

**Department of Defense Press Briefing by Gen. Philip M. Breedlove
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Full Transcript**

GENERAL PHILIP BREEDLOVE: Last time I was here, I explained the security situation in Europe was rapidly evolving and becoming complex. Even in just these past four months, the situation has grown more serious and more complicated.

As I stated in each of my congressional hearings, Europe continues to face security challenges from two directions. First to the east, Europe faces a resurgent, aggressive Russia.

Russia has chosen to be an adversary and poses a long-term, existential threat to the U.S. and to our European allies and partners. Russia also seeks to reestablish a leading role on the world stage.

Russia sees the U.S. and NATO as threats to its objectives and as constraints on its aspirations. So Russia seeks to fracture our unity and challenge our resolve.

To the south, Europe faces the daunting challenge of mass migration spurred by state instability and state collapse, and migration that masked the movements of criminals, terrorists and foreign fighters. Within this mix, ISIL or Daesh is spreading like a cancer, taking advantage of paths of least resistance, threatening European nations and our own with terrorist attacks.

Its brutality is driving millions to flee from Syria and Iraq creating an almost unprecedented humanitarian challenge. Russia's entry into the fight in Syria has complicated the problem, changing the dynamic in the air and on the ground. Despite public pronouncements to the contrary, today Russia has done little to counter Daesh, but a great deal to bolster the Assad regime and its allies.

To be clear, all genuinely constructive efforts to end the war are welcome. But in the end, actions will speak louder than words. The war against Daesh hits home particularly hard for our close NATO ally, Turkey, which shares borders with Syria and Iraq.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: And further complicating the picture, sharply divergent interests in Syria have created a deep tension between Turkey and Russia, and the risk of miscalculation or even confrontation remains high.

EUCOM is standing firm to meet this array of challenges. To counter Russia, EUCOM is working with allies and partners in deterring, and preparing for conflict if necessary.

In an ideal world, as a core element of deterrence, we would significantly bolster our permanent forward presence. In a resource- constrained environment, we are aiming for the appropriate mix of forward presence pre-positioned war stocks ready for use if needed, and the ability to rapidly reinforce with troops coming from the continental United States.

To counter Daesh, EUCOM is actively facilitating intelligence sharing and encouraging strong civil-military relationships across ministries and across borders. And to meet these challenges, EUCOM is a central part of U.S. leadership of the NATO alliance. We will seek to continue to increase the readiness and responsiveness of the entire NATO force structure.

The continuation of the European Reassurance Initiative, or ERI, would strongly support EUCOM's efforts to counter Russian aggression and other threats. This year's budget request would significantly increase ERI funding to \$3.4 billion, which would deepen our investment in Europe along five key lines of efforts: one, providing more rotational forces; then increasing training with our allies and partners; increasing pre-positioned warfighting equipment in theater; increasing the capacities of our allies and partners; and improving the requisite supporting infrastructure.

Together, the tools ERI would provide would send a clear and visible message to all audiences of our strong will and our resolve. Our further efforts to assure, deter, and defend are supported by ERI and would complement those of the entire whole-of-government team.

So, EUCOM remains committed to a shared vision of Europe whole, free, at peace, and prosperous.

I thank you for this, and I look forward to your questions.

Q: General, thanks for doing this, and hopefully we'll see you a couple more times before you leave. I have a follow-up on your flow of foreign fighters, and one sort of unrelated question. On the flow of foreign fighters, terrorists and criminality that you talked about, can you give us an estimate of what you believe the foreign fighter and terrorist portion of that foreign flow is? And if it's, you know, how you've seen it increase or change over time?

And whether the ceasefire you think if it holds is affecting that flow or not. With less bombings, is there more chance for more people to get across more easily?

And my unrelated question is, I was wondering if you would be able to complete the sentence you started in the hearing today, but were cut off by Senator Graham. He was asking about Afghanistan and you said there needs to be -- the mission needs to be completed there. I'm wondering if you can say whether or not you think the current troop level is needed longer in order to complete that mission, based on what you know of the situation today.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Okay. Thank you.

