

TRANSCRIPT

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General Pavel: -- more than one hour to answer.

Let me thank you for inviting me. It's a great pleasure to be here, and especially with such a broad audience of defense media. It's a great opportunity to share the views.

When we talk about Russia, the answer will always be complicated because the very relationship with Russia is complicated. It's based on entirely different perceptions.

Quite often what is seen from our side as clear aggression, Russia sees an entirely different light, and have their own narrative, their own explanation that they believe, because they generally believe that they are threatened by NATO. They believe that NATO has aggressive plans against Russia. And they also believe that many measures they are taking are in response to our own measures.

So it is about managing perceptions.

However, there are some facts, they are undeniable, and I think if we stick to the facts and I stress that they're in our discussions with our Russian counterparts many times, that probably even a very [narrative] cannot deny that there is some rule-based world order established post 2nd World War, and we all try hard to stick to this system because otherwise, we would be living in anarchy.

And what is clear, that after a period of partnership after the Cold War and the breakup of the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact, we all tend to believe that we only have a very bright future ahead of us and that we will be able to develop a standard partnership with Russia. And this approach is a reflection in the NATO Russia Founding Act, in developing the structure for cooperation with the NATO-Russia Council, a number of working groups below the NATO-Russia Council, and a number of activities.

Unfortunately, the situation has dramatically changed in 2008 with the annexation of

South Ossetia and Abkhazia in Georgia, and especially later in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and direct support to the Separatists in Donbas. All the trust that has been developed over this period of partnership has been lost. All cooperation with Russia was suspended. And since then, we were in a period of, I can probably say, blaming each other from this worsening of relationship.

We are trying to reestablish the links with Russia, both at political level and military level. They were not cut entirely. As I said, cooperation was suspended, however, mostly political diplomatic links were there all the time, and we are trying to connect again at the military line, which we managed recently when I had a face-to-face meeting with General Gerasimov. We also had conversation at my level, as well as the level of SACEUR. And we will have, hopefully, a face-to-face meeting between SACEUR and General Gerasimov by the end of this year.

So we keep saying to our Russian counterparts, we are open to dialogue. However, we are not now open to resuming cooperation because the conditions are not yet there. And these conditions were set by political level quite clearly, and the expression of that statement is in respect to international law and compliance with international law, and concerted approach to a long-lasting problem in Ukraine.

I think I will stay there, to leave more room for other questions.

DWG: Sir, next month the NATO Defense Ministers meet. Among other things, they're going to discuss some new command structures. But many of these new things require some resources and priority. So things like a new Logistics Command, new Arctic Command. Can you discuss where those, I guess how you prioritize those, what you think from your position is particularly important for NATO to restructure toward?

General Pavel: When we look back to the times of the Cold War, NATO command structure was about 23,000 strong. With the period of détente, there was no need for such a robust command structure, so it successively went down to less than 7,000 recently.

With the new situation with security threats that we are facing today, the assessment by strategic commanders and then adopted by the Chiefs of Defense as well as Ministers of Defense, was that this structure was useful and sufficient for the time of peace, but with some deficiencies for crises and especially for conflict.

These deficiencies were identified and they also reflected new challenges such as cyber, [hybrid] [inaudible], and terrorism in new forms. All these required some adjustments to NATO command structure.

Strategic commanders presented their view of functional model of NATO command structure that is called outline design. This outline design was discussed first by the Chiefs of Defense and it will be presented to Ministers of Defense.

Before this outline design is agreed by the Ministers of Defense, I think it is premature to talk about any concrete facilities being in the Arctic or Logistic or any other because we are simply not yet there.

Once this outline design which represents full functionality for current and potential future challenges is agreed, we will start developing options how to implement it. And then we get into the area of resources that is a clearly political issue.

So depending on political will, we will see which option for implementation will be then adopted. And the decision on a final design, final option, is expected by February at the Defense Ministerial meeting. February 18th.

DWG: You mentioned in a recent speech [inaudible]. There have been reports that [inaudible]. Can you kind of elaborate on how discussions, how you see them continuing and how you reassure those nations that were the most impacted by [inaudible] about [inaudible]?

