

“Russia and the Future of NATO”
Gen. Philip M. Breedlove, USAF (Ret.)
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Reflecting on an Early Career:

Gen. Breedlove recalled standing on the inner German border facing north and looking towards the operational maneuver group of the Warsaw Pact as it would come West to Northern Europe. As a young captain serving with the Army in Europe Gen. Breedlove acknowledged the challenging times of the Cold War but argued that the threat and problem was monolithic and overall understood.

Today, however, the United States faces the “4-Plus-1” threat set. These threats include: China, Russia, North Korea, Iran, and violent extremism such as ISIS. These specific threats pose challenges so onerous and complex that the world arguably faces its most volatile state in history.

Military Support:

Nowadays it might be hard for Americans to consider rationing rubber, steel or gasoline but that doesn't mean that U.S. citizens don't support the military. In fact, Gen. Breedlove felt that the military is supported now more than ever sighting the days he was once advised not to wear his uniform at Georgia Tech classes during the drawdown of Vietnam.

Although the military is supported by the American people what can we make of the fact that less than half of 1% of Americans will ever serve in the military? Gen. Breedlove posed the question: Are we disconnected from our military?

NATO's Relevance Today:

The world has changed and our opponents around the world are more emboldened than ever before. Russian military endeavors have successfully relied on force to manipulate the internationally recognized borders of Georgia and the Ukraine. What's more, in a brazen and apparent way Russia has interfered in foreign elections and political affairs.

With the uncertainty of motives and actions of China in the South China Sea, North Korean nuclear missiles and the emergence of ISIS in North Africa; strong alliances like NATO are crucial. Although NATO is far from perfect it has been successful in keeping the peace among superpowers. Gen. Breedlove maintained that NATO's strongest foundation is not its military, economic or industrial might, but instead the values and morals that it stands for.

NATO Requirements:

Gen. Breedlove stated his support of NATO countries investing the required 2% of GDP in military defense. He clarified that investing in military personnel is not enough; recapitalizing in the forces and its equipment is vital to a nation's ability to come to its own defense as stated in Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty. Gen. Breedlove reminded the audience that Article 5, the Collective Defense of NATO,

has only been invoked once in the history of the alliance was on behalf of the United States after 9/11 and our gratitude for their support.

Russia's Method of Indirect Means:

While the entire national debate on Russia regarding the legitimacy of the election persists, Russia has succeeded in distracting us while they carry out their intended missions. Political parties aside, the actions of President Putin are of utmost importance and suspicion. Russia's method of "indirect means" requires using all elements of its power to attack another nation and include the following:

- **Diplomatic** - Delegitimizing the government in Kiev, Ukraine
- **Informational** - Fake news programs
- **Military** - Manipulating preexisting borders
- **Economic** - Energy wars (transmission and purchasing prices)

The Indirect means method is laced throughout Russian military actions and speech. This method is not surprising but Russia's comfort in being so open about it is. Gen. Breedlove believes that Republicans and Democrats need to come together as President Putin continues to attempt to delegitimize democracy by sabotaging our democratic processes.

Two Sides to Every Story:

When Russia looks to the West it sees NATO expansion, shortcomings in Iraq and Libya, and a U.S. missile shield that Russia claims abrogates the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty.

When the West looks towards Russia it sees a 2008 invasion of Georgia, an invasion first of Crimea in 2014 and a subsequent invasion in Donbass and Russia unwavering support of the Bashar al-Assad regime in Syria. Gen. Breedlove claimed that Russia doesn't want to break the rules; it wants to rewrite them to place Russia as a key player and world superpower.

The Bridge Forward:

A self-declared optimist, Gen. Breedlove feels the path forward requires "building a bridge". This figurative bridge would evaluate the current and future relationship between the U.S. and Russia. Past incidents make the U.S. weary to call Russia a partner or to form a sense of a partnership; perhaps a national debate can guide and define a path forward.

Although it is not clear what the U.S. national strategy towards Russia will entail looking ahead to the next 10-20 years, Gen. Breedlove closed with the idea that small steps are crucial. By working together and identifying intersecting needs and desires, Russia could in fact join forces in the fight against terrorism, drugs, and uncontrolled nuclear materials. As these objective goals are attained the U.S. can begin to establish trust with Russian counterparts bit by bit.