So, I'll unsatisfy, because I can't give you a number on the estimate of the flow. I think that what is clear is that we have seen all these three elements. And I do divide the last two, which some don't understand, but criminality, terrorists and foreign fighters. In that latter category, foreign fighters, some of them were there and are returning. What worries, I think, the nations is that these foreign fighters return home and then, if -- and then in a situation where there are no jobs or no way to address their desires and their approach to life, then they might use their skills in a bad way.

But criminality, terrorism and foreign fighters in there. The numbers, recently I've seen reported, are numbers I had not seen in the past, but some are reporting now that they believe as many as 9,000 fighters have gone and as much as 1,500 fighters have returned back to Europe. That's not our numbers, but that's the numbers I'm seeing widely reported.

As to the effect of the cease-fire, first and foremost, as I said in my statement, any genuine real opportunity to find peace for the Syrian people can only be a good thing and we support it. And hopefully, that would settle some of these issues, but there is a long way to go to determine whether what we're seeing now will be a lasting and genuine effort and I think what's important here is as I have said before, the real proof will be in the actions and the results, not the words.

To the Afghan mission, when asked about troop levels, I try to avoid numbers. I don't think numbers are terribly productive. What I do believe is that we have a mission to finish and even so, we have an opportunity to finish this mission and get it right. And right now, what I think is key to the mission is remaining in the four-spoke arrangement so that we're out connected with the cores in the field. We need to continue our TAA, train, advise, assist of these cores and to get some contact and work with the 215th, which we had chosen to uncover in the past.

So rather than talk about numbers, I think it's important now that we have a mission to finish, we want to efficiently finish the mission and part of that is remaining connected, and so that construct would drive some troop level for some time. So again, my thought is finish the mission that we went there to accomplish.

Q: This is a follow-up. Are -- there are obviously -- do you think there are enough troops there right now to do this mission? Can you do it with fewer?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: We have advocated for some improvement to our troop levels to address some of this train, advise, assist that we think is still important, and those are -- have been considered and we await judgment on that.

Q: Tom Watkins, AFP. Thanks -- thanks very much for doing this. You spoke this morning about the long-term existential threat, and you just mentioned it again, posed by Russia to Europe and -- and to the U.S. as well. That's -- that's quite strong language, and I'm wondering are you talking about an existential threat in a kind of -- in a -- in a very real sense or more of a kind of conceptual, like a long-term -- a hypothetical? Or is this something that's actually giving you cause to -- to raise the rhetoric to this -- to this level?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So I don't think I've really raised the rhetoric. This is the same word I've used. This is the same word other senior leaders in our defense establishment have used, including our new chairman, and we've been using it for some time. I think that I wouldn't call the existential threat; I can't remember the words you used.

I see it as a real threat, and I would just point to the fact that this is a nation that holds thousands of nuclear weapons and they talk all the time about using those nuclear weapons. In fact, at this podium, you have heard me in the past more than once say that I think their talk is a bit irresponsible for a nation that is a nuclear power.

STAFF: Go ahead, Barbara.

Q: One question on Europe -- your comments on Europe and then I wanted to ask something else. When you talk about the possibility of 1,500 returning to Europe, what's your current assessment right now about whether there is -- you see operational planning for some type of plot or attack in Europe. How active are these people? And then I have a follow-up.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So Barbara, I can't satisfy -- I'm not going to talk to you about intelligence, but I think you have seen reporting of the concerns of the nations that these things -- that these returning fighters are doing the kind of planning that is required to do something like the Charlie Hebdo and other attacks. These are just not spontaneous. So that's as much as I can give you on that.

Q: So you do think there is -- I mean, you're indicating they're -- that planning is happening.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: What I said was that many are saying they see planning happening. I see what is being reported, and I think that that line of thought is indicative of what we've seen in the Charlie Hebdo and other attacks.