General Pavel: You can imagine that my communication with Russian top military leader is under a very thorough scrutiny of all the nations. So not only I have a clear political mandate for that communication that is framed by risk reduction transparency, and obviously any urgent issue that may arise at the military domain between NATO and Russia.

I am also corresponding on a regular basis to all military representatives and the Chiefs of Defense. So all my steps with Russian counterparts are monitored, discussed and agreed.

Before I went for the meeting with General Gerasimov, I had a clear agenda and clear mandate from both political and military level. So there was no surprise to those countries you mentioned who may be most concerned about potential outcome of this meeting, because they were informed before, during and after.

The discussion with General Gerasimov was quite open, and we both tried to keep it at military level. Because if we are to have any meaningful military communication, it cannot be based on political arguments because then we probably end very early with the discussion.

So what I tried was to focus on military issues like exercises, defense posture, military activities which can be measured and where we can verify each other's arguments, and that's demonstrate that there is a will to establish trust that has been broken for last years.

I believe that we have achieved this initial stage, that we have developed at least this initial relationship that will allow us to have occasional phone calls and face-to-face

meetings on military issues that will lead to preparation of input for political discussion at NRC level.

DWG: And have you seen [inaudible]?

General Pavel: You will be aware of other terms, as airspace violation and air policing and alpha scramble. These are quite often confused because when we look at air policing, that is to reinforce air awareness and especially in Eastern countries, mainly in the Baltic countries -- Romania, Bulgaria. It is to ensure that they are not only issues by alliance cohesion and will to assist them, but also it is kind of a visible deterrent to Russia.

Sometimes we see confusing terms of alpha scramble and airspace violation. Alpha scramble is fly order to check unusual situation, and that situation may arise with the loss of communication of civilian aircraft or even military aircraft, but not necessarily with hostile intent.

So vast majority of these events falls into category of technical or human mistake. There are very few occasions where there is deliberate violation of airspace. So I will say that we trace [inaudible] airspace violation. What we face, however, is an increase of air activities. That's quite clear. But not an [inaudible] of violations.

DWG: As a senior military leader, do you see a need to reform institutions as the Founding Act, Russia-NATO Founding Act? And NATO-Russia [inaudible] based on the fact that there are institutions which remind you of [inaudible], pretty much sole intention was to [inaudible]. They failed. [Inaudible] and [upper Crimea]. Do you think something else needs to be created to [inaudible]?

General Pavel: Now we are entering political domain which will not be up to military to assess or even lead any dialogue on adjustment or reconstruction of these arrangements.

But I believe it's always better to have some arrangement than none. And NATO-Russia Council, even though often disputed is a document that defines relationship. Maybe outdated in some parameters, but it doesn't mean we should simply abandon it. If anything, then we may have discussions about modernization of the document. But if we talk about modernization of documents involving NATO and Russia, I would probably set the priority first with modernization of the Vienna document, and then modernization of NATO-Russia Founding.

DWG: [Inaudible]?

General Pavel: It will be between General Gerasimov and General Scaparrotti. There is no date yet set, but from both sides I, I heard that there is a will to meet by the end of this year.

DWG: I wanted to follow up on what my colleague from Janes asked about briefly. Without asking you to weigh in on potential [inaudible] that are in flux right now, does the structure of NATO as it stands right now, [inaudible], does the structure right now need to change to keep up with where [inaudible]?

General Pavel: When we approached the discussion on NATO [structure] adaptation, we deliberately didn't call it review, because we didn't want to drop anything on a blank sheet of paper. So we started where we are with existing structures and existing resources, and our effort is to adjust it to fit the requirements, not to reconstruct it entirely.

So we started with a functional assessment of the current command structure, and it's fair to say that we basically told them two categories. NATO command structure and NATO force structure. And then third category, national assets. Even though NATO force structure is also primarily funded by national assets.

So we made an assessment of functional NATO command structure. We identified deficiencies, [confirmed] with current and potential future challenges. And then the [strategic] commanders presented their view, how to mitigate these deficiencies. And this is the basis of their outline design that is now being discussed.

DWG: And broadly speaking again, NATO owns very little stuff. By design. Does that need to change? Put more assets directly underneath?

