

**Commission on Security & Cooperation in Europe:
U.S. Helsinki Commission**

**“European Security in 2018: A Conversation with General Hodges, Former
Commander, U.S. Army Europe”**

Committee Staff Present:

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Europe;**

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Cooperation in Europe**

Participants:

**Lieutenant General (Ret.) Frederick Benjamin “Ben” Hodges, Former
Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe**

**The Briefing Was Held From 10:02 a.m. To 11:31 a.m. in Room SVC 210,
Capitol Visitor Center, Washington, D.C., Alex Tiersky, Senior Policy
Advisor, Commission for Security and Cooperation in Europe, presiding**

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PARKER: I guess it's just about 10:00 by the clock here. On behalf of Senators Roger Wicker, Ben Cardin, and the entire bipartisan, bicameral leadership of the Helsinki Commission, good morning and welcome to the Commission's first briefing on military security in the second session of the 115th Congress. Let me also extend a warm welcome to one of the great military leaders of our time. Reading General Hodges' impressive biography this morning on the Metro brought to mind the G.I. Joe jingle of my youth, "a real American hero." General Hodges, thank you for your service and for honoring us with your presence this morning.

I am personally very interested in benefitting from your perspective on security problems big and small. How are we doing on our great post-Cold, post second war goal of securing a Europe that is whole, free and at peace? Is the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe's concept of comprehensive security as true as many of us – in what I like to affectionately refer to as the human rights racket – would like to believe? In other words, are problems of corruption and the collapse of the rule of law in other countries top-level national security concerns for the United States? And can neglecting them lead to war in Europe? Has it already?

Has the pace of European integration led to a weakening of national identity within individual states of Europe to such an extent that populations have become unwilling not only to spend what's needed to meet their collective security obligations, but to ensure their own national defense? Do we need more flag-waving patriotism in Europe, or is it still too soon given the destructive legacy of nationalism in the Second World War? And, more in the policy weeds, is it time for NATO to update its strategic concept, or does the risk of exposing division within the alliance at a volatile moment outweigh any benefits from a new concept? Does the NATO-Russia Founding Act have a future, or has it been overtaken by events?

Finally, if we have the high-class problem of a large country like Germany meeting its defense spending commitments, might we then confront another problem, that of smaller countries worried about the militarization of Germany? I have many more, and I'm sure our audience does too, but with that I'll turn it over to my colleague Alex Tiersky to properly introduce our keynote speaker and moderate our discussion. Thank you.

TIERSKY: Great. Thank you, Kyle. Kyle Parker, our chief of staff, of course. And let me be the first to, in this format, say: Welcome back to the Helsinki Commission. We're thrilled to have you. Thank you for your words this morning.

I have just a couple of administrative notes. I want to remind everyone that this event is streaming live on the Helsinki Commission's Facebook page, as well as our website. If you're tweeting, as I know many of you do, please use the Helsinki Commission handle, which is @HelsinkiComm. My name, again, is Alex Tiersky. I'm the political-military affairs advisor for the Helsinki Commission.

And I'm thrilled to see the turnout this morning. I see a number of senior congressional staffers in the audience. The diplomatic community is well-represented, as well as the expert community in Washington. So thank you for being here. I think that's – of course, we like to

think of it as a tribute to the Helsinki Commission. I think it's also a tribute to the reputation of our guest today.

Before I formally introduce General Ben Hodges, I'd like to provide some context for today's discussion from the Helsinki Commission perspective. As many of you will recall, the Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the formal name of the Helsinki Commission, is an independent agency of the federal government charged with monitoring compliance with the Helsinki Accords of 1975. Kyle has made reference to, of course, this set of commitments. And our commissioners, who are composed of nine members from the Senate, nine from the House, bipartisan, and one member each from the Departments of State, Commerce, and Defense. The Commission is thus a bicameral, bipartisan, and interagency group of U.S. government leaders.

Now, our mandate to monitor the Helsinki Final Act accords of 1975, and the commitments contained in it, has really been very active in recent years, particularly in the political military space. As you will all of course be familiar, there have been flagrant breaches of these commitments. Let me name only a few select examples. The commitments under the Helsinki Final Act include refraining from the threat or use of force against other states; refraining from violating the sovereignty, territorial integrity or political independence of other states; respecting other states' right to choose their own security alliances. We've also seen an extremely worrisome breakdown in the commitment to transparency in military affairs, which is a key part of the Helsinki Final Act.

Now, the perpetrator of these breaches of commitments, fundamental to the European security order, is, of course, the Russian Federation, a country that I would note has very recently been described in both the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy as a revisionist power and a strategic competitor of the United States. Today's briefing thus fits perfectly within the context and the mandate of the Helsinki Commission, and represents our continuing efforts to track the evolution of the European security environment, to draw attention to violations of key commitments, and to explore the U.S. role going forward.

So, ladies and gentlemen, we are extremely fortunate to be hosting today a uniquely qualified and distinguished speaker for what I understand is his first public engagement out of uniform in Washington, D.C. From November 2014 until his retirement in December 2017, Lieutenant General Ben Hodges helped lead the U.S. response to Russia's military aggression as commanding general of U.S. Army Europe. I could spend the next hour simply listing his well-deserved awards, commendations, and distinctions, as well as the number of positions that he's held. With his permission, I'd like to direct you simply to his extraordinarily distinguished biography in your packets for a full description.

But I did want to selectively quote – and this is not something I can do for all of our panelists – from a tribute that was included in the Congressional Record of the 5th of September 2017, a tribute to Lieutenant General Hodges on the occasion of his retirement. Lieutenant General Ben Hodges has served our Army and our nation for more than 35 years. Throughout his career he has commanded our great soldiers at many levels. He has deployed to combat

numerous times in defense of the nation. And he's been assigned to the most critical positions in our Army.

For the past three years, he has been the commanding general of the United States – U.S. Army Europe. During this period of extraordinary change and challenge in Europe's security environment, Lieutenant General Hodges has improved relationships with NATO allies and European partners. Through his leadership, Lieutenant General Hodges has successfully led his command through some of the most complex issues our Army has faced in recent years, with unparalleled results. The foundations set by Lieutenant General Hodges will allow NATO and our Army to meet every mission requirement in Europe.

I'd like to underline that although he has retired from the Army, we are thrilled that we will continue to benefit from his experience and expertise, as he has taken up the position of the Pershing chair in strategic studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis here in Washington, D.C. Sir, I suspect one of the most challenging environments and assignments you've served in was perhaps when you were the U.S. Army's chief of legislative liaison. But even in that context, we couldn't be happier to welcome you back to the Hill.

Ladies and gentlemen, we've agreed to structure the briefing with an overview from General Hodges. He and I will have something of a conversation here at the top table. And I'll make sure to reserve times for your questions towards the back end of our briefing. So, without further delay, General Hodges, please, the floor is yours.

HODGES: Thanks, Alex.

So I'm very grateful to the Helsinki Commission to give me this opportunity. This is my first time out as I make the transition from the Army into the civilian side. Carrying a briefcase now. I realize you can't carry a backpack and a suit anymore. And so I'm having to make some adjustments. And also how to use a phone by myself and get a cab by myself. So it's been an interesting transition. I've realized people actually do the phone by themselves and make their own flight arrangements. It's very interesting. (Laughter.) I was – I was in a bank the other day for the first time in 10 years. I had to register my vehicle in Tallahassee at the DMV. I felt like I'd really accomplished something. I did that by myself and everything.

