

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE WITH GENERAL KARL-HEINZ LATHER, CHIEF OF STAFF, SUPREME HEADQUARTERS ALLIED POWERS EUROPE (SHAPE) SUBJECT: THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF NATO TIME: 10:30 A.M. EDT DATE: FRIDAY, MAY 1, 2009

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LIEUTENANT JENNIFER CRAGG (Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs): Welcome to the Department of Defense's Bloggers Roundtable for Friday, May 1st, 2009. My name is Lieutenant Jennifer Cragg with the Office of the Secretary of Defense for Public Affairs, and I'll be moderating the call.

A note to everyone on the line just to clearly please restate your name and then the organization or blog you're with.

Today our guest is General Karl-Heinz Lather. He's the chief of staff for Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. He will be discussing -- excuse me -- NATO's continued relevance in the world, which is challenged by new and legacy security concerns.

So without further ado, I'm going to turn it over to you, sir, if you'd like to start with an opening statement. GEN. LATHER: Yeah. Thank you very much, first of all, for inviting me to join you on that conference. I'm from SHAPE here, from Europe, south of Brussels. And as you know, we are the headquarters which is commanding, controlling all the operations which NATO currently is doing.

Couple of remarks before you should just open fire on me is, could we have ever imagined -- and if I say "we," then I'm referring to our 12 original NATO members -- that in 2009, when we celebrate our 60th anniversary, the alliance would be conducting operations in Afghanistan, Iraq or off the coast of Africa, supported by 28 member nations now, alongside with many other partners?

I think very unlikely, but here we are.

One month ago, we formally celebrated our anniversary in Strasbourg and Kelh. We welcomed two new members, Croatia and Albania, and we welcomed France back into our integrated structures, where they have not been in for the past 30 years or so. In doing so, I think we reaffirmed our open-door policy to those who want to be members of the alliance. We continue to advance the democracy throughout Europe and to get another step forward to what the vision -- one of the visions of NATO is, which is a Europe whole and free.

Now, at the historic milestone, the alliance reached consensus on the next secretary general, which will be Mr. Rasmussen from Denmark. France confirmed, as I said, its content (sic) to fully reintegrate into our military

structure. We signalled a continued determination to stay the course in Afghanistan, even if all members don't see everything in the same way. But that's what an alliance is about. And we -- our political masters, they penned a declaration on alliance security, and we resolved to create a new strategic concept.

Maybe now would be a good time for NATO to adopt a political slogan from that country I speak from currently, which is, yes, we can do. And I think yes, we can. But it won't be easy, not even a little bit. The process with which we will engage all allies is a NATO debate about all aspects of NATO, and that will, I think, eventually lead to the founding of a new strategic consensus within the alliance, a consensus which then would correspond to the evolving security environment as we see as it and as it continues to evolve.

Coming to grips with the complex and dynamic security environment, (venerating ?) what I would like to call a transatlantic bargain and a common approach to security, and adapting ourselves institutionally and operationally, that is all not easy tasks, but as the slogan says, yes, we can do that. (Audio break) -- past and present signal is affirmative that we will do that.

What NATO does on the ground today, I think, is a visible demonstration to the world, to our peoples, of our willingness to act in the name of collective security for those peoples. NATO demonstrates its importance in today's environment, and we do that each and every day.

We do it on the ground and in the skies above Afghanistan. We do it on the streets of Kosovo or Bosnia-Herzegovina. We do it in training centers in Iraq. We do it undersea around the Mediterranean and the Gulf of Aden --(audio break) -- South Africa. There and elsewhere, more than 60,000 soldiers, airmen and sailors and Marines from more than 40 NATO and non-NATO partner nations are working side by side and confronting today's security challenges.

I think we are an alliance which is redefining itself, which is shaping -- helping and shaping the security environment, to safeguard the freedom of our citizens and increase security around the world.

And with that, I would leave it for you to, well, dwell on my considerations, or ask whatever question you want of me. And I try to be as honest as I can, to repeat and answer.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir, very much. Let me go and head it over to Andrew Lubin. Andrew, you're first, please.

