

Army Gen. Bantz J. Craddock, Commander

Washington, D.C.
1/8 12:10:49 PM

Thule, Greenland
1/8 2:10:49 PM

London, England
1/8 5:10:49 PM

Stuttgart, Germany
1/8 6:10:49 PM

Tel Aviv, Israel
1/8 7:10:49 PM

Vladivostok, Russia
1/9 3:10:49 AM

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Advanced Search

Home

Command Group

Directorates

EUCOM A-Z

European Command

- About USEUCOM
- History
- Mission
- Posture

Media Gallery

- Photos
- Video

Newcomers

News

- Releases
- Resources
- Transcripts

Operations

Weather Forecast

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- Spanish
- French
- German
- Italian
- Russian
- Arabic

U.S. Forces, Europe

- Army
- Navy
- Marine Corps
- Air Force
- Special Operations

NATO

- SHAPE

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Transcript - National Press Club Luncheon with General James Jones, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe (MAY 25, 2006)

SUBJECT: "NATO: NEW CAPABILITIES FOR EMERGING GLOBAL CHALLENGES"

MODERATOR: JOE ANSELMO, BUSINESS EDITOR, AVAIATION WEEK AND SPACE TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE; MEMBER, PRESS CLUB BOARD OF GOVERNORS NATIONAL PRESS CLUB BALLROOM, WASHINGTON, D.C.

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MR. ANSELMO: Ladies and gentlemen, I'd like to thank you for coming today. Good afternoon. Welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Joe Anselmo. I'm the business editor for Aviation Week and Space Technology Magazine, and a member of the Press Club Board of Governors.

I'd like to welcome club members and their guests in the audience, as well as those of you today watching on C-SPAN.

Please hold your applause during the speech so that we have time for as many questions as possible. For our broadcast audience, I'd like to explain that if you hear applause, it may be from guests and members of the general public who attend our luncheons and is not coming necessarily from the working press.

A video archive of today's luncheon is provided by ConnectLive and is available to members only through the National Press Club website at www.press.org. Press Club members also can access free transcripts of our luncheons at our website. Nonmembers may purchase transcripts, audio and video tapes by calling 1-888-343-1940. For more information about joining the Press Club, contact us at 202-662- 7511.

Before introducing our head table here, I would like to remind you of future speakers. On June 7th, we'll have Senator Sam Brownback, Republican of Kansas, who will discuss human dignity and the national interest in foreign policy. On June 19th there will be the Gerald Ford Journalism Awards. And on June 22nd, John Edwards, senator from -- former Senator from North Carolina and director of the Center on Poverty Work, will talk about the opportunity -- excuse me. John Edwards, director of the Center on Poverty Work and Opportunity at the University of North Carolina will be our featured luncheon speaker.

If you have any questions for our speaker, I would ask you to write them on your cards provided at the table and pass them up to me. We'll ask as many as time permits. And I had the honor of sitting next to Mr. Woodward, who gave me some advice. He said the questions are too long. So if you want to get some good advice, try to keep them concise.

I'd like to introduce our head speaker now. Actually, I'll introduce the head table first.

Starting from my right, Joe Davis, public affairs director at VFW; Jerry Bastarache, freelancer; Steve Sami, publisher, Military and Diplomats World News; Jeff Schogol, Stars and Stripes; Arnaud de Borchgrave, UPI editor-at-large; Tom Vanden Brook, reporter for USA Today; Bob Woodward, reporter and editor, Washington Post.

On this side, we have John Hughes, transportation reporter, Bloomberg News and chair of the National Press Club's Speakers Committee; skipping over our featured speaker, John Fales, aka Sergeant Shaft, of The Washington Times -- he's a Speakers Committee member, and he was responsible for organizing today's event; General Chuck Wald, former deputy commander of EUCOM; Jeff St. Onge -- he's a defense correspondent for Bloomberg News; Ramona Joyce of the American Legion; Ward Carroll, editor of military.com; and Lieutenant Colonel Ken Blackshaw (retired), Pentagon press officer. (Applause.)

And now for my introduction of our guest. (Chuckles.)

We are honored to have with us today General James L. Jones, NATO supreme allied commander in Europe and former commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps. He is the first Marine to have this honor, in the NATO job. His job is to pervert -- preserve the peace, security and territorial integrity of NATO member-nations in Europe.

General Jones is also commander of the United States European Command, where he directs efforts to support and achieve U.S. interests and objectives in 91 countries in Central and Eastern Europe, Africa and portions of the Middle East.

The military forces under General Jones' command perform a variety of functions. They plan and conduct contingency operations, such as the evacuations of noncombatants and humanitarian relief. They provide combat-ready forces and intelligence to the Allied Command Europe and other U.S. unified commands.