So it's – so, anyway, I loved every day I was in the Army, 37 ½ years, but I am so fired up about what I call the second half. I mean, I've come out of the locker room now for the second half. But I'm lucky that I get to working on stuff that I really love. And so this sort of overview that I want to do very briefly up front is the three sort of main themes of things that I really care about. And then I look forward to the conversation with you, Alex, and with everybody else in here. And, by the way, I welcome any challenges on this. What I'm interested in is not winning an argument, but being as effective as I can in communicating what I think is important for our country and our alliance.

So, number one, why does Europe matter? You know, I'm from Tallahassee, Florida. I've been in Tallahassee the last several days, and at a friend's house in Beaufort, South Carolina. People don't walk around talking about Europe a whole lot. So it's not the front of

your mind unless you actually deal with it. But when you think about why Europe's important for the United States, first, from an economic standpoint, the economic relationship between North America and the EU is about five times greater than anywhere else in the world.

Now, in 20 or 30 years, you know, that sort of proportion with the Pacific will begin to change. But for now, and the next two or three decades, the economic relationship between North America and Europe is significantly greater than anywhere else in the world. So even if the Europeans don't spend one euro for their own defense, our economic prosperity is tied to civilian security in Europe. And our most reliable allies all come from Europe, as well as Canada and Australia.

And we don't do anything – can't do anything by ourselves around the world. No matter who the president is, the first thing they start doing is looking for coalition partners wherever it is we're going to be. And all of our most reliable allies, the ones you can always count on, come from Europe, as well as Canada and Australia. So being in Europe, maintaining those relationships is essential for our ability to build coalitions and to achieve what we're trying to do around the globe. So that's why Europe matters.

Secondly – and by the way, you can't just, you know, dial up somebody if you don't have existing relationships, if you don't understand what's going on there. So you have to be there. You have to engage. And that's certainly what I believe in. The second sort of broad theme is the alliance – the most successful alliance in the history of the world. Is it perfect? No. But the nature of coalitions, the nature of alliances is that you get a group of countries, of nations, that have shared common interests. But each one has different histories, they have different – a whole range of factors.

It shouldn't be a surprise to anybody that nations would have friction. But when you take a look at the lineup of who was in NATO, every country inside NATO, now 29 nations, has fought against at least two or three other members of NATO prior to the beginning of the alliance, or prior to their beginning, joining the alliance. Think about Greece and Turkey. I mean, the fact that both of them are NATO countries, given all the friction, the challenge, the hotspots, and the ongoing friction – the fact is, they're still in the alliance together. And this has helped, I think, create a security framework that for almost seven decades now has helped provide stability and security in Europe.

Does that mean that there's no war, there's no conflict, there's no friction? Of course not. But that sort of structure is what has prevented exactly what it was intended to prevent, was the outbreak of a world war. It's provided deterrence and it's provided a framework for solving security problems. And I think that maybe during the conversation we can talk about how the alliance has, in fact, adapted. That's sort of the main theme coming into the NATO summit that'll be in Brussels here in July, is NATO adaptation.

And I would challenge any large organization to adapt and change as quickly as the alliance has. When you think about, as example, the deployment of the enhanced forward presence battlegroups. I mean, the decision was made at the NATO summit in Warsaw in July of '16 to do that. And by early '17, you had the first battlegroups all deploying. In less than a

year, all of them were deployed, and going through exercises, and were integrated into Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.

I'm from Florida. And the Florida legislature could not pass a highway bill and see construction inside a year, guaranteed. But yet, here our great alliance in less than a year made a strategic decision and then deployed multinational formations into four countries in less than a year. I think that's an example of what the alliance is capable of doing. And the adaptation that's coming up here, particularly things that would improve speed and improve the deterrent capability of the alliance, we're going to see this, and an increased role for Germany inside the alliance. I think that's what's going to come out in July.

And the finally, the third sort of theme is Germany and the United States. I think this is the most important relationship in the world for us. That doesn't mean it's the only one. I mean, we'll always have a special relationship with the U.K. for historical, cultural reasons. But in terms of what's most important, it's Germany. Why is that? When you look at Germany's – first of all, their geography. We depend so much on Ramstein Air Base, on the port at Bremerhaven. Most of the 30,000 American soldiers in Europe are stationed in Germany.

We do things out of Germany that support operations in Africa as well as the Middle East. It's an important place for us for transit, for entry. And it's obviously critical for transit for alliance forces in Europe as well. Everything has to go through, emanate from Germany. Germany's economic power is not a surprise to anybody. So if our economic prosperity is tied to Europe, then, of course, this relationship with Germany is going to continue to be extremely important.

Frankfurt – of course, who knows how Brexit's actually going to turn out, but everybody has this feeling, many of the financial institutions that are currently in London, many of them are going to begin to move to Frankfurt. So Frankfurt's already sort of the financial hub certainly for Germany. And I think that's going to increase. A lot of American businesses are there. Largest consulate in the world is the U.S. consulate in Frankfurt. So an important part of our own economic prosperity is tied to Germany. Which, by the way, it always hurts when you see State Department being cut, because all that does is hurt our business interests, as well as our diplomatic efforts.

Military potential – Germany has, like they've always had, extremely professional quality men and women in their formations. The army is working very hard to rebuild its operational capability after 15 years in Afghanistan. Like us, they've been focused on Afghanistan and other counterterrorism-type things. They now are retooling their organizations and capabilities to become a more effective land power, exactly as the United States Army, and the British Army, and other European armies are trying to do. Now, they have a long way to go. But the potential that they have, and they're – what they're able to do with their 1.3 percent of defense spending, it's just equal to the 2 percent of what is being spent by the U.K., given the size of their economy.

Now, is that adequate? Absolutely not. Should Germany be doing more? Absolutely. But I think we can be a little bit more sophisticated about pressing Germany on what they do for

defense spending. In my view, we need to think more broadly than just tanks, airplanes, military hardware, or even expanding the size of their army. What we really need to think about is what capabilities can Germany provide, does Germany provide to the alliance that would help us, as well as the rest of NATO, for security and stability in Europe?

I believe that they will probably in Brussels in July accept the designation of this new NATO command called a Rear Area Operations Command, and be responsible for transit, rapid transportation, the ability to move NATO forces quickly across Europe, which is an essential part of deterrence. And that, deterrence, I'd like to come back to here at the end, and then I'll hand it back to you, Alex.

It seems to me if Germany expands their rail capacity, for example, more rail cars that can carry tanks, or expands the actual capacity of the rail network, expands the port at Bremerhaven, does things like that, that improve the ability of the alliance, who cares if it helps them domestically. If it has a real military value, I think that that should count towards their 2 percent. If they have – that's what we need from them. Frankly, I don't need to see more German tank battalions or artillery battalions. I really need to see more trains. I need to see a lot more capacity at Bremerhaven to receive stuff and to move it through.

And I think that, improved missile defense – the Germans and the Dutch have Patriot, just like we do. They could expand their missile defense capacity, of which they already have. Even the SPD, I think, could probably agree to some of these kinds of things. But if we just continue to pound them over the head, like, you're not doing your 2 percent – like those are dues to some club or something – I guarantee you it's not effective. They just roll their eyes and it causes the SPD in particular to dig in even more, than they're not going to do it.

So let's look for a way to be a little bit more sophisticated about how we encourage them to invest in defense. And I feel very confident that that 1.3 percent will begin to start moving up. And, by the way, they still have six more years. I mean, all the allies gave themselves 10 years to reach that 2 percent back at the Wales summit. So that relationship with Germany is so important for economic reasons, military reasons, political reasons. We need the Germans to keep the pressure on Minsk. EU sanctions are an essential part of making sure Russia knows that the West is not going to accept Russia using force, changing internationally recognized sovereign borders of a European country, like Ukraine, for example.

