



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

## DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE (DSC)

# REINFORCING NATO'S DETERRENCE IN THE EAST

### General Report

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## I. INTRODUCTION

1. NATO's most conspicuous steps to adapt its defense and deterrence posture since 2014 are being taken in the Alliance's eastern European territories. Increased Allied presence in the form of rotating forces, equipment stockpiles and exercises is changing the balance of conventional forces to deter a resurgent, revisionist and increasingly capable Russia. This general report will review and assess the Alliance's 'tripwire' deterrence via the establishment of the Enhanced Forward Presence (EFP) in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, as well as the Tailored Forward Presence (TFP) in the Black Sea region.

2. Increased Alliance presence in both regions is meant to signal the credibility of the Alliance's post-2014 defense and deterrence posture – which includes the balance of conventional and nuclear forces, as well as missile defense and arms control initiatives. Significant contributions from the United States and Canada underscore the transatlantic security imperative of the efforts to reinforce the Alliance's eastern flank. According to officials at NATO HQ, the EFP and TFP are intended to communicate Alliance cohesion and capability in the face of an evolving threat to Allied populations and territory.

3. As this report highlights, the current configuration of conventional forces in the Alliance's eastern territories remains insufficient. In the instance of a contingency in any region along the eastern flank, particularly in the Baltic States, the Alliance would be at pains to reinforce any operation to repel an invading force and return the area to the *status quo ante*. This is due to two critical remaining challenges: first, the ability to move necessary military equipment and personnel to and across the region due to cumbersome bureaucratic and logistical hurdles; and second, the lack of a sufficient number of European member states high-readiness rapid reaction forces currently available for deployment in the event of a crisis.

4. Russia has neither of these problems and can bring overwhelming force and manpower to bear upon the region quickly. Russia has the advantage of efficient internal lines of communication and a restructured brigade-focused army, which permits rapid deployment. In addition, Russian modernisation allows these forces near-peer capabilities in firepower and mobility, as well as air defense systems.

5. The Alliance is taking steps to overcome these critical hurdles. In the fall of 2017, NATO HQ announced the creation of two new commands in Norfolk, Virginia and Ulm, Germany. Both will assist with the coordination of the movement of troops across the Atlantic and within Europe. In addition, the United States is increasing its investment in the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) and Allies are increasingly investing in the personnel and equipment needed to make the current rebalancing of conventional forces available for NATO's defense and deterrence posture. More still needs to be done.

6. This paper continues the Defence and Security Committee's reporting on NATO's evolving post-2014 adaptation, which has followed the Alliance's reconsiderations of the proper weight to be given to the mix of forces comprising its deterrence and defense posture. NATO's ability to reinforce its conventional capabilities along the eastern flank remains a vital security concern.

## II. NATO'S NEW SECURITY CONTEXT

7. As this Committee discusses frequently, the Alliance's eastern and southern flanks are new sources of threat, instability and potential conflict. As NATO SACEUR, General Curtis Scaparotti told the audience at the Joint Committee Meetings in February: "We now have to manage crises, stabilize, and defend in an environment shaped, manipulated and stressed by strategic challenges. The two principal challenges we face are Russia and violent extremism. Both have strategic destabilization efforts that go after the foundation of our security and target its key institutions. They

attempt to turn the strengths of democracy into weaknesses.” The recent buzzword for this in NATO HQ briefings is the commitment to 360-degree security in a complex and distributed environment.

#### **A. NATO-RUSSIA RELATIONS DRIVING EASTERN DEFENSE AND DETERRENCE RECALIBRATION**

8. NATO-Russian relations are hovering close to historic lows. Russia’s annexation of Crimea unleashed escalating tit-for-tat sanctions, dangerous rhetoric and acrimonious distrust. As a result, brinkmanship is at its highest levels since the Cold War (Frear, Kulesa and Kearns, 2017; Boulègue, 2018).

9. The size, scope and pace of Russian military modernization, a change in military doctrine and aggressive nuclear rhetoric and conventional military actions are critical variables driving NATO’s defense and deterrence posture in the eastern part of the Alliance (NATO Warsaw Declaration, 2016). Russian saber-rattling via ongoing operations in Ukraine and Syria, large-scale ‘snap’ military exercises against the "spirit of the Vienna Document" and disruptive military activities in the seas along the Alliance’s eastern flank from the Baltic to the Black Sea are also highlighted in the official Warsaw Summit Declaration.

10. The deployment of modern anti-access/area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities along NATO’s eastern flank also gives Russia the potential to reduce or even block Allied freedom of movement within its own territories and water spaces.

11. In the interim, Russia has engaged in aggressive disinformation campaigns via multiple media outlets to sow discord and confusion across member states of the Alliance. Russian interference in Western democratic processes via election manipulation is a particular point of contention and division in many Allies’ domestic political discussions. Cyber interference is now one of the ways in which Russia is continuing its long history of political interference. In addition, for years, Russia has used its supply and control of natural resources to bully its neighbors.