General Jones has a distinguished career that spans four decades of military service. He spent his formative years in France, and returned to the U.S. to attend the Georgetown University School of Foreign Service. After earning his Bachelor of Science degree, he was commissioned as a second lieutenant in the Marine Corps in 1967 and ordered to Vietnam, where he served as a platoon and company commander.

His long list of posts after Vietnam include commanding officer of the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit at Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; deputy director of the U.S. European Command in Stuttgart, Germany. After serving as the military assistant to Secretary of Defense William Cohen under President Clinton, he was promoted to general in 1991 and was appointed as the 32nd commandant of the Marine Corps. In January of 2003, he assumed duties as commander of the U.S. European Command and Supreme Allied Commander Europe, his current job.

His numerous military decorations include the Defense Distinguished Service Medal, the Silver Star Medal, the Legion of Merit with three gold stars, and the Bronze Star Medal with Combat Valor.

In remarks conferring an honorary doctorate on General Jones, Dean Robert L. Gallucci of Georgetown University said, quote, "When Bishop John Carroll established his academy at Georgetown, he envisioned a place that would educate new generations of leaders for the nation. The same spirit led Edmund A. Walsh, more than a century later, and in a much changed world, to build at Georgetown a School of Foreign Service that would help prepare citizen leaders who would preserve and advance liberty in the United States and, in turn, on the world stage on which the nation was then taking its place. We celebrate a son of Georgetown and a graduate of our School of Foreign Service whose distinguished career of public service and patriotism is a contemporary embodiment of the traditions that have infused and inspired Georgetown since 1798." End quote.

Press Club members, ladies and gentlemen, I'm pleased to present General James Jones, NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe and Commander of United States European Command. (Applause.)

GEN. JONES: Thank you, Joe. And thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for being here. It's a great honor to be back for, I think, my fourth appearance. And Sergeant Shaft, John Fales, thank you very much for arranging this. And you might know that John was strategically seated between two four stars because he's been charged to help us get through our lunch and use the right forks and knives and things like that. (Laughter.)

May I also take a moment to acknowledge some very special people here. You're all very special, but I want to talk -- I wanted to acknowledge my friend, Bob Woodward, who's been a mentor and a friend for many, many years. And I'm delighted that he could be here today. And I also want to emphasize that he spent five years in the United States Navy, and allowed as how the Marines formed a large portion of the way he thinks now days. (Laughter.) And so we're happy to make that contribution.

General Chuck Wald was introduced as the former deputy commander of United States European Command. Let me just say that that title is only as of about two weeks ago, two or three weeks ago.

Chuck and I worked together for the last three and a half years in the United States European Command. And I know of no one who has contributed more to the transformation of U.S. forces in Europe and Africa and no one who has done more towards raising the reality of Africa to our national consciousness than Chuck Wald. His vision, his tenacity, his conviction, his friendship, his loyalty and his dedication to this nation for his long, long and distinguished career in the Air Force, both as a fighter, a warrior, and a thinker and a strategist, is something that I will always treasure, have benefited from immensely, and I'd like to publicly thank him for his service to the nation today.

Chuck, thank you very, very much. (Applause.)

Arnaud de Borgrave is known to everyone in Washington, D.C., but one of the things that may not be known by everyone in Washington, D.C. is that Arnaud made the D-Day landing as a member of the Royal Navy in Normandy. And I had the great honor of asking them to accompany me just recently, a couple of years ago, for the celebration that was held at Normandy. And Arnaud, it's a great pleasure to have you here today, and I thank you so much for your service in the cause of freedom.

May I also introduce someone who is very, very special to me and has been since the day I met him, and this is the 14th Sergeant Major of the United States Marine Corps, and also and equally importantly, the first Sergeant Major of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization to hold that particular billet: Sergeant Major Al McMichael, who has contributed not only much to the United States Marine Corps, but in the last three years, much to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization by almost single-handedly -- not quite single-handedly, but almost single-handedly -- conceptualizing the idea of teaching the values of non-commissioned officers and staff non-commissioned officers to the armies formerly known as Eastern European or Soviet bloc armies. And armed only with a concept and very few dollars, and even fewer euros, Sergeant Major McMichael and a very small band of dedicated, like-minded staff NCOs from a variety of countries embarked on this journey to teach and preach the values and the essentiality of staff NCOs and NCOs and has -- I think today, if I count them correct, has collected about nine countries who are in the middle of a major transformation and adopting NCO corps and staff NCO corps in their own structure in former Eastern Bloc countries. And Sergeant Major McMichael will be retiring from active duty, but not from national service.

This was one of the most gifted men that I have ever been fortunate enough to associate with. He and his

wife have given much to the United States Marines in his tour as 14th Sergeant Major, and, on a broader scale, much to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization for the last three years. And I'd like him to stand and be recognized, please. (Applause.)

