

TRANSCRIPT: Press Briefing on U.S.-Polish cooperation in Allied Spirit, a DEFENDER-Europe 20-linked Exercise

SPECIAL BRIEFING VIA TELEPHONE, JUNE 5, 2020

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Moderator: Greetings to everyone from the U.S. State Department's Brussels Media Hub. I would like to welcome all participants to this discussion. This call will focus on the U.S.-Polish cooperation in Allied Spirit, a DEFENDER-Europe 20-linked exercise that will take place in Poland.

Today we are very pleased to be joined by three speakers: Brigadier General Christopher R. Norrie, Commanding General, 7th Army Training Command; Brigadier General Brett Sylvia, Deputy Commanding General-Maneuver, 1st Cavalry Division; and Colonel Kazimierz Dynski, Deputy Chief of Staff and J3 Division Chief in the General Command of the Polish Armed Forces.

We will begin today's call with opening remarks from our three speakers, and then we will turn to your questions. As a reminder, today's call is on the record. And with that, I will turn it over to Brigadier General Norrie for opening remarks.

Brigadier General Norrie: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. I'm Brigadier General Chris Norrie, the Commander of 7th Army Training Command. On behalf of U.S. Army Europe, thank you for taking time from your schedules to speak with myself, General Sylvia, and Colonel Dynski here, and Justin, thank you to you and our colleagues in Brussels for hosting this event, which makes it possible for us at the moment to have this conversation.

I do want to highlight that I'm on this phone call today from my basement here in Grafenwoehr, Germany, where I've been quarantining for almost two weeks now so that I can comply with host-nation requirements for entry from Germany, and that I will take a COVID-19 test before I enter the exercise itself, which is to say, like the rest of the world, COVID-19 has shaped and continues to shape everything we do here in U.S. Army Europe.

DEFENDER-Europe 20 was originally designed as a deployment exercise to bring large amounts of U.S. soldiers and equipment to Europe to build strategic readiness in support of our National Defense Strategy and NATO deterrence objectives. We had already begun this exercise when, in March, we decided to modify the exercise in conjunction with our allies and partners to ensure the safety of our forces and host-nation communities here in Europe.

Over 6,000 soldiers and 3,000 pieces of equipment arrived via air and sea to Europe, and an additional 9,000 pieces of equipment were drawn from Army prepositioned stocks here in Europe. Although we had plans for much larger formations of troops and equipment to arrive and then join our allies and partners for training on the ground here, we were able to exercise the systems and processes of mobilizing and delivering credible combat power from the United States into Europe from port to port and across land to a potential point of crisis. While many of the linked exercises for DEFENDER-Europe 20 were canceled in March, after careful planning between U.S. Army Europe and the Polish Ministry of Defense, exercise Allied Spirit – originally scheduled for May – starts this weekend in Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area in Poland and will run through June 19th.

I'll defer to General Sylvia to discuss specifics related to the exercise, but I do want to highlight the significant work that has gone into the planning and execution of these exercises and the resumption of larger training this summer here in Europe with our allies and partners.

These exercises still utilize many of the original DEFENDER 20 – Europe 20 training objectives to enhance our combined readiness between U.S., allied, and partner nations, and importantly, they demonstrate that NATO allies and partners stand stronger together and that we're able to operate and train in any environment. As commanders, we manage and mitigate risk. I don't think anyone could have imagined when we started to cancel exercises earlier this year just how much this virus would impact the world, but we expect to operate in this environment for the foreseeable future. As military professionals, we have to balance keeping our force and community safe and healthy while maintaining operational readiness. As we progressed through spring and now into summer, we have done that here in Europe in close concert with our allies and host nations throughout Europe.

In Germany, for example, we've followed host-nation ordinances on size of gatherings, instituted strict social distancing, and maximized telework to the greatest extent possible. As conditions have improved, we've resumed our training but modified wherever possible to limit any potential spread of the virus. These are – there are just some jobs, though, in our military that you cannot telework, however. In order to train effectively and be able to work together with our allies and partners, you have to get out into the field and do it. We're confident that we can do it safely and that's what you're going to see if you come out to Drawsko Pomorskie over the next few weeks, or if you follow along online with the training that we're executing.

I do look forward to answering any questions that you may have, either here in this forum or over the next few weeks, and I'll now hand it over to Brigadier General Sylvia for his comments. Thank you again.

