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Telephonic Press Briefing
on the European Reassurance Initiative

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MODERATOR: Good morning everybody, and greetings from the U.S. Department of State. I would like to welcome all of our participants who are dialing in from across Europe this morning, and thank all of you for joining in this discussion.

Today we are especially pleased to be joined from Stuttgart, Germany by Major General David Allvin who is the Director of Strategy and Policy for U.S. European Command. Major General Allvin is going to speak with you today about the European Reassurance Initiative and that's an initiative I know that all of you are very familiar with and about which I know you have very many questions. So we'd like to keep that the focus of today's call.

We are going to begin today's call with opening remarks from Major General Allvin and then we're going to turn it over to your questions. Of course we're going to try to get to as many of your questions as we can during the time that we have.

As a reminder, today's call is on the record.

With that, I will turn it over to Major General Allvin for his opening remarks, with many thanks to you, sir, for joining us.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Well, thank you, Mireille.

First, I apologize. My voice is a little off, a little under the weather, but good morning to everyone. I'm Major General Dave Allvin and as Mireille said, I'm the Director of Strategy and Policy here at the United States European Command.

First of all, I'd like to take a moment to thank all of you for joining me today to discuss our European Reassurance Initiative Budget request for Fiscal Year 2017.

As many of you may know that General Breedlove, our European Command Commander has testified before our Congress last Thursday, at which time he directly addressed the European Reassurance Initiative. In his testimony General Breedlove emphasized the importance of both continuing our assurance activities and enhancing deterrence in Europe. Today I'd like to take the opportunity to provide some additional insight into our command's approach to utilizing the significant increase in Fiscal Year '17's budget request.

First and foremost, the United States and our NATO allies and partners stand together in achieving and sustaining the vision of a Europe that is whole, free, prosperous and at peace. The strategic landscape has changed over the last several years which potentially puts that vision at risk. It is therefore imperative that we continue to analyze the environment as it evolves, and provide the support necessary to counter challenges to that goal.

The European Reassurance Initiative Budget Request is a reflection of our commitment to this vision, as it is central to our commitment to collective security and defending the homeland and our national security interests abroad.

As General Breedlove has stated, our force presence in Europe is the bedrock or our ability to assure our allies [inaudible] real and potential adversaries and respond in a timely way should that deterrence fail. And in response to the evolving security environment here in Europe, our commander has strongly advocated for not only suspending further drawdown of forces in theater, but also for the need to look at tailored, supportable increases and capabilities.

As you may know, this budget request represents the third year of the European Reassurance Initiative and provides the funding for activities included in our Operation Atlantic Resolve.

Through the last 18 months of Atlantic Resolve U.S. European Command has strengthened the foundation of assurance and deterrence through increased exercises and training as well as partnership capacity building and improving interoperability. These activities continue to bear fruit as we raise effective awareness of the challenge to respond quickly and decisively as individual partner nations and an alliance to counter [inaudible]. In Operation Atlantic Resolve we also make the statement that we are here in Europe, forward and ready.

Now as it stands, the Fiscal Year ’17 proposed budget seeks to significantly increase ERI funding from just under $800 million in Fiscal Year ’16 to approximately $3.4 billion in Fiscal Year ’17. This four-fold increase is built on the foundation that I mentioned and broadens ERI’s focus of continued assurance of our commitment to NATO allies and partners to the inclusion of deterrence to improve readiness [inaudible].

The bottom line is that we have proposed a detailed plan to execute the requested $3.4 billion and that is currently making its way through Congress.

ERI funding will enable the United States to expand and deepen activities within the following five established lines of effort.

The first line of effort is increased rotational presence. The United States will continue to maintain a persistent rotational presence of air, land and sea forces in Central and Eastern Europe. Our increased rotational presence in Europe is fully in line with our international commitments and is a visible signal of our commitment to collective defense. In fact, this ERI proposal proposes roughly a doubling of our current rotational brigade combat team presence in Europe.