Another member of the media that I'm personally beholden to and most fond of is Art Buchwald.

Art Buchwald was a columnist for the Herald Tribune back in the 1950s. As some of you may know, and as it was said, I was raised in France. My family arrived in France in 1947, and I lived there, had the privilege of living there for 15 years. And my father and mother introduced me to Art Buchwald in the pages of the Herald Tribune at a very young age.

Art is not only a great American and had a lot to do with shaping our thinking and with his very humorous way of looking at the world -- I think his Thanksgiving Day column is required reading in my family, and has always been -- and he's also a former Marine. And I got to know him late in life and in the last six or seven years. But I wanted to salute him from this podium, in front of his peers, because he is truly one of a kind and a legend.

And so, Art, if you're out there, we salute you. Thank you. (Applause.)

And lastly, to my great surprise today, Tom Coleman (sp) and -- my freshman coach at Georgetown, the guy who never played me enough -- (laughter) -- is here. And so you don't get a piece of cake, Tom. (Laughter.) But Tom Coleman is a distinguished lawyer, a great athlete from Georgetown University, and certainly was very influential in my life. And he's accompanied by a Georgetown Hall of Fame basketball player who we all admire and had just graduated when I was a freshman there, Brian Puddy (sp) Sheehan, who was the captain of the team and is a member of the Georgetown Basketball Hall of Fame. Brian Puddy (sp), good to see you here today. Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Ladies and gentlemen, for the past three and a half years, I've been privileged -- as I've said in talking about my colleagues in the United States European Command, I've been privileged to be embarked on two wonderful journeys, the first one as commander of the United States European Command and the second as the commander of the Allied Command Operations for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I say an "adventure" because no one can control the times in which we live. But I would tell you that if I were to pick a time that I wanted to be in Europe and in either one of those two assignments, I would have picked these last three and a half or four years.

These have been times of amazing change and transformation.

I've had the good fortune of being at the epicenter of two ongoing efforts in support of the causes of freedom and liberty that have to do with the transformational change to the United States European Command and also to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

I will talk mostly today about the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. But let me just say that the U.S. transformation is fundamentally more important because what I think has happened in the last few years is that we have realigned the United States European Command in such a way that although it will have fewer forces and fewer bases, it will be realigned in such a way that it can meet and contribute to the common threats, the asymmetric threats of the world and even the conventional threats that might come up in the years ahead, and meet them most effectively.

We have done so by having a strategic concept that recognizes that sitting on a big base somewhere in Western Europe waiting for an enemy to come across to fill the gap is simply not going to happen. That is -- those days are over.

Instead, we needed to develop an agility, an expeditionary capability and a usability to the forces, and we have been working hard to do that. But to do what? To recognize that our investments have mostly been in Western Europe -- that's where our large bases are -- but our activities are definitely moving to the East and to the South with new realities in this asymmetric world. And so the European Command of tomorrow -- and indeed, of today; we're already into the transformation -- will have fewer soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines. But the ones we have will be able to be strategically much more effective, and they'll be augmented by rotational forces from elsewhere in the world and the continental United States.

So I would say to the young leaders of tomorrow who wear our nation's uniform that if you come for duty in the United States European Command -- which is really the European African Command because of our focus -- that you will be challenged in ways that you perhaps can only think about today in terms of the type of work, where you might work, what you might do, and it -- in some cases, great strategic distance.

But one thing that every man or woman wearing the U.S. uniform will do in Europe, I predict for the future, is bring support to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. And this is perhaps the main theme that I would like to discuss today, and that is what is NATO? Why is NATO important? Why should we care about NATO? And where is NATO going in the future?

The reality of NATO is that -- at least my assessment is that most people fully understand what NATO was in the 20th century, there's no question about that. We built exactly the right kind of force to bring about the results that were caused by the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It was built to be a very large force, it was built to be reactive, it was built to be static, and it was never built to be an offensive force; it was defensive in nature. And all of those cultural instincts were built into the alliance, and it worked very, very well.

With the demise of the Soviet Union, the fall of the Berlin Wall, the world changed a little bit, and for a few years we looked around at each other and people were saying, well, what do we do now? And what we decided to do now is to -- at the Prague Summit of 2002, is to transform this alliance and turn it into something that could meet the threats that we face today, the family of asymmetric threats, and in a way that spins the entire alliance almost 180 degrees not only in terms of its capabilities, but in terms of its military

culture, if you will, the very essence of its philosophical base for existing or its *raison d'être*. That process probably started at the Prague Summit in 2002, which I view as one of the most transformational and inspirational summits that have had -- inspired by the heads of state of then 19 nations, where they decided to expand the alliance by seven new members -- and that was done in 2004. They required that the alliance create a NATO Response Force and that it be fully operationally capable by 1 October of 2007; that we completely take a look at the entire structure of our military headquarters and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization and cut and reduce most of the -- the many headquarters that we have; that we take a almost 30 percent personnel cut in achieving these efficiencies; that we disestablish the Supreme Allied Command Atlantic, SACLANT, and establish the Supreme Allied Command for Transformation in the same place, in Norfolk, Virginia; and that we embark in the alliance on a program to remedy the critical shortfalls in the alliance's capabilities in such things as strategic lift, air-ground surveillance systems, and the like.

