

Russia Says NATO Must Have UN Mandate for Afghan Mission After 2014

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The  Moscow Times

Russia will stop cooperating with NATO over Afghanistan after 2014 unless the alliance gets UN Security Council authorization for its new training mission in Afghanistan, a senior Russian diplomat said on Wednesday.

A NATO official said only that it would be "helpful" to have a UN Security Council resolution authorizing the post-2014 training mission, but stopped short of saying it was essential.

Nikolai Korchunov, Russia's acting ambassador to NATO, did not specify what any halt to Russian cooperation with NATO on Afghanistan after 2014 would mean, but Russia will be an important transit route for NATO as it ships out billions of dollars of equipment from Afghanistan in the next few years.

NATO defense ministers meeting in Brussels gave military experts the go-ahead on Wednesday to begin detailed planning of the post-2014 training and advisory mission that will start after NATO ends combat operations in Afghanistan.

"Let's proceed from the assumption that any such mission should be based on an international mandate," Korchunov said by e-mail.

"It is a pre-condition both for carrying on the operation and for our cooperation with NATO on that issue post-2014," he said.

Korchunov said that by international mandate he meant a new United Nations Security Council resolution.

The current mission of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan is endorsed by the UN Security Council.

But the nature of the mission will change after 2014, when ISAF is due to hand over security duties in the whole country to Afghan forces, possibly requiring a new resolution.

The new training and advisory mission is expected to be much smaller, but NATO has given no details yet.

Responding to Korchunov's comments, a NATO official said it would be "helpful" to have a UN Security Council resolution in support of NATO's planned post-2014 mission.

Pressed on whether NATO could go ahead with the post-2014 mission without a UN resolution, the official said: "NATO, of course, takes its decisions autonomously based on the consensus of its allies. All its missions are based and conducted according to the principles of the United Nations charter."

"Clearly, it is in the interest of the whole international community and of countries in the region, including Russia, to have a stable Afghanistan with the right training, advice and assistance for the Afghan security forces," the official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

German Defense Minister Thomas de Maiziere told reporters that an invitation from the Afghan government was a "pre-condition" for the post-2014 NATO mission.

"And we would want to have a UN resolution, a resolution of the UN Security Council, too," he told reporters at the NATO meeting on Tuesday evening.

President Vladimir Putin is a regular critic of NATO. But he has backed cooperation with the alliance on Afghanistan, allowing the use of Russian territory for transit and supplies.

However, any wrangling involving the Security Council could prove problematic. International pressure on Syria's president, Bashar Assad, has been curbed by Russia and China blocking Western-backed draft UN resolutions.

NATO must send home or dispose of 200,000 shipping containers and vehicles as it scales down its combat mission in Afghanistan over the next few years, and the Russian route is important to lessen its dependence on Pakistan.

Pakistan re-opened NATO transit lines through its territory in July after months of closure over a NATO air strike that killed 24 Pakistani soldiers.

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