

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY / MIDDLE EAST UPDATE
March 14 - 20, 2013

1. [Obama: U.S. Commitment to Israel is 'Solemn Obligation'](#) (03-20-2013)
2. [Obama Challenges Iran to Resolve Nuclear Standoff Diplomatically](#) (03-20-2013)
3. [Stavridis Shares NATO Perspective on Afghanistan, Syria](#) (03-19-2013)
4. [State's Richard at Senate Hearing on Syrian Humanitarian Crisis](#) (03-19-2013)
5. [Gulf Remains Critical to U.S. Interests, Dempsey Says](#) (03-18-2013)
6. [NATO Secretary General Discusses Progress in Afghanistan](#) (03-18-2013)
7. [Europe Remains Strategically Vital to U.S., Admiral Says](#) (03-18-2013)
8. [Hagel: U.S. Bolstering Missile Defense](#) (03-15-2013)

1. [Obama: U.S. Commitment to Israel is 'Solemn Obligation'](#) (03-20-2013)

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 20, 2013 – President Barack Obama today pledged in Jerusalem that the United States stands by its commitment to Israel's security, noting the alliance between the two countries "has never been stronger."

During a joint press conference with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at his side, Obama said he's "made it clear America's commitment to the security of the State of Israel is a solemn obligation, and the security of Israel is non-negotiable."

Today, the American and Israeli militaries and their intelligence establishments "cooperate more closely than ever before," Obama said.

The U.S. and Israeli militaries also "conduct more joint exercises and training than ever before," the president added.

Additionally, the United States is "providing more security assistance and advanced technology to Israel than ever before," Obama said.

The U.S. military is providing support for Israeli missile defenses like the Iron Dome, Obama said. Earlier today, the president said, he'd visited the Iron Dome system, "which has saved so many Israeli lives."

The Iron Dome, a short-range rocket and mortar defense system which was developed by the Israelis and funded in large part by the United States, prevented war following hundreds of Palestinian rocket attacks on Israel from the Gaza Strip in March 2012.

America's support for Israel's security is "unprecedented," Obama said, noting "the alliance between our nations has never been stronger."

During meetings he'd had earlier in the day with Netanyahu and other senior Israeli government officials, Obama said he'd agreed to begin discussions on extending U.S. military assistance to Israel.

"Our current agreement lasts through 2017," Obama said, "and we've directed our teams to start working on extending it for the years beyond."

Obama also announced the U.S. will take steps to ensure that there's no interruption of funding for the Iron Dome system.

"As a result of decisions that I made last year, Israel will receive approximately \$200 million this fiscal year and we will continue to work with Congress on future funding of Iron Dome," the president said. "These are further reminders that we will help to preserve Israel's qualitative military edge so that Israel can defend itself, by itself, against any threat."

And, the United States "continues to work with allies and friends and the Syrian opposition to hasten the end" of the rule of Syrian President Bashar Assad, Obama said.

"We also share Israel's grave concern about the transfer of chemical or other weapon systems to terrorists -- such as Hezbollah -- that might be used against Israel," Obama said. "The Assad regime must understand that they will be held accountable for the use of chemical weapons or their transfer to terrorists."

Obama said he and senior Israeli officials also discussed the topic of Iran.

"We agree that a nuclear-armed Iran would be a threat to the region, a threat to the world, and potentially an existential threat to Israel," Obama said. "And we agree on our goal. We do not have a policy of containment when it comes to a nuclear Iran. Our policy is to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

"We prefer to resolve this diplomatically, and there's still time to do so," the president continued. "Iran's leaders must understand, however, that they have to meet their international obligations. And, meanwhile, the international community will continue to increase the pressure on the Iranian government."

Meanwhile, "the United States will continue to consult closely with Israel on next steps," Obama said. "And I will repeat: All options are on the table. We will do what is necessary to prevent Iran from getting the world's worst weapons."

Meeting today's challenges in the Middle East won't be easy, Obama observed to Netanyahu, noting that "it will demand the same courage and resolve as those who have preceded us."

