



News Release



Office of Public Affairs

U.S. Embassy

NATO Leaders Strengthen Commitment to Afghanistan

(Alliance leaders drop many restrictions on troops, call for regional Contact Group)

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Riga, Latvia -- NATO leaders have removed some of the restrictions, or "caveats," for troops deployed in Afghanistan and called for the establishment of a "Contact Group" to promote reconstruction in that nation.

NATO's 26 heads of state discussed the Afghanistan mission at length during a late-evening dinner meeting November 28 amid a two-day summit in Riga, the capital of Latvia. The NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) numbers 32,000 troops from 37 nations and supports elected Afghan President Hamid Karzai as his young government establishes control over the war-torn Central Asian country.

The world leaders left their dinner meeting with "a strong message of ... solidarity" about Afghanistan, said NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer of the Netherlands. "It is winnable; it is being won, but not yet won."

Alliance leaders also "clearly indicated" the need for a "comprehensive approach" to Afghanistan that includes political, military and economic aspects involving not only NATO but also the European Union, the United Nations, the Group of Eight and the World Bank, de Hoop Scheffer told reporters November 29 in Riga.

At least three nations have offered to send more troops, NATO officials said in Riga. France, for example, planned to send more helicopters and aircraft and agreed to allow French troops to operate more freely outside their base in Kabul, Afghanistan.

"We have made real progress on caveats," de Hoop Scheffer told reporters. Some restrictions on troops are continuing, but all 26 allies confirmed that, regardless of the remaining caveats, every ally will come to the assistance of other allied forces in an emergency situation.

"There is no negotiation of the definition of an emergency," de Hoop Scheffer told reporters. The decision to declare an emergency rests on "one man, and only one man -- the commander of ISAF." Currently, the commander of ISAF is British Army General David Richards.

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The reduction in "caveats" means that Richards can maneuver 26,000 of the 32,000 ISAF forces freely, de Hoop Scheffer said. Nations with troops in Afghanistan's southern and eastern provinces -- where much of the recent combat operations have taken place -- have voiced concern that troop restrictions undermine alliance solidarity as well as public support in their home countries.

Before the November 28 dinner meeting, U.S. Marine General James Jones, NATO's supreme allied commander, said he had worked behind the scenes in recent weeks persuading allies to reduce their caveats and to follow through on deploying the number of troops they have committed to the mission in Afghanistan. Jones said about 85 percent of the required troops had been deployed -- a high percentage for a typical NATO mission, but still a significant shortfall of 15 percent. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=November&x=20061129095625mvyelwarc0.4325678>).

During the dinner meeting, de Hoop Scheffer said he was able to convince allies to deploy more troops, reducing the shortfall from 15 percent to 10 percent.

NATO leaders also welcomed a proposal to create a "Contact Group" of donor nations and those with a regional interest to coordinate reconstruction and development efforts in Afghanistan. The Contact Group concept has been used for more than a decade in the Balkans. A group for Afghanistan was proposed independently by de Hoop Scheffer and French President Jacques Chirac. NATO allies tasked de Hoop Scheffer, in his capacity as secretary-general, to develop the concept.

An Afghanistan Contact Group "would bring together key stakeholders to discuss and agree on key strategic issues," NATO officials said.

In their joint declaration following the Riga Summit, NATO allies said they "pledge to ensure that ISAF has the forces, resources and flexibility needed to ensure the mission's continued success." Allies also agreed to increase their support for the training and development of the Afghan National Army. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=November&x=20061129115501mvyelwarc0.3759729>).

Allies said they also want closer coordination with the international community, "notably the U.N. and the World Bank," to promote civil reconstruction in Afghanistan. "NATO will play its full role," the allies said, "but cannot assume the entire burden."

For more information on U.S. policy, see The United States and NATO (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/nato.html) and Rebuilding Afghanistan (http://usinfo.state.gov/sa/rebuilding_afghanistan.html).