

The USAFE commander offers parting thoughts about Russia, NATO, and credible deterrence.



BEARS W

WHETHER or not the situation between the US and Russia amounts to a new Cold War, Russia's steady buildup of forces on its border with NATO, and its actions and rhetoric in the past few years, demand a constant rethink of US and NATO military posture in Europe—particularly with regard to air forces.

The focus in Europe should shift to airpower, Gen. Frank Gorenc, who retired in August after three years as chief of US Air Forces in Europe, said in an interview with *Air Force Magazine*.

Since the NATO Summit in Wales two years ago, much of the reaction to Russia's adventurism has focused on land forces, Gorenc said, but "we've been carefully putting in the air perspective and the air proponenty" to ensure a combined-arms posture that's ready and responsive.

Part of that is to go back to the basics, Gorenc said: to train heavily and demonstrate solid, full spectrum capability in strike, air superiority, command and control, and intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. That's already happening as part of the "increased reassurance initiatives," the multibil-

lion dollar US effort to rotate more forces to Europe and conduct more readiness drills.

The basics are being married with new capabilities, Gorenc went on. "For two years in a row, we brought F-22s over" from the US to demonstrate rapid deployment, operations from austere or unprepared airstrips, and the ability to fly from one base and recover at another.

"The combination is a holistic approach" toward demonstrating that NATO can, in fact, roll back Russia's formidable air defenses if necessary. It's important for deterrence, Gorenc said, that NATO demonstrate "our commit-

An RAF F-35B, flanked by a British Tornado, flies to its new home at RAF Marham, UK.



ATCHING

By John A. Tirpak, Editorial Director

ment to establishing superiority in the air,” without which nothing is possible. Russia may have the ability to create an air defense wall, but “I have the capability to address [it],” Gorenc said.

F-35’S EXPONENTIAL EFFECTS

In February, Gorenc told reporters at AFA’s Air Warfare Symposium that the F-22 deployments were calculated to both remind Russia of USAF’s ability to field fifth generation fighters as well as the beginning of a process to familiarize NATO allies with the F-22 and the F-35, which some NATO allies will deploy in Europe before the US

does. In April, he told defense reporters in Washington the F-35 will provide an “exponential” increase of NATO’s capabilities versus Russia.

Regarding the chilly relationship between Washington and Moscow, “I don’t exactly equate it to a Cold War footing,” Gorenc said in the interview, “but what we do see is a Russia that perceives itself as a ‘great power.’ ... And so we are rightfully treating what happened in Europe as a change that has to be accommodated.”

He was referring to Russia’s war with Georgia, its illegal annexation of Ukraine’s Crimean Peninsula, and its

ongoing shadow war in Ukraine. He also pointed out that Russia has heavily fortified its air defenses along the NATO front and has made threatening comments and gestures toward some NATO republics formerly in its sphere of influence.

“From the Barents Sea to the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea to the Mediterranean,” Russia has built deep and overlapping anti-access, area-denial systems, Gorenc said. His turn of phrase was reminiscent of Winston Churchill’s “From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic” Iron Curtain speech 70 years earlier. These new



USMC photo by Cpl. Kelly L. Street

Above: An F-22 Raptor taxis down the runway past a Romanian IAR-330 helicopter at Mihail Kogalniceanu AB, Romania.

Russian defenses are “the single most concerning thing that I see as an airman,” Gorenc said.

The A2/AD systems, which Gorenc said feature modern, long-range surface-to-air missiles and advanced interceptor aircraft, are clearly meant “to neutralize any kind of conventional deterrence that we develop through adaptation in NATO.” Russia has willingly shown off new aircraft and new missiles in European-area exercises and has used new systems—like long-ranged conventional cruise missiles—in the Syrian conflict, he noted.

You can’t have deterrence if nobody knows about it, so Russia wants everybody to see these new systems. Their exposure is meant to “create a buzz about some of the capability improve-

ments they have,” Gorenc said, adding, “they are ... relatively impressive.”

Russia launched a volley of new Kalibr cruise missiles against anti-regime targets in Syria last fall. Their use was not necessary—anti-regime forces generally don’t have air defenses—but they demonstrated the Kalibr’s ability to make a precision attack from more than 900 miles away—well beyond what Western analysts had previously thought.

“We have been able to learn a lot from what we saw—and what we’re continuing to see—in their conflict in Syria,” Gorenc pointed out.

Although the air defense systems particularly are tough, mobile, and lethal, they are not impenetrable, Gorenc said. However, it will take a concerted effort to achieve freedom of movement for NATO forces if direct conflict erupts between NATO and Russia.



USAF photo by SrA. Gustavo Castillo

Though the Russian weapons themselves are on display, their full capability requires some guesswork, as NATO tries to divine the degree of training the Russian crews have with these systems and what their tactics, techniques, and procedures are, Gorenc said. But “we don’t take it for granted, whatsoever.”

NATO is already shifting from a policy of “responsiveness” to “deterrence,” a theme struck at the July NATO Summit in Warsaw. Russia and NATO have been increasingly matching each other, Gorenc said. “From the air perspective, in and around NATO, we’ve seen a pretty consistent pattern with them,” he explained. The Russians “react in a linear way to anything we’re doing.” If NATO has an exercise, Russia will mirror it in a “you do this, we’ll do that” manner.

What’s new, though, is that Russia has been calling “snap exercises” that don’t mirror NATO wargames. These



NATO photo by Giordano Paletti



USAF photo by SrA. Erin Babis

Above: Gen. Frank Gorenc (l), USAFE commander, and Maj. Gen. Rumen Radev, commander of the Bulgarian air force, on the flight line at Graf Ignatievo AB, Bulgaria.

are sudden, unannounced exercises that look like actual attack or invasion preparations. These snap exercises are worrisome, “particularly to Alliance members on the East side of NATO,” Gorenc said.