All of those things are under way. The alliance today is poised, I believe, to fully enter the 21st century in ways that we would not have thought possible as recently as 2002-2003.

No one would have thought in 2003, myself included, that today we would be standing on the verge of asking NATO to take over the entire operation in Afghanistan, yet that is about -- that is what is about to happen.

No one in 2003 would have thought that NATO would ever be able to muster any kind of political consensus to have a mission in Iraq, but that has happened and it is under way.

NATO has always been thought of a(n) east-west organization with no look whatsoever to our southern regions, and yet today there is a NATO mission in support of the African Union and its operations in Darfur.

Certainly, the Balkans have fixated NATO for a long time, and 16,000 NATO soldiers are on duty today as we speak in Kosovo as we approach a very critical time in resolving the final status of Kosovo and Serbia and Montenegro.

And finally, in the Mediterranean, for the last several years NATO's had the only Article 5 mission that it has for counterterrorism -- a naval mission called Operation Active Endeavor, which is a unified family of nations who are patrolling the Mediterranean from choke point to choke point to ensure the security and the safety of that important waterway, and making great contributions to the collective security of our -- of our nations. And as a matter of fact, I might add that that operation has been so successful that it is attracting an expanded membership of like-minded nations from North Africa and also from Russia, which has joined this operation with two warships, fully integrated, fully inoperable, fully up to NATO standards, in the Mediterranean.

So this is not an alliance that is showing signs of disappearing from the face of the world, or it's not an alliance that's showing signs of fatigue or irrelevance. To the contrary, this year is a pivotal year -- perhaps more pivotal than any of the last two or three or four. As we approach November with a conference of heads of state -- a summit in Riga, Latvia, where heads of state will gather for a very important meeting to take on the new issues that have to do with the future of NATO -- new issues relating to possible future enlargements, possible future missions as we talk about and as we observe many nations expressing concerns about energy security, the security of critical infrastructures, much more global concern about the expansion of the drug trade and the narcotics trade from such countries as Afghanistan, with 90 percent of that product being sold in the capitals of Europe, and then turning around to finance terrorist organizations and insurrections.

We will celebrate, I believe by this year's end, the -- NATO's taking over the mission in Afghanistan.

We will, I believe, celebrate the full operational capability of the NATO Response Force. We will demonstrate the NATO Response Force's new capability in the Cape Verde islands, at great strategic distance off the west coast of Africa in June, which will be a milestone to achieving full operational capability.

And so, in short, the alliance is in the process of its most fundamental change and transformation. It is not without problems. We are beset by declining budgets in the alliance. The goal of 2002 in Prague was 2 percent of our national GDPs as a floor. It is what we sought to attain. We have not done that. And, in fact, we have lost ground on that. We need to do better. It is a paradox that we have political will to do more, to take on more missions, but also political will to resource less. And those two are polar opposites in terms of where we want to get to. And we're going to have to do something about it. We still have to understand that our forces, when they're committed, have to be, in my view, committed relatively caveat-free: that is to say, with a minimum number of national restrictions as to how our commanders can use those forces once they're -- the transfer of authority to NATO has been taken. But today, as we sit here enjoying this great lunch, 30,000 or so NATO troops are on duty on three different continents, bringing -- making extraordinary contributions to the collective security that we all hope to enjoy in the future.

I think NATO's best days are very possibly in its future. But we must do a better job of understanding what that future is, of explaining it to our nations on both sides of the Atlantic, and of understanding that the future of NATO is not to be a reactive defensive static alliance, but it is to be more flexible, more proactive. We must take on the family of missions that actually prevent future conflicts instead of reacting to future conflicts once they've started, and it takes a 10-year commitment of our forces to bring order and stability back into the entire region. And I need only cite the example of the Balkans to illustrate that point -- or perhaps even Afghanistan.

So the future of NATO, I think, is potentially quite bright. It is an exciting time to be in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. I'm extraordinarily proud of all of the 26 nations and 20 partner nations -- 46 countries that are generally pulling together on the same oar. The militaries have done a great job at achieving standards of interoperability that previously we could not imagine. And I believe that NATO is destined to continue to be an organization -- a unique organization, I might add -- in the world that may even draw into its fold in some way that we can't fathom, but nations of great strategic distance who have contacted NATO and expressed to have a security relationship without becoming a member.