Q: And on a different subject very briefly, I met sort of appealing to your plain spoken nature, I wanted to ask you, you know, as you begin to come to, you know, potentially retiring from military service, it has to strike you, I suppose, as really unique that there is a national conversation right now about the legality of military orders, about things like returning to waterboarding, torturous practices, carpet bombing. And I would think that one of things people on your level are looking at is not just what the troops may be thinking about this, but especially you who deal with so many counterparts in so many countries, what are you beginning to see about their reaction to this national conversation in the U.S. if the military really gets asked to engage in practices like waterboarding and torture that have been ruled illegal in international law.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So rather than address any single element and to stay clearly out of a political sense, I would just tell you that I get a lot of questions from our European counterparts on our election process this time in general. And I think they see a very different sort of public discussion than they have in the past, and I think I'll just leave it at that.

Q: Well, of course, I have a follow-up. When you say your counterparts, so your European military counterparts. Can you give us any indication of the kinds of questions they're asking you?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: I -- counterparts is an interesting. I mean, it's civilians and others. I think the Europeans have always watched our election process very, very closely. And I think that they --

Q: But this time around, sir, you're saying you're getting some very unique interests. So what are they asking you?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: I think I'll stop there, Barbara.

STAFF: (off mic)

Q: Two questions, sir. First one, going to (inaudible) Air Base, the B-52s that touched down took off on Saturday. Can you kind of talk about that? I know they're there for cold response, but I -- and from

what I understand, it's pretty rare to position -- I know it became a 200 support personnel (inaudible) position these kind of aircraft on the continent. So if you could talk about that and what -- what they're there for, if it's a part of this ERI, or a deterrence initiative, and then I have a follow-up.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: No, these are not part of ERI, and they're not a part of deterrence initiative. In fact, they're a part of a long-scheduled, long-planned Cold Response exercise.

The timing -- every time we fly bombers to Europe so rarely, as opposed to what you see quite often coming out of the other side of the equation, when we take bombers over it, it seems to pique interest.

But in fact, this is a routine mission scheduled for a long time, for Cold Response, and it has been public knowledge for some time, and it's a part of the exercise objectives, and if you would like more details, we can get you a follow-up.

But there are any number of other aircraft types -- of both fighter, airlift and others, involved. So, long-standing plan, not normal and not a part of either ERI or any response to anything going on now.

Q: And my (inaudible) question -- today's testimony -- I was talking to (inaudible) earlier about this -- you talked about Russia weaponizing the migrant population going into Europe, and you -- you frequently talk about hybrid warfare, and I'm just wondering if you think you could link -- or if there is a link between kind of using that very big issue as a wedge to kind of maybe instill things that you've seen when it comes to special warfare -- hybrid warfare, et cetera.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: I would not make the leap of tying the two. I think, though, to discuss the first piece, you've heard me talk about this before if you watched my testimony today.

Just to reiterate a little bit, let's go back to the beginning of this war that's in Syria, and what we saw was Bashar al-Assad using barrel bombs in populated areas in Syria. There is no discriminate way to apply a barrel bomb. There are no ballistics by which to employ it against a known weapon. It is a weapon of terror, and it is a weapon to get people out of a location, on the road, moving somewhere else, and make them someone else's problems.

And so this sort of indiscriminate use of unguided, imprecise weaponry has no other value that I know of, other than to terrorize and get people on the road.

I liken it also to -- as you know, the Russians are using almost no precision weaponry. Their weaponry is imprecise and dropped in large quantity, and, as you saw reported the other day, this kind of weaponry into the suburb in Aleppo.

Again, I don't know what military utility that would have, other than to get people displaced and on the road, and into someone else's problem set.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: NATO has now agreed to assist the flow of migrants -- (inaudible) -- Mediterranean. It took them a long time to get on -- get on that type of mission. What kind of resources would the U.S. play when the flow of migrants increases in coming months? And is there potential that maybe U.S. bases in the region could be used for -- as part of this mission?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So when you say it took NATO a long time to get on that, I think what you're trying to say is took NATO a some amount of time to decide to become a part, because from giving me the mission to ships on mission, it was 48 hours, and we were able to reroute the -- Standing NATO Maritime Group 2 -- 48 hours, it was in the objective area.