Brigadier General Sylvia: Thank you, Chris. Good afternoon. I'm Brigadier General Brett Sylvia, the Commander of the 1st Cavalry Division Forward, and also the Deputy Commanding General for 1st Cavalry Division. On behalf of America's First Team, let me say thank you for taking the time to talk to us today. I'd also like to say thank you to my colleagues, Brigadier General Norrie and Colonel Dynski, for being here. I'm talking to you today from the training area in Drawsko Pomorskie, Poland, and as stated, I'll address the specifics of the training and what we've done to prepare for it.

As Brigadier General Norrie stated, this training is a scaled-down version of the original training event, which had been designed to be the culminating event for the DEFENDER-Europe 20 series. What was once 10,000 soldiers is now down to 6,000 U.S. and Polish soldiers. We're very thankful to the Polish armed forces for agreeing to open up this training area and for agreeing to participate with us. At the time of the decision, it was still a very uncertain time for many nations, which is making that all that more significant.

This is an important training event for numerous reasons. One of them is to demonstrate to our NATO allies and the world that we have the capability to train safely in this COVID environment. My colleague, Brigadier General Norrie, discussed how COVID-19 changed many things. We've gone to great lengths to ensure this training event is a safe one for all the soldiers participating and everyone in the local area. As a result, 100 percent of the soldiers and civilians participating or supporting this training have been tested and found to be COVID-free. At the same time, we're putting in place protocols to monitor, periodically test, and if someone becomes sick, we have the ability to treat and trace. You can see that we're committed to preserving the integrity of the training environment, even to the point where Brigadier General Norrie has to stay in his basement for 14 days before coming here.

So secondly, this training will demonstrate our ability to operate as part of a multinational, interoperable team, conducting one of the most complex maneuvers that any army can attempt: an opposed river crossing, or what we call a "wet-gap crossing." With our Polish allies side by side with us, we bring the best of our armies together to accomplish this mission. The capabilities of the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, the capabilities of the Combat Aviation Brigade – both from 3rd Infantry Division – and then the capabilities of the Polish 12th Mechanized Brigade greatly complement one another. Some may have seen the demonstration of some of these capabilities yesterday when the Polish Minister of Defense visited.

The bottom line is that the Polish 12th Mechanized Division is a well-equipped, well-trained, and, most definitely, a well-led force. We are proud to work side by side with them as our peers during this exercise. We are truly stronger together.

I'm honored to be able to serve as the higher headquarters for this exercise. That headquarters is new to Poland and this is a fantastic opportunity for us to grow in our interoperability skills. We've trained and prepared for this exercise and we are certainly all ready to begin. So again, thank you all for being here. I'll now turn it over to Colonel Dynski.

Colonel Dynski: Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Colonel Dynski, Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations, General Command, from Warsaw East. I will provide to you the national flavor and national perspective to the exercise which was already very detailed and depicted by General Norrie and General Sylvia.

Following the deliberate planning between the U.S. Army Europe and the Polish Ministry of National Defense, exercise DEFENDER 20 Plus already started. Yesterday the Minister of National Defense, Mr. Blaszczak, accompanied by the ambassador of the U.S., inaugurated the exercise at the Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area, modified from the original design of the exercise to ensure the safety of soldiers, which is the crucial part of this, what we are speaking

about. Due to the COVID pandemic restrictions, the U.S. and Polish bilateral exercise will feature the Polish airborne operations and the division-size river crossing, which is linked with the purpose of the Polish armed forces.

DEFENDER-Europe 20 Plus will enhance the readiness and ability to respond decisively against any adversary in a multinational, multi-domain environment. It will contribute to increasing interoperability and train our troops and commands to plan and execute ground combat operations.

I would like to highlight that all the scenarios and the setup for the DEFENDER-Europe exercise is along to the national security strategy, which was already signed in May of this year by President Duda. In the strategy, it is emphasized that the importance of the strategic cooperation with the United States of America, particularly in the areas of security and defense. Poland is the host nation, providing troops and providing the HNS, host-nation support. We do our best to provide the real training environment for the exercise and providing the safety for all soldiers in this COVID pandemic, very hard conditions.

Thank you, and I'm ready to also answer any questions which may be dedicated to the host-nation country. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you very much for those remarks. We will now begin the question and answer portion of today's call.

Our first question was submitted to us in advance from Momchil Indjov with Club Z in Bulgaria, and the question is: "Do the U.S. and Poland see any real Russian threat in the Baltic region? If so, what kind of threat do they see?"