And we may see that kind of evolution in the future as nations, quite correctly, are turning in -- turning their concerns about their securities in this very asymmetric world with very real serious challenges, and finding a place where those challenges can be addressed, where militaries can work together, where standards can be developed and interoperability can be achieved.

It's a great honor for me to be with you today. I look forward to your questions. And once again, thank you very much for asking me to be here. Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. ANSELMO: Thanks, General. You've left us about a half-hour for questions, and there are --

GEN. JONES: (Inaudible) -- I can talk more. (Laughter.)

MR. ANSELMO: There are a lot of them. But if anyone has further questions, again, please pass them up on the cards.

There were a lot of questions about Afghanistan. I'm going to try to sum some of these up. But let me just ask you, is the Taliban resurgent in Afghanistan or is it shooting its last and biggest defenses?

GEN. JONES: Before I answer that question, I'd just like to make a point about violence in Afghanistan.

Over the last three or so years that I've been privileged to visit Afghanistan and work on these issues, I've come to conclude that we have to be very careful when we talk about violence in Afghanistan and to try to make sure that we understand that violence in Afghanistan is very disparate and it comes from a number of different groups. And we have to be extremely careful, it seems to me, that we don't default to the very easy headline that says "The Taliban Is Back, The Insurgency Is Back." I don't believe that to be the case.

I believe that violence in Afghanistan comes from at least these following number of groups: some remnant capability of al Qaeda; some capability of the Taliban; certainly the narco -- the cartels, the narcotics cartels; certainly some of it from crime and corruption, of which there is, unfortunately, a great deal; some of it from tribe on tribe; and some of it from remnants of the warlords' organizations.

Until such time as we are able to stitch up the capabilities of the Karzai government, which deserves our support, to meet the very high expectations of the people of Afghanistan, we're going to have those areas of instability that are going to be populated as refugees from the people of the groups that I just discussed.

In some areas of the country it will certainly be Taliban, in other areas of the country it will be narcotics, in other areas of the country it will be crime, and so on. Let me be very clear that everybody has access to IEDs. So an IED going off does not mean an Islamic -- a radical Islamic organization. It could be anybody. A suicide bomber probably is a theological, fundamentalist organization. But -- so violence has to be carefully dissected and analyzed before you pin the label on it and say the Taliban is back.

I think -- with regard to the specific question, I think that what's going on in the south right now is a combination of things. One is traditionally there is a spring offensive in Afghanistan, and everybody was braced for that. Two, is the very satisfactory development of the Afghan National Army, which is an army that will fight and has shown great courage and great capacity, especially of late. We were able to go to more places in Afghanistan than we'd ever been before. So areas of the country, particularly in the south, which have never had an awful lot of troops, have been -- have not been able to be visited as often as we'd like. With the NATO expansion that will happen by July into the southern region, with the armed forces of the United Kingdom, Canada, Holland, Romania, and some United States, you're going to see more troops and more capacity in that part of the country than we've ever had before, by a considerable margin.

And so I think the answer to the question that I was just asked is we'll have to wait and see. Some people say it is that, that it is just a message-sending, a strategic move, a way to discourage and intimidate countries that are thinking of sending troops there, to get the political discussion going. I think we'll have to wait and see.

There's no question that there is increased violence. I'm just not prepared to say how long that will last. I personally don't think that once the expansion takes place, I don't think that the ratio of bad actors to NATO forces and Afghan Army forces -- that the ratio will be very favorable to our side, and that very quickly we will establish order in parts of the country that have not known that, because we are going to go to places and establish presence where we have not done this before.

The other thing I would say is that -- I've said this before, but I'm more concerned in the long term about the results of the drug war in Afghanistan than I am about resurgent Taliban, because the linkage to the economy, which is somewhere around 50 percent of the country's GDP, is tied to the narco-trafficking, but it also bleeds over into the system of law and order, the police system, the corruption and the like.

The military commitment will be able to do its job in Afghanistan. I'm convinced of that. But the quicker Afghanistan becomes whatever it's going to become depends on other factors not directly associated with military forces. And that is, as I said, a trained police force that is free of corruption; a system of law and order that is effective and working and removes bad actors from the society, successfully; and continued work in disarmament and reintegration of former fighters; and the expansion of the Karzai government into areas of the country that it hasn't been able to reach yet.

That will take time. It will take international cohesion. It will take more resources on the part of the international community. But the solution is not simply a military one.

MR. ANSELMO: What do you think of retired generals calling for Secretary Rumsfeld's resignation? (Subdued laughter.)

GEN. JONES: Well, I think that in my career as an active-duty officer, one of the things that I've enjoyed the most in uniform is that I have been able to express my opinion in any way that I wanted to and to anybody I wanted to, especially as a general officer.