So those are my three main themes: Europe matters to the United States, the alliance and U.S. leadership in the alliance is so important. Even European countries that criticize us all want American leadership. They know they need American leadership. They want American leadership. And then third, this U.S.-German relationship.

Let me close with deterrence. I'm extremely proud of what the U.S. Army has done without any real significant growth to the Army. The Army– we're having to recover from decisions that were made 10, 8, 6 years ago that probably made sense at the time when we all thought and hoped that Russia was going to be a partner. Everybody believed it. So I remember the last American tank left Europe about four years ago. So for the first time since 1944 there were no American tanks in Europe.

Well, now, you know, we're bringing them back, prepositioned equipment as well as a rotational brigade. The aviation brigade that was in Europe was sent home to pay bills elsewhere. And now we have a rotational aviation brigade back in Europe. This is very expensive. Of course, without congressional support for EDI, the European Deterrence Initiative, which was the European Reassurance Initiative – without that, none of this – there is no deterrence. So that funding is essential for what U.S. European Command and, of course, U.S. Army Europe are trying to do over there. Exercises, rotational equipment, prepositioned equipment.

I do get asked every now and then by my friends in Europe, like, is the U.S. still committed, you know, with the new president? I basically say what Secretary Mattis says. You know, watch what we do. Everything that the previous administration committed to at the Wales summit – rotational forces, prepositioned equipment, increased exercises, and also the US EFP, enhanced forward presence, battlegroup, which is up in Orzysz, Poland – everything that was committed to, the current administration is executing, is doing, plus an additional billion dollars with EDI. So I think Europeans no longer are concerned whether or not the U.S. is there.

But for that deterrence to be effective, it's not just about stuff. It's really about speed – speed of recognition, speed of decision, and speed of assembly. We could have 10,000 tanks. But if they can't get to a place before the Russians do, then that's not deterrence. And the Russians have demonstrated over and over and over – whether it was Zapad and all the other exercises – the ability to move a lot of stuff real far, real fast. We've been working hard on trying to move around inside Europe, but you've got infrastructure challenges, you've got diplomatic challenges – crossing borders with military equipment – all of these kinds of things that the alliance is now working.

But speed of recognition. The Russians will not line up a column of tanks – like I thought when I was a lieutenant in Germany in 1981 – where you could recognize what's going to happen. It will be cyber, special forces, civil disturbances. And it may last for months. So recognizing that actually something is happening – and, of course, they would do it that way – partly that's how they've always done this. This is not something new, the hybrid warfare. This is not new. This is how they've always done things.

But because they know the alliance works on consensus, and so the longer they can string out the ambiguity, the better it is to their advantage. So recognizing what's going on, and we can talk about that as we go. What does that mean? What does that entail? And a lot of it involves changing laws and policies about intelligence sharing with other countries. I don't know that Five Eyes is actually very helpful. That's sort of a construct.

The speed of decision – of course, we're talking about political decision – not only a decision by the NAC, the North Atlantic Council, but also, as this thing sort of unfolds, if – and, by the way, there is nothing inevitable about this; it doesn't have to happen. The more clear we can be in our deterrence commitment the less likely it is that the Russians will make a terrible miscalculation. But the more uncertain we look, the slower we look, the higher the risk, in my view.

So the speed of decision is at NAC level. But also, you know, if you look at all the pictures of tanks that are in Ukraine, they are covered in what we call a reactive armor, because the lethality on the battlefield is so severe that the Ukrainians and the Russians and the Russian separatists are all covering their armored vehicles with reactive armor. Well, we have reactive armor now. We've brought it back into Europe. There wasn't any for a while. We brought it back into Europe. But that is a big decision. When you put that reactive armor on a tank, first of all, it takes time. Secondly, you can no longer have them on trains. So the decisions, when – where to move your stuff to by rail and then start putting reactive armor on it, that takes time. And this all gets factored in too. So from tactical level to strategic level political decisions, that speed is going to be very important.

And then finally, the speed of assembly – you know, how fast can we get there? Russia's number-one objective is to undermine the alliance, to see the alliance come apart. And the quickest way to do that is grab a little bitty piece, violate the sovereignty of a NATO country using force, and then see if the alliance responds. I mean, that would be a very low-risk thing for them to do, actually, if we don't look like we can prevent it. So that's why this deterrence and this speed, having capability, demonstrating capability, demonstrating will is so important.

All right. Good, well, thanks for hanging with me for that first five minutes or 10 minutes. And Alex, back to you.

TIERSKY: Sir, thanks very much for what was both a 30,000-foot comprehensive overview of some of the strategic challenge that you've been dealing with but also – I'm not sure how many people in this room were expecting a deep dive on Germany. So that's very much a terrific perspective to bring to the table, and it's very much appreciated.

Let me just tell colleagues who are around the back and who may be looking for a seat, there are plenty of seats in the front. If you'd like to take one, please feel free.

Sir, I think we have to start our conversation with the events that changed global perception of the security environment in Europe, which was the takeover of Crimea, the illegal occupation there, and, of course, Russian aggression in Eastern Ukraine, which is ongoing. Can you talk to us, as a starting point, a bit about U.S. Army support to Ukraine? Talk to us a little bit about what we're learning from their fight and from our support to their fight?

HODGES: So Ukrainian soldiers are really tough. I mean, they are good, hard, adaptive, resilient soldiers. They were not prepared – the military was not prepared, of course, when Russia invaded Ukraine, specifically Crimea. You all watched that. And then when they went into the Donbas region on the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. But they have responded. And they've stopped – along that line they've stopped the Russians. I mean, my guess, somewhere between 35,000 and 40,000 Russian-led separatists. Of that, probably 4,000 or 5,000 actually are Russians. Most of the commanders at every level are Russians.

And obviously the OSCE has been prevented – you know, the brave men and women that are the special monitoring mission of the OSCE, Organization for Security and Cooperation in

Europe, have not been allowed to monitor the border between Ukraine and Russia, which is that border between the Donbas and Russia. It's wide open. So the amount of ammunition, equipment, people, it's wide open coming in there.

So the U.S. response, and frankly the response of the West which is important to remember – people talk about Ukraine, you know, there's corruption and, you know, there's no transparency, and all that. Sure enough. I mean, there's a lot to do. And I think U.S. policy and the expectations of the West towards Ukraine are correct. And expecting, demanding cleaning up corruption, improving transparency of the defense budget, for example, which the Rada has been asking for – the Ukrainian parliament.

But at the same time, the European Union has continued its sanctions against Russia. So no matter how grumpy people might be about Ukrainian lack of transparency or corruption, the fact is nobody is willing to accept that it's OK for Russia to use force to change a sovereign border of a European country. This is not the 18th century where that was common, where people would divide up big, giant chunks of the continent. Not in the 21st century. So that's very important. Which, again, is why I think French and especially German leadership is so important here.

The U.S. Army's role in this, of course, was to help with the training mission. There's a training center at a place called Yavoriv near the city of Lviv in western Ukraine. And we've got about 250 American soldiers there today, about 150 to 200 Canadian soldiers, and you've got Lithuanians, Poles, and Brits that are all part of this training effort helping prepare Ukrainian battalions to go to the front, to go fight. And I've watched this now over the last couple years, as the quality of the training has improved, the quality of the output, and especially the quality of the training center itself, so that Ukrainians are able to do their own training the way we do at the National Training Center in the states or at our great training center at Hohenfels and in Grafenwoehr in Germany.

