

Atlantic Club of Bulgaria
NATO and the Transatlantic Relationship: The Role of Airpower in Global Security
Air Force Secretary Deborah Lee James
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SECRETARY JAMES: Good afternoon, everyone, and thank you very much, Dr. Passy for that very nice and warm welcome and introduction. Thank you also to the members of the Atlantic Club of Bulgaria, members of the press who are in attendance here today, and most importantly I want to say thank you to the people of Bulgaria for their strong friendship, the strong friendship that you always show to the United States. I am really, really delighted to be here. Before coming I had the honor of meeting your new ambassador in Washington, Dr. Stoytchev, who told me that Sofia is one of the oldest and one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. And I'm here only briefly and I've not seen the entirety of the city, but wow. What I have seen so far, he certainly was right about those comments. And, of course, being here, at the central military [inaudible], that also is a huge cultural and iconic building in Sofia.

I have to tell you [inaudible] Atlantic Club. We certainly thank you for providing such an important forum for dialog that shapes our thinking and educates all of us on the importance of the NATO Alliance and the transatlantic relations that we share. The U.S. really, really values efforts like this one, efforts like this forum, so much so that, as you may know, every U.S. ambassador to Bulgaria delivers his or her first remarks right here at this very forum.

Now, by way of background, I am here in Europe for about 10 days. I've just started my visit to Europe. I was in Lisbon, Portugal yesterday. The day before that I was in Lajes in the Azores. I had a very good visit in Portugal. I arrived here in Sofia this morning and from here I will travel on to the three Baltic States, to the Ukraine to personally witness some of the challenges that this region is facing and beyond those states I will then travel to several other locations, a total of eight countries in 10 days. I came to Europe for a number of reasons. First, I wanted to see the many U.S. Airmen who are forward deployed here in Europe, to be able to thank them personally for what they

did to ensure peace and stability in the region, of course, in conjunction with our allies. Their presence demonstrates our long-standing commitment to Europe, and of course, I also want to thank the countries who are hosting them. Indeed, later today, I'll be meeting with several [inaudible] about our U.S. Airmen who are deployed here, training together with their Bulgarian counterparts, sharing their expertise, and strengthening our joint cooperation.

My second reason for coming is to meet with senior military and government leaders in each of the nations to discuss specific areas of mutual cooperation, the defense challenges that we face together and how we can deepen our relationships, work together more closely to counter some of the various serious threats that are right there on our doorsteps. Earlier today, in fact, I had the opportunity to meet with Defense Minister Nanchev, general of the Armed Forces Popov, Major General Radev, the chief of the air force, and several other officials. This is a really time [inaudible] period to be visiting Europe, to be visiting Bulgaria, in my opinion, as the U.S. and Europe face the changing geopolitical environment. Some observers around the world have said that the global influence of our transatlantic partnership is in decline. Well, I say they are dead wrong. And our president says they are dead wrong. We believe that the U.S. will remain Europe's closest partner, and that our defense cooperation, especially through NATO, will remain the foundation for solving our world's most pressing problems, and that's really what I want to talk about today.

Specifically, I want to focus on two things. First, why I think our transatlantic defense cooperation is more relevant today than ever. Results of the just completed NATO Summit, I believe, bear this out. And second, I want to discuss what the United States Air Force is doing in Europe, in coordination with our allies to strengthen that overall relationship. First, just a little bit more background about my role in the U.S. defense establishment. As the secretary of the Air Force, it's my job to provide the secretary of defense and the president of the United States with military options, options that affect the air, space and cyberspace domain. I'm responsible, just as [inaudible] said, for

organizing, training, and equipping the Air Force and very importantly, taking care of our Airmen, both our military personnel and our civilian personnel and their families.