Obama also observed that Netanyahu and his family, like other families across Israel, have “served and sacrificed to defend your country and to pass it, safe and strong, to your children just as it was passed on to you.

“Standing here today,” the president added, “I can say with confidence that Israel’s security is guaranteed because it has a great deal on its side, including the unwavering support of the United States of America.”

Besides Israel, Obama will also visit the West Bank and Jordan on the first foreign trip of his second term of office.

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[Iron Dome System Demonstrates U.S.-Israeli Partnership](#)

2. Obama Challenges Iran to Resolve Nuclear Standoff Diplomatically (03-20-2013)

Washington — President Obama said the United States seeks to prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon, and he urged Iran’s leaders to resolve their dispute with the international community through diplomatic means.

Speaking with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in Jerusalem March 20, Obama said there is still time to resolve the standoff peacefully, but “the question is, will Iranian leadership seize that opportunity? Will they walk through that door?”

The most permanent solution “is ultimately going to be their decision that it is not worth it for them to pursue nuclear weapons,” he said. “If we can get that, that’s good for everybody, including Iran, because it would allow them to break out of the isolation that has hampered their society and their economic development for many years.”

The president said the United States and Israel agree that a nuclear-armed Iran would be “a threat to the region, a threat to the world and potentially an existential threat to Israel.”

He said the United States is committed to Israel’s security, which he said is “non-negotiable” and “a solemn obligation.”

The president said the United States and Israel are beginning discussions to extend U.S. military assistance beyond 2017, as well as to continue funding Israel’s anti-missile Iron Dome system.

“These are further reminders that we will help to preserve Israel’s qualitative military edge so that Israel can defend itself by itself against any threat,” he said.

He said a two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict would allow Israelis to feel a greater sense of security, break out of their current isolation in the region and allow Palestinians to “feel a sense that they too are masters of their own fate.”

Obama said he had come to the region to listen to Israeli and Palestinian leaders to get a sense of how they see a peace process moving forward.

In his remarks with Israeli President Shimon Peres, Obama said despite the difficult realities of their lives, the dreams of Israeli children are much the same as those of children all over the world.

“They want to be safe. They want to be free from rockets that hit their homes or their schools. They want a world where science and technology is created to build and not destroy. They want to live in peace, free from terror and threats that are so often directed at the Israeli people. That’s the future that they deserve,” he said.

Upon his arrival in Israel, Obama said it is “no accident” that Israel is the first stop on his first foreign trip since being re-elected.

“Across this region, the winds of change bring both promise and peril. So I see this visit as an opportunity to reaffirm the unbreakable bonds between our nations, to restate America’s unwavering commitment to Israel’s security, and to speak directly to the people of Israel and to your neighbors,” he said.

3. Stavridis Shares NATO Perspective on Afghanistan, Syria (03-19-2013)

By Army Sgt. 1st Class Tyrone C. Marshall Jr.
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 19, 2013 – Afghan security forces are on track to assume complete control of security in the country, and NATO is monitoring the situation in Syria, the top U.S. commander in Europe said here today.

“They currently have 87 percent of the population under their remit, and that will go up to 100 percent this year,” said Navy Adm. James G. Stavridis, who also serves as NATO’s supreme allied commander for Europe.

Stavridis told the Senate Armed Services Committee he is “very focused” on Afghanistan, which he called “a key operational mission for NATO at the moment.”

The admiral said he believes the president's decision to draw down 34,000 U.S. troops from Afghanistan by February 2014 “looks militarily supportable.” Additionally, he said, NATO intends to negotiate a status of forces agreement with Afghanistan for NATO forces to participate in a post-2014 mission -- independent of the U.S. negotiation for a similar agreement.

“It's going to be sequential,” he told the senators. “We're going to conclude the U.S. bilateral security agreement, ... and then we will move forward with the NATO one after that, using the U.S. one as a basis.”

Stavridis also discussed NATO’s position on the current situation in Syria.

“As we all know, the Syrian situation continues to become worse and worse and worse -- 70,000 killed, a million refugees pushed out of the country, probably 2.5 million internally displaced,” he

said. “No end in sight to a vicious civil war. The alliance has taken a position that it will follow the same sequence that was used in Libya.”

