

NATO, U.S. See Rise in Russian Naval Activity in Seas Around Europe, Top Commander Says



Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, NATO's supreme allied commander and commander of U.S. European Command, speaks to a Defense Writers' breakfast Dec. 10. George Washington University
NATO and U.S. forces in Europe are seeing increased Russian naval activities in all the seas around Europe. But following a meeting with Russia's military chief they have seen no unprofessional or unsafe incidents at sea or in the air in at least 90 days, the top allied and U.S. commander in Europe said Dec. 10.

"I see Russian activity in the Arctic, see it in the Baltic, see it in the Black Sea, the Mediterranean," Air Force Gen. Tod Wolters, NATO's supreme allied commander and commander of U.S. European Command, told a Defense Writers' breakfast.

"I see Russia doing everything they can to expand their coverage, to see as much of the space as they possibly can, and it's something we will continue to dialogue about so that our sailors and their sailors are appropriately deconflicted, and we don't have any future incidents of unprofessional actions at sea and in the sky."

In recent years, allied commanders have complained repeatedly about dangerously close maneuvers by Russia aircraft near alliance

planes or ships and aggressive conduct, including near collisions, by Russian warships, particularly in the Black Sea.

“Since my last face-to-face with Gen. Gerasimov we have seen zero unprofessional incidents at sea, zero in the sky,” Wolters said, referring to Gen. Valery Gerasimov, Russia’s chief of staff, who he met in the fall.

Asked what the alliance is doing in response to the growing presence of Russian submarines, Wolters said, “we’re always looking at exercises and investments to improve our view of the maritime environment.

We’re heavily engaged in the Arctic, we’re heavily engaged in the central

Atlantic, in the western Med, the eastern Med. Every single day we’re looking

to see what we can possibly do to improve our ability to see the maritime

environment, to command and control the maritime and we do so comprehensively,

360 degrees, all around the European continent.”

Wolters said the Standing NATO Maritime Force is “focused on both” anti-submarine and counter-surface capabilities. NATO has two surface standing

groups and two mine countermeasure groups, made up of rotating ships from

alliance members.

Asked about his biggest technology needs, Wolters cited resources that allow commanders to act faster, that allow them “to see the

entire battlespace, so they could better defend” resources to command and

control. He noted NATO’s decision to buy Northrop Grumman’s

Global Hawk

long-endurance "remotely piloted aircraft," as the Air Force calls UAVs, with five in the initial order.

Walters spoke extensively about the upcoming Defender Europe 20 exercise, which will involve moving 20,000 U.S. troops from the United

States to join with more than 8,000 American and a similar number of allied

troops forces in Europe. It would be the largest movement of U.S. forces from

the states to Europe since the Cold War Reforger Exercises.

"It would be a huge benefit to show we can deploy from anywhere on earth" to deter a potential adversary, he said.

Asked about the

challenge of moving forces and supplies across the Atlantic in the face of the

growing Russian submarine threat, Walters said: "I'm always concerned about

that. And the reason we're doing Defender is to improve our ability to shift

and maneuver those forces over long distances. When we're done, we'll critique

it and get better in the future."