Seeing the Ukrainians invest in the institutional requirements to field a quality force is very important. I could not speak much to the Ukrainian naval capabilities. Our U.S. Marines are working with the Ukrainian naval infantry down towards Odessa, helping them improve. But I would not be the expert on their naval capability. But certainly, they need to be able to protect their coastline because if Russia – if, again, it's not inevitable – Russia tried to expand to get the whole coast of the – along the Sea of Azov, which would mean Mariupol, for example, it would require an amphibious operation by the Russians. And so the Ukrainians need that sort of capability. And certainly, the air defense capability that the Russians have provided in the Donbas keeps Ukrainian Air Force out of there, so that they're not a factor right now.

Our soldiers, who have spent so much time with Ukrainian soldiers in Yavoriv, have learned as much from them as they've ever learned from us, because, again, our experience for the past 15 years has been in Iraq and Afghanistan. And we never had to worry about anything overhead. We never really had to worry about – I mean, the Taliban doesn't have rocket launchers. It's a different fight. And so Ukrainians now have been fighting in this environment against Russian forces for the last three years.

What we have learned from the Ukrainians – is that the Russians are extremely effective at integrating drones, UAVs of all types, and electronic warfare and artillery and rockets, so that they're able to – as good or better than we can in many cases – are able to detect something, whether it's an intercept or they spot something with a drone. And then, within minutes, rockets or artillery are hitting that target. You know, we provided seven 236 radar systems to the Ukrainians. Of course, the Russians, not surprisingly, came after that immediately. And they managed to get one of them that was out in a field, it was out in the open, just for a very few minutes. Just a few minutes too long. Was detected and then struck. So they've got that capability. This is a very high-end thing, which, by the way, is something they exercised a lot during the Zapad exercise.

So this has affected our training. What General Milley directed all of our training centers to do is, like, everything that the Russians have put on display in the Donbas, the OPFOR – the dreaded OPFOR at the National Training Center or at Fort Polk or at Hohenfels now has that capability – drones, long-range fighters, and connecting it all. The electronic warfare capability, again, that's something we never had to worry about in Afghanistan or Iraq. The Ukrainians live in that environment. So you cannot speak on a radio or any device that's not secure, because it's going to be jammed or intercepted or, worse, it's going to be found, and then you're going to be hit. So that's part of this. I think can talk about Javelins a little bit later if you'd like, you know, what that means as well.

TIERSKY: That's actually, for me, the very next question. I mean, the debate here for a long time was a kind of binary lethal assistance/not lethal assistance kind of debate. Now that some of these decisions have been made, how important do you think those decisions are? How impactful? And let me wrap into that, what more could or should we be doing to support Ukraine in regaining its territorial integrity?

HODGES: Well, helping them – if that's our policy – if that's U.S. policy to help reestablish Ukrainian sovereignty, then we've got to be serious about it. And, of course, providing lethal aid is an important part of that, helping to raise the cost for the Russians where it's a little bit more painful for them. So this should improve the bargaining position or the negotiating position of Ukraine in the Minsk process. I mean, that should change the dynamic. And I have real trust in Ambassador Volker and the approach to help make Minsk work. I mean, obviously, there has to be a diplomatic solution to this. Russia has to, at some point, agree to stop supporting the separatists or to pull out to allow the reestablishment. So there's – getting to a diplomatic solution is critical.

And so providing Javelins and other types of lethal aid, I think, is a useful part of that. I think that the Russians are able to exploit, though, the corruption that goes on in Ukraine. I think that –without fixing that, there's always going to be an undermining of the effort. And I know there are a lot of people working with the minister of defense, other ministries inside Ukraine, from the U.S. and from the alliance, that are working on those projects. The George C. Marshall Center in Garmisch has been an excellent venue for helping Ukrainian Ministry of Defense and Ukrainian Rada members work towards something that you would all recognize as congressional oversight of the military.

Right now the Rada has just about zero oversight of the budget, where the money goes. And they're desperate to get that. I think that's something that we should continue to do, so that the Russians cannot continue to exploit these gaping holes in what we would expect in a democratic society, oversight of where the money goes. I think that's as important as providing Javelins. Still, they – the Ukrainians have got to believe, and the Russians have got to believe, that we are going to stick with them. We're going to continue to support them with training.

By the way, it's the New York National Guard is who is in Yavoriv right now doing the mission. They replaced the Oklahoma National Guard doing that mission, because the Army is not big enough – U.S. Army is not big enough to keep doing that mission. So we've turned to the National Guard. And Oklahoma did a great job. New York's doing it now. And I don't recall who's coming next behind New York.

I think we probably ought to look at other things that we can do to continue to show Russian involvement in the Donbas. I mean, nothing happens in a vacuum, but certainly we have the capability to show everybody what Russia specifically is doing in the Donbas. And I think that would be helpful to keep pressure on Russia to live up to what they've said they were going to do.

Again, I've mentioned OSCE before, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the special monitoring mission that they're doing is really important. They report that typically about 90 percent of the ceasefire violations are from the Russian-led separatists. And this is – and that's even after acknowledging that they are not able – the separatists keep them away from a lot of the places. So they still are not able to go everywhere, but they still report typically about 90 percent of the violations come from the separatist side. And there are Ukrainian soldiers that are getting killed every week still. So there is this kind of a drip, drip, drip that goes on, which is exactly what the Russians want, of course, is to keep it a mess so the Ukraine could never join the EU or NATO, and just to continue to undermine the Poroshenko regime.

Now, I did go visit the – I'm a little bit of a history nerd. And I had heard about this tank factory in Kharkiv. Of course, Kharkiv was a great – I think three times during World War II between the Soviets and the Germans fighting back and forth, it was a very important city. This is where the famous T-34 – probably the most famous tank, certainly of World War II – was designed and produced. I said, well, I've got to go see this place. And so I did. And it looked exactly like what you might imagine an old Eastern European giant factory would look like. There's no evidence of OSHA there, that's for sure. (Laughter.)

But there were some really proud employees. This one guy had been working there for 50 years. I mean, they were smoking cigarettes and they were wiring tanks and, you know, putting things together. And they were cranking it – they were doing repair of battle-damaged tanks. And they were extremely proud. And they were saying how this was a better tank than the Abrams tank, better than Leopard, whatever. So it was really fascinating.

Well, I'm watching them. And then I notice on the other side of the factory there's a long line of shiny brand-new tanks. And I'm like, well, what are those? Oh, these are for export.

Well, export? I mean, you're asking us to provide Javelin and you're exporting tanks? And so – and there's not a simple answer to this, and I would not claim to fully understand it. But they have the technical capability to produce really, really good stuff. But the way that their defense industry is kind of set up, and the lack of transparency, they're not buying, or can't afford – and again, I'm not the expert on this but I just know what I saw with my own eyes – they could be producing more.

But this goes back to how their economy is structured and congressional oversight or Rada oversight. I think that – getting that right, getting their defense structures right, having a joint sort of command that fights the fight – you know, they've got a general staff. And General Muzhenko, who's an exceptional soldier, the chief of defense, and very impressive. As more and more of the younger officers move into the higher ranks, you know, more Western-oriented, I think we're going to keep seeing improvement. But General Abizaid, you know, who is helping to advise the minister of defense, is working very hard on things – on these things. I would obviously defer to him on the specifics. But those are all things as important as providing Javelin.