Prior to NATO involvement, he explained, there would have to be a U.N. Security Council resolution, a regional agreement, and agreement among the alliance’s 28 nations.

“So within NATO channels, what we are focused on is defending that border with Syria,” Stavridis added. “We’ve moved Patriot missiles down there to do that. We are looking at a wide range of operations, and we are prepared if called upon to be engaged as we were in Libya.”

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[4. State’s Richard at Senate Hearing on Syrian Humanitarian Crisis \(03-19-2013\)](#)

Testimony by Anne C. Richard, Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration, Committee on Foreign Relations Subcommittee on Near Eastern and South and Central Asian Affairs, United States Senate, Washington, DC

The Syrian Humanitarian Crisis

Introduction

Good afternoon, Chairman Casey, Ranking Member Risch, and Members of this committee. Thank you for hosting this hearing today on the humanitarian crisis inside Syria. I am pleased to be able to appear before the Committee with my colleague, USAID Assistant Administrator Nancy Lindborg. Our offices work closely together to provide critical humanitarian aid to those affected by the violence in Syria.

The two year anniversary of the Syria uprising coincides with another dark milestone: over one million refugees have now fled across Syria's borders into neighboring countries. More troubling news is that half of that number arrived in the last two months. The United Nations (UN) estimates that over 2.5 million people are displaced inside Syria and many more have been affected by the upheaval and fighting.

I would like to share with you the approach my bureau in the State Department is taking to address the crisis and how our efforts and USAID's work are complementary and mutually reinforcing... I shall first briefly comment on how the refugee crisis is affecting the neighboring countries, discuss the challenges we face in delivering humanitarian assistance to those in need throughout the region, and provide some specifics on the priorities of the Bureau for Population, Refugees, and Migration (PRM) and our diplomatic outreach to other countries.

Refugees in Neighboring Countries

Countries bordering Syria are approaching a dangerous saturation point with refugees. According to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, in January of this year, 2,000 people fled

Syria every day. In February, the number climbed to 5,000 a day; and in March, we've seen 8,000 people a day crossing from Syria into Jordan, Lebanon, Iraq and Turkey. In addition to serving as evidence that life inside Syria has become extremely dangerous for many, the number and the rate are overwhelming the capacity of humanitarian aid organizations to meet the needs of these victims and are sorely testing the limits of host countries' abilities to provide safe shelter. If international borders are closed to Syrians seeking refuge, the awful tally of human destruction will only increase.

Jordan: There are approximately 350,000 refugees in Jordan according to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Approximately 70 percent of refugees in Jordan live outside of the refugee camps in cities and towns. Many have been taken in or helped by relatives, friends or even strangers. Only 30 percent live in the Za'atri refugee camp in northern Jordan. The Government of Jordan set up Za'atri in response to the large numbers of refugees crossing the border, and it has moved to set up another camp, as yet uninhabited, and initiated plans for another. Za'atri camp has been plagued by security problems and we have been in active conversations with the UNHCR and the Government of Jordan to improve the safety of refugees there as well as humanitarian workers.

Jordan is allowing refugees to cross its borders but is finding that its resources are stretched to help massive flows of refugees while providing services to its own citizens at the same time. We should note that we are concerned by reports that some Palestinian and Iraqi refugees have been turned around at the border and we have asked the Government of Jordan to let them cross. We've thanked the Government of Jordan for its ongoing assistance to the refugee population, and asked them to keep their borders open to all refugees. Knowing the significant economic cost associated with hosting hundreds of thousands of refugees, the U.S. government is providing Jordan with budget support.

Lebanon: Lebanon is hosting over 354,000 Syrian refugees. Lebanon has also taken in 32,000 Palestinian refugees who have fled the violence in Syria. Syrian refugees in Lebanon live in host communities and are not in camps, which allows for greater freedom of movement, greater possibilities for self-sufficiency and a semblance of a normal life. At the same time, the presence of so many refugees in a country of 4 million people taxes Lebanon's infrastructure and resources and has increased tensions within the refugee-hosting communities. Hizballah's presence in southern Lebanon creates a challenge for UN agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGO) in providing aid, while its involvement in the Government of Lebanon complicates U.S. efforts to provide help during this crisis. Despite these strains, the Government of Lebanon continues to keep its borders open, though its leaders have warned that Lebanon has reached its saturation point and requires significant international assistance in order to support the refugees.