12. As the past four years have demonstrated, Russia is ready to use any means available – from hybrid tactics, to conventional operations, to nuclear menacing – to leverage its power over the Alliance. Ultimately, its goal is to break Allied consensus and reduce Washington’s say in the future of European security.

#### **B. DISRUPTIVE DOCTRINE AND MILITARY MODERNIZATION VIEWED MORE CLOSELY**

13. NATO officials point to Russia’s changed military doctrine and military modernization as particular drivers of the Alliance’s defense and deterrence posture changes in the eastern territories.

##### ***Doctrinal Shift***

14. In 2014, a few months after the intervention in Ukraine, Russia published its new military doctrine. The document marks a fundamental change of direction in Russian foreign policy. While Russia’s 2010 military doctrine openly contemplated cooperation with NATO, four years later, the updated doctrine considers the Alliance as a *de facto* competitor.

15. The 2014 military doctrine repeats much of the language of its 2010 predecessor, but the tone is strikingly more hostile toward NATO. While both doctrines list NATO under the category of “main external military dangers”, the 2014 publication characterizes the Alliance as acting against Russia rather than simply having the *desire* to do so. In particular, the 2014 doctrine highlights NATO’s activities in central and eastern Europe as a threat to Russian national interests (Sinovets and Renz, 2015). It notes the intention to increase Russian efforts to protect Russian interests in its immediate neighborhood, moving from the Arctic down through eastern Europe to the Black,

Mediterranean and Caspian Seas. NATO's deployment of missile defense systems and the implementation of "global strike" are designated as major military dangers for Russia. Additionally, the doctrine views the use of information and communication technology for political-military purposes as another major threat to the Russian Federation and its allies (Russian Embassy to the UK, 2015). As such, the Russian government interprets the Maidan and other "Color" Revolutions as attempted or successful external interference to drive regime change by the West, which merits reciprocal response, possibly in the form of election meddling in the West.

16. Russian military modernization, exercises and rhetoric in recent years confirms this shift in strategy.

***Russia's Increasingly Modernized, High-Readiness, Deployable Forces***

17. As previously reported in this Committee, Russia continues its now decade-long concerted effort to build a modern, professional and high-readiness suite of armed forces. Increased investment is impacting the quality of the forces dramatically.

18. The Russian army of 2018 is a far cry from that of 2008. After relatively hobbled performances in the Caucasus during the first two decades after the demise of the Soviet Union, particularly during the Georgian War of 2008, Russia instituted a massive military reform project, termed the "New Look." In addition to structural reforms, a massive arms procurement policy, the State Armaments Programme (SAP), has reversed decades of decline and significantly improved the Russian military's ability to sustain firepower and maneuver over time and distance (Giles and Monaghan, 2014; IISS, 2018). Russian defense spending increased 16-fold in nominal terms from 2000-2015 (IISS, 2015). In recent years, Russia has consistently dedicated 3-4% of its GDP toward force modernization (IISS, 2018).

19. Though military spending was somewhat slowed in recent years due to the sanctions-stressed Russian economy and depressed global oil and gas prices<sup>1</sup>, Russia now fields very capable land, air and sea forces. New Russian equipment has increased the ability for precision strikes at distance, state-of-the-art air defense systems and highly-mobile and powerful equipment, for example the SU-57 5<sup>th</sup> generation stealth fighter, the T-14 *Armata* tank and the dual-use *Iskander* tactical ballistic missile systems, among others (IISS, 2018; RAND, 2018).

20. Restructuring is making the Russian army more brigade-focused, which allows for quicker mobility. In addition, the number of volunteer (or contract) soldiers has increased dramatically – up to approximately 360,000 out of a total of about 900,000 personnel in the armed services (IISS, 2018; Golts, 2017). The professionalization of the army allows for a larger number of units to be ready for short-notice deployment. Russia has also reinforced its Western Military District, sending units from its inner regions and activating new armored, infantry, artillery and air defense formations – the Western District now bases up to 400,000 forces, approximately 80,000 of which are within close proximity to the Baltic States (RAND, 2018; IISS, 2015).

21. Finally, the Russian military has been training its forces via large-scale 'snap' exercises, which emphasize sustaining combined-force operational scenarios over time and distance. These exercises have been augmented by the real battlefield experiences of combined-arms operations in both Ukraine and Syria, where Russia is not only testing troop readiness, but also the efficacy of its new, modern weapons systems.