Brigadier General Norrie: This is Brigadier General Norrie. I won't speak for Poland, and I'll defer to Colonel Dynski for his opinion. But from a U.S. perspective, we see that certainly our allies and partners are concerned with the realities of any threats in the region. That concern and our commitment to ensuring the territorial sovereignty and defense of our allies is what launched Operation Atlantic Resolve in 2014, and it continues not just through that but also with NATO's enhanced forward presence in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. And Colonel Dynski, I'll turn it over to you.

Colonel Dynski: Correct. The assessment of this security situation, we are very careful on this and we will see how the security environment has changed in Europe and especially in the central part of Europe from the east side. So as the – all efforts which were done establishing as the enhanced forward presence, the troop – NATO troops in Poland and the Baltic nations, as enhanced forward presence in Romania and the presence of ABCT U.S. troops stationed in Poland are the answer for how we have to be careful with assessment of the security environment in this region.

So as from the top to down, we are as a military, we are looking very carefully what is the real threat.

Moderator: Thanks very much. Thank you very much for those responses. Our next question goes to Nicholas Fiorenza with Jane's Defense Weekly in the UK.

Question: Hello, generals. I had a couple of questions, some clarifications. And after the exercise, the 1st Cavalry Division was going to set up a forward headquarters – originally it was going to be after the exercise – set it up in Poland under this agreement with – between Presidents Trump and Duda. I understand that the headquarters has already – the forward headquarters actually has already been established by the 1st Cavalry Division, but now I'm wondering whether that's actually a rotating headquarters.

My – and my second question is: Do you have any details about the exercise planned for next year, hopefully without being hindered by COVID?

Brigadier General Sylvia: This is Brigadier General Sylvia. So to address the first portion of the question about the headquarters, we replaced the 1st Infantry Division as part of the rotational division forward headquarters. What was formerly called the mission command element has since changed its name to the division forward mission, which is part of the Atlantic Resolve mission where we provide the higher headquarters for the rotational forces that come over into Europe as part of Atlantic Resolve.

As to the question about the exercises for next year, and I can also turn it over to General Norrie for his perspective, I can tell you that much of it is in planning right now and I believe that there's a lot of assessments and reassessments that are taking place based off of the new environment in which we're operating. But I'll turn it over to General Norrie.

Brigadier General Norrie: Absolutely. The planning for next year is happening now with our allies, with our partners. We are working to define what those exercises might be, but we always are looking for opportunities to exercise our ability to move through Europe with our allies, and then to practice large-scale combat operations and large-scale maneuver training and exercises with our allied partners as well in support of the alliance and our shared objectives here in Europe.

Colonel Dynski: Colonel Dynski, if I may, to add something from the host-nation perspective. We are very grateful that the U.S. side decided to establish – so most recently it was the 1st ID, Infantry Division Forward MC, command, and right now it is 1st Cav MC headquarters at Poznan. We are very happy to have U.S. troops on the Polish soil, not only from the presence, which is the very measurable point of dedicated to the security, however, I would like to add that we are taking very great advantage of the conducting the common training. Together with the U.S. troops, we are increasing interoperability. We're also conducting day-by-day training, which is most – which is influencing our abilities to conduct future operations.

Moderator: Thank you very much, commanders, for those answers. Our next question comes to us from Dmytro Shkurko with the National News Agency of Ukraine, and his question is: "Do the Allied Spirit – or does the Allied Spirit scenario consider assertive Russian rhetoric against neighboring countries as a factor threatening the security of not just Poland but also the wider Euro-Atlantic area? Have you invited neighboring partner countries like Ukraine to participate

with units or observers? And finally, in particular, are you going to deploy NATO SALIS airlift capabilities?”

Brigadier General Sylvia: This is Brigadier General Sylvia. We’re not focused on any one specific adversary for these exercises. Only focusing on one of them would certainly leave us vulnerable to others. So instead, each time for every exercise, we build a challenging scenario that builds the readiness of our forces while assuring our NATO allies of our commitment to them. Allied Spirit’s scenario is about Poland and the United States working together as peers. It’s a scenario that gives us the opportunity to meet the main objective we want to achieve in terms of a large-scale maneuver. This is strengthening our ability to work as a combined arms team with our Polish allies. The original plan, as discussed a little bit, was for Allied Spirit to involve multiple nations, but as we’ve had to adjust it, it will only feature U.S. and Polish forces. Also, there’s no incorporation of NATO’s strategic airlift capability in this exercise in its current construct. From what I understand, they’re currently busy delivering supplies to allied nations to help fight COVID-19, which for them, obviously, is a significant undertaking.