“RAPID X”

What it all adds up to, he continued, is that the security environment in Europe is changing, and the US and NATO will have to adapt to that. The role of airpower will play a big part in any military solution, he said.

At the AFA symposium, Gorenc said the European Reassurance Initiative would fund extended F-15 deployments to Europe, as well as interoperability and airfield improve-

ments, particularly in Eastern Europe. These will include facilities for fuel and munitions storage and potentially runway lengthening.

At the meeting with defense reporters in Washington in April, Gorenc said he’s launched an initiative called “Rapid X.” It will see sharply increased deployments of as few as four aircraft to austere airfields for refueling, rearming, and relaunching, to be recovered at yet another airfield. This approach is to “create challenges for any potential adversary” and “make the adversary’s problem that much harder.” There are hundreds of airfields in Europe that could be used in this way, he said.

Part of the holistic approach of combined arms, Gorenc said, is to make sure that the basics are funded. He acknowledged that in the aftermath of NATO’s 2011 Libya operation, NATO allies ran short of munitions and had to borrow from US stocks. With many

SSgt. Del Williams, a crew chief, changes a tire after NATO training exercise Arctic Fighter Meet 2016 at Bodø Main Air Station, Norway.

NATO countries part of the anti-ISIS coalition conducting air strikes in Syria and Iraq, “everybody’s using a lot of munitions. ... I think a lot of the countries have run into shortages,” but he reported they’re “working with the manufacturers to replenish that.”

Over time, “slowly but surely, ... everybody will come back into good health with respect to stockpiles,” Gorenc asserted, though he admitted reaching that goal is not a short-term proposition. He said it would probably take a year to get stockpiles back up to where they should be.

Russia’s saber-rattling is a good reminder to concentrate on the basics, and that includes having enough weapons available, Gorenc said. In times of



Fighters from four countries line the ramp at Trapani AB, Italy. At far left is a Tornado from Italy. Lined up are F-16s from Greece (blue and white tail flash), the US (SP tail markings), and Poland (red and white checks).



Russian Federation Ministry of Defense photo



Top: Armored fighting vehicles near Donetsk, Ukraine, operated by Russian-backed rebels. **Middle:** MiG-29SMTs take off for a combat training exercise. **Bottom:** A Russian Tu-160 Blackjack is followed by two French Rafale fighters.



British Ministry of Defense photo

A NATO AWACS E-3 flies over Trapani Air Base. Gorenc, then USAFE commander, said surveillance and command and control, such as what AWACS provides, are among the “basics” the US and its allies should concentrate on in Europe.



NATO photo by Miks Uzans

austerity, munitions stockpiles tend to be seen as a bill payer.

The airplanes have to be ready, ground crews and maintainers trained and exercised, “and of course, the availability of munitions to meet the aspirations of the country have to be ready,” Gorenc said, and “everybody’s making a move to replenish those that are used.”

Isn’t the common knowledge of such a fundamental shortage damaging to the credibility of the conventional deterrent?

“I don’t think that’s an issue,” Gorenc answered. The Alliance—training and acting in a coherent manner—is itself a sound deterrent, and the US/NATO deterrent derives from a combination of capability along with capacity and a willingness to act.

“In the end, yes, we’re using a lot of munitions in other parts of the world, but it’s not to such an effect” that the responsiveness is hollow.

“We are an expeditionary Air Force; we move aircraft as required, ... and I’m confident that if anything happened in Europe that we’d be able to meet our requirements,” Gorenc stated. Munitions are available to USAF worldwide, he said.

The UK’s vote to separate from the European Union shouldn’t have significant impact on its special military relationship with the US, Gorenc said.

“I see very, very little effect” on Britain’s role in NATO as a result of the “Brexit” vote, he said. “We’re going to pursue the great capability that we have in the air together.” The biggest impact on USAF from the surprise move is that it’s “the only thing that they’re talking about, now, in Europe,” when there are many more pressing security issues to discuss.

AFRICAN CHALLENGES

Africa, however, demands more attention from the Air Force, especially given that ISIS is targeting “ungoverned spaces,” but he doesn’t think USAFE and AFAFRICA should be broken up into two organizations, as they once were.

“The challenges in Africa are growing,” Gorenc said, demanding specifically more ISR assets and airlift, given the lack of surface infrastructure in the interior of the vast continent.

“I see the requirement for air transport and ISR booming in Africa as ISIS starts moving about, particularly in Libya,” he said.

But should AFAFRICA be spun off from USAFE? There’s been no talk of doing that, Gorenc said.

The needs of US European Command and US Africa Command are being met by the current structure, he said, adding, “Right now I think we’re ideally suited.” What will be needed as ISIS ramps up its Africa activities is an increase to staffing, both at headquarters and in the Air Operations Center.

Gorenc said he’s proud of USAFE’s achievements during his years at the tiller.

“When I took command, the biggest thing on the plate was how we would transition the mission in Afghanistan from combat ops to ‘train, advise, and assist,’” he said. Within seven months, Russia seized the Crimea, “we were fully engulfed with ISIS,” and the Ebola outbreak in Africa demanded people and aircrews.

“Each one of those required a response from air early,” he said, with assets not just from his command but from USAF’s rotational forces, as well. The success of those missions “has been a simply spectacular validation of how we’re postured in the Air Force,” he said. ✪