Q Thank you. General, good afternoon to you, sir. This is Andrew Lubin from The Military Observer. Thank you for taking the time to speak with us today.

Sir, the question I have regards Afghanistan. Currently, we have the Marines arriving in Helmand province, who are going to be aggressively engaging on the opium front with the opium dealers and the opium growers. NATO in the past has been less than enthusiastic on this. Is there a split policy between NATO and the United States, or how would this -- how will this proceed?

GEN. LATHER: No, I think the -- this what we call the uplift of forces in southern Afghanistan, mainly -- mainly and predominantly by the influx of U.S. forces, is not only against opium. I mean, it's -- or the poppy growing, actually, and the opium and the narco- trafficking and processing. This is part

of it, but there is a clear Afghan lead in that effort and we are -- we, NATO, are in support of an Afghan lead operation.

So I think we have established a clear criteria from that. We have given orders from SHAPE, the SACEUR has done so, to the COM-ISAF (ph) last February, and we are now based on that -- on that guidance. The forces who now flow into southern Afghanistan help at the same time establishing a more secure environment for Afghanistan to develop, and they help to battle insurgents, Taliban, al Qaeda, so that you limit their freedom of movement by a greater presence of allied forces in the area.

I think that's the effect which then would support the conduct of the elections which are planned for August this year, presidential and governmental elections in Afghanistan. You know, it's a combination of all that. It's not only the -- as you said, the opium battle.

Q Okay, thank you very much.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Jeff, you're next.

Q Hi, General. This is Jeff Schogol with Stars and Stripes. Can you talk about the upcoming training mission in Georgia, whether it will be teaching the Georgians counterinsurgency or conventional warfare?

GEN. LATHER: With Georgia, NATO has a special relationship which is a little more than what we normally do in Partnership for Peace with other -- with other countries. So it's a bilateral -- sort of bilateral relationship. This is all based on a plan which is negotiated between Georgia and us, the alliance, and there is various trends. It's -- counterinsurgency is not yet a -- an agreed NATO doctrine. It's an agreed U.S. concept which -- well, may become a NATO-agreed doctrine.

Elements of that are applied in NATO already, and we are doing that in Afghanistan as we speak. So elements of that will be used for assisting the Georgian endeavors, the Georgian desires in making their forces compatible and interoperable with our NATO forces. And that's a process which has just started, or has been restarted after the crisis last year. It's at the very early stages. As we speak, we are conducting an exercise, a Partnership for Peace exercise -- not only with Georgia, but it's happening in Georgia. And there is, I think, 18 nations or so -- about 10 NATO nations, and the rest is Partnership for Peace nations participating in that.

Q Well, if I could follow up, the question I was driving at was, is NATO now going to train the Georgians how to defend themselves against a Russian invasion?

GEN. LATHER: No, we are -- we are certainly not doing that. We -- as I said, we are assisting them in building their force. On top of what NATO is doing, our military cooperation division at SHAPE is doing that. We are -- we are engaged with our nations who individually support that as well. It's a coordinated planning effort, but the intent is certainly not that we as NATO collectively see -- see a danger or a threat that Russia could invade Georgia.

Q Uh-huh. Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Jim, please go ahead. Q Good evening, General. Jim Dolbow, with the Naval Institute Blog. Will you give an update on some of NATO's humanitarian missions?

GEN. LATHER: Humanitarian missions, currently we are supporting the endeavors of the African Union. There we are only with a liaison office active in Addis Ababa in Ethiopia, offering assistance. Mostly, it's a transportation effort when the African Union rotates their forces towards Somalia.

Then every operation -- every other operation which we do, of course, has an element of humanitarian assistance, but the primary role currently, the primary missions we have, are not typical humanitarian assistance missions.

Q Okay. Thank you, General.

LT. CRAGG: David?

Q Hi. This is David Axe with "warisboring." Can you hear me okay?

GEN. LATHER: David, I hear you, yeah.