So it was a fairly quick response once the decision was made.

Currently, there are no U.S. assets involved in standing NATO maritime group number two. And it will be some time before we're scheduled to be a part of that. As you know, the U.S. contribution to the maritime in the Med, the U.S. contribution is primarily fashioned around ballistic missile defense and our four -- our four frigates that are in Rota that do Aegis work.

And so -- not frigates, destroyers. I'm sorry. I need to be precise. I'm not a Navy guy. But our four destroyers at Rota. And so they are routinely more involved in the (inaudible) mission as opposed to the standing NATO maritime groups. And so right now, U.S. -- a portion of that is at a point in the future where we might have a ship scheduled to be a part of standing NATO maritime group number two.

As far as the involvement of U.S. bases or bases of NATO, I'm not sure really where you're question comes from, because the construct is that if there are migrants that are picked up, which is not the objective of this mission, but if due to observation of the law of the sea or anything else, migrants are picked up, the agreement is that all migrants will be returned to Turkey so they wouldn't be moving forward into -- further into the Med.

And if anyone else would rather have a more fulsome description of that mission, it is something I would like to talk about.

Q: (inaudible) -- follow up, though?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Sure.

Q: So, a lot of these migrants are -- they're traveling short distances from Turkey to these Greek islands. What -- what is the actual practical purpose of having these warships --

(CROSSTALK)

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Okay, let's just do that now.

So, to describe the mission more fully, what was agreed was actually two-fold. And most people are talking about the maritime piece of the mission, but there's actually an over-land piece of the mission as well.

The maritime piece of the mission is that we will have a maritime group that will work in these Aegean spaces. And that they will be, if I could just paraphrase, sort of the eyes and ears of what's going on on the water. They are not a policing force and not expected to police any of what goes on on the water.

They are expected to pass actionable information to the two coast guards -- the Turkish coast guard and the Greek coast guard, who are policing forces and have the wherewithal and the ROE to deal with these sorts of things.

And so gathering, observing, collecting information, handing it off to the coast guards so the coast guards can take action.

Of course, all ships have to observe the law of the sea. So if there are migrants in distress or whatever, that the NATO ships come into contact with, they will observe the law of the sea. And the agreement, then, that has been struck among the nations are that any migrants that are picked up will be returned to Turkey, as opposed to move forward into the mission space.

Q: General, a year ago in this room you spoke about the Russians putting 1,000 pieces of military hardware, including tanks, armed personnel carriers, artillery pieces, into Ukraine. A year later, are you seeing more Russian activity in Ukraine or less? Are they putting more weaponry in? Or are they taking some out?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So, since that time, the number went above 1,000, well above 1,000. And to your latter part of the question, there is still Russian activity in the Donbass. They are still supporting the -- the separatists there. Command and control and fire support and UAVs, communications, over watch with surface-to-air missile defenses, et cetera, et cetera.

So the Russians are still very much involved in the Donbass.

Q: So a year later, now that the Russians have moved dozens of fighter jets and -- and helicopter gunships into Syria, how can -- if -- if Russian activity has -- has gotten worse in Ukraine now they're in Syria, how -- what do you tell people that say they're hoping the Russians come over to the U.S. side when it's pretty apparent, when the Russians bomb U.S.-backed forces in Syria, that the Russians are not on the side of the United States?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So in the first part of that question, I think you -- would you say again what -- how you describe what Russian activity is now in the Donbass? Because I don't think I agree with your formulation of words.

Q: Okay. Would you say that the -- the Russian activity has increased in the Donbass in the past year?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Okay. So, no, I do not. In fact, I think that, in general, possibly, the Russian activity in the Donbass has decreased a little bit. What you saw for some time was a period of relatively calmer -- we should never use the word "calm", but more calm activity along the line of contact.

Now, what I would tell you is, in the last couple of weeks, this has changed, and the activity along the line of contact has very much increased.

I just spoke to the ambassador this morning, right before testimony. What is being reported -- these are not my numbers, but what is being reported from some fairly reliable reporting -- is that, over the last 24 hours, there were about 71 instances along the LOC -- skirmishes, firefights, sniper activity, artillery activity, et cetera.