Moderator: Great, thank you. Thank you very much for that, General. Our next question comes to us from Pat Carty in the UK with Defense Press Agency.

Question: Good afternoon, generals. Will there be a SOF element, in particular involving [inaudible], in the exercise?

Brigadier General Sylvia: I did have a hard time hearing the last part of that. You asked if there would be a SOF, a Special Operations Forces, element participating? Is that what you said?
Question: Yeah, affirmative.

Brigadier General Sylvia: Okay. Yeah, there are no SOF elements participating in this. The forces are an Armored Brigade Combat Team from the 3rd Infantry Division, a Combat Aviation Brigade from 3rd Infantry Division, and then forces from the 12th Mechanized Division as well as some engineer forces. There is the – one of the battalions from the 6th Polish Airborne unit that will be participating, but we do not have any special operating forces.

Question: Thank you.

Colonel Dynski: Also, from the Polish side, there is no intent to put the special forces to the exercise, but as I already stated, the 12th Mechanized Brigade as the 9th Armored Cavalry Brigade, 2nd Tactical Air Wing, 3rd Airlift Wing, [inaudible] Brigade, and engineers – all those are forces from the Polish side participating in this exercise.

Question: Thank you.

Moderator: Great, thank you very much for that. Our next question comes to us from Alexey Naumov with Kommersant news in Russia.

Question: Good afternoon, generals. I wanted to ask that Russia’s foreign ministry, when DEFENDER-Europe 20 was announced, aired concern that NATO is creating an armed fist near

Russia's borders. However, Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg replied that the exercise is purely defensive in nature. However, when describing the specifics, you mentioned the wet-gap crossing, the river crossings with armed forces. I would like to clarify: Could this operation be considered defensive in nature or, rather, offensive? Thank you.

Brigadier General Sylvia: This is Brigadier General Sylvia. It absolutely is considered a defensive operation. I think that as you look at the construct of the multiple missions that need to take place as part of any combined arms team, there is the integration of multiple forms of maneuver that form the broader form of maneuvers. So for this one, yes, we are doing a wet-gap crossing. We are moving forces forward; that is certainly true. And elements of that are completely offensive in nature, but can be brought into the broader framework of a mobile defense in order to be able to defend certain terrain. And so there is nothing inconsistent with the Secretary General's statement about it being defensive maneuvers in nature. So this is just our ability to be able to work on the interoperability amongst the multinational elements.

As I stated, my headquarters is new to the European theater. The Armored Brigade Combat Team that's participating from the U.S. side is also new. And our ability to work alongside our Polish allies to be able to work all of the human, technical, and procedural interoperability requirements, it comes all together in this particular training event in order for us to be able to work together as a NATO team. And so it absolutely remains consistent.

Moderator: Thank you very much for that. Our next question comes to us from – was submitted in advance. This is from Bob Morrison with JointForces.com in the UK, and his question is: "In addition to Polish and U.S. personnel, will any British army troops from the NATO EFP Battle Group Poland serving operationally under the 2nd U.S. Cavalry be participating in the later stages of the exercise? If so, what will their role be?"

Brigadier General Sylvia: So this is Brigadier General Sylvia again. There are no EFP forces that are participating in this training. There was an element in the former construct of the DEFENDER series where they did participate, so I can understand where the question may have come from. But under this construct of Allied Spirit here in Drawsko Pomorskie, that element is not participating as part of this training.

Moderator: Great, thank you very much for that. Our next question comes to us from Alexander Pausch with Der Neue Tag in Germany.

Question: Hello, my name is Alexander Pausch from German newspaper Der Neue Tag, which is published around Grafenwoehr Training Area. Thank you for the opportunity. My question goes to Brigadier General Norrie. The 7th Army Training Command is participating in the upcoming exercise. Are there parts of the exercise in Grafenwoehr as well, or is the whole exercise only scheduled in Poland? Thank you, sir.

Brigadier General Norrie: There is no specific training tied to Allied Spirit resident here at Grafenwoehr. However, the capabilities in terms of creating a training environment that are a part of our mission here at 7th Army Training Command are integral to Allied Spirit. Allied Spirit, again, it's an exercise planned as a multinational division river crossing, and it includes a

command post exercise that is stimulated through simulations. We have equipment that allows us to understand the maneuvers that are occurring as part of the training and to provide feedback to participating units in the form of after-action reviews, and then our operations group from the Joint Multinational Readiness Center at Hohenfels, they are observing and controlling the event with our Polish partners in support of the exercise training objectives.