I'm also the principal Department of Defense space advisor. This means I oversee all of the departments space matters. That means budgets. It means policy. And it means strategy issues that affect space. And this is an important area given how much our military and our civilian populations rely on space capabilities to conduct many type of operations. For example, I'll just give you one example, the GPS, the global positioning system constellation. This is operated by our U.S. Airmen. It is 40 satellites strong, 40 satellites in orbit, and it support not only precision position navigation and timing, which is very important for our military users, but it also supports rebuilding civilian users worldwide. Today U.S. Airmen are providing two-thirds of America's nuclear deterrents. We're performing intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, as well as strike missions in Iraq and Syria in the fight against ISIL. And, of course, we're very focused on partnering with our European allies to reassure and ultimately to deter egression that threatens all of us.

In the two and a half years that I have served in this current job, I have seen the demand for what we do in the Air Force continue to grow. It grows precisely because our world is so rapidly changing, more so than I can remember in the 30 plus years that I have been working in defense. We're seeing threats that are more sophisticated, more diverse, and we're seeing these threats in each of our war fighting domains, meaning on the land, at sea, in the air space, and in the cyberspace, as well. And we're seeing disturbing behaviors from certain nation states and non-state actors, as well. The bottom line here, ladies and gentlemen, is no single nation can solve today's and tomorrow's challenges alone, which is exactly why our transatlantic partnerships are more relevant today than ever. And NATO is the cornerstone, not just of transatlantic security, but in many ways, I believe it's the cornerstone for global security. And let me give you just a few examples.

When the leaders of the NATO Alliance met last week in Warsaw, they discussed at

great length the Alliance security posture in the face of what the [inaudible] of NATO, ultimately called the "arc of insecurity and instability" along NATO's periphery and beyond. The NATO leaders acknowledge that the Alliance faces a range of security challenges and threats that both originate from the east and from the south, threats from state and non-state actors, from military forces, and from terrorist, cyber and hybrid attacks. The leaders identified Russia as a source of regional instability that fundamentally challenges the Alliance, and damages Euro-Atlantic security.

Equally important was the NATO leaders' declaration that the Alliance does not seek confrontation with and certainly poses no threat to Russia. NATO will continue to be transparent, predictable, and resolute. However, and I think most importantly, NATO cannot and will not compromise on the principles and values on which the Alliance and security in Europe and North America rests. The leaders declares that the Alliance's decentral mission is to ensure that the Alliance remains an unparalleled community of freedom, peace, security, and shared values, including individual liberties, human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. It is these same principles and values that are historic, the historic transformation across all of Europe, including right here in Bulgaria, a quarter of a century ago. It's the same principles and values that underpin the strong partnership and the cooperation that we have today between the U.S. and Bulgaria.

Now let me put this partnership and cooperation in a broader context. We're working together with Bulgaria and other allies to strengthen our capabilities, our plans, our posture, and our investments. In the case of the U.S., next year the U.S. will increase our funding for what we call the European Reassurance Initiative. The amount of money we will devote to this is \$3.4 million which by way of comparison is four times larger than the amount we devoted to this program a year ago. The funds will be used to increase capability and readiness and responsiveness of NATO forces through training and exercises, improved infrastructure, and the pre-positioning of U.S. equipment in Europe. Air power, which is my line, is certainly part of this mix. For the Air Force, this initiative has enabled

us to deploy, for example, F-16s and A-10s here to Europe, as well as an F-22 training detachment.

All of these things, of course, are on a rotational basis.

Now, to go back just a few short years, to the 2014 Wales Summit, the NATO allies at that point agreed to enhance the capabilities of the NATO response force in order to adapt and respond to emerging security challenges posed by Russia, as well as the risks emanating from the Middle East and North Africa. And, in fact, NATO has increased its readiness by doubling the size of the NATO response force, and they stood up a very hard readiness joint task force to facilitate the lack of movement of our response forces should that be needed.