The second line of effort is additional bilateral and multilateral exercises and training. The enhanced U.S. force presence I just mentioned, will enable more extensive U.S. participation in exercises and training activities with NATO allies and partners, which ultimately improves our overall readiness and interoperability. In particular, the Fiscal Year ’17 ERI budget request will expand the scope to 28 joint and multinational exercises which annually train more than 18,000 U.S. personnel alongside 45,000 NATO allies and Partnership for Peace personnel across 40 countries.

The third line of effort is enhancing the prepositioning of U.S. equipment in theater. The Fiscal Year ’17 request will increase our overall readiness for prepositioning ammunition, fuel and equipment which enhances our ability to provide a rapid response against threats made by aggressive regional actors. This year’s request will place additional Army pre-positioned stocks, or APS, in Europe. These additional combat vehicles and supplies are intended to reduce the force deployment times and will enable a rapid response to potential contingencies.

The fourth line of effort is improved infrastructure. Improvements throughout Europe on installations such as airfields, training centers, and ranges will improve allied military readiness in the region and provide for quick disbursal of forces if required. These upgrades will provide near-term flexibility in the responsiveness to the dynamic changes in the European security environment.

Finally, the fifth line of effort is building the capacity of our allies and partners. The ERI funding will continue to build capacity of Central and Eastern European allies and partners to defend themselves and enable their full participation as operational partners in responding to crises in the region.

I'd like to emphasize that it's important to understand that the real value is not in one individual element or line of effort, but that it is the collective sum of all of the European Reassurance Initiative lines of effort that really makes it a powerful and effective initiative.

For example, if you increase rotational presence you're able to increase frequency of training with allies and partners, ultimately leading to greater interoperability. Without that improved interoperability you can't truly be ready to fight as a coalition or an alliance, so without it you effectively reduce both assurance and deterrence.

Similarly, while providing infrastructure helps build partner capacity, the ability for U.S. forces to have that infrastructure to support training and exercises also improves our readiness. So again, I'd like to point out that this increased funding will significantly expand ERI's focus from continued assurance and our commitment to NATO allies and partners to the inclusion of deterrence measures that vastly improve our overall readiness.

Finally, as our leaders have stated, the United States along with our NATO allies will continue to take actions that increase the capability, readiness, and responsiveness of NATO forces to address any threat or destabilizing actions that threaten a Europe that is whole, free, prosperous, and at peace.

With that as opening remarks I'd like to open it up to any questions.

MODERATOR: Great, thank you so much, General Allvin. And thanks for setting the stage for us.

We are going to begin now the question and answer portion of today's call. Our first question this morning is coming to us from Poland. It's from Jedrzej Bielecki who is with Rzeczpospolita. Go ahead, sir.

MEDIA: Good morning, General. I wanted to ask you two questions concerning your points three and four of the plan. First, it concerns the prepositioning of equipment, of vehicles, military vehicles especially in Poland. As I understand there are five locations, but if you could be a bit more specific which locations and what will be the role of [inaudible] which is north of Warsaw would be a kind of headquarters of these forces?

And concerning your point on four, infrastructure, I wonder if you have some specific plans concerning the airfield in Lask, which is an important place as well as I understand.

And I wonder if, apart from vehicles and equipment, is it possible to expect the kind of permanent bases with soldiers in Poland or for the moment it's unfeasible.

Thank you so much.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you very much for the question. If I may start with the second question first with respect to permanent basing. Obviously, and my commander has said this before, the ideal for us as the European Command, we do believe that forward stationed forces are great and they would be the best, but we currently understand that in this current environment the opportunity for increased rotational presence, basically as we call it a heel-to-toe rotational presence, will provide the next best thing. Understanding that, as with your nation and other nations, there are other challenges to our budget and so we are looking to make sure we have that near 1.0 as we call it, that heel-to-toe, that non-stop presence in lieu of more permanently based forces.

With respect to prepositioning of equipment as well as the infrastructure, quite frankly at this point we do have some ideas, but because this still has to make its way through our Congress, I think it would be irresponsible for us to give details about one specific location or one specific set of capabilities, knowing that as our Congress debates and looks to evaluate this proposal, the outcome might look quite different than our input, and I would not want to preliminarily give

information that could turn out to be inaccurate on the other end of it.