Iraq: Over 110,000 Syrian refugees have fled to Iraq, and most are now in Kurdistan. Domiz camp in Kurdistan accommodates approximately 54,000 persons, and two camps in Anbar province at Al-Qaim accommodate over 7,500 persons. In addition to those living in camps, there are many who live in villages and communities. In Kurdistan, Syrians are permitted to live and work in the community once they have registered.

Since October 21, 2012, the Government of Iraq has kept the Al-Qaim border crossing with Syria closed, except for medical emergencies and some family reunification cases. Local authorities and the Iraqi Ministry of Migration and Displacement state that the border is closed for security reasons. Syrian refugees in Anbar prior to the closure of the border are restricted to the camps, although some have family members nearby. The main reasons for return to Syria continue to be lack of freedom of movement out of the camp and lack of a way to earn a living. UNHCR continues to

provide support to those expressing interest in returning to Syria but is not encouraging repatriation because conditions are not conducive to a safe return.

Turkey: Since the beginning of the crisis, the Government of Turkey has supported most of the humanitarian needs of the refugees from Syria who have crossed its border. In addition to 186,200 refugees registered in 17 camps set up by the government and 71,000 registered (or soon to be registered) outside of camps, the Government of Turkey estimates that an additional 100,000 unregistered refugees live in urban areas. While the government has previously focused its support for Syrian refugees on the camp-based populations, it is now beginning to address the needs of the out-of-camp Syrians by setting up centers where urban refugees can register for IDs and free health services. Turkey has a strong economy but is experiencing a decline in its once vibrant cross-border trade with Syria.

Challenges in Crisis Response

The challenges before us are many. USAID Nancy Lindborg's testimony discusses access, security and funding issues. Therefore, I will focus on: (1) the need to work with host governments to ensure that they keep their borders open to refugees and have what they need to help the refugees; (2) specific contributions made by the PRM bureau; and (3) ensuring that other countries are contributing to humanitarian aspects of the crisis so that the UN and other humanitarian agencies have more of the support they need to respond.

Working with Host Governments

We recognize the huge strain that the influx of refugees is currently placing on countries that neighbor Syria. In both Jordan and Lebanon, government leaders are concerned about their capacity to absorb so many refugees. Iraq has expressed concerns that al-Qaeda and its Syria affiliate, al-Nusra Front, are sending fighters and weapons across the border. Turkey, for the most part, has maintained an open border policy for all refugees, although each day it limits the number of refugees allowed to cross at border crossings with high traffic. It is essential that neighboring countries continue to keep their borders open for those refugees fleeing violence in Syria. In every meeting with officials from these countries, we thank them for allowing refugees to cross and discuss ways to help them uphold humanitarian principles while safeguarding their own security so that they are protected from a spillover of violence.

It is important that short-term relief programs link to longer-term development aid as part of overall U.S. government aid to the region. This is particularly the case in Jordan and Lebanon. We must leverage other aid and investments and incorporate refugees into the fabric of these countries, in order to minimize the costs that hosting refugees places on communities. This is an important area in which the State Department and USAID are working together.

Department of State Response

The Department and USAID lead the U.S. government's humanitarian response and we work closely together in response to the crisis. Nancy Lindborg and I have traveled together to the region twice and were also recently joined by Ambassador Ford in Turkey, prior to our participation at the Kuwait Donors Conference in January. Our communications teams are taking advantage of maximizing every opportunity to get the message out to domestic and international audiences about the dimensions of the crisis and to highlight our government's leadership role in responding.

