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U.S. Army General Outlines Urgent Air Defense Strategy at LANDEURO

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At the recent Association of the United States Army (AUSA) LANDEURO conference in Wiesbaden, Germany, U.S. Army Brigadier General Curtis King issued a clear warning: the nature of modern air defense is evolving at a rapid and perilous pace. Speaking on the panel “Defending the Skies: Today’s Capabilities, Tomorrow’s Edge,” King joined defense and technology leaders in highlighting how new warfare tactics, especially mass drone attacks, require swift adaptation across Europe’s defense infrastructure. His remarks centered

around deterrence, technology, and the importance of the *Eastern Flank Deterrence Line* (EFDL), a developing framework aimed at fortifying NATO's eastern front.

King, who commands the 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command, spoke alongside defense leaders, including Riki Ellison of the Missile Defense Advocacy Alliance and retired Major General John George, now with Leidos. Together, they underscored the pressing challenges of countering coordinated aerial assaults like those witnessed in Ukraine, where Russia has demonstrated the ability to deploy hundreds of drones daily. "This isn't a future threat; this is the threat we face today," King said. "It is a threat that is only going to grow."

One of the key messages of the panel was the importance of combining ground-based air defense with advanced digital command systems. According to King, systems like the Integrated Battle Command System (IBCS) allow defensive sensors to track attacks in real time and quickly pass targeting data to offensive platforms such as High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS). "We can process a fire mission within milliseconds," he noted.

However, speed alone isn't enough. King pointed to data analysis as a critical area needing improvement. In his view, relying on months-long upgrade cycles is no longer viable. "We can't wait nine months," he emphasized, stressing the need for immediate integration of artificial intelligence (AI) and *machine learning* tools to rapidly refine defense systems in real time.

The economic imbalance between inexpensive drone swarms and costly interceptors was another theme echoed by several panelists. Dr. Alexey Boiarskyi, adviser to Ukraine's Ministry of Digital Transformation, noted that "no matter how successful your interceptors are, they will be exhausted or overwhelmed" if attackers can produce cheaper threats faster than defenders can respond. Ukraine's reliance on commercial off-the-shelf tech has proven that adaptability and affordability are not mutually exclusive, lessons that NATO nations must take seriously.

King also shared insights into cooperative strategies that are being developed in partnership with Ukrainian forces, the U.S. 5th Corps, and private industry. A major focus, he said, is the development of unmanned ground systems equipped with sensors and interceptors that can hold the line during early-stage attacks, especially from unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). "How do we develop those capabilities and move them forward so as not to put a soldier in danger?" he asked.

That question, King argued, is central to the EFDL, which aims to establish a pan-European air defense grid capable of shared data integration and collective response. Riki Ellison described it as a “backbone of deterrence by denial”, a system designed not merely to react, but to prevent attacks from succeeding in the first place. By pooling data and capabilities across allied nations, EFDL represents a long-term strategic vision rather than a stopgap measure.

As Europe confronts the consequences of intensified and technologically advanced threats, defense leaders like King are sounding the alarm and calling for immediate innovation, cooperation, and political will. The path forward, they argue, requires a reinvention of traditional defense paradigms. “You just can’t counter the mass from the air alone,” King concluded. “You’ve got to have significant capability on the ground.”

With experience spanning both the Army and Air Force, King’s unique role bridges airspace coordination in contested zones. His position ensures that ground-based defenses complement, rather than conflict with, air superiority missions, an essential element as NATO adapts to the new realities of modern warfare. The EFDL and its integrated strategies may prove to be the decisive step toward ensuring Europe’s skies remain protected under mounting pressure.