However, I will say that with respect to the locations of the prepositioned equipment and the infrastructure, we evaluate that in the context of the ability to be able to rapidly have forces fall in on the prepositioned equipment and be able to move forward to areas of potential aggression. And with respect to some of the infrastructure, it really allows us to operate from additional sites to be able to complicate potential adversary action and be able to give us more freedom of movement with respect to operations forward. But at this point, I'm quite reticent to be able to provide a specific location or two in that that is so pre-decisional pending congressional approval of the funding for it.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

For our next question we're going to go over to Budapest, Hungary and if you could go ahead and open their line, and if the journalist could please state your name and outlet for us before you ask your question. Go ahead.

BUDAPEST HOST: Hi, Mireille. We have two journalists here with us today. Our first question will come from Peter Bakodi of the Hungarian Daily Magyar Idok.

MEDIA: Hello, my name is Peter Bakodi. Mr. General, do the United States have any plan if some of its European allies got [invaded in] an unconventional way like the little green men in Crimea?

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Peter, thank you very much for the question.

Of course we do understand that, we are starting to understand some of the Russian behavior and understand that this concept of little green men, understanding that there are new and unconventional ways that they are applying coercive pressure.

We here in U.S. European Command, we're trying to look at our forces and our capabilities and our partnerships with host nations and looking at ways that should that activity occur, that we as the United States military are engaging with our partners in vulnerable countries or in countries where that influence might be attempted and looking at the military capabilities that may be able to counter that. But as you know,

sir, the idea of the little green men as it was called, and I think now General Breedlove refers to them as little gray men. But this unconventional way of applying pressure is really a whole of government approach. So I know there are other areas in which there are engagements that cross the spectrum of the diplomatic, the information, the economic side of governments in addition to the military that really, that really do work towards helping to identify and characterize and recognize and attribute that sort of activity in vulnerable countries.

So we do look with our relationships that we have with partner nations and within the Alliance that we support of NATO, looking for capabilities within the military construct that we can look to help characterize those and attribute those sorts of actions to raise awareness.

MODERATOR: Thank you. And while we've got the line open we're going to go ahead and take a second question from Budapest. Again, if you could just state your name and outlet. Go ahead.

MEDIA: This is Szabolcs Voros from the news site Origo.

General, I would like to ask you one specific issue, the issue of combat and transport helicopters in the Hungarian Air Force is a long-term problem, and instead of purchasing new models from NATO allied countries, maybe from the U.S., the Hungarian government just issued a tender of renovation of Soviet-made helicopters.

You as a top commander of the U.S. Air Force, what do you think when you hear news like that? You are maybe disappointed or do you have any specific feelings about that? Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Well thank you very much for the question, and I think it would be inappropriate for me, not knowing all of the context within the individual nations, to understand the complexity of those policy decisions and the different tensions that rest with each individual government.

I will say that from a U.S. perspective and as a partner nation and an ally in NATO, we do encourage that any sort of equipment that is more easily interoperable is probably more advantageous. So we do prefer, with respect to interoperability, those sort of systems that are Western made or Western supported, but again, that's because it helps us fight as a coalition and helps us fight as an alliance better with Western made equipment.

However, again, it would be presumptuous for me to place a judgment on such a sort of an internal and national decision.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

For our next question we're going to jump over to Romania, and we're going to take a question from Dragos Sasu with Digi 24. Go ahead.

MEDIA: Hello, General. My question is what is the perspective of the American-Romanian military cooperation? And if we will see in Romania more troops and equipment on the ground and when?

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you very much for that, Dragos, and I will repeat that with respect to specific troops and equipment, I don't want to get ahead of our own Congress. But I can tell you with full confidence that our relationship between the U.S. and the Romanian military is phenomenal. It's nothing short of phenomenal. Between our engagement through our rotational forces, through our commitment with respect to infrastructure and ranges and our Black Sea rotational forces, as I mentioned, it is quite incredible and it keeps growing all the time.