That said, allow me to outline the role the State Department has in helping to get as much humanitarian aid into Syria as possible through partners. Over several decades, PRM has developed

a privileged relationship with the humanitarian agencies of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross, and non-governmental organizations. These agencies are a key part of the international humanitarian system that is governed by humanitarian principles. They bring technical expertise and operational capacity to respond to this large-scale crisis. Of the nearly \$385 million in humanitarian assistance that USAID and the State Department are providing in response to the Syria crisis, the State Department's contributions total nearly \$185 million. Our contributions provide life-saving emergency assistance to meet basic humanitarian needs, such as shelter, water, sanitation, and health both inside Syria and in host countries.

The delivery of assistance is often undertaken at great personal risk to those distributing the aid. For example, in the past couple of months, two UNHCR convoys and one UN interagency convoy have delivered aid into north-west Syria, where thousands of internally displaced people are in acute need of humanitarian help. The operations were carried out in collaboration with the Syrian Arab Red Crescent and the local community. Once the convoys moved across battle-lines into areas controlled by the opposition, the missions were facilitated by the Syrian Opposition Coalition. Such operations are dangerous and difficult, which underscores the need for unhindered and safe access for those providing humanitarian assistance inside Syria. We will continue to encourage the UN to do more such cross-line assistance deliveries, counting on the Syrian Opposition Coalition to help coordinate and negotiate safe access. While these convoys are good, much more is needed to ensure supplies consistently and safely reach people in need.

Of course, people in need are not concentrated in one area and instead can be found on both sides of shifting battle-lines. Humanitarian organizations provide aid in a neutral and impartial manner. The United Nations is seeking to get access to all communities in need on a regular basis. It is unacceptable and a violation of humanitarian principles for the Syrian regime to deny this access.

I should also mention the plight of the 525,000 Palestinian refugees who were living in Syria prior to the start of the conflict. They, too, have been caught up in the violence in Syria. Fighting has engulfed many Palestinian refugee camps and neighborhoods, including in Yarmouk, causing over half of Syria's Palestinian population to be displaced. For the most part, the Palestinian population has kept away from taking sides in the conflict. Those refugees who remain in camps are the poorest and most vulnerable. Some Palestinians have fled Syria, but most remain inside the country, having heard that they will be turned away at the borders with neighboring countries. The U.S. is the largest bilateral donor to the UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), the UN agency responsible for assisting Palestinian refugees. There are also approximately 63,000 Iraqi refugees inside Syria. In recent months, many other Iraqis who were living as refugees in Syria have chosen to return to Iraq or flee for a second time to other countries.

Contributions of Other Countries

With no end in sight, we are facing a resource crisis. The UN's Regional Response Plan to assist up to 1.1 million Syrian refugees in the region has thus far received only 21 percent of the funds it needs to operate for the first half of 2013 and, as of mid-March, refugee arrivals have already nearly reached June 2013 planning figures. Despite our own budget constraints, the United States continues to make every effort to continue to provide funding to meet the increasing needs. However, it is vital that other donors quickly honor the pledges they have made and provide the cash that agencies need to keep life-saving operations going.

Even if the Asad regime falls soon, displacement and the need for humanitarian aid will continue. This is because of the widespread destruction of Syria's infrastructure and predicted flows of refugees that would continue to cross borders – likely in both directions. If refugees are not able to

return for years, host countries will need to continue to help host Syrian children in schools, and help families with medical facilities, and provide other public services.

Using diplomatic channels, we are using every opportunity to ask other donors to follow through on the pledges they made at the Kuwait Donors Conference in January in order to raise the promised \$1.5 billion. The Secretary and other Department principals have reached out to other governments to ask them to do more for the Syrian people, including Syrian refugees. Funding is urgently needed if UN agencies and others are able to continue to operate.

Coordination of the international humanitarian response is complex and must occur on multiple levels. The United States participates in meetings in Geneva of the Syria Humanitarian Forum that bring together senior officials from key donor governments, countries affected by the crisis and UN leaders to discuss the humanitarian aspects of the crisis, and to coordinate our collective response. We also actively participate in UN coordination meetings in the field. In addition, we are deepening our coordination with the Syrian Opposition Coalition's Assistance Coordination Unit. We have also encouraged UN agencies and other partners to do the same, and are pleased with the initial results.

