

Transcript

Gen. Tod Wolters, Supreme Allied Commander, Europe, and Commander, U.S. European Command, Press Briefing on USEUCOM Priorities

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General Tod Wolters, Commander, U.S. European Command, and
Supreme Allied Commander Europe



STAFF: Okay, good. Well, good morning, everyone. I'm Wendy Snyder, EUCOM Public Affairs.

A great opportunity to have Gen. Wolters with us today and so we'll get right at it. We have a hard stop at 11:00, but we want to maximize opportunities for questions.

And so we'll open it up first, sir, if you'd like to make a few comments before we get into Q&A.

GENERAL TOD WOLTERS: Well, I would.



night, as I serve as the U.S. commander representing the United States in the confines of the European continent, is the continued promotion of our democratic value system.

And it sounds a little bit corny, but every second of the day, I am looking at people that are attempting to do things that – that erode our ability to promote our great value system. And it's – it's something that I stay closely, closely tied to in all of my endeavors.

I'm – I'm Tod Wolters. I serve as the United States European commander and I also have a hat that's called the Supreme Allied Commander for Europe. And the beauty of those two postings is it allows me the opportunity to take a look at U.S. equities and fuse them from a transparency and alignment perspective to the max extent practical with all of the challenges that we face from a NATO perspective to be effective.

I have some foundational priorities that – that I – I stick to as the United States European commander, but as you could well imagine, those priorities nest very nicely with the activities that I embrace as Supreme Allied Commander for Europe.

And the first priority is to make sure that we're doing all we can from a U.S. perspective to support NATO. And as we support NATO with that number one priority, we are promoting those value systems. And it's very, very important that we – we take – stay tied to that.

The – the – the second priority is to make sure that we counter Russian malign influence. And as – as you talk about countering Russian malign



The third large priority is relationships and engagements, which means we do everything we can within our USEUCOM power to make sure that we're promoting the readiness of our forces, so that they can be as responsive, as resilient and as lethal as possible, to continue to promote those democratic values that are so important to NATO and that are certainly so important to the U.S.

A couple of recent activities that we've embraced from a USEUCOM perspective and from a SACEUR perspective that at the strategic level have been very, very important in enhancing our value system.

The first is the adaptation of the NATO military strategy. NATO did not have a strategy for the last five decades plus. We did not have a document that the military arm that represents NATO could follow in order to apply a strategy.

So in the first time for over five decades, we've been able to produce this document. It was endorsed by the North Atlantic Council. And it allows myself and the components that serve me the opportunity to go forward with a productive strategy.

And that strategy defines two basic threats, one, being the near-peer competitor of Russia; and two, being international terrorism. It also identifies four additional challenges that I don't need to mention at this point.

But the beauty of that NATO military strategy is it defines the large picture ends, ways and means, and the approach that we can take to be



century far different than it was in the past.

The last thing I'll leave you with is, on top of that NATO military strategy, we have recently produced the initial concept for the deterrence and defense of the Euro-Atlantic area. And that concept starts to describe the maneuvering patterns that we have to take as a NATO entity, all 29 nations involved, to improve our ability to deter in the 21st century and, if called upon, to defend. And the beauty of that concept is, it starts to lay out the transitional activities that you would have to embrace as a military entity to transition out of deterrence, into defense; something that's a lot easier said than it is actually done.

And finally, we've done some really smart things inside of NATO with respect to the force. We've just completed a NATO command structure adaptation. And that's, kind of, a term of art that we use that really means we are putting the forces where they need to be to be best aligned to most effectively deter, so that the unfortunate potential of conflict never occurs. And we need to improve our ability to deter so that we actually never get to a situation to where we have to have kinetic conflict and defend. And we need to make sure that we're focused keenly in that area so that we can be more productive.

And this NATO command structure adaptation is a path that we've been on to make sure that you've got the right uniform military member in the right place at the right time to more effectively deter, so that ultimately a kinetic conflict never has to occur.

So some very, very exciting changes that have occurred on continent. The one thing that I've been very, very grateful of is the fact that I've had



Allied Commander and U.S. commander, EUCOM.

And I'm very familiar with what their TTPs were; their tactics, techniques and procedures; what their desires were. And what we've seen from those two commanders was a European continent that transitioned out of assurance, into a deterrence mindset, which was Phil Breedlove's charter, and during Mike Scaparrotti's time he did a fantastic job of posturing the forces to better be able to deter.

And I believe, as Tod Wolters, following those two commanders, it is my time to show to our senior civilian leadership, what it is we are doing from a proactive standpoint, that allows us to deter in a more effective fashion to keep the peace.