As a matter of fact, this evening Secretary Nicut who is your Secretary of Defense for Planning and Policy, he and his staff delegation will be here in Stuttgart and I will be hosting them tonight and tomorrow, and we will conduct talks over several subjects designed to further integrate and increase the closeness of what is already a very productive relationship. So I would say that the state of our relationship between the United States and Romania is incredibly strong.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

For our next question we're going to jump over to Lithuania and we have Vaidas Saldžiūnas who is with the Lithuanian news site DELFI. Go ahead, Vaidas.

MEDIA: Hello, yes, my name is Vaidas Saldžiūnas. I'm from the Lithuania's portal DELFI.

I have two questions. What can you tell us about the NATO naval presence in the Baltics? We heard a lot about the British, the Royal Navy involvement there which is somewhat of a rarity since 1920 I would say. But as it comes with the NATO Maritime

Standing Group 1, what about the U.S. role there? Will there be any U.S. role there in ASW missions or whatever?

And the second question is also related to the Baltics. A lot of people with stars and PhD's up their sleeves have been talking about the A2/AD factor lately. There is already understanding it's a growing issue, however, what are the means to counter it or to minimize at least it? So what are those means and whether they should be deployed somewhere closer to the Baltics. If so, where? Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you for the questions, Vaidas. Those are, especially the second one is a particularly challenging one that I'll get to in a second.

On the first one, again, I can't speak with too much specifics with respect to the NATO piece other than the U.S. contribution to it. We refer most of those questions for the NATO Maritime Standing Group 1 and 2, to the NATO staff. However, obviously as a member of NATO, our commitment to Article 5 is ironclad and we do support those in the ways that make sense within the construct of NATO. So I would say that with respect to the U.S. participation in those sorts of activities, as it relates to today's subject of the European Reassurance Initiative, some of the proposals having to do with the maritime domain with respect to anti-submarine warfare, et cetera, et cetera, have to do with our maritime patrol aircraft, some infrastructure that supports that. There are some proposals to be able to strengthen that infrastructure in the Baltic region in the Northern Norwegian Sea area. Those are under consideration. So again, I don't want to get into specifics as to what might go where, but our commitment to be able to robust that anti-submarine and in some sense anti-surface warfare is definitely on our minds, and not only as U.S. EUCOM specifically, but as a member of NATO.

With respect to the comment about A2/AD. As you know, you mentioned you've seen it in all sorts of press and professional articles and the like. This is a very challenging situation. We understand that capabilities need to be developed as well as, not only just with the military domain. Within the military domain we understand we need capabilities, but this is really the essence of what appears to be the A2/AD is not only the capability but the will to employ that. And obviously we understand, once that A2/AD environment is activated, should you say, if it impinges on NATO sovereignty we take that very very seriously per my previous mention of Article 5. That is a very very serious issue for us and our commitment is ironclad.

With respect to the capabilities. I will tell you that there are not any specific in the European Reassurance Initiative, but we are looking throughout our military and throughout each of our services and our research and development, and all those areas, looking for ways to be able to counter this because it does not only affect areas of sovereignty of the host nation, shall we say, but it also impacts the sovereignty of surrounding nations, and that's something we should take very very seriously if it's combined with the will to be able to exercise that.

So in a nutshell, it is a challenging problem that we are heavily invested in within our government and our military, but I would say that it is not part specifically of our European Reassurance Initiative.

MODERATOR: Our next question is coming to us from Alix Rijckaert from AFP. Go ahead, Alix.

MEDIA: Good morning, General. Thank you for taking my question.

I was wondering, there was talk one and a half years ago if I remember well, that with the retreat of U.S. troops from Afghanistan some of the equipment would also be located in Eastern Europe or in Europe. How much of this is still true? And how much of the Reassurance Initiative is actually taking equipment from Afghanistan? Or is this equipment based in the U.S. that is going to come to Europe?

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you, Alix, for that question.