In conclusion Mr. Chairman, I would like to say that my bureau's primary concerns are providing protection to and aiding those who have fled the violence. The State Department's overall goal, of course, is a return of peace and stability to Syria and to one day see the refugees return home.

I am grateful for the generosity of Congress and the American people who make our assistance possible, and for the excellent collaboration with the State Department's Near East and European bureaus, and USAID colleagues. Thank you once again for the opportunity to highlight PRM's role and some of our concerns regarding the Syrian humanitarian crisis.

5. Gulf Remains Critical to U.S. Interests, Dempsey Says (03-18-2013)

By Karen Parrish
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 18, 2013 – The U.S. commitment to security in the Persian Gulf remains firm, the nation's senior military officer said here today.

Speaking as part of a recurring Persian Gulf forum hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies, Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, discussed how budget pressures and a force drawdown will affect U.S. military engagement in the Gulf region.

Countries bordering the Persian Gulf include Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Bahrain, United Arab Emirates and Oman.

Dempsey noted he lived and worked in Iraq and Saudi Arabia for many years. "I came here today with a message of assurance -- a little peace of mind in the context of uncertainty," the general told the audience.

Nations and people share an interest in a common future, he said, "and that will always be the case, and always factor into the decisions we make about distribution of forces, partnering, engaging --

all the things we've done, really, for the past 25 or 30 years -- to make sure that the Middle East, in particular, is on a path for greater security and stability."

The U.S. presence in the Gulf since 1991 was originally because of Saddam Hussein's aggression, Dempsey said. "But we stayed there because, I think, we came to a realization that the future of the region was tied to our future ... through shared interests in a common future where people would be able to build a better life, and where threats could be managed collaboratively -- not by the United States uniquely, but by the relationships we would build," he added.

Dempsey said his view is that while the number of U.S. boots on the ground or airplanes in the sky varies over time, that's not a good measure of regional commitment. He said multinational training and military school exchanges, for example, offer U.S. and allied forces opportunities to build commitment and partnerships in the Gulf region.

Dempsey noted the 10-year anniversary of the start of the Iraq War serves as an occasion to reflect on U.S. actions there.

"I spent three years in Iraq. ... We're all aware that tomorrow is the 10-year anniversary, and the debate goes on about whether we should have, whether it was worth it -- and that debate will go on," he said.

Dempsey said his personal belief is the United States achieved two significant results in Iraq.

"First of all, there is no longer the strongman, the dictator, and the threat to the region ... that there was," he said, referring to the fall from power and subsequent execution of Saddam Hussein.

"Secondly, and I think importantly, we've given the Iraqi people an incredible opportunity," the chairman said. While he acknowledged the Iraq War included missteps and opportunities gained and lost, he noted that, in the end, the nation gained a partner and lost an adversary.

"It remains to be seen, still, about how strong a partner they are willing to and can become," he said. "But we have a partner."

Dempsey said he seeks to build relationships in the Gulf, as in other regions, that are not measured simply in terms of air wings or carrier battle groups. Where allied and partner nations are willing to build their capabilities, he said, the United States is eager to help. He noted a recent counter-mine exercise involving some 24 nations.

"That's the future," he said. "Not necessarily the United States of America sitting there with half of the United States Navy positioned in the Gulf, but rather ... a long-term strategy that's feasible given the resources available."

The United States has strong Gulf allies in countries such as the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, Dempsey said.

"We just have to figure out, 'How do we help you do more, so we can do less?'" he said. "But that doesn't mean less well."

From September 2001 to June 2003, Dempsey served in Saudi Arabia, training and advising the Saudi Arabian National Guard. In June 2003, he took command of the Army's 1st Armored Division in Baghdad, where he led the division for 14 months. In August 2005, he returned to Iraq

for two years to train and equip the Iraqi security forces. From August 2007 through October 2008, Dempsey served as the deputy commander and then acting commander of U.S. Central Command.