<sup>1</sup> Oil and gas revenues surpass 35% of Russia's annual budget, up from only 9% in 2000. See, US Energy Information Administration, Russia: International Energy Analysis and Data, October 31, 2017. [www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=RUS](http://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=RUS)

### III. CHANGES TO NATO'S DEFENSE AND DETERRENCE POSTURE – EAST

22. NATO responded to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea by revamping the NATO Response Force (NRF) via the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which sought to scale the number of forces capable of responding to a contingency to 40,000 and to make them more flexible and adaptable, with the objective of guaranteeing rapid reinforcement and mobility. After its reform, the NRF contains air, land, maritime and Special Operations Forces (SOF) components.

23. The RAP also established the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) as the spearhead of the NRF, capable of deploying 5,000 brigade-level troops within two to seven days' notice to the periphery of the Alliance. At the same time, NATO Allies held land, sea and air military exercises, from the Baltics to the Black Sea region and established new air and maritime policing missions<sup>2</sup>.

24. By 2016, Allies recognized the necessity of larger-scale adaptation across the Alliance to create a more modern mobile and dynamic deterrence posture to face the realities of a far more complex security environment.

25. In light of continued deterioration in NATO-Russia relations, NATO Allies decided at the July 2016 Warsaw Summit to further strengthen the Alliance's posture in order to deter potential adversaries from using force against NATO member countries: the Enhanced Forward Presence in Poland and the Baltic States and the Tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea region are the key resulting initiatives in NATO's eastern territories. During the Warsaw Summit, then-US President Barack Obama committed to using US defense funds in reassurance and support of the European Allies' defense efforts, referred to as the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). These initiatives were reaffirmed at the most recent NATO Summit in Brussels in July 2018.

### IV. THE EFP AND TRIPWIRE DETERRENCE

26. NATO's EFP consists of the deployment of four rotating multinational battlegroups, stationed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. These forces are over 4,500 strong and are drawn from 17 different NATO member states under the lead of four framework nations: Canada in Latvia, Germany in Lithuania, the United Kingdom in Estonia, and the United States in Poland. The four battlegroups are under NATO command as they report to a new multinational division headquarters based in the Polish 16<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division in Elblag, which will in turn answer to the Multinational Division Northeast (MND-NE) Headquarters in Szczecin in Poland. The four battlegroups became fully operational on 28 August 2017 after the completion of all certification exercises (CERTEX). The MND-NE will reach full capability by December 2018.

27. From a conventional power perspective, the deployed battalions are clearly insufficient to defend against a large-scale, conventional Russian offensive, a point driven home to the Defence and Security Committee during its table exercise with members of the RAND Corporation research staff during its January 2017 visit to Washington.

28. The table exercise summarized the findings of the RAND Corporation's study on NATO's ability to repel a concerted attack on the Baltic States. According to the study, the longest it would take Russian forces to reach either Tallinn or Riga would be 60 hours. As RAND Corporation researchers told Defence and Security Committee members, despite efforts to bolster the Alliance's deterrence posture in the region in terms of forces and equipment, NATO would in fact need about 35,000 soldiers already on the ground and with much better equipment, such as air defense systems and heavy armour, to thwart a serious Russian invasion.

<sup>2</sup> This Committee addressed in greater detail the impact of the decision in a previous report, *NATO's Readiness Action Plan: Assurance and Deterrence For The Post-2014 Security Environment*, by Xavier Pintat, [167 DSCFC 15 E bis].

29. As of February 2018, EFP rotating battalions only interpose 4,692 troops, and they are distributed across a wide geographic area: in Tapa, Estonia a battlegroup led by the United Kingdom, operating with Estonian forces and supported by Denmark and Iceland has 1,001 NATO troops; the forces based in Adazi, Latvia number around 1,170 and are led by Canada and supported by Albania, Italy, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia and Spain; German forces lead a battlegroup of 1,404 troops in Rukla, Lithuania, supported by Croatian, French, Dutch and Norwegian forces; and, finally, a US-led battlegroup with 1,117 troops from Croatia, Romania and the United Kingdom is based in Orzysz, Poland. (See Appendix)

30. While perhaps insufficient as standalone forces in the instance of a full-scale attack by Russia in the region, the EFP serves as a tripwire for a whole-of-alliance Article 5 response in the instance of an aggressor's potential action against any Allied territory and/or populations. Ultimately, the EFP seeks to bolster the credibility of the Alliance's deterrence posture in what had been perceived as a strategically vulnerable part of the Alliance.

## V. THE TAILORED FORWARD PRESENCE

31. At the Warsaw Summit, NATO also established the Tailored Forward Presence in the Black Sea region. Based on a proposal by Romania, the TFP bolsters NATO's presence in the land, air and maritime domains (Romania's Permanent Delegation to NATO, 2017).

32. The NATO PA was reminded of the geostrategic importance of the Black Sea during the 2017 Annual Session in Bucharest, where the NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, noted the Alliance's desire to increase its efforts to project stability across the region in response to Russia's illegal activities in Ukraine.

