

## **NATO defense ministers gather in Istanbul to discuss Afghan operation**

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NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2nd L), and Turkish National Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul (3rd L) walk to the venue for the informal meeting of NATO defense ministers in Istanbul, Turkey, Feb. 4, 2010. NATO defence ministers started a two-day session in Istanbul on Thursday dedicated to reviewing operations in Afghanistan and finding ways to solve a one-billion-dollar shortfall for 2010. (Xinhua/Chen Ming)

NATO defense ministers and non- NATO partners gathered here Thursday for an informal meeting to discuss some major issues including the evolving NATO-led operation in Afghanistan, its engagement in Kosovo and defense transformation.

The two-day close-door meeting is chaired by NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen.

On Thursday, NATO ministers will hold a working dinner to discuss the transformation efforts required to best conduct the full range of NATO's agreed missions.

Ministers will look at how to get the most value for hard- pressed national defense budgets in the current economic climate and how to enhance NATO's capacity to counter Improvised Explosive Devices (IEDs), field additional helicopters and improve medical treatment for deployed forces.

On Friday, ministers will exchange views on the operation in Afghanistan carried out by the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF).

Topics to be discussed include the need to fully fulfill the training and mentoring requirements for the NATO Training Mission- Afghanistan (NTM-A).

NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen (2nd L), shakes hands with Turkish National Defense Minister Vecdi Gonul (2nd R) during the informal meeting of NATO defense ministers in Istanbul, Turkey, Feb. 4, 2010. NATO defence ministers started a two-day session in Istanbul on Thursday dedicated to reviewing operations in Afghanistan and finding ways to solve a one-billion-dollar shortfall for 2010. (Xinhua/Chen Ming)

Particular focus will also be placed on the implementation of the plans agreed at the International Conference on Afghanistan which took place in London on Jan. 28.

Afghan Minister of Interior Mohammad Hanif Atmar and Minister of Defense Abdul Rahim Wardak will take part in these discussions, joined by European Union High Representative Catherine Ashton and United Nations High Representative Kai Eide.

Chairman of the NATO Military Committee Admiral Giampaolo Di Paola, NATO supreme commander Admiral James Stavridis and ISAF Commander General Stanley McChrystal will also participate in the meeting.

With regard to Kosovo, NATO ministers will take stock of the alliance's engagement in light of the considerable progress achieved on the ground.

KFOR, the NATO Force in Kosovo, has recently downsized its number of troops to approximately 10,000 and has moved to a more flexible structure.

Delivering a speech at a meeting on "NATO Science for Peace and Security" in Istanbul, NATO Assistant Secretary General Jean- Francois Bureau said that there was need for joint and comprehensive efforts to resolve security problems which have global impacts.

"There are several security issues including terrorism, proliferation of mass destruction weapons, information security, energy and environment safety, and climate change," Bureau said.

"Source: Xinhua "