Biographies:

[Army Gen. Martin E. Dempsey](#)

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[Dempsey Vows He, Chiefs Will 'Lead Through' Sequester](#)

6. NATO Secretary General Discusses Progress in Afghanistan (03-18-2013)

By Jim Garamone

American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 18, 2013 – Though setbacks may happen, real progress is taking place in Afghanistan, NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen said in Brussels today.

In a news conference at NATO headquarters, Rasmussen discussed a recent trip to Afghanistan's Helmand province, once a Taliban stronghold, to visit International Security Assistance Force service members and meet with Afghan officials.

Rasmussen said he saw a significant shift from NATO control and operations to Afghan forces in charge of security.

"The Afghan army and police are in charge of three quarters of the province," he added. "They are already conducting nearly all the security operations. ISAF's role has already shifted to training, advising and assisting."

Rasmussen stressed that in places such as Helmand, Afghan forces "are doing the job."

Now, the challenge for NATO and partner nations shifts from doing the mission to sustaining the effort, he said. "That means providing the training they need in leadership," he told reporters. "That means specialized skills such as logistics, management and maintenance."

The ISAF mission ends at the end of 2014, and Rasmussen acknowledged that the mission will not be easy. "There will be hard fighting. There will be casualties, and there may be setbacks," he said. "But already Afghanistan's forces are stronger than they have been at any other moment in history. They will continue to grow stronger, more effective and more experienced. And we are determined to support them through 2014 and beyond."

Security is just one aspect of progress in the country, he noted. Local governments are taking hold in Helmand, the secretary general said, and elected district councils are investing funds in development.

"This is the Afghan people's chance to take control of their security and to take control of their destiny," he added. "I believe, and the Afghans with whom I spoke believe, that this is a chance which they must seize."

In the Afghan capital of Kabul, Rasmussen said, he met with young Afghans who are committed to a democratic and stable country.

“A new generation has emerged in Afghanistan,” he said. “This young generation wants a new way of life, not a return to the dark days of the past. The Afghan people have tasted freedom and seen what progress can bring. In the future, the enemies of Afghanistan must not only fight a strong Afghan army, they will also have to fight the aspirations of the Afghan people toward freedom, peace and prosperity.”

Biographies:

[Anders Fogh Rasmussen](#)

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[7. Europe Remains Strategically Vital to U.S., Admiral Says \(03-18-2013\)](#)

By Donna Miles

American Forces Press Service

Washington — The top U.S. commander in Europe emphasized the importance of NATO and the United States’ forward presence in Europe, while acknowledging that he continues to prod the allies to meet their financial defense commitments.

“Europe continues to matter greatly for the United States,” Navy Admiral James G. Stavridis, commander of U.S. European Command and supreme allied commander for Europe, told the House of Representatives’ Armed Services Committee on March 15.

U.S. military bases in Europe represent the “forward operating bases for 21st-century security,” not bastions of the Cold War, he told the committee.

The U.S. force in Europe has decreased about 80 percent from the height of the Cold War, he said, when the United States had 450,000 service members serving at some 1,200 bases. Today, Eucom consists of 64,000 joint forces, representing less than 5 percent of the U.S. military, spread across 21 major bases and smaller supporting sites.

Stavridis called the current force posture in Europe appropriate. Rotational forces to serve about two-month deployments there, he said, will help make up shortfalls due to troop reductions.

Noting the transformation in Europe over the past generation “from a security consumer to one of the most important security producers,” Stavridis cited the shared values and economic and security interdependence that make the region strategically important today.

Stavridis recognized, for example, the \$4 trillion trade route across the Atlantic Ocean. “That binding of our economic interests will continue to make Europe our most important trading partner, collectively,” he said.

And Europe’s location, he said, makes it vital in terms of U.S. support for operations in Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia.

“Geography matters,” Stavridis told the House panel. “Europe in that regard is critically important.”

At the heart of the U.S. relationship with Europe stands the NATO alliance — a historic bond that includes 28 nations, Stavridis said, that collectively possess 24,000 combat aircraft, 800 ocean-going ships and 50 airborne warning and control system aircraft.

NATO “is a powerful, capable alliance that has stood” with America in missions across the region and beyond, Stavridis said. Ninety percent of non-U.S. troops deployed in Afghanistan are from Europe, he said.