And that's where we currently are today, and I would enjoy the opportunity to take any questions on any subject from A to Z. And if the questions are too hard, I'll just defer them to Capt. Snyder over here.

STAFF: All right. I'll start out. Lita, go ahead.

STAFF: Lita, good to see you. Please.

Q: Nice to see you again, General.

Can you talk to us a little bit – this is a two-parter – about Ukraine? Can you tell us what your assessment is of the Russia threat in Ukraine as it stands now?

And have you had conversations with many of the U.S.-European allies over the last several weeks, about aid to Ukraine? And do these allies



the U.S. in Ukraine, zero conversations.

What I have had conversations about is, over the course of the last three months, all of the activities that we have embraced from a U.S. perspective and from a NATO perspective, to help the Ukraine military defend themselves.

And you're very, very familiar, in our previous conversations, and those engagements, those exercises, those operations, those activities, those investments, from a military standpoint, have been continuous and sound over the course of the summer of '19 to the very present. And they have come in the form of military training teams that we cycle into the country on occasion, that reach out to different functions that exist inside of Ukraine military, to find better ways to allow them to better defend themselves.

So the engagement activity, Lita, over the course of the last three months, has been just exactly that. And I haven't had any conversations with my mil-to-mil counterparts or with anybody, about concerns over investments in the Ukraine.

Q: Well, can you – the threat from Russia, how that stands today?

GEN. WOLTERS: My sense is that what we've experienced over the course of the – of the last five months during my tenure, and the last half of Mike Scaparrotti's tenure, is the security disposition of Ukraine with respect to Russia plateaued, and it's stayed that way. And we all know that there are ongoing activities as we speak, with respect to the transference of folks who were held captive.



were just alluding to.

Q: Okay.

STAFF: Over here, go ahead.

Q: Hi there. Can I – so I first have a follow-up question, and then I have a separate question. Follow-up on Lita's question, can you talk a little bit about specifically the Javelin missiles that the U.S. has provided to Ukraine, and what difference that that capability has made for the Ukrainian military?

GEN. WOLTERS: I can. Number one, it's a – it's a defensive contribution, the Javelin. It affords a soldier the opportunity to put a resource in his or her hands, that affords them the opportunity to protect – protect their sovereign turf. And it's a sophisticated capability, it's a modern capability; it has great precision, it has great speed.

The key part of this is, are we as a U.S., are we as NATO, willing to go into Ukraine and assist them with tactics, techniques and procedures to better utilize this resource, to better defend their territory? And we've done so. And those engagements, over the course of the summer of '19, have been very, very productive.

So, all in all, when it's said and done, you see a little bit of a bounce in the step of the Ukrainian soldier, when he or she has had the opportunity to embrace this system that allows them to better defend their turf.

Q: Thank you.



GEN. WOLTERS: We have a security mechanism zone, as you're familiar with. We've conducted joint patrols with our Turk counterparts, U.S. and Turk. I think we've completed approximately nine of those joint patrols. Mostly in the air domain, a couple in the ground domain.

Those – those patrols have been very, very effective. They serve the purpose of taking a look at the fortification disposition in the – in the security mechanism zone.

With respect to Turkey – and you and I have talked about this before, and I have had the opportunity to serve in Europe for the last three and a half years. Not in my current posting, but as the NATO air component commander and the U.S. air component commander. The mil-to-mil relationship with Turkey is – is as palpable today as it has been in the past.

One of the things that we deeply appreciate in the relationship is the fact that when we as U.S. service members interact, from an exercise standpoint, with our Turkish counterparts, they treat us as brothers at arms. They truly treat you as a bloodline. So the trust that exists, from a mil-to-mil perspective, is as strong as it has been in the past.

And as the military commander representing NATO and as the U.S. commander representing the U.S., I am tasked by the president and the secretary of defense to make sure that I can do all that I can in my military lane, to keep the relationship sound. And obviously, as we sit today, Turkey is a very, very important partner from a NATO perspective. And what they do to enhance the security disposition on the continent remains very, very productive.

Q: Thank you.

General, you mentioned, earlier, the continued – the fact that the continued promotion of the democratic values were a powerful tool for you. Are the – all the discussions about the U.S. president trying to pressure Ukraine to get dirt on a political opponent, weakened your – your ability to defend those democratic values?

GEN. WOLTERS: No.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: That won't do that?

GEN. WOLTERS: No. (Laughter.)

(CROSSTALK)

Q: I think that's a legitimate question. I mean, you began with your – about how that's the – that's what keeps you up at night. Is you said, is your – sorry, is – is the – whether you can promote these democratic values. And that's something that is very much in question right now, when you have the American president, on transcript, saying to Ukrainian president, I would like a favor, though.