TIERSKY: General, I want to shift gears a little bit here and ask you about something that I have developed something of a personal interest in, which is Russian military exercises. I had the opportunity to go to Belarus for the final phase of Zapad 2017. Fascinating experience. The consensus is that the transparency commitments that Russia is a signatory to under the Helsinki Final Act, including its modern expression, the Vienna document, that those commitments were in face breached. Any number of senior international officials have stated as much. I would love your thoughts on both transparency regarding Zapad, the broader trends in Russian military exercises, and the absence of transparency – how that relates to their commitments under the Vienna document, among others. And then let's – you know, let's put it out on the table. How do we do transparency? How does that differ? And why does transparency in military exercises matter at all?

HODGES: Could I have that European map, please? The first one?

Now that I'm by myself and I don't know how to make slides, I rely on other people to make them – at least provide a map. (Laughs.) The transparency is an important part of this because it helps reduce tensions – I mean, the obvious thing – the reason we've had observers and stuff like that is to prevent one side from being able to launch a surprise attack. And so it's a confidence building thing to have that transparency. And exercises in the West, we've always invited experienced journalists all over the place. In fact, we beg journalists to come out to the exercise, because you're wanting to demonstrate what you're doing and highlight what you're doing. Congressional delegations, that a part of the transparency, having CODELs.

I've seen more CODELs in Europe this last year – I saw more CODELs in Europe this past year than I think I've ever seen in Europe, which was a great thing because it demonstrates people are interested. You know, members, staff, don't have a lot of time. So you pick and choose where you want to go when you – when you do have these opportunities to come visit. So when you have CODELs to Yavoriv or come to Hohenfels, or go to visit soldiers that are exercising in Poland, for example, things like that. And by the way, you'll never end up in The

Washington Post on a boondoggle article if you go to Hohenfels. No one will accuse of you exploiting anything there. (Laughter.)

It's so important to help communicate what it is we're doing. And if we say we are defensive in nature as an alliance, the journalists are there. And I always – I would have journalists almost every day on an exercise go with me, different ones – European as well as American – so that they could see for themselves what it is we're doing.

The other side, unfortunately, there's zero transparency, which is why everybody that lives from Estonia down to Bulgaria absolutely believes that the Russians could and would use an exercise as a sort of a Trojan horse to – that was not my word – those were not my words. That was the Europeans - to get a lot of people next to a border and then, without much warning, they're there. They're inside whether it's Lithuania, Latvia, Romania, whatever. The Romanians would always tell me, hey, Ben, you know, we have a border with Russia too. It's called the Black Sea. So they are absolutely worried and believe.

So it's interesting that all the countries that have either been – that were Soviet Republics – and, fortunately, the United States never recognized Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as officially – fact is, they were. Them, or Warsaw Pact countries, or, of course, Georgia and Ukraine that were Soviet Republics – all of them believe that the Russians would do it. So the further away you live from Russia, the less likely something that like that seems.

Regardless, that was – if the Russians were truly interested in being seen as a global power, if they were truly interested in stability and security in Europe, then they would be – I think could be more transparent, and people would not be so anxious. And I have no illusions that that's what they're going to do. But that would go a long way to demonstrating commitment to they really want security and stability in Europe, by being more transparent.

Now, for three years I've been trying to get Belarus, and I was never allowed to go. You got to go there. And when you look on the map, for us Belarus is a gigantic black hole. We have a charge there. We have a military attaché. But they end up having to spend a lot of their time in Lithuania. So they go back and forth. We just don't know much about what's going on there. But yet, it's such a critically important place geographically from our perspective, in terms of deterrence. If Russia was ever going to do anything against a Baltic country or Poland, Belarus is going to be at least a transit place.

And honestly, I can't make up my mind about where Belarus is. You see indications that they really want to break free somehow of Russia, be more Western oriented. You've seen demonstrations. I believe those are legitimate. But I also believe that they are so beholden to Russia for a variety of reasons that they can't go as far as they want. So we just don't know. If you talk to some in Lithuania, for example, they absolutely – and I wouldn't attribute this to anybody – but I'm sure most Lithuanians believe that Belarus is completely with Russia. But other countries will have a different view. So it's not a simple thing to figure out what they're going to do, which is why I wish we knew more about it. I wish we could get back into Belarus in a big way.

What my take away is from Zapad – first of all, I absolutely believe there were about 100,000 people involved in it. Now, there were not 100,000 troops at one place. They were – that Zapad actually was a collection of exercises all over Russia and Belarus. And what Russia attempted to do, and I think probably got away with it to some extent, was make everybody think that Zapad was just what was in Belarus. And you had about 12,700 troops involved, which is below the magical 13,000, which is amazing, by the way. Every Russian exercise somehow miraculously only has 12,700 soldiers in it. I never know how many of our guys are in an exercise. It's changes all the time. So now they can so definitively say there were only 12,000 – it's impressive.

And I'm very sure that every Russian soldier that was in Belarus left at the end of the exercise, and probably took most of their stuff with them. So I don't think that was what many people feared it was. But because everybody tended to focus on that, they didn't pay as much attention to everything that was going on everywhere else in Russia. And it kind of depends on where you draw the circle. What was Zapad? What was included? And people passing through there – air force, rail, logisticians, not just infantry battalions or artillery battalions that were in the exercises – I think you probably add it all up and it's close to 100,000 people participated in that Zapad series of exercises at some point.

So in terms of takeaways, we did have the best and highest level of cooperation sharing intelligence that I think I've ever seen in Europe. Estonians, Latvians, Lithuanians, and Poles will know more about Russia, Swedes and Finns will know more about Russia than we'll ever know in a million years. I mean, for language, history, they're there, relationships. And so we – I think our intelligence structures worked very hard to be more integrated with allies. And there was more sharing of intelligence at all sorts of different levels – unilateral, bilateral, multilateral as well as in the alliance, because we were all waiting to see what was going to happen. So it showed that it could be done, and I think that that ought to be the norm. Remember what I talked about, speed of recognition.

Now, our posture – you know, General Scaparotti was supreme allied commander and also my commander as commander of the U.S. European Command. He said: Look, we're not going to do anything that's stupid or provocative. You know, we're not going to have everybody up in the parapets. This is not going to be the Sharks and Jets, you know, out in an ally somewhere. We're going to do what professional militaries always do, which is to be ready. So all the normal exercises that were already scheduled is exactly what we were doing.

So you had the exercise Aurora, Sweden's largest exercise. That took place. You had an exercise going on in Ukraine, which was already scheduled, Rapid Trident. And then Poland had its exercise going. So everybody was doing normal stuff. We still did our rotation, the armored brigade combat team, on time. That all continued. And I think that was exactly the right posture to have. So it didn't look like we were being provocative or overreacting to a Russian exercise. But everybody was certainly well-prepared.

The second thing I think we learned is they – I'm not 100 percent sure yet, but the Russians have always used exercises to test concepts, which I'm kind of envious of. I like that. And I think NATO exercises should focus – don't worry about making a mistake. Let's test

concepts. Test new command structures, which is what the Russians did. And I believe they probably discovered that their new structures were not quite ready for primetime yet. But no doubt they worked hard on that and will continue to work on it to get their new command structures right. They did a pretty extensive fire exercise up in northwestern Russia at a training area up there, where they continued to practice integration of fire in UAVs, to continue to develop that.

So it was a serious exercise, but I think some people walked away saying, oh, you guys overreacted. I had German friends saying, see, I told you it wasn't going to be a big deal, because they bought the little Potemkin village thing going on in Belarus, and not the other 80,000 that were involved in doing all the other things. And now that I'm an old person, all I care about is logistics. You know, when I was a young officer all I cared about was, you know, shooting and going to the range and flying helicopters. Now all I care about is rail transport and sea ports and having stuff – big piles of ammunition and fuel, everything that you need so that the young guys can come in there quickly. And the Russians demonstrated, again, that they can move a lot of stuff real far, real fast.

