

General Tod D. Wolters, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR)

# “SOLIDARITY AND COMMITMENT are key to NATO’s success”

General Wolters stresses that the Armed Forces of all the countries of the Atlantic Alliance “have responded to the complex situation caused by COVID-19”

U.S. Air Force General Tod Daniel Wolters has led NATO’s Allied Command Operations (ACO) since May 2019, from where he has coordinated the efforts of the allied armed forces in assisting the civilian authorities of the member states in their battle against COVID-19. Aware of the enormous challenge faced by all in confronting the pandemic, this pilot with more than 5,000 flying hours is proud of NATO’s capability to respond when required in this health crisis, while continuing with operations and ensuring deterrence and defence against old and new threats.

He highlights disinformation as one of these threats and believes that, to neutralize it, it is essential for all actors involved to work together, “from international organizations and national and local governments to private companies, civilian society and free and independent media, including Allied Command Operations”. As far as Spain is concerned, SACEUR underscores

Spain’s unwavering commitment to NATO and argues that “it is a key actor for an Alliance with a 360-degree approach” to deter every potential threat and defend allies against any adversary.

—You have coordinated all the Alliance’s military support to counter COVID-19, what did this assistance consist of?

—Every nation has responded to the crisis, demonstrating the solidarity and

*“Our goal in the pandemic has been to strengthen civilian efforts and provide added value”*

commitment to one another central to NATO’s success for more than 70 years. Forces across the alliance deployed to their homelands to strengthen civil efforts by providing planners and constructing care facilities. They assisted with the decontamination of the affected areas, and delivered critical resources to those in need. Across the alliance, forces employed military transport capabilities to move medical personnel, equipment, supplies, and treatment facilities under great stress. Our goal throughout has been to facilitate those activities and add value without disrupting national responses.

—The *Allied Hand* operations plan has been developed in case there is a new pandemic, what are the general guidelines of this plan?

—Operation Plan *Allied Hand* ensures that we are ready to provide requested assistance to our Allies and Partners in need. The plan establishes a stockpile of medical equipment and



General Wolters was appointed SACEUR in May 2019.



a fund for the purchase of supplies to deliver critical assistance to soften the impact of COVID-19 on our populations and forces. SHAPE can complement and support national and international efforts in this pandemic, while not impacting the Alliance's core purpose: deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area. Our plan is flexible and scalable to both the level of demand and the resources made available by Allies.

**—Has the COVID-19 affected ongoing missions and operations?**

—The Alliance remains focused on deterrence and defence of our area of operation. Our goal during the pandemic is to ensure this health crisis does not become a security crisis. We sustained a conditions-based approach and prudent measures to preserve the health of personnel and continuity to guarantee effectiveness of our operations, missions and activities. Our forces are resilient and continue to carry out the mission across all domains, air, land, sea, cyber and space; while respecting evolving national regulations because of the pandemic. As a result, Allied Command Operations continues to deliver its core mandate.

**—How do you see the future of missions in Afghanistan and Iraq?**

—All Allies remain committed to the fight against terrorism. As part of the Global Coalition to Defeat ISIS, we contribute with AWACS intelligence flights and with training for Iraqi forces. The Alliance remains committed to working with Iraq to ensure that ISIS does not return. NATO Defence Ministers recently tasked our military commanders to expand our mission in Iraq. We will continue to consult with the Global Coalition and the Iraqi authorities about the way ahead.

The Alliance also continues to support the Afghan security forces with training and funding. The Afghan peace talks in Doha are fragile, but they are the best chance for peace in a generation. NATO supports the peace process, and as part of it,

we continue to adjust our presence. We decided to go into Afghanistan together; we will make decisions about future adjustments together; and we will leave together, when the time is right. We want to preserve the gains made over the last two decades with so much sacrifice, and to ensure that Afghanistan never again becomes a safe haven for terrorists that can attack our countries.

**—What is the Alliance doing to defend itself against new threats such as cyberattacks or disinformation?**

—The Alliance is increasing its agility and the ability to respond to Cyber threats at the speed and magnitude in which they happen. This is tested alongside Nations on a regular basis within exercises. Continually developing and practicing our interoperability processes allows us to focus on protecting Allied Command Operations' cyberspace and providing support to Allies, when requested.

Multiple solutions are an imperative to combat disinformation. From international organisations and national and local governments, to private companies, civil society and a free and independent media, all actors, including Allied Command Operations, all have a part to play to conquer this challenge. This is the strength of the international alliance and provides the platform for a strong, unified, fact-based, timely, transparent and coordinated response within a contested information space.

**—As far as conventional threats are concerned, what are the current challenges?**

—The significant challenges in the Euro-Atlantic Area that we face are increased threat capabilities, diffusion of disruptive technologies, and ambiguous malign activities below the level of armed conflict. The 2019 NATO Military Strategy acknowledges these challenges and clearly articulates the enduring vigilance activities the Alliance must embrace to sustain peace through comprehensive deterrence and defence. Regardless of the threat, Allied Command Operations will



meet these challenges with vigilance and speed across all domains and functions. These efforts ensure the Alliance deters, and if called, defends with victory.

**—Last year, Jens Stoltenberg launched the NATO 2050 initiative. Will the military structure be modified to better respond to the new challenges?**

—NATO 2050 outlines how we adapt to ensure our Alliance remains fit to face the challenges of the next decade. One of its key themes is keeping NATO strong militarily. Staying strong militarily means continuing to invest in our armed forces and modern

military capabilities, which have kept us safe for over 70 years. *NATO 2050* also highlights NATO's role globally, which is based on working even more closely with like-minded partners to defend our values in a world of increased global competition.

**—How is the strategic association with the EU developing?**

—Cooperation between the EU and NATO is strong. We work together on military mobility, exercises, countering hybrid threats, and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic, complementing our efforts to further strengthen our cooperation and build our resilience in the future.

*“Spain is a highly valued member of the alliance and its contributions to the full range of NATO missions remain vital”*

**—The southern flank is becoming increasingly important. What role can NATO play in preserving stability in this area?**

—NATO nations have recognised the importance of the southern Flank for Alliance security by implementing the *Framework for the South*, an integral part of NATO's strengthened deterrence and defence posture, which guides our engagement in the region. The Alliance actively contributes to security and projecting stability in the South, where we maintain formal bilateral relations with 11 countries via our Mediterranean Dialogue and Istanbul Cooperation Initiative, through a range of practical initiatives. Through our partnership formats, we work with partners to enable them to build resilience against security threats and to provide for their own security.

Additionally, we provide training, advising and mentoring activities to partners in the South in sectors including border security, counter terrorism, demining, and preventing illicit trafficking.

Finally, the Alliance supports the international coalition to defeat ISIS, as well as the African Union in its peacekeeping missions on the African continent.

**—Finally, what do you think of Spain's role in NATO?**

—Spain is a highly valued member of the alliance and its contributions to the full range of NATO missions and activities remain vital.

Spain's contributions include professional support to the NATO Mission in Iraq and Afghanistan, supporting NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence multinational battlegroup in Latvia, commanding the Maritime High Readiness Force, providing forces for NATO Air Policing which includes ballistic missile defence and most recently offering specialized national capabilities in support of the wider allied response for COVID-19. Spain remains a key player in our active 360 degree alliance, and their support reflects the comprehensive character of the alliance; ready and capable.

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