General Pavel: When we talk about assets that NATO owns, it's AWACS, early warning, and AGS. Everything else is in possession of nations. However, there are some assets, they are declared as in readiness forces, be it [BGTF] or [NRF], it's a bigger package. And then there are many other measures that allow swift transfer of [inaudible] from nations to SACEUR based on the situation. They are mostly defined within a so-called crisis management manual, and these measures are pre-agreed or in packages that will be released to SACEUR based on the development of a crisis situation.

So all of these measures are well staged to respond to the seriousness of situation.

DWG: Just to clarify, I think what you're saying, you don't think more directly owning assets would [inaudible].

General Pavel: I don't think there is a need for it because those forces that are available to SACEUR in peace time that are sufficient to handle the first crisis situation. And then the procedures allow other assets to be transferred quite quickly.

DWG: Getting back to the air incidents. I'm wondering if you can elaborate a bit on how your talk to the Russians has maybe helped the situation, or has it? [Inaudible]?

General Pavel: We can probably see these incidents in several categories. Some are unintentional as I already mentioned. Some are deliberate and they relate much more to we would call fairly good [inaudible] or good behavior [at sea]. Some of these activities have the nature of provocation where the aim is to find out the reaction of the other side, or to demonstrate that simply we can.

If you ask, why would you do that? Because we can. That's a good answer.

So it is a bit kind of a relationship, a demonstration of, a capability demonstration, a power demonstration of approach. But they are not right now intended as a hostile act that is to provoke military action, but rather find out what the reaction will be.

It is dangerous, of course, because in some of these situations like very low over-flow at international waters [inaudible] war ship. It is the situation where it's up to captain to decide what is the level of threat to his vessel, because he's the one who is responsible. If he decides to react by military means, it will be justified because it was a breach of the rules. But of course that would immediately create conflict situation and escalation.

Up to now, all these incidents were fortunately resolved by common sense and common [inaudible].

DWG: So when you go and you talk to General Gerasimov, do you explain that to him? That [inaudible]?

General Pavel: We have a form which is called Baltic, BSPT. Baltic Sea, whatever, Team. That relates to good [inaudible]-ship in the Baltic Sea area, and that team together with the Civil Aviation organization, were working on the cases of violations of bad [inaudible]-ship in the Baltic Sea region. Also related to use of transponders and air traffic. And so this was the basis where NATO, [inaudible] in the region and Russia were present. And the discussion within this BSPT was very pragmatic and they came to a number of recommendations which are now being implemented.

As a general principle, we obviously stress the need to respect these common rules of behavior at sea, in the air, so that we avoid any unintentional escalation.

DWG: I wanted to ask you a little bit about Africa. Secretary Mattis said last week that he expects to see more activity in Africa, and as a result a greater U.S. presence there. I wonder to what extent your American counterparts have talked to you about that. And do you see NATO expanding its presence in Africa?

General Pavel: In fact Africa was very much in the center of our discussions yesterday when I attended conference focused on countering violent extremist organizations, wherein we discussed very broad spectrum of [inaudible] from South Asia through Middle East and to Africa.

DWG: What was the conference? Sorry.

General Pavel: Conference on Countering Violent Extremist Organizations. Organized by your Chairman of Joint Staff. And 75 Chiefs of Defense were represented, were present at the conference. And we had very good discussion.

I have to say that not only, not only these quite special events we discuss issues of extremism, terrorism, we are concerned with the security situation or instability in northern Africa in NATO because it is our area of interest.

We have different partner formats, one of them being Mediterranean Dialogue where we discuss security situation with these countries. We have a number of different capacity building projects with the countries in the region. We cooperate closely with both USCENTCOM and AFRICOM on these issues, so we don't lose sight of [inaudible] and the significant issues there because it directly affects the situation in Europe, especially through illicit trafficking and migration.

DWG: Do you think that the attack in Niger at the beginning of the month affected the extent to which you and your colleagues were talking about Africa at this meeting? Did it change your perspective on the [structure]?

General Pavel: The incident was not specifically mentioned but we spoke about Niger yesterday because it is one of Sahel [inaudible] countries. They had created their own group to confront violent extremism. And all of the groupings and activities that are aimed at confronting effectively [inaudible] in the broadest sense are very much welcome. The aim of the conference yesterday was to bring coherence to all these opportunities to make it most effective when using limited resources.