TIERSKY: Sir, thanks for that. I see the audience chomping at the bit to ask some questions. And I'm really eager to get to them. You know, I hope that I have endless questions from how is the Schengen Zone for military transport going, a little bit more on the NATO summit, how are we dealing with the whole arms control architecture in Europe with Open Skies, CFE, Vienna document, INF, with the Russians not playing ball –

HODGES: Is that one question?

TIERSKY: No. (Laughter.) I'm going to hope that the audience asks these questions for me, because what – before I – before I send it over to them I want to make sure to put on the table one more of the many different questions we could talk about. Turkey clearly is of concern to our commissioners. We have had a number of events featuring different aspects of the evolution of Turkey in recent times. You served in Turkey fairly recently at a very senior level, in charge of a NATO command there. Give us your thoughts on the evolution of Turkey as a strategic ally, your relationships there. Please take that where you'd like.

HODGES: So Turkey is such an important ally for us. I mean, you look at the – again, the map, the geography of where Turkey sits, there's a reason that Turkey was invited to join NATO. They've been a member since 1952. There's been a NATO headquarters of some sort in Izmir since 1952 – longer than any other place in Europe except Naples. So Turkey has been a loyal ally and a great teammate for all those many years. They have a very, very capable, professional, well-equipped, disciplined military. General Akar, the chief of defense, is on the finest people I've ever met. That guy is a great soldier.

But, of course, he has – he has political bosses too. And he's been given a mission. And I think most Turkish officers would tell you that they're fighting three terrorist organizations. They're fighting ISIS – in fact, they'll say they're the only country fighting three terrorist organizations – ISIS, Kurdish terrorists – which they define differently from us which is, you

know, a huge problem for us in our relationship – and then, of course, the Gulenists. Those are the three terrorist organizations that they're fighting. And they're dead serious about it.

I think that – I didn't appreciate this earlier, the fact that, you know, we have – see a nuanced difference between the different type of Kurdish – branches of Kurds in Turkey and Syria. The Turks don't see it the same way. And so I think, you know, that, as always, there's such a difficult strategic choice that you have to make for, hey, if the Kurds – if we're saying that destroying ISIS is our number-one priority, who's the best at it? Well, the Kurdish forces have been extremely effective. So you could see the attraction of that. But then you balance that against, what's that doing to our relationship with an extremely important ally, Turkey?

So that's a real tough challenge for our leaders. I know that U.S. European Command leadership works on this all the time, and certainly here within DOD working on that, because everybody recognizes the importance of destroying ISIS, but also preserving an ally. Not just a friend or a partner or something like that – an ally, a NATO ally. That this is very important for us, not just so we can fly in and out of Incirlik, but I mean, that's the counterweight in the Black Sea. This is a very important ally for us. And I hope we can find a way out of it.

Right now I'm very worried that, you know, potentially you've got Turkish soldiers shooting at Kurdish soldiers, having American advisors in those formations. This is a potentially dangerous situation. Now, we have exceptionally talented leadership in U.S. Central Command, you know, General Votel and, of course, General Thomas at SOCOM. Those guys, you know, they are fully aware of all this. But that's a really difficult situation that I hope we can avoid rupturing this very important alliance.

Now, to be fair, I think Turkey always is quick to take offense at things too. So, you have to manage that as a part of a relationship. But they are so important for us. And they've been such a good ally. And it's a great people and a great country. I was there for two years in Izmir. And it's terrific. Incredible people. It's a very difficult political situation right now. Of course, the Russians are loving this. Not just for selling weapons, potentially, but when you think about deterrence and how important the Black Sea is for the Russian Navy, if not having Turkey completely onside with us, you know, that's exactly what Russia, of course, would love to achieve.

TIERSKY: Well, we're got some time for audience questions. And if you wouldn't mind introducing yourself when I call on you for a question. Do I see – I see a question right here, please. Wait for the microphone, if you wouldn't mind.

Q: Good morning. It's Andrew Fillon (ph) with the Embassy of Liechtenstein.

Lieutenant General Hodges, do you think that the amendments on the crime of aggression to the Rome statute that were introduced in Kampala in 2010 might have to be strengthened in the face of cyberwarfare, civil disturbances, and the modern hybrid warfare that we see Russia invoking?

HODGES: Would you say the first words again?

Q: Do you think that the amendment to the crime of aggression to the Rome statute that were adopted in Kampala, Uganda in 2010 might have to be strengthened?

TIERSKY: Sir, I think I saw another question. I might want to take two at the same time.

HODGES: OK.

TIERSKY: Yeah. So there's a microphone coming.

Q: Orest Deychakiwsky, Helsinki Commission staff, retired. I covered, among other things, Ukraine and Belarus for many, many years for the Commission.

But I wanted to ask you a little bit more about the role and importance and value and contributions of some of the eastern NATO countries. You drilled down a bit on Germany, you know, for obvious reasons, but if you could talk more about that. And not only the Baltic states and Poland, but also Romania and Bulgaria, especially given the Russian militarization of the Crimean Peninsula. Thanks.

TIERSKY: Two very different questions.

HODGES: Great. Well, I know the alliance is working hard at taking on the question of what constitutes an armed attack. You know, Article 5, the armed attack. And of course, when it was written up, an armed attack meant, a nuclear strike or jets or tanks or something in a traditional sense. But today, you can cause as much or more damage with cyberattacks on the right kinds of places in terms of damage to another nation – whether it's economy or disruption – through the use of cyber. And so I know it's a question that the alliance is going to continue to look at, is what would constitute an armed attack.

One of the things that will always make it difficult, of course, is attribution. I think we have become increasingly effective at being able to attribute where something might come from, but that's typically going to be after the fact – after somebody's economy is wrecked or, you know, transportation networks have been disrupted or damaged for long periods of time, things like that. But I think that sort of attack or aggression has to be taken into account by the alliance, and also by the United States and other countries. What constitutes that? Otherwise, states will be able to do things that harm nations, harm economies, without too much fear of real retribution.

Now, for our other allies, – probably by the end of '18 everybody on the east flank of NATO, from Estonia down to Romania, is going to be a 2 percenter. I mean, all three Baltic countries, Poland and Romania will all be in the 2 percent club. Poland and Romania, of course, have the Aegis antimissile systems. They're buying Patriot. Poles are going to buy HIMARS, which is an excellent long-range rocket system as well. They're all working very hard to modernize formations, equipment. They've gotten serious about defense planning. So they've taken Article 3 of the Washington Treaty – which is the one that says you're supposed to defend yourself also – they've taken that very serious.

Quality of officers, soldiers, quality of training that they do now – I mean, they really are breaking free, getting unshackled from their Warsaw Pact past. Getting a core of noncommissioned officers, having sergeants is something that, you would not have seen in the Warsaw Pact days, where officers did all the NCO stuff. Now – and of course, that's one of the best ways to connect your army to your population, is through noncommissioned officers, where young men and women see opportunity. And it's a great part of their defense. And so I'm actually very impressed from what I've seen from every one of those countries.

You know, the U.S. Army in Europe – Poland is the center of gravity, actually. You've got the division headquarters is in Poznan. The Polish Air Force Base of Powidz. We've got close to 1,000 American soldiers that are there. It's a logistics and Army aviation site to help support everything in northeast Poland, to help with that speed of assembly. Now, all of them want to see more American soldiers there. And I think we could talk later about rotational versus assigned and what's enough, because I do get people pulling on my sleeve all the time about that when I'm in Lithuania or Poland. And there's a lot of interest in doing that. But I think there's a lot of reasons not to do it as well that we could talk about.

