

Reinforcement of NATO forces and military mobility

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How does NATO adapt to current threats, in terms of logistics? The key word is improving military mobility. What obstacles should the Alliance overcome to this end?

During the Cold War, NATO's focus was on central Europe with massive conventional forces deployed forward, facing eastwards, pushed hard up against the inner-German border in response to the Soviet threat. Field Commanders held stated regional responsibilities, and all were well aware of the boundaries between forces and flanking formations, the likely combat and communication zones and the arrangements made with the respective Host Nations. National forces stretched back across NATO territories to the channel ports and established secure rear areas, which were specified and resourced as supply routes across the continent. This posture provided the basis for rapid reinforcement from North America across the North Atlantic and into Europe. All necessary arrangements, infrastructure, war stocks, lift capacity and very detailed plans were in place. And the ability to work together effectively was achieved through regular training and exercising at all levels.

Do it all

When the Berlin Wall finally fell in 1989, the threat from the east was assumed to have disappeared so the Allies drew down their forces and larger-scale exercises were reduced. NATO focused its attention on 'out of area' operations,

conducted by Allies on a discretionary basis. How, where and when operations were launched was for the North Atlantic Council to decide, and, when such a decision was made, it meant military planning was initiated, rather than executing an existing defense plan with troops being employed immediately, as was the case during the Cold War era. The Ukrainian Crisis of 2014 woke up NATO to the reality of a resurgent and assertive Russia. It highlighted the need to be able to rapidly and confidently reinforce a threatened Ally on the periphery of NATO territory, to underpin deterrence in peacetime and, should deterrence fail, to defend an Ally from an attack. Added to this, conflict in Syria and the rise of ISIS, the upsurge in terrorism, cyberattacks and other forms of hybrid warfare against Allies have reminded NATO of the potential for conflict across the full domestic and international spectrum. It has also become clear that the Alliance needs to be *able to do it all*: from collective defense at the higher end of the spectrum; to crisis management; to projecting stability beyond our borders; to contributing to combating terrorism. So, times have changed and the risks and burdens have increased.

Stronger, faster, larger

Since the historic decisions taken at the Wales (2014) and



Warsaw (2016) Summits relating to NATO's Deterrence and Defence Posture, the Alliance has been getting stronger, faster and, with the accession of Montenegro, larger. The posture preserves a flexibility of response to the full variety of threats across the territories of Allies that have almost doubled in number since the Cold War, in some cases effectively multiplying the distances that might need to be covered in a deployment of force. Today, from a conventional military standpoint, NATO maintains a very limited forward presence on its eastern periphery combined with an ability to rapidly reinforce, if necessary. As part of this, the enhanced Forward Presence of four multinational battle-groups in Poland and the Baltic States includes altogether over 4,500 troops from across the Alliance, able to operate alongside national home defense forces. And these are complemented by bilateral US presence under the European Deterrence Initiative. Additionally, a number of measures in the Black Sea region have led to a substantial increase in NATO's presence on land, at sea, and in the air.

At the Brussels Summit (2018) Allies also adopted a NATO Readiness Initiative. It will ensure that more high-quality, combat-capable national forces at high readiness can be made available to NATO. From within the overall pool of forces,

Allies will offer 30 major naval combatants, 30 maneuver battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces, at 30 days' readiness or less. This Initiative will further enhance NATO's rapid response capability, either for reinforcement of Allies, or for rapid military crisis intervention.

But it is important to note that the speed of reinforcing the forward deployed elements has many dimensions. It is not just about the level of readiness of our forces. The ability to provide timely reinforcement is also dependent on such aspects as: quick decision-making supported by adequate intelligence, based on indicators and warnings that can register the various aspects of a hybrid campaign; advance planning and preparations; as well as the capacity to physically project and sustain the vast forces at NATO's disposal, including across the Atlantic Ocean from North America. These are all areas that have been strengthened by NATO since 2014 to underwrite the Alliance's posture and make it more capable, credible and relevant.

"Professionals study logistics"

Warfare is not an exact science and, according to Baron de Jomini, a celebrated founder of modern military thought,

[A US Abrams tank is being unloaded from a train in Romania. NATO's modern posture depends on the ability to move forces and their equipment into and across Europe at speed \(photo: Flickr/U.S. Department of Defense\)](#)

Special Section: Overview

“Logistics is all or almost all of the field of military activities except combat” (1838). In his day, Jomini viewed logistics as “the practical art of moving armies,” by which he meant the whole range of functions involved in moving and sustaining military forces: planning; administration; supply; billeting and encampments; bridge- and road-building; and even reconnaissance and intelligence insofar as they were related to maneuvers away from the battlefield.

In this spirit, NATO seeks to remove all obstacles to military movement into and across Europe and the North Atlantic, and to sustain its forces in a theater of operations. To this end, work is being conducted in four areas: authorities and legislation to facilitate border crossing; command and control to direct the logistic moves; adequate lift capabilities that can transport troops and their equipment; and an infrastructure that can cope with large quantities of heavy military transport. At NATO this broad effort is being referred to as “Enabling SACEUR’s Area of Responsibility.”¹ Military Mobility, originally a term coined by the European Union, is now a familiar term among NATO’s Allies because of its significance to these broader efforts.