Q Great. Thank you for taking the time to speak to us. Sir, I have a question about the NATO force that is assigned to the counter-piracy mission in -- off of Somalia. Can you talk about how NATO is coordinating its counter-piracy efforts with all the various -- the other entities in the region -- the EU force, the U.S.-led CTF- 151, and the various independent national forces? How are we tying together the NATO force with all of those other forces in the region?

GEN. LATHER: We do that -- we do that above all on the political level, where there is a sort of coordinating board. There is an international website which is accessible for those forces active in the area. Then we have -- and there we are lucky -- we have with the European Union headquarters which are in England, in southern England in Northwood, the NATO headquarters. The NATO Maritime Command and the EU Operations headquarters for the Operation Atalanta are almost co-located. They are in the same barracks. So there is -- there is coordination -- (audio break) -- tactical level, and then the commanders of the different flotillas -- Operation Atalanta, in our case Operation Allied Provider, the CTFs you mentioned, but Saudi ships as well -- they coordinate as they -- as they pass in the area. And they operate a common website.

Q Great. Thank you very much. And I have other questions, too, but I'm assuming we're saving those for a second round, right, Jennifer?

LT. CRAGG: Second round, yep.

Q Okay. Great. LT. CRAGG: Bob and Jarred just joined us, so let's go with Bob, and then Jarred will be next, okay?

Q Fine. Hello, General, and thanks for joining us. Bob Michael, from the Mudville Gazette. Following up on the piracy question, recently heard reports of NATO ships capturing pirates and virtually immediately releasing them.

I've heard that explained as the individual navies are required to act in accordance with their own national laws regarding that particular topic. Is

there any effort at coming up with a cohesive NATO policy for dealing with captured pirates?

GEN. LATHER: Yes, there is, but I can't predict when that will be the case. It's a very complex legal issue. It's one which -- which is linked to national law, to international law, to the law of the high seas, what you can do. And depending where nations come from, which history they have in naval warfare, they're all very different. I mean, take the United States, take the British, take Netherlands, take Germans, they all have a different background and history. So this is currently being -- being addressed intensively, and I can reassure you that that is a process at NATO Headquarters.

We at SHAPE have taken initiatives to support that. We have demanded that, for instance, the rules of engagement which the European Union is applying and the rules of engagement which the NATO force in the area is applying should be as similar as possible because if you are a sailor and you sail under Atalanta or you sail under Allied Provider, the objective is always the same -- that's countering the pirates. So it should be very similar, it should be coordinated. But there is work to be done in the legislative side of our various nations. And we are not at the end, but the target clearly is, as you said, having a sort of consolidated/coordinated set of legal preconditions to run an operation like that.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, Jared. Jared, did you come back on the line? Jared was on the line.

So let's go around the horn one more time and let's start with Andrew. I know all of you probably have a follow-on question.

Q Thank you. General, Andrew Lubin again, Military Observer.

I'd like to go back to Afghanistan. A couple months ago, Mrs. Merkel pledged more German troops into the fight. Have they been dispatched yet, or is that still hung up in parliament? And how is the rest of NATO doing in sending more troops?

GEN. LATHER: The biggest -- the biggest uplift currently is that what we addressed in the first round, with the -- with the Americans. We're bringing in a lot into the effort. But most of the other nations do as well. Germany is one example. The Brits are one. The Italians are one, the Poles. So -- even the Australians. So you will see that.

What it does is it helps Commander ISAF General David McKiernan to have -- to have a more robust force in order to hold the terrain where has been fighting, or where he has established a presence for a longer period, together with the Afghan National Army and hopefully the Afghan National Police as well.

So as we speak, that is a process -- Marines -- we were addressed by another question earlier, and the -- and the Germans are building up, as stated by Mrs. Merkel and the defense minister, a reinforcement for the election period. And some of that will, as far as I know, stay in country and some will redeploy. But that's a process over the year.

Q Guys, if I could follow up with a quick one.

General, when I was in Afghanistan -- and I was there a couple times in 2008 -- the Spaniard -- excuse me, the Portuguese, the Italians, the Turks were forbidden to get off the bases. They do no good if they're not allowed to actually come out of the compounds. Are we -- are the new troops going to -- are they going to be allowed to go out and actually work in the field with the Afghan forces?