Bulgaria is interesting. We actually – thanks to former DASD Jim Townsend, in Novo Selo, there's a training area there, which is a Bulgarian/U.S. training area. And we've got two companies that are permanently there from the rotational force. And that has really – thanks, again, to ERI, now EDI, it's turned into a very good training area. The Bulgarians also have supported us with being able to transport out of their ports on the Black Sea. We've moved strikers and tanks across the Black Sea to Georgia, for example, for exercises. I think they have more challenging domestic issues to deal with that – so they're not at the same level of investment yet as Romania is.

Romania — under President Obama, we increased our troop strength in Afghanistan, the so-called Obama surge. Only three countries increased – the United States, obviously, the U.K., and Romania. Romania doubled their contribution there. And they're very good. So I'm impressed with what Romania does. We have at – near Constanta on the Black Sea, there's a huge port there, there's a Romanian air force base called Mihail Kogalniceanu, which we all call MK, for obviously reasons. And it's a Romanian air base. And inside of that is a U.S. forward operating site. We have half of a battalion that's there from the rotational force, ammunition. It's a place to project power from in exercises in that region, which is what we're trying to recreate in Powidz up in Poland. So you've got two forward operating sites that would facilitate rapid deployment and forward logistics and that sort of thing.

Georgia, again, another great country. You know, they've got nothing left to prove – they've suffered more casualties per capita than any other country in Afghanistan. They are very, very good. And I think they've got the right sort of approach now to their own defense. We are constantly in Georgia, both regular army as well as U.S.-Georgia National Guard State Partnership Program. The problem is that 20 percent of that country is still occupied by Russia. Despite Russia agreeing to pull out after the so-called Sarkozy Agreement in 2008, they still have several – about 10,000 Russian soldiers sitting in 20 percent of Georgia.

TIERSKY: Sure. Let me take right here in the front.

Q: Thank you. Natalia Robert (sp), Voice of America.

Ukraine's asking for lethal weapons for four years. And now finally the administration last month, in December of 2017, approved the sale of lethal weapons to Ukraine. How do you see the dynamics of the conflict changing, and if you see that it'll change?

HODGES: So I was actually a little surprised. I hadn't seen as much of a reaction from the Russians or Europeans to that decision, which tells me that Ambassador Volker did a great job of laying the groundwork and making sure that this decision did not break up the unity of the alliance, and keeping that sort of pressure. So I think that's a positive thing. We're not talking about thousands of these things, obviously. But the Javelin is the best anti-tank weapon system there is that an individual soldier can carry. It's very good. And so the key will be how the Ukrainians choose to employ it.

So whenever we provide a weapons system to another country, there's a package that goes with it. There's training, and some things -it's not just a here you go. There's a training aspect to it. It does not have magical powers, but it is very good. I don't know how they're going to use them. But I am very confident that the Russians will be looking for where those things are, because it is a very capable system that can change how people think about things.

Now, with the ceasefire in place you shouldn't see lots of tanks moving around, that sort of thing, anyway. But they will always know that that capability is out there. And so I think that causes the Russians, the separatists; to rethink where they might try to – which typically happens, is where you make a small grab to move the line a little bit during certain periods. I think this is going to force them to rethink what it is they're doing.

Q: May I have one more question, or?

TIERSKY: We'll come back. I did want to follow up on something you said in your prior response, which we haven't touched on at all, which is the linkage to European publics. I know it was a high priority of yours as commander, as demonstrated even today, to tell the story of the European Reassurance, European Deterrence Initiative to publics both here and in Europe. Can you talk a little bit about how that aspect of this has gone? Ultimately, you need host nation support. You talked a lot about Germany, how is the German public viewing the proposals that you have – or the proposals that would be on the table for increased defense spending, increased capabilities, even in the context of logistics.

HODGES: I think the government of Chancellor Merkel, and with Defense Minister von der Leyen, has been very clear about Germany doing its part. And I've seen evidence of that. The Bundestag, the parliament, has a really strong role in what the military can do. I mean, they generally did exactly what we asked them to do, make sure they could never invade anybody again. I mean, they couldn't invade Luxembourg today. I mean, there's so many laws. And that's an outcome of the Second World War.

Now, I think they need to kind of break free of some of that. That's seven decades, and Germany's role shouldn't – they can't behind, well, you know, our neighbors would be worried about, you know, a resurgent German military. There was a senior Polish diplomat one time said a weak Germany is more to be feared than a strong Germany. It's worse for Europe. And I think that the fact is the Bundestag has supported – there are currently 14 mandated operations – meaning 14 Bundeswehr operations where German men and women, soldiers or airmen, are deployed somewhere around the world with the support – or, the formal approval, which is required, of the Bundestag.

You'd have a hard time finding many people in the U.S. that are aware that they're doing that much. And I don't know how many Germans are even aware that they actually are doing – taking on such a role. But they could not do it without the Bundestag. And so that, to me, indicates that there's support for Germany taking on more responsibility. Obviously, the influx of migrants, which started two years and which has subsided somewhat, really changed the dynamic inside Europe and inside Germany. Obviously, the CDU and CSU paid a big price for that – in the September elections.

But I think even Germany, which has so many business ties to Russia, has recognized that Russian aggression is not – is not acceptable. And the Germans were the first to deploy their EFP battlegroup to Lithuania. I mean, within months of the decision they had that battlegroup up in Lithuania. That's a significant step. And I think they would not have done that if they weren't confident that most of the country was behind it. I'd like to see more public discussion by the minister of defense about why it is, what they're doing. I think that would help explain it.

TIERSKY: Good. I'd like to give the audience one more shot at a final audience round to put General Hodges on the spot. I've got a couple questions of my own that I'd like to close with. Anyone from the audience have something you'd like to put to General Hodges.

HODGES: You had a follow up, I think.

TIERSKY: Please.

Q: The U.N. peacekeepers, do you think that the Russians will ever agree to have U.N. peacekeepers sent over to the occupied territories, not only along the demarcation line?

HODGES: In the Donbas?

Q: Yeah.

HODGES: Well, I think the fact that they offered that up at some point doesn't mean that they want to do it. But that's, you know, part of the whole – their approach. I think there's value in it, but it's got to be the right countries. I mean, it's got to be serious, quality people that could actually – and whatever the mandate is. You know, the Dayton Peace Accord that was carried out, when NATO went into implement the Dayton Peace Accord, with the IFOR, implementation force, you had the right rules of engagement, they were armed to the teeth. I mean, they were ready. And that communicated to the Serbs and everybody else that this was serious. And, you

know, the SACEUR at the time, General Joulwan, made that very clear, that he had the right rules of engagement.

So if it's a U.N. – that's different, obviously, from IFOR – but if it's a U.N. force, they've got to have a mandate that doesn't freeze in place forever what Russia has already achieved. It's got to be about implementing the Minsk agreement, in my view. And it can't be just anybody that volunteers for a blue helmet mission. It's got to be a very professional kind of force that everybody would respect and that can carry out what is going to be a really, really hard mission.

TIERSKY: Yeah. Please.

Q: Mantos (ph)

I have a question regarding providing military arms to Ukraine. Based on the previous events on military battles back in the – (inaudible) – or Donbas region, when the Ukraine Army retreats, and in many cases it was sort of like leaving army and military capabilities behind. And overall, that – the Russian-backed separatists, they took over it and used against the Ukrainian Army. So would you see a sort of technique or military capabilities additional applies to prevent that United States military capabilities wouldn't end up on Russian backed-up separatists, for example, like, anti-tank Javelin? Thank you.

