



Chairman Rodney Frelinghuysen

Subcommittee on Defense, House Committee on Appropriations

**FY 2017 Budget Hearing:
United States European Command
February 24, 2016
Opening Statement As Prepared**

This morning the Committee will hold a hearing on the posture of United States European Command.

Our sole witness this morning is General Philip Breedlove, United States Air Force. He is Commander United States European Command and NATO, and Supreme Allied Commander Europe.

General Breedlove assumed his current duties in late spring of 2013.

General Breedlove, welcome back to the Committee. Unfortunately, I believe this is the last time you will be testifying before us. We would like to thank you for your long and distinguished military service to our Nation and we wish you the best in your next endeavor. We hope you will not be a stranger because we value your advice and counsel.

Of course, when you assumed command three years ago, EUCOM was relatively quiet. After decades of keeping the peace, EUCOM, NATO and our allies and partners now face threats on many fronts, primarily from Russian aggression.

Terrorist attacks from ISIL and its sympathizers in Europe, most recently attacks in Paris and Ankara Turkey, have killed hundreds, including dozens over the last week.

Today, a major refugee crisis is threatening to unravel the European Union's border-free zones, even as it creates a monumental humanitarian catastrophe. At the same time, ISIS is using the refugee crisis to smuggle its own operatives into Europe.

Finally, your responsibilities are not limited to the critical role you play in helping to stabilize Europe. EUCOM plays a key role in assisting CENTCOM and AFRICOM with crises and conflict in the Middle East and Africa.

Members of this Committee have traveled to multiple countries in your Area of Operation in the past year, including countries in eastern and western Europe and Ukraine. So we speak with you today with the benefit of seeing first-hand just some of the challenges you face.

We are keenly aware that our footprint in Europe has been declining. EUCOM has gone from over a half a million US personnel at the height of the Cold War to only 62,000 permanent military personnel today, with rotational forces attempting to make up the difference.

General, given the challenges your command faces, we remain concerned that you lack the military support needed to accomplish your mission.

EUCOM has received additional Army, Air Force, and Navy resources since the implementation of the European Reassurance Initiative (which we fund) to expand training activities with allies and demonstrate resolve in the face of Russian aggression. However, these actions have paled in comparison to the planning and resources that the Russians have dedicated to the Crimea and Ukraine alone.

General, we have no doubt that, despite the resource deficit you face, the men and women under your command will execute your mission faithfully and with distinction.

Many of us are concerned about the lack of political will by this Administration to push back against Vladimir Putin. Many worry this lack of will has established an environment in which Putin believes we and our allies will not stand up to him if he makes further aggressive moves in the region.

I firmly believe that one lesson from history is that failure to stand against aggression only begets further aggression. Our lack of response to date to Russia's illegal invasion and annexation of Crimea, attacks against Ukraine, and threatening actions in the skies near Europe and the United States makes me question whether this Administration has learned that lesson.

I'm also concerned that Putin has been able to widen already existing fissures among our NATO allies, weakening their resolve to fight if called to do so. I'm sure you saw the recent Pew poll which found that support for NATO has dramatically fallen in Germany since 2009, from 73% to 55%. As you know, an effective NATO alliance must include a strong Germany, and we seem to be losing them.

General, we understand that your job is a tough one, and we stand ready to offer you whatever support we can. And after my rather bleak comments, I hope you can bring us some positive news.

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