DWG: Is there any particular sense of urgency when you see countries like Russia and China also moving to establish security influence in Africa?

General Pavel: I think it is, it can be seen as a challenge, but also as an opportunity. I would rather present it in a positive way because both China and Russia have, if not the same, then similar interests on basic stability in this broad region. It has an impact on the one hand on internal security in other countries. Russia is affected by terrorism the same way as we are. And from the other side, economic stability. Economic interests are the same for us and China and Russia when it comes to a stable environment because they are dependent on international trade and they should have similar interests in stabilizing these regions.

So we can probably find some common ground to coordinate the activities and not to compete.

DWG: I just wanted to ask about integrated air and missile defense. NATO just

wrapped up Formidable Shield 2017. I was wondering if you could talk about some of the lessons learned from that exercise that will carry forward.

General Pavel: You will probably understand that most of the activities within integrated air and missile defense fall under classification so I can only comment on those things that are well known. And I can only tell you that we pay increased attention to integrated ballistic missile defense, especially with the development of the situation in North Korea; with continuing development of Iranian ballistic missile program.

As you know, NATO has its own plan for integrated air and missile defense. Construction of a new site in Poland continues. And we also discuss how to improve procedures to make them more effective and responsive.

DWG: [Inaudible], do you think that NATO needs to change its strategy in any way in this area? Especially after what you learned at Formidable Shield?

General Pavel: I don't see any urgent need for changing policy right now.

DWG: And what will you guys try to kind of iterate off of this past exercise going to next year's exercise? What will you try to further develop and change?

General Pavel: Again, only in general, every exercise produces a number of conclusions and lessons. They are identified, they are analyzed, and then prepared to either change the procedures, policies, or develop further exercises.

So all the lessons are well captured and then implemented into further decisions.

DWG: I was wondering if you [inaudible]. For example, [inaudible] equipment needs [inaudible]?

General Pavel: About, sorry?

General Pavel: NATO, as we discussed previously, doesn't own much own equipment with the exception of these two assets. And both these assets are now in development because you probably know that they are, the fleet of NATO AWACS aircraft, it is aging and will eventually be retired and then a new project is now being developed to replace this early warning capability. But it is the horizon of ten years, so it's not done [inaudible].

AGS capability delayed for mostly administrative reasons, but it is expected to be fully operational in next two years. So it will be delivered and will provide NATO with additional surveillance and intelligence capability.

When it comes to other equipment it is all nationally owned, so it's up to nations. But nations develop their capabilities not only based on their own needs and national plans,

but also on NATO defense planning, and NATO defense planning is [owing] from nations receive their capability targets, and based on these capability targets, they translate it into their national defense planning policies and national acquisition plans.

DWG: Are there any [inaudible] with [mobility]?

General Pavel: This is an issue that is discussed quite widely, especially after the implementation of VJTF and Enhanced NRF. The greater mobility across European territory to be responsive to the situation that may arise quite quickly. And it's fair to say that we were in a situation where administrative and legislative procedures were too slow to allow quick move of forces across Europe.

There is significant improvement over last half a year where we moved through the period from let's say 30 days needed to authorize the transfer, up to several days in most of Europe today.

There are still some challenges for [road traffic] of heavy equipment, the trailers, the rail movements. But these assets are, again, mostly nationally owned.

The same way as we adapt our policies and procedures in other areas, the whole logistical concept for enabling European theater is being developed and adapted. So it's a matter of time when we will entirely new concept, how to logistically enable the whole European theater.

DWG: When you've got as many partner members as NATO has, each individually making their defense decisions, you do have the potential for the overall acquisition programs to head off in a direction that might not be ideal for the, for NATO collectively. You might wind up with way too many fighters and tanks and not enough say cyber and chem/bio defense capability.

How receptive are the individual members to overall guidance from NATO to say we've got gaps here and here? Can you redirect in those directions? And what are those shortcomings?

General Pavel: The process of defense planning in NATO is working in a way that where simply NATO planners plan for the worst-case scenario. They developed set of forces that is necessary for such a scenario of collective defense as 29 allies.

