

## IWI Fireside Chat with LTG (Ret.) Ken Tovo

### Description

On March 5, 2024, the Irregular Warfare Initiative (IWI) Project Europe hosted a virtual Fireside Chat with LTG (Ret.) Ken Tovo. The event focused on European security issues, aiming to deter, defend, and enhance resilience against irregular and hybrid threats.

The conversation began with an exploration of the historical evolution of SOF, tracing back to the OSS and the post-World War II era. LTG Tovo emphasized the multifaceted nature of SOF, distinguishing between direct action capabilities and the human-centric approach, exemplified by the Green Berets. He highlighted the dual nature of SOF's mission: precision targeting and working with indigenous partners to shape and influence environments, particularly relevant in the context of irregular warfare.

Addressing the strategic importance of SOF, LTG Tovo underscored their role in great power competition, where conflicts often manifest in gray zones short of conventional warfare. He emphasized the long-term, complex operations aimed at shaping and influencing partners and populations to achieve national objectives. LTG Tovo stressed the complementary nature of SOF capabilities, blending direct action with human-centric approaches to address diverse challenges effectively.

The conversation then delved into the evolution of irregular warfare, challenging the perception of change versus the evolution of our understanding. LTG Tovo highlighted the post-Cold War era's transition from conventional threats to complex, irregular conflicts, necessitating a nuanced understanding of warfare beyond traditional paradigms. He emphasized the gradual shift towards recognizing warfare as a continuum of political objectives, where irregular warfare emerges as a strategic choice for achieving objectives while mitigating the costs and uncertainties of conventional conflict.

When asked about how US leaders should try to combat Russian misinformation, LTG Tovo emphasized the importance of US leaders presenting factual information to the US public rather than attempting to control the media environment. He highlighted the need for a coherent narrative at all levels of government to counter misinformation effectively, especially regarding ongoing conflicts like the one in Ukraine.

The conversation delved into the historical influence of Russia and the USSR, which extended beyond media manipulation to include restructuring education systems and influencing societal narratives. LTG Tovo advocated for leveraging soft power and intellectual capabilities to mentor and build capacity in partner nations, emphasizing the role of Special Operations civil affairs and psychological operations units.

Regarding education and training, LTG Tovo stressed the significance of understanding adversaries like Russia and China at an academic level. He emphasized the need for a deeper understanding of irregular warfare and the operational options available beyond conventional military responses.

The discussion expanded to include the role of allies and partners in countering threats, with LTG Tovo underscoring the importance of alliance self-awareness and resource optimization. He emphasized the need for the United States to be a good partner, sharing knowledge and assistance where needed while recognizing the expertise and capabilities of other nations.

Lastly, LTG Tovo highlighted his work with the Green Beret Foundation, a nonprofit organization supporting active duty and former Green Berets and their families. He emphasized the importance of providing assistance and resources to military personnel transitioning to civilian life.

LTG Tovo's insights resonated with the changing landscape of global security, particularly pertinent to Project Europe's efforts in retraining and refocusing strategic approaches. His nuanced perspective underscored the importance of adapting to evolving threats while leveraging the diverse capabilities of SOF to navigate complex geopolitical challenges effectively. Through the Fireside Chat, participants gained valuable insights into the strategic role of SOF in contemporary security environments and the imperative of holistic approaches to irregular warfare.

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