So I think that while I support the idea that in the broad context that retired members of the military are -- in fact enjoy the same privileges and freedoms of -- as our citizens to express themselves, I'm not one that thinks that it's a particularly useful thing to do while our troops are in contact and we are in a war. I think that there's a -- that all of us have had plenty of times to make our opinions known and that we should be careful not to inadvertently give false hope to an enemy, and also to understand that we have young troops out there that are doing very dangerous things and need to be assured of the integrity of its -- of the command chain.

And so I don't like confusion that goes out from messages that have to do with former generals then now coming back and second- guessing the ongoing -- the nature of the engagement.

That's just a personal observation.

MR. ANSELMO: This questioner says there are basic issues of other NATO countries being a decade behind in -- being behind the United States in military technologies such as communications, precision weapons, stealth. Have the Europeans given up on defending themselves?

GEN. JONES: I think that one has to be very careful about categories of that nature. It's true that the United States has -- invests more in its military than probably the next 10 nations combined. That is not true that our European allies, particularly our NATO allies, are without capacity. There are as many people under arms and wearing uniforms in Europe as there are in the United States. There is considerable capacity there that is extraordinarily useful, particularly in the family of threats that have to do with large forces being in place for long periods of time.

In the Balkans, for example, in Afghanistan, for example, we will have a presence there for a -- quite a bit of time. Forces in NATO are actually very good at peacekeeping. They're extremely good at maintaining order. And so there is a capacity in our allies, once they commit to an operation, to bring the types of forces that can, in fact, in the asymmetric world, make a difference.

The problem that is -- that I think is the most prevalent problem is that the allies -- our allies, at least by our standards, are not spending enough of their national treasure to maintain those forces and to continue the pace of transformation so that they can be as effective at the strategic distances that we think we'll be operating on in the future. This is ongoing discussion in the alliance. We talk about it all the time. Smaller nations are shifting a little bit to understanding that not every country needs to have an army, a navy, air force and a Marine Corps. Some small nations can bring capacity to the alliance by providing huge qualities, such as chemical and biological incident response forces, command and control capabilities, deployable headquarters, multinational logistics, intelligence centers and those kinds of things that are in high demand but in low availability.

So we are working on all of those things to try to make our forces more usable, to make them more interoperable. But I wouldn't want to leave you with the impression that the gap between what the United States can do and what the Europeans can do is so large that the two are not reconcilable. We actually need a lot of what NATO can do right now to augment our own forces. And so, there's nothing, in my view, that's particularly wrong with the fact that we have some countries who can do the big end of the mission and some countries that can do the little end, because we've found out that if you have too much of one and not enough of the other, you're going to have difficulties. So, the balance is a good thing.

MR. ANSELMO: What are your thoughts about the continued military build-up of the Chinese? Are we on a collision course with them?

GEN. JONES: Well, my job is Europe and Africa. (Laughter.) I'm not colliding with too many Chinese in Europe and Africa. So I -- I don't -- you know, I don't know what that means, to be honest with you. I will say that there is no doubt in my mind that China is very active in Africa, for example. I think General Wald has spent three years studying the marketplace of Africa. But we both believe that Africa is a reality that the United States needs to pay attention to, and we've -- I think we are both pleased to see that happening.

But I believe that the world of the next 10 or 15 years is going to be such a strategically different place of competition. And it's not going to be uniquely about who's got the biggest and the best military, it's going to be about who can compete in this new world order, so to speak, economically, culturally, politically, and what are the things that we need to be able to do, but with much greater agility than we can do them now. And it is important, I think, for our nation to understand that change is necessary to be competitive in the new century. We need agility in our institutions, we need agility in our decision making, we need agility and understanding that the paradigms of the 20th century don't necessarily apply in the 21st century, that countries that we used to have great influence over by cajoling, by threatening, by pressuring now have options by turning to other countries.

And so, I'm absolutely certain that the interagency that we talk about so often has got to be more strategically agile in meeting the 21st century challenges in the world over to compete and to hopefully maintain the prominent position that the United States has enjoyed for the last 50, 60 years since the end of World War Two.

MR. ANSELMO: General, we had multiple questions on this topic. What is your view of allegations that Marines have murdered civilians in two locations in Iraq? Why is this happening, and why are the Marines involved?

GEN. JONES: Well, that's an issue that I've heard about but I don't know much about, and so it would be improper for me to make a comment at this time. I think -- I know the commandant of the Marine Corps is working on this issue, and I'm sure there will be much more authoritative people than myself who will be able to shed some light on this issue. I just am unable to do that right now.

MR. ANSELMO: How can the military better shape itself to address the threat that a very small number of people can get access to highly destructive weapons that can harm the U.S.?

