

NATO to Continue Presence in Afghanistan Beyond 2016



Antalya, May 15 (RHC)-- The secretary general of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) says the Western military alliance will keep some troops in Afghanistan even after its current mission ends in 2016.

Jens Stoltenberg made the remarks following a meeting of the NATO foreign ministers in the southwestern Turkish city of Antalya, which was attended by Afghan Foreign Minister Salahuddin Rabbani. "We will maintain our presence in Afghanistan even after the end of our current mission," Stoltenberg said, adding: "Unlike our present mission, our future presence will be led by civilians."

The alliance's future mission tasked with advising Afghan security bodies "will have a light footprint but will have a military component," he said.

The NATO chief further noted that the military alliance and the Afghan government had agreed on the "guidelines" of the new mission. NATO's current so-called Resolute Support mission, involving some 12,500 troops, is expected to end in December 2016.

The United States and its allies invaded Afghanistan in 2001 as part of Washington's so-called war on terror. The offensive removed Taliban from power, but insecurity still remains across the country.

The U.S.-led combat mission in Afghanistan ended on December 31, 2014. However, thousands of foreign forces have remained in the country in what Washington calls a "support mission."

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