



Interview: General Knud Bartels, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee

SECURITY HAS A COST, BUT THE PRICE OF INSECURITY IS MUCH MUCH HIGHER

In the period of this year, which 100 years ago marked the beginning of World War I, Slovenia and the Slovenian Armed Forces are hosting the visit of General Knud Bartels, Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. A century is a long period of time, above all the last one. Many people believe that the last century has been marked by significant changes, developments and progress. It especially seems so when it comes to armed forces and global security. However, in order to verify these statements, we have set up an interview with General Bartels who, in addition to devoting full attention to his current duties, takes great interest in history, in particular topics related to World War I.

General, welcome to Slovenia. In addition to various other sights, Slovenians take pride in a number of well-preserved World War I monuments and one can certainly have a look at a good number of sights, if time permits. A lot has been going on in our territory in that period; a large number of battles and fatalities. What is your view on that period?

How do you perceive and understand the then security situation from your current position and how can it be compared with the contemporary situation?

Being very interested in military history, I have studied a lot of that period and I would say that, what

we are experiencing today, in the current global situation, one way or another comes from the consequences of WWI. I think you cannot compare one situation exactly with another as nothing is repeated exactly like before but you can learn from the past and take those lessons forward. You can learn from tactical, operational and strategic events that have occurred, but that also doesn't mean we can predict the future.

With the current arc of insecurity that is spreading from NATO Eastern to Southern flank, hindsight tells us that there were signs that we should have seen. After an event it is very easy to point out what could have been improved or what actions should have been taken but at the time.

What similarities can I point out? Armed forces are still fighting to stop elements from threatening the security of their country, political argument and solutions are still the first resort with military power, hard power being brought in, when no other solution can be found. Now, the current security situation although turbulent is not the same as during WWI. NATO is the strongest military political alliance in history and an essential source of stability. A product of World War II, when countries wanted to prevent the possibility of World War III ever taking place and after realizing that countries are stronger together than apart .

South East Europe has always been a turbulent region with various religious, ethnic, national and social differences. The international community is still present in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, etc. How do you see the future of this region and what are the Alliance's goals and priorities in the region?

This region has a combination of both Allied and Partner Nations who are working together on regional and international issues as they share borders

and a share common interests. I have recently visited the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (6-7 November 14) and along with the NATO Military Committee I visited Montenegro (27-28 October 14). I was able to see firsthand the progress these NATO partner countries are making in their defence reforms and gave my personal thanks for their contributions to NATO-led missions and operations. NATO has been working with Allies and Partner Nations to strengthen the security infrastructure in the region as it is a natural part of the Euro-Atlantic family. Regarding Kosovo, NATO is indeed still involved with our KFOR mission. For the time being, KFOR will continue to contribute to a safe and secure environment and freedom of movement in Kosovo in close cooperation with the Kosovo authorities.

NATO Summit has concluded recently. It has produced some of the key documents defining NATO's future posture, which is directed towards transformation, with special emphasis given on the Russia-Ukraine crisis and NATO's post-ISAF role in Afghanistan. What are the concrete changes the Alliance and its member states can look ahead to according to the decisions of the NATO Summit?

Joint media statement of Chief of the General Staff of the Slovenian Armed Forces Brigadier General Andrej Osterman and Chairman of NATO Military Committee General Knud Bartels.





The distinguished guest was also received by Minister of Defence Janko Veber.

I would say that NATO has gone through four phases in its history: Massive Retaliation, Flexible Response, the Expansion of the Alliance and now the Re-posturing of the Alliance at the military level. NATO has constantly adapted to situations and sought to improve and adapt. The current crisis in Eastern Europe has meant that NATO and its 28 member Nations have made some key decisions, such as the Readiness Action Plan and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force.

We currently have assurance measures in place in the Eastern part of our alliance. We are maintaining a continuous presence on a rotational basis. We have Air Policing over our Eastern Allies, we have deployed more ships in the Baltic and Black Sea and this year we conducted over 200 NATO and national exercises in Europe. The Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) is currently being developed and discussed so that by February 2015 the Defence Ministers will have the necessary information in order to make a decision and approve the size and design of the force. The VJTF will contain several thousand troops that can be deployed quickly and we are also putting in place elements of command and control structure on the territory of our Eastern al-

lies and pre-positioning equipment and supplies. At the Summit, the Heads of State and Government also launched two new initiatives, the Partnership Interoperability Initiative and the Defence and Capacity Building Initiative. Working with Partner Countries during NATO-led mission, such as in Afghanistan has shown the crucial role partnerships play in the promotion of international peace and security.

Looking ahead, I see more exercising, more training, more evaluating of policy so that NATO becomes faster, fitter and more flexible as an Alliance. We will continue to develop relations with international and regional organizations, engage to prevent and manage crisis, stabilize post conflict situations and support reconstruction, and we will be prepared to use military force when necessary.

NATO member states have responded to the global economic crisis by reducing their defence-related resources and adopting - in this transitional period - several measures and initiatives (Smart Defence, Framework Nations Concept, Connected Forces Initiative), to 2% of GDP and to allocate 20% of defence expenditures to capability development.



General Bartels talked to the President of the Republic of Slovenia and Supreme Commander of the Slovenian Armed Forces Borut Pahor.

Photo: Karel Movrin, SAF General Staff

As I already mentioned, there is an arc of instability across NATO's East and Southern Flanks as well as transnational and multi-dimensional threats which challenge our security. Nations committed to gradually increase defence expenditure to 2% and to allocate 20 % of defence expenditures to capability development. The word to focus on there is gradually. We understand that there is economic hardship and so the decision was a spending guideline that should be moved towards within a decade.

However, it is necessary to increase defence expenditure, to invest more in NATO's defence capabilities, but also crucially to spend wisely so we are ready whatever the situation. This is the way forward: to pool our resources and our expertise, so that we develop together the capabilities which we would not be able to afford alone. Such smart arrangements already exist today in this region in which Slovenia participates. Italy and Hungary provide Quick Reaction Alert assets for air policing and Slovenia provides a valuable contribution of transport helicopters to NATO's pool of deployable forces. Helicopters are a scarce asset for other Al-

lies.

Slovenia has been NATO member for ten years. Currently, we are one of the nations spending a smaller GDP per cent on defence. What is your position regarding the allocation of financial resources for military purposes?

It is not my place to tell a nation how they should spend their money, but I would say this, we need to remind ourselves that security has a cost, but the price of insecurity is much much higher..... This is why during the Summit in Wales, the Heads of State and Government recognized that in this unpredictable world it is necessary to make the most effective use of funds and to further a more balanced sharing of costs and responsibilities. Allies have realized they cannot take security for granted. NATO's overall security and defence depend both on how much we spend and crucially how we spend it.

Liliana Brožič

Photo: Vekoslav Rajh