GEN. LATHER: Well, it's very much a decision to be taken by the tactical commander based on the -- based on the security situation where they are positioned. If you saw that they were forbidden, then they must have a tough security situation. And --

Q Their government refused to let them off the base. I was in Camp Black Horse. I was in the area around there, and the Turks weren't allowed to come off base. The Portuguese refused. The Italians refused. It wasn't tactical. I was off base. They refused to go. That's coming from their home nations.

GEN. LATHER: Yeah, that's certainly not helpful if that is the case, and I'm sure that we -- that we did address that with those nations. It's a fact that not each and everybody gets out of base, but those who have to patrol, those who have to fight in places, those who have -- those who -- those who have to do civil/military missions with the Afghan population and institutions, they certainly have to be able to leave posts.

Q Great, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, let's move on to Jeff.

Q Hi, General. This is Jeff Schogol again.

Can you say when the exercises with Georgia are expected to be -- to take place, and whether U.S. troops will be part of those exercises?

GEN. LATHER: The exercise is in the buildup as we speak. It's about 1,500 participating in that exercise. It's -- it's a command- post exercise with, at the end, live firing at the company and platoon levels. So it's a -- it's a small thing which ties together, as I said, about 18 nations. I don't know whether U.S. troops are participating in that as we speak. I would have to look into that. But as I've said, if I remember correctly, it's only 10 NATO nations and the rest is Partnership for Peace nations.

Q Okay. And you have said that the -- this is not training for Georgia to defend itself against Russia. What exactly will NATO be training the Georgians to do?

GEN. LATHER: It's -- this exercise, called Longbow/Lancer, is a long-planned exercise. It's part of a series which we routinely do every year that is the land forces one year, and there are similar ones on the naval and the air force sides.

In general, all of those countries who are part of the Partnership for Peace -- and Georgia is part of that -- are trained, making efforts on our program, which is planned over a couple of years, to become more interoperable, to build capabilities which are similar to that which other NATO nations have. So closing that gap between them and us and enabling them to participate in NATO

operations, I think that's the -- that's the art of what we are trying to achieve.

Q Thank you.

LT. CRAGG: Okay, we have David and Bob, really quick follow-up questions. David? Jim dropped off the call, just so you know. So, David?

Q Great. General, David Axe from War is Boring again.

Some critics have said that NATO is still overwhelmingly organized for territorial defense with, you know, forces that can't really deploy, mostly heavy mechanized forces and tactical aircraft, lacking some of the strategic mobility forces and deployable forces that would be more useful for the kind of operations that NATO's involved in today. Is there an effort under way to reorganize NATO forces to be more appropriate for expeditionary operations?

GEN. LATHER: If you take the NATO command structure, it's a clear yes. There is programs under way. In part, we had that.

We are, I think, already quite good in that, that we are more expeditionary, we are more deployable than we used to be in the past.

The rest -- if you talk up NATO forces, than you mainly mean national forces, so nations, including the United States or the 28 actually designing their forces -- the ability of their forces in way that they are deployable.

Now, having said that, you have to strike the balance between the need for national defense and what armed forces do in nations together with those operational challenges which we are faced with. So it's -- it's not a white or black sheet of paper, it's the balance between the two of them, and that's addressed in what we call the Defense Review Process, where we challenge the plans of nations -- we, NATO, do that, and that's a routine process over a two years period of time. And their nations explain what their efforts are and we match that against what is collectively agreed upon.

But --

Q Okay, thank you.

GEN. LATHER: -- the bottom line is more deployable -- more deployability, probably more lighter forces, which doesn't mean that just the (men ?) works, but -- but away from those -- (inaudible) -- type tank armies which we had in the Cold War; I mean, that's the trend and that's the need and that's the requirement.

Q Okay, thank you.

LT. CRAGG: The last -- sorry, David. The last person is Bob. Bob?

Q General, Bob Michael again. Quick one for clarity and, if time, another question. But the -- the command post exercise, which you said there were 1,500 NATO troops involved. Are they actually on the ground in Georgia for this exercise or is this done more as a -- a virtual-type exercise?