HODGES: I would image that that was all factored into the decision that, let's say, two or three or four of these things were captured, for example. I think that the technology is not something that's so – it's worth it. I mean, we have these things in Afghanistan. I mean, we've run the risk of getting them captured in a lot of different places. So I'm sure that would have been taken into account. And I'm sure the Ukrainians, as they think about how they're going to employ them, obviously they're going to want to protect them and not lose them, just the way they have with the radar – the different types of radar that have been provided.

So I'm pretty confident that they would be smart about how they would use it. But, you know, you always – you can always assume you're going to lose some equipment, especially in a messy thing like Debaltseve where you've got that many people that close that are fighting against each other. I mean, the Russians have very good – you know, Kornet system is a very, very good anti-tank system as well. We still don't want to see the Ukrainians lose – I'm not so worried about the Russians getting it. I'm worried about the Ukrainians losing that sort of capability.

TIERSKY: Sir, let me zoom now way back out to where we started, and offer you a chance at some kind of overarching and concluding thoughts along two areas that I'd like to ask you about. As you know, the Helsinki Commission flows from the same process that is now – that is now manifest in the OSCE that you've mentioned a couple of times. We've had the opportunity to talk about the monitoring mission in Ukraine.

For those who are more interested in the monitoring mission, I'd just remind you we had an excellent briefing here at the end of last year with a senior monitor from the front lines. So I

commend that to your attention. The OSCE is a consensus-based organization in which the Russians are members. Talk to us about the continued value you do or do not see of the OSCE as an institution.

I'll give you the second concluding question as well. Give us your laundry list for Congress. After all, we are here in the halls of Congress. What more should Congress be doing, or what should Congress be doing differently, to support the efforts of both the troops that you led, and also the efforts of our allies and partners in the region.

HODGES: So I have grown to love and respect multinational, international organizations because, again, the United States, we can't do anything by ourselves. We just don't have the – not something that's lasting. If we want it to last, you've got to have other nations invested in it. And our European allies and other partners that are in Europe have a lot of respect for organizations like OSCE, United Nations, and the various other organizations that are out there. And so we really are hurting ourselves if we disdain those organizations.

We don't have to like them, and certainly there's ways to put leverage on these organizations, but one of the things, for example, the Germans always want to see is, oh, we got to keep talking to the Russians. Well, OSCE is there. You know, you got a Russian ambassador as well as a U.S. ambassador, and 55 other ambassadors that are there. So it's a place where you can continuously engage.

You know, the former ambassador to the OSCE, Ambassador Dan Baer, one of the great public servants I have ever known in my life – I wish he was still there as the ambassador – gave me the chance to give a presentation in front of one of their big sessions. And I loved it because the Russian ambassador came right up to me and got in my face afterwards, and, you know, I got a lot of that. And it was awesome. (Laughter.) But I knew that I had gotten to him.

And so – but it's a place. And you can understand, when you think about what Germany suffered in World War II in terms of the destruction – as did other countries after World War II, as did Russia – you could understand why there's a lot of reluctance of anything that looks like it's going to lead towards another conflict. And so our involvement in something like OSCE, that's respected, helps keep our allies onside.

The first time I ever heard of OSCE was when the Dayton Peace Accords were being put together, and listening to General Joulwan talk about, hey, we got to get OSCE involved in this. He recognized the importance of an organization like that. And it is – again, it's a – it's a venue when you can talk to the Russians, someone in Russia thinking, OK, we're out of trouble, it's back to business as usual. It's not. But it's another venue. So I value it. And, again, Dan Baer was an exceptional public servant.

What can the Congress do? There's three or four things. First of all, that European Reassurance Initiative, now the European Deterrence Initiative, is so important. I mean, that's what's paying for everything – rotational forces, prepositioned equipment, exercises – all the things that are an essential part of this – of the deterrence. Without that, we really would have a hard time creating the deterrent effect that U.S. European Command is expected to do right now.

So that's very helpful. And I was impressed that, first, the number of CODELs that came over and STAFFDELS that came over last year, and the fact that I did not encounter one member or one staffer, not one, in really the last three years, who said: What are we doing here? Why are we doing this? Somebody else should be doing this, not us. Not a single – no matter what party, no matter what committee, no matter what. They were all in support of stability and security in Europe. So that, to me, was very encouraging.

Now, I can remember when I worked in congressional liaison a few years ago and we were looking at BRAC. And a very distinguished member of the armed service – Senate Armed Service Committee said: General, why should we close Fort X when we got all those troops just sitting in motor pools in Germany? Now, he was about 10 years behind on understanding what we actually had in Germany. We had already gone from 300,000 down to about 50,000. It's down to 30,000 now. But it also – I was alarmed because it was a member of the Senate Armed Service Committee that did not appreciate why you're there. So, I mean, 30,000 troops, that would not even fill up half of a stadium where the Redskins play. I mean, we're talking about it's a tiny little number of troops there, but it has a significant effect.

And we used to talk about our mission was to make 30,000 look and feel like 300,000, to achieve the same deterrent effect that we did when we had 300,000 back in the '70s and '80s. And we did it through – because of that EDI and some great young men and women being spread out all over the place, and putting more and more responsibility on very junior leaders, where a captain and his first sergeant might be the senior Americans in a country, other than the ambassador. But yet, they understood what they were trying to do, and so to show that presence everywhere. So continuing to support that.

Now, back to why should we – why should close a fort when you got all those troops sitting in Europe, I've had a lot of members and staff say, hey, we – we need to station somebody in Poland. We need to station somebody in Lithuania. We need to get more troops over there. But unless the Army grows, or the Air Force grows, then they're coming from Fort Hood or Fort Carson or Fort Lewis or Fort Bragg. I mean, they're going to come from somewhere in the U.S. If you want to permanently station somebody in there.

And honestly, I've not met a single member that was willing to say go ahead and take a brigade out of Fort Carson or Fort Hood. That's not going to happen. Everybody can live with rotational forces, but not give them up to move them from Fort Riley – I don't think. I could be wrong, but I haven't met that member yet. So in order to increase capability in Europe, I think you're going to have to grow the Army to some – and I'm very happy, we are getting a new artillery brigade, actually with two rocket launcher battalions, will show up in the next two years. That's new growth. That's not coming from Fort Wherever. An Avenger battalion, which is a short-range air defense. So there is some growth, which I think is very helpful.

And then finally, this notion of 2 percent is very important, absolutely. Every member of the alliance should – has to do its part. But I think let's continue to highlight those countries that are doing their part, to include that are moving in the right direction. But also, I think we can be a little bit more sophisticated about what 2 percent means. You can find ways to encourage, versus, you know, just continue to beat them over the head with a 2 percent club. Instead, you

know, rail, ports, transport, missile defense – things that are not controversial that even, I think the SPD could probably get behind. Let's make it easier for them to do that. And I think the Congress understanding that would be very helpful.

TIERSKY: Wonderful. General Hodges, your participation in this event, your insights are absolutely critical to the Commission continuing to fulfill its mandate. Thank you. Congratulations on your extraordinarily distinguished Army career. We very much look forward to continued collaboration in the second half of your career, as you join CEPA and ramp up there.

Thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. There will be a transcript of this event on the website of the Commission probably by the end of the week. Please join me in thanking General Hodges. (Applause.)

[Whereupon, at 11:31 a.m., the briefing ended.]