And over the past week, it's been over 450 -- in the last seven days. So what this is indicative of is the activity along the LOC is picking up, and what is concerning to those watching is that there are areas that have been very calm for some time -- for instance, vicinity Luhansk -- and that has actually picked up.

As you know, the lines are actually separated by a river there, so you have to be pretty dedicated to engage the enemy across that area. And so there are concerns that the activity is becoming more broad. There are concerns that the activity is picking up.

And probably more concerning is part of this activity, according to the reporting, is now involving heavier weapons that are formerly thought to be out of the fighting area.

Q: The Russians have broken multiple agreements -- the Minsk agreements, which you're describing, should -- can you trust that the Russians will maintain some sort of ceasefire in Syria? Can you trust the Russians -- their government or their officers?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So, I would take you back to what I said about -- opening remarks, that any real, sincere effort at a ceasefire could only be a welcome thing if we can get a ceasefire for the Syrian people.

But what we will watch is what happens, because the actions and what actually happens on the ground will be much more important than the words of any agreement.

(CROSSTALK)

Q: Those warships that you're putting in the Aegean to -- to help with the refugee crisis -- aren't those warships and submarines also there to check the Russians in the Black Sea, or the -- part of the Russian fleet in Europe as well?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So the mission that we're doing in the Aegean Sea is wholly focused on immigrant flows.

STAFF: Go ahead, Andrew.

Q: General, hey. Andrew Tilghman with Military Times. You've mentioned a couple times the prospect of needing to rapidly reinforce U.S. troops in Europe, and I'm wondering if you could just tell us under what circumstances you think that might be required.

And kind of related to that, to what extent do you think the U.S. and NATO are -- are taking on some operational risk by not having a larger force in Europe full-time?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Sorry, Andrew, thanks. This may take just a minute, because you've opened something that I really wanted to talk a little bit about today, so I'm going to answer the question in the way I want to answer it.

So the rapid reinforcement is an important part of our way forward, and let me talk a little bit about something I discussed in the Congress today, and that is the vision of how we would go forward, and ensuring that we have an appropriate force to meet the challenges that we see in Europe.

We do not have, in my opinion, enough U.S. forces permanently stationed forward. But in this time of fiscal austerity and the challenges that we face, we need to look at other ways to address the needs that we see for our mission in Europe.

And so I believe that the permanent forces forward need to be reviewed, but then the shortfalls that we see in what is required would be addressed in two ways.

First, what you see as a part of this year's ERI is an appropriate mix of forward pre-positioned capabilities -- wartime capabilities -- from equipment to munitions.

And on top of that, forward stationing of pre-position supplies, a rotational presence, heel-to-toe forward presence -- fully funded -- of rotating troops to flesh out that forward troop requirement.

And then the third element of this mixture is the rapid reinforcement. Why is this important? Because it cannot be taken for granted anymore. You've heard us talk about the A2/AD environment that Russia has created in several places in Europe -- anti-access area denial requirements.

And so we need to be able to, one, penetrate the A2/AD environment. That is, we need to invest in the appropriate capabilities and capacities to do that, and then, once we are able to get through the A2/AD environment, we need the appropriate infrastructure ashore to be able to receive those forces.

And so, also a part of the ERI are those investments in ports, rail heads and railroads, and airfields so that we can rapidly receive, and then deploy and employ forces.

So just to recount, there's sort of a three sort of step process here. Get the forward forces right, address the shortfalls that we cannot get corrected in the forward forces via rotational forces, falling in on the appropriate numbers and types of pre-positioned forces forward, and then third, guaranteeing that we can rapidly reinforce through an A2/AD environment, and having the infrastructure to receive that rapid reinforcement.

Q: My name is (inaudible). I'm from Afghanistan, work for Ariana Television Network.

I would like to ask your general opinion about Afghanistan. General situation -- people complain that there is lack of security nowadays. Taliban attacks day by day increasing in Afghanistan, and peace process also, if you share your opinion about that.