That's – you can't – I mean, how – how does – that does not affect, at all, when you go and talk to people about democratic values, the – the



GEN. WOLTERS: As the USEUCOM commander, I've had the opportunity to engage with military counterparts in the Ukraine to promote these democratic values and – and I – I have seen no decline in that relationship. We have been – we have been able to exercise, engage with military training teams, and – and we've been able to continue to do all the things that we need to do from a military perspective to continue to inspire these democratic values.

STAFF: Over here.

Q: I have, actually, a follow-up question on Turkey, and then another question.

So as EUCOM, as you've read, are also involved with the security mechanism deal, are you also aware, or do you have anything that the U.S. is giving any training to SDF regarding air SS-like drones, helicopters or kind of a JTAC [joint terminal attack controller] training?

GEN. WOLTERS: The – the – the mil-to-mil relationship that we have with Turkey addresses the USEUCOM and the NATO equities that exist on Turkish soil. That – that part of the conversation is – is something that applies to the U.S. Central Command's activities with respect to what takes place in Syria. So as we speak at this time, what I do is work mil-to-mil with Turkey to make sure that from a – a security mechanism zone's standpoint we are doing all the things that we agreed to do in accordance with the charter, and – and that charter is our guidepost, and – and I think some of you may have had access to that. And we continue to rely upon that charter with respect to the activities that we



commander, what do you think?

GEN. WOLTERS: As – as you probably heard, the NATO secretary general say many times, we're a family, and families have brothers and sisters and sons and daughters, and every once in a while, they have small disagreements. And – and in military terms, I refer to these small disagreements as rain, and we have to wake up every morning, and we have to find a way to get to work in the rain. And – and quite honestly, this activity is one of those things that we have a disagreement on, but we continue to put one foot in front of the other and march forward, and Turkey remains a very, very important NATO ally. And we'll – we'll see what happens over the course of the time with respect to the stance that the United States has taken and Turkey has taken with respect to the co-location of the S-400 and the F-35. They should not be co-located. There's a decision that Turkey could make, and we'll continue to press forward. But as we speak, they're an important NATO ally, and the mil-to-mil relationship from the U.S. and NATO perspective remains strong.

STAFF: Back here.

Q: General, I'd like to ask you about, do you anticipate having a continuous carrier/striker presence in your AOR? And if not, what kind of presence do you anticipate having, and what adjustments are you having to make in the absence of that striker?

(CROSSTALK)

GEN. WOLTERS: That – that – that's a great question. We – we have to



commanders should do is prepare for all the – the possibilities of – of having not quite the force that you would prefer. And when you prepare to have a force be prepared to adjust at the very last second to have the existence of that force go someplace else, so we prepare for that.

One of the very, very smart things that our United States military did was produce a – a – a national military strategy nested under the – the Defense Strategy. And – and what this did was make people like me, the – the USEUCOM commander, not just focus on all of the security activities as they embrace the European continent, but what I have to be prepared to do is if I see an activity that is changing on European turf. I have to jump up to 50,000 feet and make sure that that activity is accounted for from a global perspective.

So as you can well imagine, I spend a lot of my time in consultation with my INDOPACOM counterpart commander and with my Central Command commander, with the NORTHCOM commander and all of the other commanders – USCYBERCOM and USSTRATCOM. So when we have situations where we – we have the potential for a resource that you're addressing to potentially go someplace else, we have to look for as many options as possible to make sure that we can continue to effectively deter and defend, and this is a classic case where I'm preparing for both situations.

STAFF: Barb

Q: To go back to a couple of issues, you started by saying democratic institutions are under assault, and you worry about that. What specifically – specifically are you seeing in your theater that you think is



community in this country. You guys live very much in the real world.

Can you tell the American people, in the four-star world what your approach is going to be with your counterparts over the coming months as the political turmoil, the impeachment inquiry continues? Even if you have not gotten query from your counterparts yet, what is your plan for the way ahead? You must have some thought of how you will approach that, should that concern come your way.

GEN. WOLTERS: Number one, I – I – Barbara, I strongly advocate the promotion of our democratic values. That's – that's exactly what I believe, so that starts to answer your first series of questions.

