated an interventionist U.S. foreign policy.

The *Times* quoted Gates as saying that the Obama administration's decision on Afghanistan was still two or three weeks away, and he cautioned that it was "vastly premature" to presume at this time that the President would deploy more troops. "As has been said in Washington, I think the analytical phase is coming to an end and probably over the next two or three weeks we're going to be considering specific options and teeing them up for decision by the president," CNN quoted Gates following the morning NATO session.

The two days of discussion in Bratislava bring home the realization that NATO has morphed itself considerably since it was founded in 1949 for the ostensible purpose of helping to defend Western Europe against possible invasion by the Soviet Union. Less well known is that NATO was established as a "Chapter VIII regional arrangement" of the UN. Article V of the North Atlantic Treaty was, by definition, a prime example of an "entangling alliance" that our Founders warned against: "The Parties



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agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.”

If our nation had continued to follow the advice set down by Thomas Jefferson: "Peace, commerce, and honest friendship with all nations — entangling alliances with none," it is unlikely that our government would now be debating whether to send more troops to Afghanistan. That is because our troops would all be stationed within U.S. territory, ready to defend the states of the union against foreign invasion, as our Constitution mandates.

McChrystal photo: AP Images



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