And also, could you please tell us what will be NATO role in Afghanistan over the next -- a few years in Afghanistan?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So thank you for the question, and I'll just pile it on top of what I said before. We are there to accomplish a mission now. The nations of Afghanistan believe that is a right and appropriate mission, and it is my and other judgments that we should stay and get that mission done.

Currently I believe that that mission requires us to be able to continue to do the train, advise, assist mission to the corps level, and that requires us to be out and a part of those corps.

And so I think the four-spoke structure that we have used to drive us in the current phase of this work is still appropriate, and still required. We need contact and training, advising and assisting out there at the corps levels.

And so I think that that's what I see as NATO's focus across the next months -- is to remain engaged with the corps, remain engaged also with the ministries and other things in the capital.

The Taliban is a dedicated and tough opponent, but I think that the ANDSF continues to perform well, and it is still growing in its capabilities.

We know that there are some shortfalls that need to be worked on -- aviation, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, et cetera. We knew this before this current set of training started. These things are going to take some time, and so we need to continue to be focused on that.

As far as the peace process, I don't have huge comments, except for those that we have said in the past, which is there has to be a political solution to this, and we support the efforts of the government to move that solution forward.

Q: Yes, Brian Everstine, Air Force Magazine. Earlier this morning on the Hill, you said that, in your opinion, seven NATO nations have a critical internal plan to reach the 2 percent spending goal on defense budgets, in addition to the 5 percent that the five that are already investing 2 percent or better.

What are these countries investing in? What are they spending their money on? And from your perspective, what is needed more? What do these countries need to spend more on?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So -- Brian, thank you. That discussion was a little larger than that. Let me just back up.

You know, the challenge is that there is concern -- rightfully so -- that the nations of NATO should be doing their part to finance this defense and the NATO defense.

In fact, Article 3 of the Washington treaty is -- or the Atlantic Treaty is actually that -- and I'll paraphrase it -- defense starts at home. Every nation should prepare for its own defense. That's Article 3 -- rarely talked about, but it's an important one.

And so we have set the goals well into the past that the nations should shoot for two percent of investment, and as importantly as you heard me talk about is 20 percent of that two percent should be on recapitalization and investment in capabilities.

In other words, the two percent cannot just all be personnel cost. We need to be investing in capabilities.

NATO has a process by which we give the nations investment goals. What do we ask them to invest in? You could give me the list. It's all of the low-density, high-demand things. ISR, aircraft, precision capabilities, rotary-wing lift, both heavy and medium, et cetera, et cetera.

It's all the list that you have seen, and as you know, we're working hard on some of those capabilities in the nations. And the nations, to some degree, are working within those frameworks and making those investments, and in things that we're short of.

Q: Thank you, General Breedlove. Always a pleasure to see you.

You've mentioned to Lucas -- you talked about how Russia was involved with command and control links in the Donbass region. We've also had our deputy assistant secretary of defense -- Michael Carpenter had told VOA that there's a force presence still inside eastern Ukraine, they're pouring heavy weapons.

Is -- are all these things a sign that the U.S. and NATO response to Russian aggression has so far been ineffective?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: I wouldn't use those words. We have gone through a period of -- as I talked about before -- of decreased activity along the line of contact. Of course, now, we've seen that disappear, and we see the activity picking back up.

Here's how I would put this: there are a lot of things that need to be accomplished to to finish out the Minsk accords. There seems to be a lot of emphasis on what Ukraine is supposed to do, and I would point out that Russia has responsibilities in Minsk as well.

Every discussion of Minsk ends in the same way -- that we reestablish the internationally recognized border of Ukraine. That would mean getting a lot of forces and capability and supplies out of eastern Ukraine.

And so I think what would signal that we're having success is not only progress on Ukraine's behalf, but progress on Russia's behalf, in getting out of the Donbass and stopping supporting the fighting that goes on there.

STAFF: Kimberly?

Q: Sir, to follow on with that -- Kim Dozier from the Daily Beast. It seems that Russia has made a lot of mileage out of -- out of saying it's going to do one thing and acting in another way.