I will tell you that I would have to get back to my staff to understand if any or to what extent there was any equipment from Afghanistan being moved towards Eastern Europe, but I can tell you that within the construct of the European Reassurance Initiative, that is not part of the proposal at all. It is not taking equipment from Afghanistan into Eastern Europe as far as the equipment sets.

MODERATOR: Thank you.

For our next question I'm going to read one that was submitted to us via email from Konstantin Vasilkevitch who is with Ukraine's 2000 Weekly and Foreign Affairs Chronicle Magazine. And Konstantin has asked the question:

Can you describe the main military tasks of NATO forces deployed in Eastern Europe? What developments in land warfare in Eastern Europe should we expect in this regard? And what about potential Russian response to NATO military reinforcement in Eastern Europe? How do you see that?

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you very much.

Again, I don't want to speak for all of NATO, however, as a contributing nation to NATO and a participant and as U.S. European Command supporting NATO, I can say that some of the areas that NATO is evolving with respect to really to the second question, the approaches and tactics type, it's to be more responsive. So as we look at the adaptation that NATO is undergoing leading up to Warsaw Summit here and beyond, as well as some of the activities that have been in place since the Wales Summit, we do see that there is an increased emphasis on being more responsive, and so you'll see things like the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, they're looking at more exercises, more training to be able to enhance interoperability. They're looking also at better command and control through some of the elements that really will help a more responsive NATO understanding that the pace of war has quickened as we've seen with the rapid behavior by the Russians in Ukraine, primarily Crimea and the Donbas, that they need to be much more responsive and much more decisive earlier on. So I would say that's part of what we believe NATO is doing, and we're supporting NATO as U.S. European Command.

With respect to the Russian response, I would say that I'm ill equipped to understand what is really in the heads of the Russian leadership. But what we can do is we can really base some of our decision-making on behavior, and we certainly have noticed that behavior has been aggressive behavior.

So when you look at what some of the activities going on within NATO and within U.S. European Command to be able to provide a more robust defense, and that defense is not a threat in and of itself unless one is anticipating trying to act aggressively. However, the Russian response will be what the Russian response will be. We have a commitment to our allies and partners for a free and peaceful Europe and so that's where we come down on being able to support Article 5, being able to support NATO, and bring stability to a dynamic changing security environment in Europe.

MODERATOR: Great, thanks.

For our next question we're going to go back over to Poland and we have a question coming in from Marek Świerczyński of Polityka INSIGHT. Go ahead, Marek.

MEDIA: Thank you for that, and thank you, General, for talking to us this morning. A great opportunity.

I would like to get back to the A2/AD problem. I know that you are unwilling to speak before the congressional approval of the funding, but if it were you to decide, what would you see in the rotational enhanced presence to counter-balance the A2/AD threats?

And the other thing I would like to ask is, when this whole procedure of prepositioning will start, how long will it last, and how it will actually look like? Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you very much, Marek.

If I can start with the second question first, the how long will it last. We have not determined any sort of an end time for once the prepositioned stocks are in place. Again, as I mentioned in my opening statement, we look to the dynamics of the evolving security environment and if, God willing, we find in the future we continue to adapt and we find, at the other end of this, we find a more peaceful and stable, with fully committed partners to the international community throughout Europe with no threats of aggression, then obviously it would be time to relook at that. However, this commitment for the preposition is, I would say until further notice, which is about as specific as I can get, but it is intended to be there as long as that potential aggression and that threat persists to the nations of Europe.

And with respect to the other question on what are we doing specifically with respect to countering this A2/AD environment, I would say there are a few things that, not one or two things will actually solve the problem. However, we do have within the proposal, and again I can't get too specific, but in general we're proposing the ability to make it easier for some of our 5th Generation fighter aircraft to be able to better operate and repair and maintenance to more easily operate within the theater, which allows a longer presence of those type of assets which are a good counter to the A2/AD environment. Within our prepositioned stocks we're looking to have more fires, actually on a rotational presence we're looking to have more fires

brigade, more ability to be able to operate underneath that environment.