Now let me just take a moment and give a couple of thoughts on the most recent summit, the one that just completed in Warsaw. First, the allies committed to strengthening NATO's defense and in turn its posture by enhancing our forward presence on the Eastern Flank, building upon that European reassurance initiative that I spoke about a moment ago. Second NATO agreed that under the enhanced forward presence concept, four allies will deploy a battalion-style unit to each of the Baltic States plus Poland. And as President Obama announced, the U.S. will take the lead in Poland. We'll deploy a battalion of American soldiers there. The United Kingdom will take the lead in Estonia. Germany will take the lead in Lithuania. And Canada will take the lead in Latvia. This ultimately will mean on the order of 4000 additional NATO troops will be in the region on a rotational basis. Moreover, an additional U.S. armored brigade will rotate throughout central and eastern Europe, including in Bulgaria, and this will be an additional 4000 U.S. troops that will come through for exercises and training.

For the staff, NATO expressed commitment to the security of the Black Sea area and committed to developing a tailored forward presence there, including a multinational brigade headquartered in Romania. Third, NATO is strengthening the readiness of its forces against a range of threats, for example, a major milestone was reached with the initial operating capability of the NATO

ballistic missile defense thanks to the progress that we've seen in Poland, Romania, and Spain.

[Inaudible] agreed on the need to boost our intelligence sharing and early warning mechanisms so that we can improve our situational awareness and ultimately deter, prevent, and defend against [inaudible] threats, including cyber.

And, by the way, speaking of cyber, NATO recognized cyberspace for the first time, formally, as the domain of operations in which it must defend itself as effectively as it seeks to defend on the air, in the air, on the sea, and on the land. This means that cyber from here on out will be integrated into operational planning and Alliance operations and missions. I think this is very, very critical. If you go back about six months, hackers, who had classical ties to the Kremlin, disrupted the Ukraine's power grid and caused blackouts for hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians. So at the Summit, the Allies made it clear that the cyber defense pledge is to commit to enhancing their national networks and infrastructures so that we don't see a repeat of a situation like what occurred in the Ukraine. And the U.S. stands ready to help the Allies build resilience, to hybrid a new threats, including cyber.

And lastly, NATO announced increasing its support to the Ukraine with a new assistance package to include alliance support for Ukrainian forces. Now, all of these actions showcase NATO moving forward with the most significant reinforcement of our collective defense in quite a few years, since the Cold War. And the U.S. Air Force to bring it back to my portfolio is going to be a key component as we look towards implementing the commitments made in Warsaw and we stand ready to support.

Now we shift just a few moments to a different type of threat. We're working closely with NATO members and other countries to address very important issues of terrorism and violent extremists. For example, you all know that we in the United States are leading a coalition to deliver, ultimately, a lasting defeat to ISIL in the Middle East and we are certainly thankful for the

contributions from all of our NATO partners. Bulgaria has been part of this endeavor and has also contributed to Operation Iraqi Freedom. Earlier this week our secretary of defense announced that the U.S. is going to deploy an additional 560 U.S. troops to Iraq to help the Iraqis establish a logistical springboard for their eventual offensive on ISIL's stronghold and Mosul as we continue to help them take back more territories and more cities. U.S. troops, including Airmen, will be part of this. They'll provide a range of support for Iraqi security forces, including infrastructure and logistical capabilities at a very critical air field that of Mosul.

As agreed in Warsaw, the ongoing crisis in Syria has direct ramifications from regional stability and the security of NATO's southeastern border, and this conflict presents another source of challenges and threats for international stability, security, prosperity. The Alliance has wholeheartedly condemned the unabated and indiscriminate campaign of bombardment, including the use of incendiary weapons which do enormous damage, and the violence that the Assad Regime and its supporters have launched which deliberately targets civilians and civilian infrastructure. But, as made clear in Warsaw, NATO and the Allies have committed to defending NATO territory and borders against any threats and adjust challenges emanating from the Syrian conflict, be they from governments or from terrorist organizations, including the Islamic State and the [inaudible] front. In addition to Iraq and Syria, we have ongoing efforts, as you know, in Afghanistan. We're committed to proactively supporting Afghan conventional forces, and one of the ways will be able to [inaudible] through additional airpower, as well as training and advisory efforts on the ground and in the air. Bulgarian forces are also in Afghanistan in support of NATO's resolute support mission providing base security and protection in Kandahar, as well as staff in Kabul.