Then this package of capabilities is divided based on key, corresponding to the number of population and the economic strength of the countries. And for every individual country, the set of capability targets is developed, and that set of capability targets is discussed bilaterally with the country and the country agrees the target.

Once they agree the target, it's then discussed collectively and also individual and collective targets are confirmed by all 29.

Then it's up to nations to come up with their plans, how to meet these targets. So nations not only are given some guidance, but they also agreed, based on their priorities and based on capabilities.

This cycle was the first after a long time where 100 percent of all the capability targets were proportioned into nations. So the nations agreed to all the targets that they were given.

In that sense, NATO is guiding the development of capabilities, but of course beyond that, if any nations, any nation decides to develop further capabilities, it's their national sovereign decision.

For NATO collective defense it is always agreed at a collective basis.

DWG: I'd like to go back to the question of [Maghreb] in Africa. As NATO is involved in Afghanistan, could one day NATO be involved directly in Africa? Not only with [cooperation] structure, but with troops on the ground?

General Pavel: The term troops on the ground can be seen and often is seen in a negative connotation, as expeditionary force pushing the will of NATO all around the world.

In Afghanistan, the mission has changed from combat mission to train, advise, assist mission. In Middle East, NATO involvement is also in training, assisting, advising. And one of two major strengths agreed in Warsaw beyond the deterrence and defense, that is the core business for the alliance is the so-called projecting stability. That projecting stability, in other words, means the whole set of corrective measures in instable neighborhood to help it become again stable. And that involves a full set of activities from purely military. Where NATO can do its part, especially in developing defense capabilities of own defense forces, through law enforcement, internal security, judicial system, development programs, educational programs, religious programs, and many others that create some conditions for stability.

Here we can clearly see that NATO will only be able to play part of this spectrum. So we need very broad international cooperation with the organizations such as EU, with internal nations and regional organizations under the umbrella of the UN that will be able to provide this well-balanced spectrum for every nation in need.

So I see the future engagements of NATO if there is political will for the decision in being part of this comprehensive package of measures that will try to reestablish stability in these unstable countries.

DWG: Two Andrews coming up. Andrew with the Daily Beast and then Andrew with Politico.

DWG: Thank you, sir. The ambush of U.S. troops in Niger has sparked a new conversation in Congress about scrapping the current authorization for the use of military force that we have and coming up with a new one that would be more targeted towards certain terror groups or certain countries. And the argument against that has been this is something that would inject too much uncertainty among U.S. allies. Is that a concerning issue?

General Pavel: First, I'm not aware of the details of that internal U.S. discussion because once they become clear I believe that General Dunford will inform us in NATO as well.

In principle, I don't see it as being in contradiction with NATO interests because all the nations have to react to a new situation and to adjust their procedure to be responsive, and primarily to protect their own troops and population.

So it is entirely up to United States what measures they will choose to take.

DWG: My question also is defense planning but it's more to the question of Turkey and the friction that [inaudible] S-400 from Russia. I know that sovereign countries have sovereign decisions to make about what equipment they buy, but [inaudible] NATO's intention to [inaudible] move away from a reliance on [inaudible] as well as the intention for interoperability across different country systems, and just broadly, unity of the alliance. Do you have any concerns about decisions when it comes to the political dimension of where those things are being purchased from?

General Pavel: First, the principle of sovereignty obviously is given in acquisition of defense equipment. But the same way as other nations are sovereign in making their decision, they are also sovereign in facing the consequences of that decision.

Potential acquisition of S-400 involves some necessary consequences. For example, it is highly sophisticated system that cannot be from partially technical but mostly security reasons integrated into NATO integrated system of air and missile defense. And that is quite [inaudible]. So very clear outcome of that is that if any single country decides to buy, it will have to stand alone and not be integrated into the system. And even as a stand-alone system, it creates challenges for allied assets eventually deployed on the territory of that country.

So there are a number of administrative, technical, security challenges associated to that decision. And I believe that it is fair among allies to have that discussion, to erase all concerns and potential difficulties. But if a nation still insists in full knowledge of consequences, if the nation still decides to acquire that asset, it's a national decision.