33. The land component of the TFP includes a multinational brigade in Craiova and a Combined Joint Enhanced Training Initiative (CJET). The Multinational NATO South-East Brigade reached Initial Operational Capability in April 2017 and was officially inaugurated on 9 October 2017. The core of this multinational formation is the Romanian 2<sup>nd</sup> "Rovine" Infantry Brigade, a brigade of up to 4,000 soldiers<sup>3</sup>, which is complemented by a separate deployment of 900 US troops already in place (Emmott, 2017). The CJET is a regional platform for cooperation, aimed at ensuring a continuous Allied presence in the region, through participation in exercises and training activities.

34. The TFP's maritime component involves integrated training and more exercises with the participation of the NATO Standing Naval Forces. An example of the TFP's recent Black Sea maritime efforts is the July 2017 multinational maritime exercise *Sea Breeze*, which included assets from the Standing NATO Maritime Group Two Task Unit Two (SNMG2 TU.02)<sup>4</sup> and other maritime assets from both Allied and partner states. The exercise played out both in the Black Sea and on Ukrainian territory with the participation of Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, France, Georgia, Greece, Italy, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Turkey, Ukraine, the United Kingdom and the United States.

35. The TFP's air component, NATO's enhanced Air Policing (eAP), is manned by rotating Allied forces patrolling the Romanian and Bulgarian airspace. On 31 December 2017, Canada concluded its four-month contribution to the eAP, after having deployed approximately 135 Canadian Armed Forces personnel and four CF-188 Hornets at the Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base in Romania. During the mission, *ATF-Romania*, Canadian Air Forces also participated in joint training exercises with their

<sup>3</sup> Also known as Scorpions Brigade, it was previously deployed in Afghanistan and in Iraq.

<sup>4</sup> SNMG2 is one of NATO's four Standing NATO Maritime Groups (SNMGs). The SNMGs are a multinational, integrated maritime force made up of vessels from various Allied countries. These vessels (including their helicopters) are permanently available to NATO to perform different tasks ranging from participating in exercises to actually intervening in operational missions. <http://www.mc.nato.int/media-centre/news/2016/nato-and-partner-country-forces-participate-in-exercise-sea-breeze.aspx>

Romanian counterparts, demonstrating their readiness in terms of medical support, flight safety, aircraft maintenance, command and control, and policing (Strong, 2018).

36. At the NATO defense ministerial meeting held in Brussels on 8-9 November 2017, the United Kingdom announced its decision to redeploy four RAF Typhoons to work with Romania to police the Black Sea skies on a permanent basis (Wills, 2017). The decision came right after two Typhoon jets were scrambled in September to monitor Russian planes heading towards British airspace; a similar incident occurred in January 2018 (Hartley-Parkinson, 2018). In July 2017, RAF Typhoons scrambled in response to Russian Air Force Tu-22 Backfire strategic bombers heading south near NATO air space over the Black Sea.

### ***US European deterrence initiative***

37. The Trump Administration's December 2017 National Security Strategy (NSS) defines the current international security environment as one of global competition at all levels. In the document, Russia is identified as seeking peer-rival status *vis-à-vis* the United States. The document underscores that an important line of effort to counter this is to build stronger alliances. The NSS emphasizes Washington's desire to remain active in Europe: "A strong and free Europe is of vital importance to the United States" (NSS, 2017).

38. US policymakers also worked to dispel any lingering doubts in delegation members' minds about the United States' Article 5 commitment during the Defence and Security Committee's most recent visit. As Thomas Goffus, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense (DASD) for European and NATO policy, noted: "The United States' Article 5 guarantee is iron-clad." Mr Goffus continued by stating that the United States would focus on the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI) during the upcoming summit in Brussels: "Deterrence is what we do together, rather than the US-focused European Reassurance Initiative, as the EDI was previously known."

39. The EDI includes plans for additional forces, prepositioned brigade sets and other support assets in Europe, with the increased number of forces coming from the combination of additional forces and the deferral of previously planned force reductions. It also provides support for an additional armored brigade combat team (ABCT). The EDI, therefore, funds the maintenance of two ABCTs, two Fires Brigades and air defense, engineer, movement control, sustainment and medical units in the region, which would be sufficient to sustain a division (US DOD, 2018).

40. The ERI/EDI has funded a significant increase in US presence in eastern Europe, which supports more exercises, infrastructure, equipment prepositioning, and partner capacity development efforts. In many ways, the proof of US commitment is in the USD 10+ billion already spent or planned to reinforce Allied defense and deterrence in Europe.

41. The United States recently announced a planned allocation of USD 6.5 billion to the EDI in 2019, a USD 1.7 billion increase from last year and USD 3.1 billion more than was allocated in 2017.

42. During the February 2018 NATO PA Joint Committee meetings held in Brussels, briefers reiterated the United States' commitment to Europe is strong and a paralleled surge in defense investment is now expected from the United States' European Allies.