GEN. JONES: I believe that proliferation is a very serious issue and that we must not only nationally do whatever we can do to take on this threat, but we must also raise the level of consciousness internationally as well. And I believe this is something that an organization like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization should seriously think about as an organization, along with some of the other asymmetric threats against terrorism. As I said, energy is a big issue now, defense of critical infrastructures, and the like.

So this is -- I think this is a worrisome threat that transcends the nation state, and we have to do whatever we can with our -- with the family of like-minded nations to make sure that we keep this threat down to the lowest level possible.

MR. ANSELMO: This questioner asks, how is it that certain nations in the alliance can refuse to engage in counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan? Isn't this hurting the mission and damaging the alliance?

GEN. JONES: Afghanistan is not just an alliance of 26 NATO nations, it's an alliance of 36 countries. So there are 10 non-NATO nations there as well. The spectrum of operations in Afghanistan covers the gamut from defensive force protection all the way to the offensive counterterrorist -- the counterterrorist operations. And so to have 36 nations somehow coordinated under one headquarters, one chain of command, and to think that you're going to get everyone to sign up to do exactly the same thing all of the time, is not exactly the way the alliance works today or has ever worked, for that matter.

Nations have always contributed forces to the alliance with some strings attached. My plea is that the strings be as benign as possible. And we keep that spotlight on what we call caveats as much as possible, asking nations not to tie the hands of our commanders with unreasonable restrictions on mission-essential capabilities.

And we are meeting with some success. Three years ago, in Kosovo, we had so many restrictions on the forces that I had to go around to several of my colleagues and ask them -- who were chiefs of defense, and ask them why their forces were even there; they had so many restrictions on them they couldn't do anything. So we put the searchlight and the spotlight on that and we fixed that, and the force in Kosovo today is actually a force that can actually execute its missions and do something.

We're not quite there in Afghanistan, but we're much better off. And as I said, the forces that are going into the south are not -- are caveat-free, and so there are no restrictions there, and that's a good thing. But it's something that we have to watch. But it isn't absolutely necessary that we hold the standard to the ideal structure that absolutely everybody has to sign up to do the exact same thing. It would be a wonderful thing, but it's not realistic.

MR. ANSELMO: In the interest of time, I'm going to stitch a couple of questions together here.

What role will NATO play in Iraq? And another question is: What role should NATO play in Africa?

GEN. JONES: NATO is playing a three-pronged role in Iraq. Our mission has three tenets to it. The first is to train young Iraqi officers for duty, to the tune of about a thousand a year. That is ongoing in Camp Ar Rustamiyah near Baghdad. The second phase of the operation is to train Iraqis outside of Iraq, that is to say host nations, bring them back for their war colleges, the NATO Defense College in Rome, for example, training in Stavanger, Norway, another NATO base -- training base, joint warfighting center, and the like. And the third component to our mission in Iraq is equipping the -- helping to equip the emerging Iraqi army. Recently Hungary donated 77 T-72 tanks, which were restored and put in operating condition and shipped down to Iraq and are now the proud property of the Iraqi army.

So we've been able to do some things to help in Iraq, and I think that mission will continue and continue very well.

In Africa, Africa is a much smaller mission, but nonetheless potentially important as the political decision-making process between the United Nations, the African Union, the Sudan, and ultimately NATO is right now in the process of figuring out exactly what is the political will and who's going to be asked to do what. Suffice it to say that the mission right now calls for capacity-building, enhanced capacity-building of forces assigned to the African Union, and controlling and enabling the troop lift of African battalions into the Sudan for rotation and then back home again.

Where that goes remains to be seen. We are awaiting political guidance in order to provide the military advice, should that come in the near future.

MR. ANSELMO: Question about Russia. This questioner notes that NATO has recently contracted with companies in Russia and Ukraine to supply transport aircraft. Do you see other potential areas of cooperation with Russia in the future, and if so, what are they?

GEN. JONES: There are two standing councils in NATO today. One is called the NATO-Russia Council, the other is called the NATO-Ukraine Council. Both councils operate on the principle that military-to-military cooperation is a good thing. And we are working with militaries of both Russia and the Ukraine to bring about a greater understanding, a greater interoperability -- and I gave you the example of the two Russian ships that joined Operation Active Endeavor; a Ukrainian ship also is scheduled to join this operation next year.

We have regular meetings with the Ukrainian military, the Russian military. I recently spent four days in Moscow and St. Petersburg with a counterpart visit. General Baluyevsky, the chief of defense of the Russian General Staff, and his staff come to SHAPE and NATO on a regular basis. General Wald hosted -- made many visits to Russia as well. We've lectured at Russian military academies. Sergeant Major McMichael and his team have lectured on the values of NCO corps. We've graduated Russian students from our NCO schools in Graffenwehr, Germany. The military-to-military relationship between Ukraine and the United States and NATO, and Russia and the United States and NATO, are ongoing and highly satisfactory.