DWG: You also mentioned earlier when talking about integrated ballistic missile

defense concerns about Iran. The United States has made it pretty clear that it sees [inaudible] Iran as a [inaudible]. Iran's activities as a security threat to the United States. From the perspective of NATO, do you share that kind of assessment? And do you feel like there needs to be a greater concern? Is there an effort to push back in whatever way possible?

General Pavel: We always base our defense on threat from wherever it comes, and if there is any nation with a capability, and even with a potential intention, then we have to be aware of it and take necessary measures. And Iran has undoubtedly the capability. We cannot be so sure about their intentions, hostile intentions against the alliance. But we have to be ready for any eventuality.

So it is a matter of concern and we are preparing measures to be ready for it.

DWG: During the U.S. presidential campaign, [inaudible] NATO members [inaudible]. I'm wondering in the year since the election happened, what are the changes from your vantage point that you see among the member nations and [inaudible] institutions both in terms of any shift or changes in [inaudible] from NATO? And also just the impact of that. Did that draw attention from the NATO member nations to respond [inaudible]?

General Pavel: First, I think that we have to distinguished pre-election rhetoric from real stuff, and in all the countries there's a lot of arguments used in the pre-election period.

What is important for NATO, that countries that were most concerned were assured several times quite clearly that the cornerstone of the alliance, Article 5, is still valid and NATO are committed, the nations are committed to this article.

There was also common agreement that burden sharing has to be fair, and that nations who do not meet the requirement agreed in Wales and confirmed in Warsaw will make their best efforts to meet it by 2024.

We also agreed that NATO has to put more attention to fighting terrorism, and it has been reflected in a number of [strategy] documents, and we are now implementing a Counterterrorism Action Plan. So there is a number of activities already ongoing.

And I believe that discussion that political leaders have and then followed by military leaders is reflecting on these changes.

DWG: [Inaudible] focusing more on counterterrorism issues, does that deemphasize other roles that NATO [inaudible]?

General Pavel: No. Primary role of the alliance is collective defense, and defense of population, territories of NATO allies.

Second core task of the alliance is crisis management. And within crisis management, we have all the missions and operations that [inaudible].

And then the third core task is cooperative security, development of partnerships at all levels, and again, we have a quite extended plan of partnership activities in a number of format in which we cooperate with partners.

So there is no major change. It is development and [evolvment] of NATO activities as was always the case over the history of the alliance.

DWG: [Inaudible]?

General Pavel: We don't have that discussion at the military level, so all the discussion on IMF is at the political level and I'm afraid that I can't comment on.

DWG: [Inaudible]?

General Pavel: We have very good I think cooperation with Japan and Republic of Korea. We had quite recently discussion with the partners from the region, namely Japan, Korea, Australia and New Zealand on nuclear issues related to North Korea. So we had very good and deep discussion with the North Atlantic Council.

We have number of meetings with the partners throughout the years, so I think that we are well in touch with the development. And wherever there is a security issue related to these partners, I think NATO is not only aware but also discussing how within the constraints of the treaties we can assist the partners.

DWG: I have a question about Afghanistan. The United States is [inaudible] of providing weapons to Taliban. Does NATO, do you have like any evidence to support that claim? Or if so, what kind of weapons and the amount, the weapons that [inaudible] to Taliban.

And my second question is, [inaudible] representative from New York and Russia will meet in, On October 26th somewhere. I don't know where. And could you please tell me what kind of topics would be on the agenda?

General Pavel: For the first part of your question on Russia allegedly providing weapons to Taliban, I don't have, I haven't seen any hard evidence on the deliveries of weapons by Russia to Taliban. However, there are intelligence reports of Russia providing fuel to some companies that are then selling this fuel to Taliban.

I think we all heard that all these reports were denied by Russia Foreign Ministry. Expressed their concerns to President Ghani of Afghanistan. And my belief, it will be also discussed during the upcoming meeting you just mentioned in the second part of your question. And it's, we can say now regular NATO-Russia Council meeting.

We already had five of these meetings since Crimea. The next one, the sixth, will take place tomorrow. And the topics are first place, Ukraine situation, in and around Ukraine. Then military activities with regard to transparency and risk reduction. And third, situation in Afghanistan. So it will be on the agenda.