### ***Exercise Trident Juncture 2018***

43. *Trident Juncture 2018* [TRJE18] is scheduled to take place in Norway in October and November and will include 40,000 personnel, 130 aircraft and 70 vessels from the 29 NATO members, Sweden and Finland. The exercise is comprised of three main phases: deployment and redeployment, a live field exercise and a command post exercise. Within the live field component, training will be divided between land, air and sea and will take place across Norway and the North



and Baltic Seas. The exercise is a major test for the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which will be certified at the end of TRJE18 (See Appendix I for Map).

44. Beyond logistical and climatic concerns, organizers also point to Russia as a potential challenge. The exercises proximity to Russia and the inclusion of non-NATO members—Sweden and Finland—is sure to heighten Moscow’s interest. Norwegian Defense Minister Frank Bakke-Jensen stated: “There will be an opportunity for Russia to practice different methods of influence. So, we must be prepared to be exposed to false news and influence, both in advance, during the exercise, and afterwards” (Taylor, 2018). The Committee will remain focused on the progress and success of Trident Juncture 2018.

## **VI. BARRIERS TO ENTRY – THE CHALLENGES OF DEFENDING THE EAST**

### **A. RUSSIAN REGIONAL A2/AD CAPABILITIES**

45. From a conventional tactical point of view, NATO’s tripwire deterrence relies heavily on reinforcements being deployed from the center to the periphery of the Alliance on short notice. Even if the decision to deploy the NRF and its VJTF is taken in due time, Russia could easily outmatch NATO’s forces by simply denying them freedom of movement to and inside the targeted area through the effective use of its A2/AD capabilities (Baroudos, 2016).

46. Russia is in the process of fielding an impressive variety of A2/AD systems in and around the Baltic Sea region, the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean and the Barents Sea. When fully operational, these systems will substantially limit NATO’s ability to reinforce Allies by land, air and sea (NATO STO, 2017). By mid-2016, the Russian Federation had already introduced air defense, coastal defense and electronic warfare capabilities as well as ballistic missiles in Kaliningrad, in Syria, and later in Crimea (IISS, 2017). Russia’s A2/AD exclusion areas were extended with the deployment of the S-400 air defense system to Syria in November 2015 and to Crimea in August 2016; each has a range of up to 250 miles. Advanced Russian air defense is also operated in cooperation with Belarus and Armenia through the Joint Air Defense System (Weinberger, 2016). According to the Lithuanian Minister of Defense Raimundas Karoblis, Russia has also permanently deployed *Iskander* missiles in Kaliningrad (AFP, 2018).

47. The TFP serves as a means of monitoring the evolution of Russia’s A2/AD capabilities in and around the region. This is especially true considering that Romania is home to the Aegis Ashore Ballistic Missile Defense site. The NATO Science and Technology Organization (NATO STO) is currently conducting an analysis on Russian A2/AD capabilities in order to address existing vulnerabilities (NATO STO, 2017).

48. In particular, given their geographical location, the three battlegroups deployed in the Baltic States could be trapped behind the Russian A2/AD wall. As noted by the Defence and Security Committee, the only weakness in the Russian A2/AD bubble in the Baltic Sea is the Swedish island of Gotland.

49. In September 2017, Sweden held its biggest military exercise since the early 1990s. *Aurora-17* involved 19,000 Swedish soldiers and a foreign contingent of seven NATO countries (the United States, Denmark, Estonia, France, Latvia, Lithuania and Norway), plus Finland. The objective of the exercise was the defense of the Swedish island of Gotland from an attack coming from territories roughly corresponding to Kaliningrad and Belarus (Winnerstig, 2017). After the exercise, following decades of absence, Sweden decided to reinstate a permanent military presence on the island. Commenting on this decision, former US Army Europe Commander General Ben Hodges reaffirmed Sweden’s and Gotland’s importance for NATO: “You have a strategically very important task here. I do not think there is any island anywhere that is more important” (The Local, 2017).

## B. THE ZAPAD 2017 EXERCISE

50. *Aurora-17* was held a few days before the start of Russia's large-scale military exercise *Zapad 2017*. While Russia holds yearly large-scale exercises<sup>5</sup>, there are several factors which make *Zapad 17* worthy of further consideration. The exercise was the first exercise held in the west<sup>6</sup> – specifically in Belarus and in Russia's Kaliningrad *oblast* – since 2013 and therefore since Russia's intervention in Ukraine and the deteriorated relations with NATO (IISS, 2018).

51. Russia was deliberately vague about the number of troops and equipment deployed for the exercise. Official statements stated 12,700 personnel participated, just short of the 13,000 threshold which would require the presence of international observers under the 2011 Vienna Document. While Belarus had indeed invited a small number of observers, Russia was vague about the number of personnel deployed to Kaliningrad for the exercise. Estimates for the total number of personnel deployed in both Belarusian and Russian territory range between 50,000-60,000 (IISS, 2018).

52. Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu described the exercise as a counterinsurgency operation against extremist groups benefitting from external support. Russia tested, *inter alia*, its air and missile defense systems, which were successful as air and land reinforcements to the hypothetical armed groups operating in the exercise. In addition to conventional components, Russia also added asymmetric components to the exercise, testing its ability to repel diversionary-reconnaissance groups and counter-electronic warfare. The exercise's counterinsurgency components transitioned to conventional warfare (IISS, 2018; Boulègue, 2017). Some analysts have underscored the significance of this, as Russia tends to rehearse tactics it plans to deploy later in a real scenario—a striking example being Russia's use of its *Spetsnaz* (Special Forces) during the 2013 exercise, which were subsequently an essential element to the annexation of Crimea (Mizokami, 2017).

53. The main takeaways from *Zapad 2017* are twofold. First, despite NATO's post-2016 reassurance efforts, Russia's ambiguity about the size and scope of the exercise was successful in rattling many Allied and partner governments, particularly in NATO's eastern territories. Second, Russia showed its capacity to conduct a range of operational theatre tactics, from heavy combined-arms to asymmetrical.

## C. THE VOSTOK 2018 EXERCISE

54. From 11 to 17 September 2018, Russia held its largest military exercise since the Soviet Union's *Zapad 81*. Minister of Defense and General of the Army Sergei Shoigu claimed *Vostok 2018* involved approximately “300,000 troops; more than 1000 planes, helicopters, and drones; up to 80 combat and logistic naval vessels; and up to 36,000 tanks, armoured-personnel carriers, and other vehicles” (Synovitz, 2018). The main exercise centered on Tsugol training facility in Zabaykalsky *krai*, but activities reached across eastern Siberia. General of the Army Valery Gerasimov highlighted multiple new technologies and armaments being tested, among them upgraded T-80 and new T-90 tanks, the new SU-34 and SU-35 airplanes, Mi-28 and Mi-35 attack helicopters, as well as *Iskander* missile systems (TASS, 2018). The size and scope of the operations is a clear demonstration of force by the Kremlin, which hopes to project military capabilities comparable to the Soviet Union.

55. In addition to Russian forces, both Chinese and Mongolian forces participated as well, with the People's Liberation Army sending 3200 troops and 900 pieces of weaponry (Higgins, 2018). China's presence at *Vostok 2018* underscores a growing strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing. This could signal a response to the US National Security Strategy, which stated both nations

<sup>5</sup> Russia's policy is to rotate the regional focus of its exercises yearly; other than *Zapad*, which literally translates as West, there are also *Kavkaz* (Caucasus), *Tsentr* (Center) and *Vostok* (East).

<sup>6</sup> *Zapad* means west in Russian. Russian exercises rotate annually along cardinal points – as noted below, *Vostok*, or east, is taking place in the fall of 2018.

“challenge American power, influence, and interests, attempting to erode American security and prosperity;” with both Moscow and Beijing signaling to Washington their desire for closer cooperation, particularly at the security level (NSS, 2017). Furthermore, through *Vostok 2018* Russia and China can mirror NATO’s *Trident Juncture* exercise and develop the image of their strategic partnership as a peer competitor to the West.

56. Concurrent with *Vostok 2018*, the Russian Navy reinforced its contingent of warships in the eastern Mediterranean. On 1 September 2018, 26 Russian warships and support vessels along with 36 planes took part in a naval exercise off the coast of Syria (Coker, Saad and Gall, 2018). As Russian forces engage in naval training in the eastern Mediterranean, only a few hundred miles away, Russian-backed Syrian forces prepare to oust the last vestiges of the opposition forces in Idlib province. These military maneuvers near Syria are another way Russia is seeking to project its renewed global reach and ambitions.

57. Despite stalled NATO-Russia cooperation attempts, communication channels remain open between the two. To prevent unintended conflict and ease tension, the NATO-Russia Council met in May 2018 to discuss *Vostok 2018* and Exercise *Trident Juncture 18* (RFE/RL, 2018). Additionally, military-to-military lines of communication are used to provide transparency in military activities.

### ***NATO’s Northeastern Flank – A Weakness Exposed***

58. As noted above, in January 2017, RAND Corporation political scientists told the Defence and Security Committee that NATO’s capabilities, posture and capacity to defeat a Russian attack on the Baltic States with its conventional land and air forces were too weak to return the region to the *status quo ante* without serious conflict escalation. While the EFP, VJTF and US EDI have certainly changed the balance of forces calculations, these remain insufficient when considering Russia’s advantages that persist, particularly in the Baltic area.