“So the alliance matters,” he said. “Nowhere else in the world will we find so many trained, capable soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines who will stand with us on missions from the Balkans to Libya to the Levant, to Afghanistan, and indeed around the world.”

“Europeans remain our most steadfast, reliable, battle-tested, and important global partners as we confront the strategic risks and military challenges of the 21st century,” Stavridis said in his written statement. “No other region so readily combines the same commitment to shared values, high-end military capabilities and capacity and willingness to stand with America — as our European allies and partners have demonstrated at great cost and sacrifice over the past decade — in this century’s fight for freedom and the pursuit of global security and stability.”

While praising NATO allies’ operational contributions, Stavridis conceded that many have fallen short in their military spending. Collectively, they spend about \$300 billion a year on defense -- about half what the United States spends, but more than China and Russia spend, combined, he said.

“But the bad news is, in my view, is that they are not meeting their own targeted 2 percent of gross national product,” Stavridis said. He called that commitment, which all members vow to spend under NATO rules, “a minimum in order to maintain the appropriate levels of interoperability with the United States.”

On one hand, “we want to have the full advantage of their spending and their integration with us,” Stavridis told lawmakers. “On the other hand, we need to encourage them to step up and to spend appropriately so we are in balance with them. We continue to do that.”

8. Hagel: U.S. Bolstering Missile Defense (03-15-2013)

By Amaani Lyle
American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 15, 2013 – The United States will add more ground-based ballistic missile interceptors to its arsenal to guard against increased threats from North Korea and Iran, Defense Secretary Chuck Hagel announced today.

North Korean and Iranian missile capabilities have increased and the United States must stay ahead of that threat, Hagel said. Both have developed longer range ballistic missiles, and North Korea has now conducted three nuclear tests, followed by stepped up threats against the United States and South Korea.

The Pentagon will deploy 14 more ground-based interceptors in locations at Fort Greely, Alaska, and Vandenberg Air Force Base, Calif, Hagel said, boosting the total number from 30 to 44. The added interceptors will provide a nearly 50 percent increase in U.S. missile defense capability, Hagel said.

“The United States has missile defense systems in place to protect us from limited ICBM attacks, but North Korea in particular has recently made advances in its capabilities and is engaged in a series of irresponsible and reckless provocations,” Hagel said.

Last month, North Korea conducted its third nuclear test. In December 2012, the North launched a satellite into orbit, demonstrating an intercontinental ballistic missile capability. In April 2012, Pyongyang also displayed what appeared to be a mobile intercontinental ballistic missile capability.

Hagel also said the United States will team with Japan to deploy an additional advanced radar there. The radar will provide improved early warning and tracking of any missile launched in North Korea at the United States or Japan.

Hagel said DOD is also conducting environmental impact studies for a potential additional interceptor site in the United States. Officials are looking for two sites on the East Coast and one on the West. While the administration has not made a decision on whether to proceed, conducting environmental impact studies will shorten the timeline of construction should a decision be made, he explained. Hagel also announced plans to restructure the SM3-2B program, a land-based standard missile, with plans to deploy it as part of the European phase-adapted approach. “The purpose was to add protection of the U.S. homeland already provided by our current GBIs ground based interceptors against missile threats in the Middle East,” Hagel said.

The secretary said shifting resources from the “lagging program” to fund the additional interceptors and kill vehicle technology that will improve performance of the GBI and other versions of the SM3 interceptor allows the U.S. to add protection against missiles from Iran and North Korea sooner.

Hagel reemphasized the United States’ “iron-clad” commitment to missile defense. “The missile deployments the United States is making in phases 1 through 3 of the European phase-adaptive approach, including sites in Poland and Romania, will still be able to provide coverage of all European NATO territory as planned by 2018,” he said.

The overall result will improve the U.S. ability to counter future missile threats from Iran and North Korea while being good stewards of taxpayers’ resources, Hagel said.

“The American people expect us to take every necessary step to protect our security at home and U.S. strategic interests abroad,” he said. “But they expect us to do so in the most efficient and effective manner possible.”

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