Moderator: Thanks very much for that. Our next question comes to us from Andrei Sitov with the TASS News Agency in Russia.

Question: Hi, thank you for doing this, gentlemen. I have a general type of question. The Russians recently updated their nuclear strategy, and I was wondering if that makes any – nuclear deterrence strategy, I should specify – whether that makes any difference in your practical work and your preparation for the exercise? Thank you.

Brigadier General Norrie: This is Brigadier General Norrie. I can speak broadly about a shared purpose that our Army and the Polish Army has, and that is allowing our units an opportunity to train on their core competencies. Those core competencies are enduring and they are consistent with those things that armies practice and prepare for around the world. The training objectives with Allied Spirit – we're in support of Allied Spirit – are those that General Sylvia outlined, and this training environment allows this incredible team multiple opportunities to practice their unit-level core competency and training objectives.

Moderator: Thank you very much for that response. I see no further questions in the queue. We have one final question that was submitted to us in advance from Maximilian Kiewel with Bild in Germany. He has two questions. First: "What can you tell us about the media day on June 17th? What is going to happen and what will be the schedule?" And then his second, broader strategic question is: "How closely did you follow Russia's movements in Ukraine, Syria, Libya, etc., in order to organize and plan this exercise?"

Brigadier General Norrie: This is Brigadier General Norrie. I'll defer to General Sylvia in reference to the media day, or our public affairs team. In reference to the second question, we always monitor the complexities of our environment with our allies, and we remain focused on preserving and further building readiness and protecting our formations.

Brigadier General Sylvia: This is Brigadier General Sylvia. So regarding the activities on the 17th, and I may have to defer to some public affairs at USAREUR with Colonel Scrocca, but as it stands right now I know that we are doing a Facebook Live event on the 14th of June in order to be able to demonstrate – to view the activities of this exercise. And so that's taking place on the 14th for everyone to be able to view. Other activities, virtual events, I think are also going to be incorporated on the 14th, and some perhaps on the 17th. But again, I would have to defer to the USAREUR spokesman for that.

Moderator: Thank you very much. We do have one late-breaking question, if we could just do this one question real quick. This is from Sebastian Sprenger with Defense News. Please go ahead.

Question: Hi, gentlemen. Thank you very much for doing this. The – now, despite the pandemic scale-backs of several exercises, the Allied Spirit is going forward as is BALTOPS, the naval exercise in the Baltic Sea. So two events fairly close to each other. What message do you hope that sends as it pertains to the region?

Brigadier General Norrie: This is Brigadier General Norrie. That we are committed to retaining and further building the combined readiness of our formations and retaining and also further building the strength of our alliance.

Moderator: Thank you very much. That was, in fact, the last question. We've already gone a couple minutes over. I'd now like to invite our three speakers to make any closing remarks they might have, beginning with Brigadier General Norrie.

Brigadier General Norrie: Well, I again just want to say thank you for the opportunity, and we're looking forward to this training.

Brigadier General Sylvia: This is Brigadier General Sylvia. The absolute same for me. It's been a pleasure to be able to spend a little bit of time with you, pleasure to be able to speak about this unbelievable training opportunity. I know that I was concerned whether or not we would be able to do this. So I am very thankful to the Polish armed forces for hosting us and for all of the multitude of people and entities and agencies that it took to be able to pull this training event together. It is going to be a fantastic training event to continue to build our readiness and to be able to demonstrate certainly that we are stronger together here as part of this NATO alliance, and that we can build our readiness, do complex training in this COVID environment, and I think that that is a – it's a great message for all to see. Thank you.

Colonel Dynski: Colonel Dynski. From the Polish side, I would like to add that as – even in this COVID pandemic restriction, as a military we are flexible, we are adaptable, also in the decision-making processes doing the preparations of the exercise and delivering valuable training to our soldiers in terms of to improve transatlantic unity, deterrence, and credible defense, interoperability, to increase military mobility. So all of those together is – it looks like that as we will deliver what was scheduled for those exercises. Thank you.

Moderator: Thank you very much. I'd like to thank all three of our speakers for joining us today, and also thank all the reporters on the line for your participation and for your questions.