### ***Russian Local Advantages Remain Significant***

59. NATO’s focus on out-of-area stability operations after the Cold War, particularly after the 9/11 terrorist attacks, diverted attention from heavy combined-arms capabilities, artillery and missile defense (RAND, 2018). This trend, coupled with the cuts to defense spending and investment, has hollowed out the conventional capabilities of most European forces, which compromises the ability to reinforce or sustain deployed forces<sup>7</sup>. A recent study of the abilities of the British, French and German armies to generate and sustain armored brigades in the Baltics found that each would likely be able to deploy and sustain a heavy brigade, though at different rates and at great sacrifice (Shurkin, 2017). The study found that, of Europe’s three largest armies, only France could deploy one battalion within a week and a brigade within a month. Recent reporting on the operability of many major German military systems reveals Germany’s contributions are even less likely (Buck, 2018).

60. By contrast, Russia has spent the last decade honing the specific capabilities NATO’s European and Canadian forces are now lacking. Russia has strengthened and improved its combined-armed forces, making them more mobile and lethal. In addition, Russia is exercising these capabilities at an accelerated rate and is even testing them in real combat operations in Ukraine and Syria. All of these improvements have indeed made Russia a near-peer competitor, as outlined in the recent US NSS.

61. In the Baltic region, Russia maintains a significant advantage in integrated air and missile defenses, long-range artillery and heavy armor (IISS, 2015; RAND, 2018). Finally, Russia’s internal lines of communication, both road and rail, would allow Moscow to launch and sustain operations in the region rapidly.

<sup>7</sup> This topic is examined in detail in the DSCTC report *Burden Sharing: New Commitments in a New Era* [170 DSCTC 18 E rev.1 fin].

62. As such, despite recent efforts to change the balance of conventional forces in the Baltics in the Allies' favor, Russia would still dominate any conflict in the short- to medium-term until the Alliance would be able to bring, likely across the Atlantic, overwhelming resources to bear upon the conflict.

## **VII. ADDRESSING NATO'S KEY REMAINING HURDLES TO MILITARY MOBILITY AND DEFENSE INVESTMENTS**

63. A robust and effective defense of all of NATO's territories and populations is essential. To get there an effective deterrence posture must be in place to dissuade any potential adversary from even considering an attack anywhere within the Alliance at any given moment. To overcome the challenges to an effective defense and deterrence policy for NATO's eastern territories, national Parliaments need to find the ways and means to address the following challenges.

### ***Military Mobility and Bureaucratic Delays***

64. During the Cold War, ensuring the mobility of troops and equipment was a priority and was reviewed during frequent exercises. Cold War infrastructure included readiness for support, command and control, as well as for destruction, denial and diversion. It also incorporated multi-layered communication lines, hardened storage for ammunition and fuel and a central and northern European pipeline to bring fuel to forward operating bases. While some of this infrastructure still exists today, it only reaches the frontier of NATO's Cold War borders (Jacobson, 2018). As NATO moved its borders further east, attention to infrastructure and connectivity with the new members did not follow (Novaky, 2017). Today, NATO faces two main military mobility problems; the first concerns infrastructure itself, the other legal regulations.

65. Today, the Alliance has significant infrastructural deficiencies. First, it lacks the necessary infrastructure to transport modern military equipment at speed over long distances due to critical shortages in rolling stock to load and unload along the rail lines of communication. In addition, there is insufficient material for military bridging. Infrastructure in certain states is not physically capable of sustaining the weight of state-of-the-art military vehicles and is in urgent need of modernization. In the Baltics, for example, the rail gauge narrows at the Polish border (Jacobson, 2018).

66. The Alliance also faces significant bureaucratic delays at member state borders when clearing the transfer of equipment and forces. US General Ben Hodges (Ret.) was particularly outspoken about his unhappiness with the current bureaucratic ordeal concerning the movement of troops at border crossings. He noted the irony of having very high readiness forces and then not being able to move them fast enough because of bureaucracy (Schultz, 2017). During the NATO PA February Joint Committee Meetings, members learned cumbersome bureaucratic regulations cause unnecessary delays, even in key areas of vulnerability. It was estimated that, even working 24 hours a day and not taking unforeseen problems into account, it could take weeks to move a considerable number of vehicles across some borders in Europe (Schultz, 2017).

67. Establishing a more coherent and straightforward legal framework within the Alliance – often informally referred to as a “Military Schengen Zone” – should go hand in hand with infrastructure modernization. At this point in time, the above-mentioned troop and equipment border transfer requests can even be unexpectedly denied (EEAS, November 2017). While the issue has been badly neglected, there are consistent joint efforts that should be able to deliver significant results in a relatively short period of time.

### ***The Example of the Suwalki Corridor***

68. The thin strip of land connecting Poland and Lithuania is increasingly referred to as the Suwalki corridor. Its location between the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad and Belarus makes it a potential choke point between the Baltic States and the rest of the Alliance's eastern territories. The Suwalki corridor bundles the key challenges to building and maintaining an effective deterrence in NATO's eastern territories: infrastructural deficiencies, red tape and a critical imbalance of forces and equipment, as well as insufficient storage facilities to handle any potential surge in Allied military activities in the region.

