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By Gordon Lubold and Naftali Bendavid

NATO Commander Says Putin Not Done in Eastern Ukraine

Philip Breedlove says he sees potential for future moves by Moscow in country

*Командувач НАТО заявив, що Путін ще не все закінчив на Східній
Україні*

*Філіп Брідлав бачить потенціал для майбутніх ходів Москви в Україні
Головнокомандувач НАТО генерал Філіп Брідлав повідомив: він вбачає ознаки того, що
Росія створює ефективну систему поставок з метою зміцнити свої можливості з
проведення військових операцій на території України. Брідлав також сказав, що
прогнозує нові кроки з боку Москви, спрямовані на зміцнення її контролю над Східною
Україною, передають журналісти. Брідлав заявив, що як і раніше бачить навчені
російські сили "готові виконати будь-яку місію". Він натякнув, що устремління
російського президента Путіна в регіоні, судячи з усього, не слабшають, йдеться в
статті.*

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/nato-commander-says-putin-not-done-in-eastern-ukraine-1435265025>



U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter, left, talks with Gen Philip Breedlove on Wednesday during a meeting of NATO defense ministers in Brussels. Photo: European Pressphoto Agency

BRUSSELS—The top military officer for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization said he sees evidence that Russia is building an effective supply system to strengthen its ability to conduct military operations inside Ukraine, and is watching for further moves by Moscow to consolidate its hold on the eastern part of the country.

Gen. Philip Breedlove, NATO’s supreme allied commander, said Thursday he continues to see a Russian force that is trained and “ready to do whatever mission is required of it,” hinting that Russian President Vladimir Putin’s regional aspirations show no sign of abating.

“I don’t think that Mr. Putin is done in eastern Ukraine,” Gen. Breedlove told reporters during a briefing Thursday as allies meet here to plan efforts to counter potential Russian aggression in the region.

Gen. Breedlove, who also serves as the U.S. military’s top commander in Europe, has used forceful language before to describe Mr. Putin’s military actions in and outside of Ukraine. His remarks Thursday didn’t spell out specific Western responses to potential aggression, but came as NATO defense ministers wrapped up a two-day meeting that focused almost exclusively on the security threat posed to the region by Moscow.

During a five-day, three-stop tour of Europe, U.S. Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced a number of measures aimed at strengthening NATO’s military resolve and U.S. commitment to the region. That included the pledge to provide a package of military capabilities to fortify a new rapid response force that is being built to respond to a crisis in as little as 48 hours. And in a separate initiative, Mr. Carter unveiled a plan to base a brigade’s worth of equipment, including 250 tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and artillery pieces across six nations in Eastern Europe.

Gen. Breedlove said that Moscow remains active on both sides of its border with Ukraine.

“What we have seen on the east side of the border is a very detailed supply situation where we see stocking of important supplies, ammunition, et cetera,” Gen. Breedlove said, allowing greater flexibility for Russian-backed operations.

Mr. Carter has tried to persuade allies to throw out the “Cold War playbook” so they can adapt to the kind of warfare Russia and other potential adversaries could pose, through using unidentified troops, information operations and cyberattacks.

For example, he told defense ministers at the NATO gathering Wednesday in a closed-door meeting that the alliance must improve its cyberdefense capabilities before it can begin developing more advanced cybercapabilities, according to a senior defense official.

Meanwhile, during a stop in Berlin this week, Mr. Carter pledged a complement of U.S. military gear for the rapid response force that is still in development. The U.S. contribution will involve intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance assets, likely to include drones, as well as command-and-control capabilities, special operations forces for both air and sea, combat helicopters, a “deployable combat post,” logistical expertise and weapons.

The response force, known as the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, or VJTF, would be manned by a number of nations on a rotating basis. NATO and U.S. defense officials have stressed that it could be used, not only in response to a threat from Russia, but to guard against any other kind of security threat to NATO.

But as the concept of the response force develops, concerns emerged this week about deployment procedures requiring agreement by all 28 members of the North Atlantic Council, the political decision-making body of NATO, which could blunt its effectiveness by slowing down the decision to deploy it.

But defense ministers this week gave the NATO commander the green light to alert the task force to prepare for deployment “if we have those intel indications that trip our concern,” Gen. Breedlove said, thereby speeding its deployment as political leaders convened to vote on employing it.

Meanwhile, NATO announced Thursday it is intensifying support for Ukraine, launching projects to help the country secure its communications and airspace and kicking off an initiative to remove mines.

NATO is also helping Ukraine overhaul its armed forces, though Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said corruption remains “a big and difficult challenge.” Ukrainian Defense Minister Stepan Poltorak acknowledged the corruption, saying, “This is one of the problems not only within our ministry, it’s a problem for the whole society.”

Ukraine expects to sign an agreement by the end of next month with Poland and Lithuania, both NATO members, to form a joint brigade. Several other NATO countries, including the U.S., are training Ukrainian troops.

But Ukrainian leaders are privately pushing for more support than NATO members are now willing to give. Kiev would like weaponry, for example, but NATO countries have been reluctant to provide it.

Mr. Poltorak said Ukraine would like to join NATO, but said he recognized the country isn’t ready. “The strategic aim of Ukraine is of course NATO membership,” Mr. Poltorak said. “But we understand very well that in order to become members we have to work very hard.”

The U.S. plans to bolster security in the region might increase the need for U.S. troops in Europe, where roughly 65,000 now are permanently stationed. But U.S. defense and military officials said they could rely on rotational forces, temporarily drawn from the pool of troops already in the region or from the U.S. The initiatives wouldn’t force the U.S. to increase its permanent footprint in Europe, they said.

Write to Gordon Lubold at Gordon.Lubold@wsj.com and Naftali Bendavid at naftali.bendavid@wsj.com