At the Warsaw Summit, 39 states, including the United States, agreed to maintain on the order of 12,000 troops to NATO's resolute support, advice, and training mission in Afghanistan in the year 2017. And just last week our President Obama announced maintaining the current U.S.

presence in Afghanistan into next year with about 8400 troops to continue training Afghan forces, as well as go after, aggressively -- more aggressively, al-Qaeda and ISIL.

Now, I've talked about threats and I think you'll agree, we face quite a few. Let me now say just a few words about budget. We all know that security does not come for free. NATO has to have more and better equipped armed forces with the right balance of manpower and capabilities. And this means, above all, that we have to increase our defense spending. That's for all of us in NATO. Now, I'm not naïve. I know this is no easy order. I can tell you it's no easy order in the United States, either. We're all struggling with different budget priorities. And, by the way, I want to thank Bulgaria for Bulgaria's commitment at the Wales Summit and the roadmap that Bulgaria has put together to reach the 2% commitment by the year 2024.

An example, a very important example, of Bulgaria's investment, is Parliament's decision in June to modernize the fighter aircraft fleet in recognition of the need to protect Bulgarian airspace. And I would say, and I did say, to the officials with whom I met earlier today, please, please, keep pressing on this one, because it's terribly, terribly important.

Let me now turn to what the U.S. Air Force is doing in Europe. Last year we supported on the order of 70 events that were tied to an exercise series called Operation Atlantic Resolve, and we are scheduled to participate and even more in the coming year. Here in Bulgaria we recently completed three months of training and exercises with an F-15 squadron out of Massachusetts. And later today, as I mentioned earlier, I'll be seeing some of our U.S. personnel from a C-130 unit based in Germany who arrived earlier this week to start joint [airlift] training with the Bulgarian forces. Our F-15s out of Great Britain are certainly in constant high demand all over Europe, and we continue to commit B-2 and B-52 bombers to exercises here in Europe, as well.

Very important, I want to thank Bulgaria for the successful posting of the [inaudible] summer exercises. These exercises and ongoing relationships help us maintain a credible and flexible

and ready capability to respond to a variety of potential threats and situations and more importantly than that, these exercises really help to professionalize our airmen. Your chief of defense, General Popov, and chief of the Air Force, Major General Radev, told me personally, earlier today, how effective this sort of training has been in helping Bulgaria to sharpen skills, sharpen airmanship, and the minister of defense went a step further. He said he thought it was very important to have these sorts of opportunities because when people come, they come as service members, prepared to do their duty, but by the time they leave, they leave not only as service members, but they leave as friends. And you cannot surge trust and you cannot surge friendship. This has to be built over time.

Let me talk about one final element of our cooperation, and that's joint professional military education of our air forces. We have a program called the military personnel exchange program where we exchange our airmen in equivalent grades and specialties with allied nations which then enhances our interoperability and our partner capabilities. It's an exchange program for military personnel. In short, this gives our direct airmen an opportunity to live in a foreign country and to work with an allied air force and also allowed the foreign exchange officer to come to the United States and work with our Air Force. We have this program ongoing with a number of nations around the world, but right now, today, we are working on an agreement to be able to have an exchange program with Bulgaria. So stay tuned this is another [inaudible] cooperation that is coming. This kind of program and others like them demonstrate that air forces are stronger and more effective when we learn together, when we develop leadership qualities together, and skills together, that contribute to the profession of arms. In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen, the challenges that we face today mean that we can't take security for granted, and we can't take airpower for granted, either. We must work together in close cooperation. And that's why our transatlantic partnership needs to remain strong. And, very importantly, we must invest in security. As the NATO summit made clear, with strategic values that community brings to our lives, the whole really is much bigger than the sum of its parts. I

want to thank you again for inviting me here this afternoon, and I very much look forward to your questions. Thank you.

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