

FTCN Replay: European Defense, Lessons from Ukraine & Global Security

In a special episode of “From the Crows’ Nest” podcast recorded live at [AOC Europe 2025](#) in Rome, host and AOC’s Director of Advocacy and Outreach Ken Miller gathered three electronic warfare experts to discuss the current state of European defense capabilities, lessons from the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and emerging threats in the Indo-Pacific region.

The conversation featured Erik Bamford, AOC Board of Directors member for International Region 1 and Branch Chief EW for the Norwegian Armed Forces; Duncan McCrory from Freeman Aerospace Institute at King’s College London; and Dr. Tom Withington, defense journalist and electronic warfare specialist.

Europe’s New Defense Focus

The conversation opened with Bamford highlighting the significance of Europe’s renewed focus on defense capabilities, particularly in EW.

“These are special times in Europe... The European Commission white paper on Rearming Europe 2030 specifically identifies EW as an area to focus on to rearm Europe and protect Europe with collective funding for larger projects,” said Bamford. “It will all affect our members, both individuals from military, industry, academia and our industry member most likely.”

Bamford noted that European-developed EW capabilities could actually improve interoperability compared to US solutions, explaining, “For Europe, we might actually be able to push towards a larger degree of interoperability than what we’ve had just buying US-built stuff.” He pointed out that the “US industry has never really built fully to NATO standards,”

while European nations and the EW industry have been including and building to NATO standards.

Lessons from Ukraine

Withington chaired a session at the conference about lessons learned from the Russia-Ukraine conflict and how they might apply to other scenarios. He cautioned against overextending these lessons, noting, "Ukraine is an incredibly important conflict, but we also have to be careful ... There are many applicable lessons, but there's also many lessons that it's very important that we steer clear of."

A key lesson discussed was the importance of air superiority. Duncan McCrory noted, "A universal lesson... was the crucial importance of gaining control of the air. We've seen in the Ukraine conflict that neither side has been able to gain air superiority and that's led to this grinding war of attrition on the ground that's reminiscent of trench warfare."

Withington questioned why Russia abandoned its attempts to gain air superiority early in the conflict: "Why did the Russians give up on air superiority? D plus four ... I was thinking at the time... that the Russian air force are going to be like a bullet out of gate for the next six weeks owning the skies of Ukraine."

The Role of Spectrum Dominance

The panel agreed on the critical importance of controlling the electromagnetic spectrum as a prerequisite for success in all domains.

"Spectrum will always be the first thing you go for," stated Bamford. "Looking at fighting an adversary, like in Afghanistan as well, spectrum was literally the last thing we gave away. It's the first thing you take and it's the last thing you give away."

McCrory emphasized how new capabilities like the UK's recently

announced Storm Shroud autonomous collaborative platform (a tactical UAS with EW payload) are designed specifically to defeat and suppress enemy air defenses.

China and Global Security Challenges

The conversation turned to Russia-China cooperation and its implications for global security. McCrory explained, “We have seen that China has been supporting, actively supporting Russia with its illegal invasion of Ukraine. That includes providing support, financial support, providing dual-use technologies, providing components to replace critical parts that have been blocked from the west due to sanctions, such as microprocessors.”

Looking ahead to potential conflicts in the Indo-Pacific region, McCrory noted that China has proven adept at acquiring, reverse engineering, and improving military technologies: “The Chinese, proven they’re very good at having acquired technologies, then disassembling them, understanding them, reverse engineering and then crucially improving upon them.”

Withington added that European nations cannot avoid involvement in a potential US-China conflict: “If, heavens forbid, there’s a war between the US and China, Europe will be involved. There’s no way. The continent cannot be. We’ve got trading links, we’ve got lines of communication, as much as the US depends on it.”

Managing Multiple Global Conflicts

The episode concluded with reflections on managing multiple escalating conflicts simultaneously, including the recently intensified India-Pakistan tensions. Bamford expressed concern that “the big danger there is that we are very focused on the Ukraine, we’re very focused on Israel, Gaza, we are very focused on China, and we forget this very potent conflict, again, between two nuclear nations that can spiral out of

control.”

He provocatively suggested that China could potentially play a constructive role in de-escalating the India-Pakistan conflict due to its regional influence and stake in preventing nuclear escalation on its doorstep.

The group ultimately emphasized that while the global security environment remains chaotic, armed forces have generally shown adaptability. As Bamford put it, “The armed forces have been flexible. It is the political system that hasn’t been foreseen... It is the political ability to foresee those conflicts and do that change the requirements in due time. That is the problem set.”

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