DWG: On the issue of equipment [inaudible], I'm sure you've heard this. Lieutenant General [inaudible] about the problem with tube radios. That [inaudible] cannot communicate [inaudible]. What is the problem? What are the steps you're taking to solve that?

General Pavel: General Hodges is a well-respected field commander and he is also very vocal in expressing his concerns. I think it's only right, because someone has to do it, and who else than the field commander? He's right, there are some challenges, especially in freedom of movement and logistic support as well as in some technical issues, but that's exactly the process in which especially during exercises, rather than during the operations, we discovered some deficiencies. And these deficiencies are then peripherally analyzed and they are translated into capability targets and advice to the allies, what changes they should adopt to be more interoperable. So it is just a tiny part of much broader package that is being considered and nations are working it.

It's not an issue that can be successfully resolved over one year, because quite often the acquisition process in the national environment takes years. And it's also based on financial resources.

But wherever the deficiency is known and described, nations are addressing it and so if we track the issue of radios, I'm sure that we will find it somewhere in the acquisition plans already.

DWG: NATO [inaudible] countries to share [inaudible] rule of law, democracy, free and fair elections. We've had rapid back-sliding in Turkey and now Poland, in addition to [inaudible] concerns about Hungary. Even if things stay as they are now or they worsen, what does the democratic back-sliding of member states mean for future cohesion, future willingness to defend one another, and [inaudible] concerns with Turkey with the Russia system, and that's not exactly in terms of Poland, but can you talk a little bit about what you see for cohesion?

General Pavel: Cohesion is obviously the most important glue of the alliance. And it is also the biggest strength of the alliance, wherever and whenever we are cohesive.

It is challenged by many factors, both internal as well as external. And when it comes to democratic deficits, show me one single nation that is perfect. No one is perfect. And we see different issues that are not necessarily 100 percent democratic in number of countries.

We may point to different countries and populist leaders taking the role in elections, and we can point to different countries on how do they apply the rule of law. But at the same time, what is important? That this quite wide community today of 29 nations is still able to find common language and unifying purpose. And that is most important.

No one challenges the role of Turkey as an important ally at the very difficult crossroad of security challenges to the alliance. No one would dispute that there are other countries that you mentioned with potential democratic deficit aren't an important part of the alliance. They are meeting their membership criteria. They contribute to the missions. They contribute to all the activities of the alliance. And wherever allies see some challenge within the alliance, we can afford open discussion. Many of these issues are being discussed at the level of 29 be it North Atlantic Council or Military Committee.

And I can tell you, when you mentioned Turkey, there was this post [crew] situation also with the impact to Turkish military and their military representation in NATO, NATO structures when we faced Turkish military activities in Syria, Iraq. I asked Turkish Chief of Defense to come up with a briefing to his peers at Military Committee level, and he did it, and it was well received by all his colleagues. He was opening up to give them the update on the situation.

This is how allies should behave, and I believe that we are able to resolve these issues internally.

DWG: Obviously, as you said, NATO is not perfect. [Inaudible] the alliance there has been previous democratic back-sliding. Do you see any parallels to other countries [inaudible], issues with elections, rule of law, that are now being turned to as [inaudible] and resolving challenges that Turkey [inaudible] possibly?

General Pavel: I think I wouldn't try and give any parallels. But it's quite a normal situation that we have ups and downs. We are living in a very difficult historical period. We're at a historical crossroads when it comes to future developments, and also development of the world security system. And I think it will be very unwise to challenge the very existence of an organization like NATO that brings together such a large number of nations and provides excellent platform for not only political consultations, but also for true will to collectively defend ourselves.

So we may be as critical as we wish to the alliance, but in a constructive way. And this is the expression of our will to improve it. That we are constructively critical. It's not a sign that we reject it. And I think this is the way to make it better and fit for future.

DWG: It's been a pleasure. I wish we had more time, but we are at 9 o'clock so we're going to have to say thank you and bring it to a close now. We appreciate your thoughts and your insights and we'd be thrilled to have you or perhaps your successor back in the same time next year.

General Pavel: Thank you very much.

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