So there are some pieces that are embedded within, but I would say ERI in and of itself does not single-handedly really provide a counter to the A2/AD environment.

MODERATOR: Our next question is coming to us from Ana Pisonero with Europa Press. Ana, go ahead.

MEDIA: For those of us who are not too clear on like the sizes and the grades which are different with the U.S. Army to other armies in Europe. At any single time, how many U.S. forces will be both deployed for the reassurance measures and also for training purposes in the Central and Eastern European countries?

And also, coming back to the first question of our colleague, the Polish colleague, when he mentioned the permanent basing in Poland, from a military perspective, sir, would, although we don't have the option, but would there be a need for any other kind of permanent basing in other countries or for example a location like Poland would have been sufficient? Knowing and bearing in mind that we don't have this option, but just to understand a bit from a military perspective.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you. I'll answer the second question first.

With respect to permanent basing, understanding that this is purely a hypothetical, we would look for the same sort of locations within EAS, I'm sorry, in our rotational presence, I would say that I'm not at liberty to say a specific country or anything, but there are areas in which we are providing our rotational forces, and so currently our rotational forces are providing the presence that permanently stationed forces would as well.

So those countries across Eastern Europe that we are providing rotational presence, we believe those are the countries that can be most helped by more sustained presence and most helped by enhancing interoperability through exercises and training. So most of those Eastern European countries that we are executing our Operation Atlantic Resolve are the countries that we believe would be best helped by that sort of presence. But again, I really need to close how I opened. That conversation has many implications, the NATO-Russia Founding Act not being the least

of those, and so we understand that those are well above my pay grade, as we like to say.

With respect to the size and the number of this increased rotational presence that we're looking at, at any given time -- and to your question if the brigades are different sizes -- we are looking for roughly doubling the time that we have a rotational brigade here in Europe. A brigade is roughly 3,000 soldiers or perhaps a little bit more, and so we're looking for that level of presence, just more often. In addition -- that's just for the ground forces.

We also, you can see on a much smaller scale with respect to individuals, but still very, the effects are still quite powerful with respect to our theater security package, with respect to air forces, maritime presence, so all those sorts of things also are presence related but aren't necessarily soldiers. So the short answer to that question is it's about 3,000 which is what we have here when we have the presence. We're just about doubling the amount of time that those rotational forces will be in theater.

MODERATOR: Our next question is coming to us from Alexander Pausch of Der Neue Tag from Germany.

Alexander, go ahead.

MEDIA: General, thank you for the opportunity to talk to you this morning.

My question goes to Germany, Belgium, Netherlands. Do you foresee using the facilities which already exist for prepositioning material, for increasing training and things like that? Thank you.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you very much, Alexander, and this will be the shortest answer that anyone will have on this today. Yes, we do. We do look to where it makes sense, we look to fully leverage those storage facilities that make sense within German, Belgium, and the Netherlands. So thank you for that question.

MODERATOR: Thanks.

For our next question we're going to go back over to Romania and we've got a question coming in from Cerasela Radulescu who is with Radio Romania. Go ahead.

MEDIA: I have two questions, if you allow me the short one first.

We are talking about some aircraft which will be deployed in Romania as Resilient Resolve, the presence there. If you could give me some details.

And second, I was interested in the south also, when we talk about Aegean and the crisis of refugees, which is evolving. How is the United States helping now? Because we could speak also about the humanitarian crisis in this region.

Thank you very much, sir.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you very much. It was not you, it was the actual communications. I want to make sure I got it.

To your first question, and I might ask you if you could, think about rephrasing the second because I didn't quite hear it fully. But on the first --

MEDIA: The first one. The first one is about the aircraft which are coming as NATO is deploying in Poland and Romania. And as part of the exercise Resilient Resolve. And I was thinking if this could be, what is your opinion when we are talking about being neighbors with a resilient Russia. And we are talking here, I heard a lot of times about Article 5.

And second is about the Aegean and the mission of NATO which was asked to be present there because Europe is now having this very very tough crisis in the south.

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: Thank you very much.