GEN. LATHER: No, they are deploying into Georgia, and the exercise area is close to the capitol, close to Tikrit in Georgia. And they use a

training base there, and I have set up command posts brigade level and below plus an exercise organization for that. And that totals up to 1,500. Q Copy that. And another very quick one. The additional troops promised at the summit a couple of months ago. Are they -- are they being looked at as a temporary surge for the duration through the Afghan elections or is this more of a long-term commitment?

GEN. LATHER: I think it's both. It's a combination of both. And the final decisions need to be taken by nations. So you will see that some of these troops will remain.

Some of them will come in for the election period, cover that, stay on for a couple of weeks or months until the government, the new government and the element has re-established, and then some of them will go back.

Q And have some of those deployed? I wasn't clear on the answer to that.

GEN. LATHER: Some of them -- some of them have already deployed, but that process is ongoing as we speak.

Q Thank you, sir.

LT. CRAGG: And prior to turning it over to you, sir, my one question that I wanted to ask is with regard to the 60th anniversary, can you explain maybe some of the successes of the alliance over the last 60 years? Can you elaborate? And then I'll turn it over to you for your final statement.

GEN. LATHER: Yes. Yes, I think what the outcome of the -- of the summit which I, from my position, see as very productive is one which, if you read the declaration on Atlantic solidarity, you'll see that what was at the heart, at the core of NATO has been reassured by that summit. We have been given the starting point of the discussion on a new strategic concept. The current one which we have dates back to '99. And I think the security situation has considerably changed since then.

9/11 is one thing which we didn't have then when we designed the other one -- the old one. Piracy is -- is just another example. Afghanistan wasn't there. So it's a fast change in the security environment, and, therefore, we need to sit down and stick our heads together and come up with something which is meaningful for the future to shape the security.

We have agreement on a -- on a -- on a new secretary-general. We have two new members -- Croatia, Albania -- and we have France back in the alliance in the -- not in the alliance but in the intergrated military structures of the alliance. And we'll certainly see that this move within the next couple of years will render dividends in a positive way so that the North Americans -- the United States and Canada -- and the Europeans come ever closer together.

So I think -- I think it was a very productive and a very good summit. Of course, very high-level politics now needs to be transformed and translated into action on the ground as far as Afghanistan. On that one, I probably -- I mean, we have a declaration on a strategy, on a more comprehensive approach to Afghanistan and Pakistan being agreed upon by heads of state and government as well, which I think is very important for that operation.

LT. CRAGG: Great. Thank you for going over that. I appreciate it. And with that, I want to turn it back over to you one more time for a closing statement.

GEN. LATHER: Thank you very much for the questions. I think they were all right, top-on. I think it's -- it's -- it's important to remember that this alliance is as strong as the consensus that you can build.

So now we are talking about 28 sovereign nations.

And each has the same say. This alliance acts only if there is consensus, and it does not act if there is no consensus. That one has to bear in mind.

But I think that has to resist the appetites to be -- to become uneasy because decision-making or consensus-finding is so difficult. It's worth the effort because I think that if 28 democratic, sovereign nations task themselves to go forward for a better future, who would stop them?

So rather than -- rather than going into coalition-type operations, I would advocate that the strength of the alliance -- which it has shown in the past and is currently showing -- is fighting inside for that consensus, and then work from the basis of this consensus. I think that's -- that's important to me. That's part of my personal history as well. And I've seen NATO always being strong when it has reached consensus.

Of course, sometimes that takes a while, to get 48 independent people together, but it's always worth the effort. And I actually enjoy working in that environment.

LT. CRAGG: Thank you, sir. And this wraps up today's roundtable.

Just as a note to everyone, today's call will be available on the "bloggers" link off of DefenseLink, along with the story and the audio file and the transcript.

Again, thank you, sir, and thank you for everyone on the call. This concludes today's event.

GEN. LATHER: Thank you very much for having me.

Q Thank you.

Q Thank you, General.

Q Thank you, General.

END.