

Cavoli, the NATO Commander: 'Prepare for a Long and Global Challenge'

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On April 3, 2025, General Christopher G. Cavoli, commander of the United States European Command (USEUCOM), presented a detailed and concerning assessment of the strategic situation in Europe to the U.S. Senate. His speech represents not only an overview of Russian conduct in the war in Ukraine but also a clear analysis of the geopolitical and military transformations that threaten the interests of the United States and NATO.



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An Evolving Alliance

Cavoli opened his testimony by emphasizing the deep connection between European security and American prosperity. The $6.9 trillion in annual transatlantic trade is not just an economic figure but a strategic bond. The network of access, basing, and overflight agreements allows the United States to project global power and intercept threats before they reach American soil. In this context, NATO is undergoing a historic transformation aimed at strengthening deterrence and combat capability.



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Russia: A Systemic and Evolving Threat

The General clearly illustrated how Russia today represents the most complex challenge since the end of the Cold War. Moscow, engaged for over three years in the war against Ukraine, has shown relentless determination in pursuing long-term geopolitical objectives: expanding its territorial control, increasing global influence, undermining the leadership role of the United States, and weakening the Atlantic Alliance.

Despite significant losses — with about 790,000 casualties and the destruction of thousands of vehicles and weapon systems — Russia has embarked on a rapid military reconstruction. The number of personnel now exceeds pre-war levels, with about 30,000 new enlistments monthly. Russian forces in Ukraine have reached 600,000 units, almost double the initial invasion force of 2022.

This effort is also reflected in the war industry: with an annual production forecast of 1,500 tanks, 3,000 armored vehicles, and 250,000 artillery shells per month, Russia is amassing firepower superior to that of the combined United States and Europe. Simultaneously, it maintains the world's largest nuclear arsenal and invests in new submarine, aerial, and cyber capabilities.

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An Unconventional Weapon: Moscow's Alliances

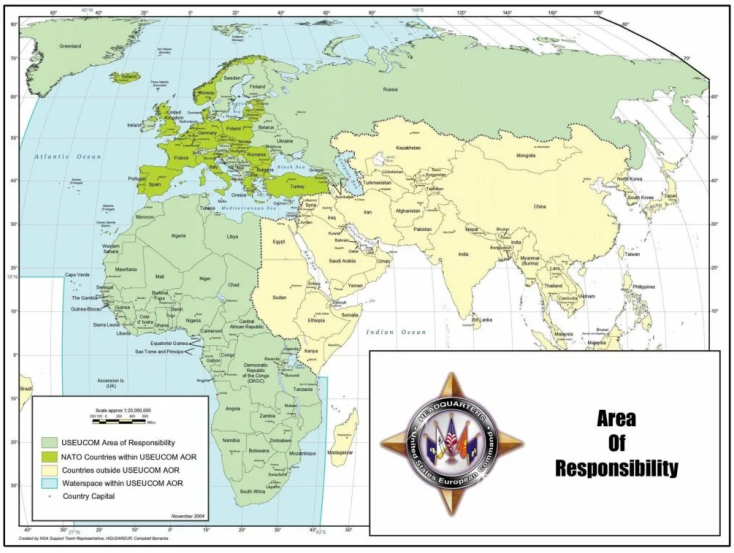
Cavoli then highlighted the evolution of Russia's strategic alliances. The strengthening of cooperation with China, North Korea, and Iran is creating a hostile bloc that endangers the global order. The introduction of 12,000 North Korean soldiers in Ukraine, the supply of Iranian missiles and drones, and joint Russian-Chinese exercises with nuclear bombers demonstrate the growing military convergence among these actors.

This geopolitical axis also works on the economic level, evading Western sanctions through payments in national currency, investments in European ports, and unconventional financing. Chinese control over more than 10% of European port capacity — in many cases near military logistics nodes — represents a direct strategic risk for the United States and NATO.