As for the first, I do not know all the details of Resilient Resolve, but I will tell you that it is completely in keeping with how we understand our support to NATO should go. The idea of increasing exercises, increasing interoperability in Poland, Romania, and all the other countries across Europe that are part of the Alliance or partners. We absolutely fully support. We think that that also acts as a deterrent value to deter any sort of aggression from Russia, as you mentioned, but it also shows the solidarity that we have. And the more we can exercise, the more we can understand how to be able to respond quickly.

I think this is one of the key differences that we see ourselves moving into. This new security environment, one of the characteristics of it, it is so dynamic. So it requires rapid response. And if you don't understand how to operate with different allies and partners your response can neither be rapid nor effective. And so that's why any of these exercises that allow us to understand better the nuances of how each of our nations' armies, navies, air forces, how they operate, that makes you that much more ready and that readiness acts as a deterrent.

That leads into your second question with respect to the issues in the Aegean. Obviously we look, and even though the subject of this conference is really the European Reassurance Initiative, as we start moving further to the south we understand that there are issues there and that NATO is very involved and Europe is very involved and is affected by those issues. So we understand that both as the U.S. European Command and as a part of NATO that we definitely support any of those activities that are called upon, whether it be looking east or looking south, to be able to defend against some of these threats and instabilities of all sorts, whether they come from Russia or from the south.

So I would say, again, all of these NATO-led operations that allow us to operate better as a team, as an alliance, as a coalition really not only enhance our ability to respond quickly, but also serve as a deterrent effect for potential adversaries.

MODERATOR: Thank you. And we just have time for one last question, and that's going to go over to Lukas Kivita who is with Lithuania's LRT Radio News Service. Lukas, you get the last question.

MEDIA: Good morning, General. Please can you outline the specific security priorities for the Baltics to increase security in the region? And how often can we expect to see ground military drills when the Reassurance Initiative is launched?

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: I will tell you, Lukas, to the first question, the security priorities within the Baltics, that is, we as European Command are falling in behind the NATO priorities, so it's really to be across the broad front to enable the resilience against unconventional aggression or

coercion, and again, to be able to provide an ironclad commitment to Article 5.

And ERI, to your second question, the frequency and the number and the types of locations and deployments, what happens is, I don't mean to take you through too much process, but we have a plan. After Congress comes up with the final actual budgeted amount, that amount of money will be integrated into the planning and that will come down to our components within U.S. European Command and so that will be coordinated amongst the Army, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Marine Corps components of U.S. European Command.

But I will tell you that I do not have the exact number, but I will tell you that you will expect, you should expect increased presence. You should expect increased visibility of those sorts of forces by the very nature of the increased, almost doubling of the presence we're looking for, not only on the Army side, but the increase in exercises and training.

So while I can't give you specifics as to the times and the durations and when specifically, you should expect an uptick in heightened visibility based on this increased presence that we have, again, roughly doubling on the land forces side the amount of time, the additional brigades in theater.

Thank you.

MODERATOR: Thank you. Unfortunately, that brings us to the end of our call today, we've run out of time here.

Major General Allvin, did you have any last closing words that you wanted to offer to the group?

MAJOR GENERAL ALLVIN: I would just like to say one thing. First, thank you very much for your patience, and I fully realize that some of the answers are less than satisfying. I will tell you that when Congress comes through and provides their answer to what it is, we will be able to provide much more detail. We just feel like it's not responsible to be able to offer something until we have money in the bank, as they say. So as we do that, we'll be happy to continue this in the future as we get more details.

But I think it's very apparent by the interest of those on the line that this is a big deal, and I just want to reaffirm that in the United States and U.S. European Command, this security

environment and its potential implications for not only here in the region but across the world cannot be overstated. So we are committed as U.S. European Command to be able to do our level best to be able to support that Europe that's whole, free, at peace and prosperous.

So thank you very much, all of you, for your time.

MODERATOR: I want to thank you, sir, for joining us and for giving us so much of your time this morning. And also to thank all of the journalists for participating and for their excellent questions.

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