MR. ANSELMO: We had several questions about -- that were asking about your thoughts on the situation,

the nuclear situation in Iran. Has NATO been approached to back up any possible sanctions that are imposed on Iran?

GEN. JONES: NATO has not been formally approached to do any type of -- take on any responsibilities with regard to the question of Iran. All these dialogues are bilateral in nature -- obviously, with the United Nations involvement, Security Council and the like. But NATO as an organization has not been asked to develop anything or to participate in any way whatsoever with regard to Iran thus far.

MR. ANSELMO: General, would you comment on NATO's role in the CNO's thousand-ship Navy concept?

GEN. JONES: The most developed military capability in the alliance is NATO's navy. It's the most interoperable, it's the most advanced, and the most developed. For some reason, if we want to sail NATO's navies, that's not a problem in the alliance. We get very quick decisions on that. If you want to fly NATO's air forces, that's also easy, provided it's restricted to fighters and not helicopters. But if you want to move NATO's armies, now you really have a problem, because this is -- I mean, it all is about economics. The way the navies are funded, they're going to sail anywhere, because they're going to be out there. So moving them to one direction or the other is quite easy.

So, if, in fact, this thousand-ship concept takes off, there's 26 -- we don't have 26 navies, but there's all the navies of NATO, and the partner navies. Certainly I think they would be very interested in exploring this interesting idea.

As a matter of fact, I think you'll find that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization will talk more about maritime -- the maritime domain in terms of energy protection, critical infrastructures, security and the like, at greater strategic distances than just the Mediterranean. We should be concerned about the Black Sea. We should be concerned about the Gulf of Guinea and the piracy off the coast, and we should be concerned about the waterways and the choke points off the Horn of Africa, up into the Red Sea. These are very real threats.

This is something that we can collectively take on. It's bought and paid for. It's interoperable and would be very complementary if in fact the concept takes off.

MR. ANSELMO: This question goes back a little bit to the very first question. Is NATO going to be in sync with the net-centric transformation or fall out of step with the United States? And how much do you want the French or Eastern European members of NATO to know? (Scattered laughter.)

GEN. JONES: Well, the second part of that is, I -- you know, you're either in an alliance or you're not. And if you're an alliance and you want interoperability, you have to -- it is based in part on the principle of sharing.

In the United States' case, it's also based on the principle of leadership. And to me, the United States' role is, if you will, the leadership role. An influential role in the alliance is something that's very, very much worth preserving.

If you want to feel good about democracy, my advice would be to take a vacation this summer to a former Eastern Bloc country. Go visit Romania, go visit Bulgaria, go visit the Czech Republic, go visit Hungary, go visit Poland.

You will feel great about how those governments and those people look at their future. And they are still basking in the release from bondage, if I could just use those terms. I mean, they are thrilled to be free. And I am absolutely in awe of the energy that Eastern Bloc countries bring to the alliance. They are willing. They may not have the economic and industrial base yet to be significant contributors, but they will be. That's the future, and that's what encouraging. They will be, as soon as they figure out how to -- how all these things work in democracies and market economics and the open societies and they get used to that. They will be big players.

And the United States' role today is setting, in my view, the conditions for a lifelong -- a long-term relationship with a lot of -- many, many countries who were formerly on the other side of the so-called Iron Curtain. So I think the future with those countries in particular is very, very bright.

And I don't mean to say that our traditional relationships aren't -- with regard to the French, let me just say that France is one of the largest contributors of troops on the ground to NATO operations, and that needs to be well understood. It may -- it's probably number two or three, no worse than that.

French special forces are fighting under U.S. command every day in Afghanistan. That needs to be understood. French soldiers are dying in the battle -- in the offensive battle in Afghanistan.

So I -- as the NATO commander, I want to stress that without French forces committed in the way they have been, we would have a much more difficult time doing the things that we're doing.

Having said all that, that's my military answer. And it's not a political answer.

But the military coefficient of French forces and their support to the alliance is very, very important.

MR. ANSELMO: General, we've just about run out of time. I want to thank you for your fourth appearance here. And to show our gratitude, here is a plaque from the Press Club, and also a coveted Press Club mug. You probably have a nice collection now.

GEN. JONES: Four! (Laughter.)

MR. ANSELMO: Thank you very much.

GEN. JONES: Thank you. (Applause.)

MR. ANSELMO: I'd like to thank you all for coming today.

I'd also like to thank National Press Club staff members Melinda Cooke, Pat Nelson, Jo Anne Booze and Howard Rothman for helping organize today's lunch. And thanks to the NPC Library for their research.

We are adjourned. (Applause.)

END.