Instability on the Outer Borders

Beyond the war in Ukraine, Russia is exploiting political volatility in peripheral areas of Europe. In Georgia and Moldova, Moscow has interfered with elections and demonstrations through sabotage operations, disinformation, and cyberattacks. In the Balkans, it has forged ties with pro-Russian leaders to hinder Euro-Atlantic integration.

The goal is clear: destabilize European security, increase regional influence, and reduce the global presence of the United States. In this sense, the conflict in Ukraine is just one of the many manifestations of a broader strategy.



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The Three Strategic Missions of USEUCOM

Cavoli reiterated the three central missions of the European command: defend the homeland forward, project global power, and deter Russian aggression.

1. **Defend the homeland forward** means operating in the North Atlantic to prevent Russian submarine forces from approaching U.S. territory.
2. **Power projection**: Europe provides essential bases and legal agreements for global operations, as demonstrated by the support provided to CENTCOM during the Israel-Hamas conflict.
3. **Deterrence**: the credible presence of combat-ready forces is the foundation for deterring any Russian military initiative against NATO.

Positioning of U.S. Forces in Europe

Currently, about 80,000 U.S. soldiers are deployed in Europe — down from 105,000 in 2022. Although they represent only 20% of the U.S. force present in Europe during the Cold War, their positioning is strategic.

In the land domain, it is essential to counter Russia's ability to rapidly mass forces along NATO borders. In the air, the replacement of fourth-generation aircraft with F-35s at RAF Lakenheath and the adoption of the Agile Combat Employment concept enhance the survivability and lethality of air forces.

At sea, the arrival of the destroyer USS Oscar Austin and the imminent deployment of a new ocean surveillance ship enhance sea control capabilities, fundamental for forward defense and power projection. Arctic operations with Nordic partners show the growing interest in climate change and new navigable routes.

In the cyber and space domains, collaboration with U.S. Cyber Command and the growth of Space Forces Europe and Africa strengthen multidomain capabilities. Special forces, present in 28 countries, play a key role in deterrence and conflict preparation.



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Exercises, Investments, and Cooperation

USEUCOM uses multinational exercises to build interoperability and credible warfighting capabilities, oriented towards high-intensity collective defense. In parallel, the European Deterrence Initiative funds the development of infrastructure, prepositioning of materials, and operational rotations.

An example is the collaboration with Poland, which has built at its own expense a $325 million depot for a U.S. armored brigade's vehicles.

Support to Kiev and the Industrial Challenge

Since 2022, USEUCOM's SAG-U group has managed the delivery of $65.9 billion in military aid to Ukraine. In December 2024, NATO created NSATU to coordinate support and training, marking a shift towards greater responsibility by the Alliance.

However, Cavoli issued a warning: the slowness of the U.S. Foreign Military Sales (FMS) system and the insufficient production capacity of the defense sector are delaying the replacement of weapons donated by Allies, with potential strategic risks.

The Modernization of NATO

NATO has initiated a historic modernization based on three regional plans approved at the Vilnius 2023 summit. These plans define necessary capabilities, restructure operational command, and delegate greater military powers to the supreme allied commander in Europe. This has already enabled rapid responses in complex scenarios, such as the protection of underwater infrastructure in the Baltic.

USEUCOM accelerates this process with a readiness-based approach, strengthening the Alliance and ensuring greater strategic flexibility for the United States to address global priorities.

Conclusion

General Cavoli's message is unequivocal: the world has entered a new era of strategic competition. Russia is not only engaged in a brutal war in Ukraine but has mobilized its society for a prolonged conflict against the West, supported by dangerous alliances. In this context, Europe returns to being the center of global security.

USEUCOM remains a decisive force for the advanced defense of the United States, power projection, and deterrence. But, as Cavoli stated, all this requires “American leadership, continuous investment in advanced capabilities, and a sustainable transition towards a European defense led by Allies.”

The security of Europe, today as yesterday, is inextricably linked to that of the United States. And the stakes, this time, are the very future of the liberal world order.

News link: https://www.armed-services.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/general_cavoli_opening_statements.pdf