The activities that I see by near-peer competitors on continent have to do with malign influence, and as we speak at this point, I'm most concerned about that malign – malign influence in the information space. And – and from – for example, from Russia. So – so that – I'm answering your question. So – so from that standpoint, we've had to do some smart things with respect to the posture of – of our European forces to be able to embrace malign information influence so that, number one, we have indications and warnings that allow us to detect it; and number two, we have a command-and-control architecture that allows for the long haul to be able to neutralize it; and number three, we have mission command to point to where we have force presentation that allows us to be effective against it. This malign information influence that exists, for example, in the vicinity of the Baltics that run about Russia, has been evident for the last several years. And when you talk to military leaders and MinDefs of those nations, they will tell you that they're – they're very frustrated with what Russia does with respect to introducing their opinions and thoughts on the people that



malign information influence that comes across to the Baltics.

And we've done so. We've done so as a NATO entity, number one, by recognizing the domain of cyber; and number two, by embracing the cyber component inside of USEUCOM. And, number three, here in the United States, I think we've done some brilliant things with respect to the information environment. We actually took the time, in the United States, to designate a combatant commander solely focused on cyber, USCYBERCOM. That's currently Gen. Nakasone.

And what Gen. Nakasone does every day is he – he wakes up, charges into work, and for a cyber information perspective, he's assisting us to do smarter things in the future, to be able to combat this malign information influence as it exists, not just in my region, but in multiple regions.

And as we speak today, having one USCYBERCOM commander that's in charge, from operational, strategic and tactical-level activities for the United States, has been very, very helpful because it gives us very, very clear direction and guidance about what we should and shouldn't be doing in order to better protect the information space.

This is a long answer to a very good question, Barbara.

On the advance side of that discussion, because of those thoughts, in NATO we've seen the value of having a focused architecture on top of this cyber domain with respect to information. And you've seen many nations in NATO who have become very, very interested in cyber, to the point where they've actually stood up national cyber centers of



networks that they communicate on and they're finding ways to improve their (inaudible), improve their defense, so that what they say and do with respect to protecting their value system is – is the message that it needs to be.

So these – these are activities that started with the "malign influence" discussion that I took to the information domain that I just laid out to you. From a U.S. and NATO perspective, the smart things that we're doing, from an application standpoint, that get better, that combat this malign influence in the information space.

And – and it's so advanced, Barbara, that we've – we've embraced this domain from a NATO perspective. We've obviously embraced this domain from a U.S. perspective. And those actions that I just outlined are identified in the NATO military strategy as things that we need to do in the future to better protect and better deter and better defend in the info space. And we've outlined that in the NATO military strategy, and we've also included that in the initial concept for the deterrence and defense of the Euro-Atlantic area.

And in this area, we talk about the comprehensive aspect of what we have to do, not just from a land perspective but from an air perspective and from a maritime perspective and from a cyber perspective and now from a space perspective, to have the best comprehensive deterrent and defense that we can possibly have in the Euro-Atlantic area.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: ... have two questions...



Who did you ask?

What answers did you get?

And what is the four-star community plan?

You live in the real world. It's happening. How do you plan to move ahead when you get confronted with these questions?

GEN. WOLTERS: Those – you know, Barbara, I think you've got an interview with Mr. Hoffman later on today?

Q: sir, I'm asking you...

GEN. WOLTERS: I think – I think I'll let you – I'll let you deal with that with Mr. Hoffman.

STAFF: Yeah, we're not going to get into the politics here. One last question over here?

Q: Two follow-ups, please. The first one is very related to the discussion we've had when it comes to this issue of Ukrainian aid. You said you have not had discussions yet. I find that somewhat remarkable, in terms of an assurance standpoint with your – with your peers.

Why do you not see that as necessary to proactively have on your own?

And if I could, the second follow, related to the Javelins, it's on the record that the Ukrainians want more of them. Do you see that as a



have been centered and focused on the operations activities, training events and exercises that we've embraced with them. And they have been incredibly positive, and I think I outlined all that.

Those – those are the only conversations that we have. And as you can well imagine, at my level and at their level, 24 hours of a day is not long enough to get all the things done that you need to do.

And for the second part of your question, they're – the Ukrainian military is very excited about the Javelin, for all the reasons that I outlined. And my suspicion is we're to a point based off the number of military training teams that we've been able to insert in the Ukraine to allow us to have comfort that, with an additional Javelin, comes enough soldiers with the ability to embrace that capability, absorb it and productively use it. And I think we're just about to the point to where we've hit the curve in the line that allows us the opportunity to say, "Yeah, I think more of those will probably help."

And right now, it is my military advice that I think we should go forward with that, because of the – of the positive outcome, because they're better able to deter their sovereign territory.

STAFF: Folks, that's...

Q: Are you aware of any conversations requesting other European countries to step up and provide more security assistance to Ukraine, as the president has suggested?

GEN. WOLTERS: Jamie, I'm not. I – I'm not.



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