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NATO General Says Ukraine Crisis Gets Worse Every Day

By The Moscow Times

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Philip Breedlove, commander of Supreme Allied Command Europe and U.S. European Combatant Command, testifies before a House Armed Services Committee hearing on Capitol Hill in Washington on Feb. 25, 2015.

WASHINGTON — The top U.S. military commander in Europe has said the situation in Ukraine is "getting worse every day" as government forces struggled against Russian-backed rebels, but he declined to say whether he favored supplying defensive weapons to Kiev.

Air Force General Philip Breedlove, the NATO supreme allied commander, said Wednesday that the U.S. military had a deep relationship with Ukraine even before the current conflict and had a good sense of what military assets it needed, including intelligence, communications and jamming and counter-battery.

"I've prepared my advice and passed it up through my chain of command and that is now in the process of being considered," Breedlove told Pentagon reporters during a briefing. He

did not offer details of his recommendations.

Breedlove spoke amid signs that a French- and German-brokered truce may be beginning to take hold. Rebels initially spurned the cease-fire, but Reuters journalists in eastern Ukraine saw artillery being moved away from the front in some areas on Wednesday.

Asked whether providing additional military assistance to Ukraine would prompt Russian President Vladimir Putin to "up the ante," Breedlove indicated there was no way to predict.

"Let's examine what Mr. Putin has done already: Well over a thousand combat vehicles, Russian combat forces, some of their most sophisticated air defense, battalions of artillery. I would say that Mr. Putin has already set the ... ante very high."

Breedlove said no one could predict with any accuracy what Putin's reaction would be to tougher Western sanctions on Russia or providing Ukraine with military assistance. As a result, he said it was important to make the best judgment possible and find a way forward.

"What is clear is that right now it is not getting better, it is getting worse every day," he said.

Asked whether the situation was likely to worsen even if the U.S. and Western allies did nothing further, Breedlove said that was already happening.

"We have seen a steady escalation," he said, noting that when Russian forces initially went into eastern Ukraine they tried to conceal their presence and create "ambiguity to confuse whether they were actually in there."

"That exterior message has now obviously fallen apart and we see outright Russian involvement," Breedlove said. "Air defense systems that have never really been used anywhere outside Russia until now are being used in that area."

"Literally now we see that Mr. Putin is all in," he said. "They will proceed until their objectives are accomplished."

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