And we hear stern words from this podium, from the State Department podium, but we never see anything from the international community that matches Russian action. There are sanctions, yes, but public opinion polls within Russia say that that is merely contributing to Putin's strength.

So at what point do you say we have got to change? That things like ERI or reorganization of forces -- that they're not going to change the Russian calculation, and change your relationship with them?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Okay, I think I understand your question. Let me take a shot at it. So as to the reactions of the international community, I think you have seen a few of the larger nations turn a more stern approach to Russia and point out that Russia has to also meet its obligations.

In fact, just across the last several days, I've seen several voices from some of the larger nations pointing out that Russia has to meet its obligations as well, and showing some pretty intense concern about this uptick of activity along the line of contact.

So I think your observation is that the international community has not stepped up to that task. I think it's a matter of degree and a matter of judgment. But the bottom line is there are strong voices in the community that have stepped up more recently to address these problems.

The question you ask -- the second part of your question, I think, is at what point do our actions begin to compel. Is that what you're asking?

So I don't think that we are -- I think that we are talking in the construct and I'll use the NATO language that we've used for some years -- or not some years, but a little over a year and a half now -- and that is, first and foremost, our actions were to assure our allies.

So assuring our allies is an affirmative thing on our side, and I think that Atlantic Resolve and other actions that the U.S. and now other NATO nations have done the assurance piece.

The next question, and you see that NATO is discussing it now in the context of Warsaw, is deterrence, and what does deterrence look like. And that work is being done in our headquarters and others', now, to give the ministers things to consider for what deterrence means and how we would shift from assurance to deterrence in these actions.

So I think it's a little too premature to try to prescribe specifics, because we're still being asked to do that work.

Q: So just as a follow-up, would you say that the U.S. contribution to special operations training inside Ukraine, for instance, would at some point match the Spetsnaz interference and advise and assist program with the Ukrainian opposition?

I'm not real -- I'm trying to search for what you're trying to get to here.

Q: Will -- will the -- the U.S. or NATO SOF, at some point, get into the field of battle and advise and assist the way it does in Afghanistan, the way it's expanding right now in Iraq, the way it does on a limited basis inside Syria?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: If your question is specifically as it relates to Ukraine, so --

Q: And offsetting Russian aggression.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Right. So what we have, I think, determined not to do is be in a tit-for-tat approach to this business. We are taking affirmative actions to train our Ukrainian brothers and sisters.

And if I could just take this moment to launch on, I think, some very good news there, I've been to Yavoriv and seen the training that we were doing there, and the training of the national guard forces went extremely well. And now, as you know, we've finished that tranche of training and we began ministry of defense training at Yavoriv.

Additionally, as you are asking about, more forward, we are training special operations forces of Ukraine. We just, literally, finished the first batch, and we're starting the second batch.

And the report this morning I received was the first series of training went exceptionally well. In fact, our SOF were pretty happy about what they were learning from these men who had been on the front with the Russians, and the Russian tactics, and what they learned from Russian actions in the Donbass.

And so not only are we training them, but we're learning from them as we go along. And so the point would be that I think that we are not trying to do tit-for-tat or trying to vie or match these things.

We are taking an affirmative approach to building capacity in our partner, Ukraine.

STAFF: So we're at the end of our scheduled time. (inaudible) -- close it out, maybe share some thoughts about where you're (headed ?)?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Okay, great. So thank you -- Barb's left, but it very well could be my last time with you all, as you know, because my time is coming fairly short as the commander of EUCOM, and as the commander of NATO. It's been a great interaction with you guys along the way. We will depart from here today and literally get about seven hours on the ground at home, and then we're on our way to Israel, where we'll participate and observe BMD -- ballistic missile defense -- exercises and things there.

As you know, U.S. European Command is charged with assisting in the defense of Israel, and we take that mission very seriously, and we will be having one of our largest exercises of the year with -- we are having now one of our largest exercises of the year with Israel, and we will go there to take a look at how that's going. Our commitment to the mission that we've been given there could not be more firm.

Thank you very much.