Changes in border-crossing authorities and legislation at national and EU levels facilitate rapid deployment and support, in particular during peacetime. Work is underway to harmonize NATO plans, processes and procedures, including diplomatic clearances, in full complementarity with all relevant actors, and the European Union is key in this effort. Further, to transit large numbers of forces into, across and from Europe, the Alliance Command and Control structures will expand to be able to cooperate and coordinate with the relevant national civilian actors. In this regard, at their Brussels Summit, Heads of State and Governments decided on a more robust NATO Command Structure that includes logistic elements at all levels, including a Command in Norfolk, United States, to facilitate rapid and secure reinforcement across the Atlantic, as well as a Joint Support and Enablement Command (JSEC) in Ulm, Germany, to ensure freedom of operation and sustainment in the rear area in support of rapid movement of troops and equipment. Additionally, NATO is encouraging Allies to enhance and increase transport capabilities through military capability development as well as through pre-negotiated contracts with the commercial sector across Europe, and work is underway to improve multinational and collective access to lift capacity. Finally, NATO cooperates with the EU and other actors to improve the Alliance’s awareness of civil and commercial transportation infrastructure, such as ports, roads and bridges, to ensure that it is all up to the required standards, standards that will be used as a basis for national and

potentially EU investments (as part of the Trans European Networks). Without a doubt, success in the above objectives will be an expensive and long-term endeavor.

It would be unthinkable to address a lot of this work without the full cooperation of the European Union. As a part of a combined effort, both organizations are working to address the removal of existing obstacles to military movement across the continent. The European Union has an important role to play in facilitating border crossing for the military and their equipment within Europe as well as in ensuring that the transport infrastructure across Europe is adequate to allow the transport of military forces and heavy materiel. NATO and the EU have identified Military Mobility as a key area for cooperation between the organizations. The Joint Declaration signed at the July NATO Summit by Secretary General Stoltenberg and Presidents Juncker and Tusk reaffirmed the interconnected security interests of NATO Allies and EU Member States and the importance of cooperation to underpin the defense initiatives of both organizations.

Integration at three levels

All of the above implies integration at three levels. First, in NATO, work is in motion to look at both combat capabilities and logistic enablers, whether military, civil or commercial in nature and to train and exercise them together. In other words, “Train as you fight.” Second, at the national level, a *whole-of-government* approach is being adopted to deal with challenges across the hybrid spectrum² and to make societies resilient enough to be able to continue to function throughout a crisis or an armed conflict. Allies agreed at the Brussels Summit to draw up national plans to that end. Finally, work is underway at a multilateral level to ensure that NATO and the EU can work together seamlessly to defend their combined geographical space as well as project security and stability beyond their borders appropriately.

The Netherlands

The Netherlands, one of the founding members of the Alliance, has an important role to play in every aspect of these efforts. It will contribute to NATO’s Deterrence and Defense posture through maintaining credible forces at the required readiness, and it makes specific contributions, such as to the NATO Response Force and to the enhanced Forward Presence in Lithuania. The Netherlands has also played an important role in efforts to overcome obstacles to freedom of movement of forces, both in the European Union and in NATO. And with the Netherlands being the “gateway to Europe” it is expected that the country will continue to be a key Ally in this regard.



Conclusion

Although some elements of NATO's mission may seem familiar, much has changed since the Cold War. A very modest presence on our periphery combined with the ability to rapidly reinforce allies under pressure is a different posture altogether from hundreds of thousands of troops permanently based within shooting range of our adversary. And today, we have many more challenges to address beyond an aggressive Eastern neighbor; insecurity and instability to our South, emerging cyber and other hybrid threats, piracy on the high seas, to name but a few.

Our leaders have acknowledged that deterrence and defense in Europe can be delivered through such a posture, but that enabling and sustaining those forces depend, amongst other things, on the ability to move forces and their equipment into and across Europe at speed. To become ever more effective in doing this, a long-term effort is underway. We are on the right track, but a lot more needs to be done. It is complex and requires working together with a lot of stakeholders at national and multinational levels. It will take time and requires financial investments, even beyond national defense budgets. This is why it is so important that our leaders at the July NATO Summit once again reiterated that they will meet the Defense Investment Pledge, moving towards 2% of

GDP on defense by 2024. This increased spending, combined with national efforts to bolster resilience and facilitate military mobility, will enable NATO to continue doing today and tomorrow what it has always done successfully in the past — guarantee the security of all its Allies.

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1. The Area of Responsibility of the Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) is defined as: The territory of Allies in Europe, the Atlantic Ocean from the North Pole to the Tropic of Cancer and up to the East Coast of North America.
2. The spectrum of hybrid conflict is defined as Diplomatic, Informational, Military, Economic, Financial, Intelligence, Legal (DIMEFIL).

[The Port of Rotterdam. With the Netherlands being the "gateway to Europe" it is expected that the country will continue to be a key Ally in NATO's mobility efforts \(photo: Flickr/berknot\)](#)