69. In the event of a contingency in the Baltic region, the Suwalki corridor would become a lifeline between the Baltic States and Poland. As such, the Alliance must have in place an effective early warning system to detect a possible incursion, developed infrastructure for the quick deployment of troops, and the necessary manpower ready to defend the territory. As noted in this report, it currently does not.

### ***Initial Steps Taken: Adapting NATO's Structure***

70. In July 2018, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg confirmed the addition of two new commands to update the Alliance's force structure. First, the NATO Joint Force Command for the Atlantic will be stationed in Norfolk, Virginia to assist not only with increasing security in the Atlantic, but also to coordinate the transfer of reinforcements across the Atlantic in the event of a contingency in Europe. Another new command to assist with the logistical and bureaucratic hurdles associated with moving troops and supplies across Europe will be built in Ulm, Germany. Further, a new Cyber Operations Centre will also be established at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE) in Mons, Belgium.

71. Allied efforts in the North Atlantic are also increasing to reflect the rapidly evolving security environment in the region and the need for increased presence to protect vital assets and key transatlantic sea lanes. In August 2018 the US Navy reactivated the Second Fleet, which will serve as a deterrent to increased Russian activity along the United States' eastern coast and across the North Atlantic. The UK Navy similarly announced an increased presence in the North Atlantic with the stated objective of protecting transatlantic submarine communication cables.

72. Further, to address the challenges of reinforcement, the Alliance announced a new initiative at the July Summit in Brussels – the NATO Readiness Initiative, often referred to as the "30-30-30-30 plan". The new initiative requires NATO to have available, from a common pool of forces, "an additional 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium maneuver battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces" ready to deploy within 30 days or less of being put on alert. The implementation of the plan can be understood as a challenge to all NATO members to meet the demands of the Alliance's new defense and deterrence posture.

73. In addition, at the Brussels Summit, Allies also endorsed the Enablement Plan for SACEUR's Area of Responsibility. While short on details of how it will be implemented at the national level, the plan commits nations to work assiduously to "improve the necessary legislation and procedures, enhance command and control, and increase transport capabilities" (NATO Brussels Declarations, 2018). As such, the Summit declarations note the need to address the abovementioned key challenges currently impeding the efficient transfer of equipment and personnel across the Alliance. The remaining question is the degree to which each nation, particularly those in the eastern territories, will take up the challenge of implementing the Enablement Plan.

### ***Increased NATO-EU Cooperation Needed To Help Solve The Problem***

74. In December 2017, addressing existing barriers to military mobility at the legal and infrastructural levels was identified as an area of cooperation between the EU and NATO (Council of the EU, 2017). Within the EU, military mobility is likely to become the first flagship initiative of the EU-led Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), as EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini vows to have an action plan for military mobility ready by March 2018 (European Council, 2017; EU Commission, November 2017).

75. The European Union identified improving the resilience of transport infrastructure as a key element in countering hybrid threats; as such, it is a fundamental part of the EU-NATO cooperation framework (EU Commission, July 2017). Cooperation with the EU is necessary in order to map out existing legislation concerning the movement of troops. Indeed, military equipment is currently excluded by the customs union; as such, military mobility is still regulated by a complex mix of NATO, EU and national regulations, which leads to uncertainties and significant delays (Fiott, 2017).

76. In March 2018, the European Commission published an Action Plan on Military Mobility to address regulatory hurdles and infrastructure deficiencies delaying military mobility across the European Union (European Commission, 2018). Most of the deadlines for key EU projects are set for the end of 2018 and 2019. An important first step set for the end of 2018 is the streamlining of custom formalities for military operations. Additionally, through the European Reassurance Initiative, the United States has invested in specific logistical improvement, such as the modernization of railheads to decrease unloading times for tanks in eastern Europe (Peel and Acton, 2018). In fact, infrastructure modernization to improve military readiness is identified as a key objective of the EDI, which dedicates USD 337.8 million of its 2018 budget to it and over USD 800 million in 2019.

77. Although infrastructure improvements are a major issue across the Alliance, there have been some positive developments in eastern Europe. For example, renovations continue along European Route E67, which runs from Prague to Helsinki by way of Poland, Lithuania and Estonia. Still, progress has been rather piecemeal; despite some localized advancements on the *Via Baltica* expressway, the project is years away from completion. Bottlenecks in the Suwalki corridor in both roads and rail leave the whole corridor strategically vulnerable (Hodges, Bugajski and Doran, 2018).

78. Other infrastructure projects undertaken in the Baltic region include expanding the Polish port of Gdansk. The EU Transportation Coordinating Committee recently approved EUR 1.9 billion for the modernization of facilities, the dredging of the port and improved road and rail connections (Maritime Journal, 2016). This will make the port more accessible to larger vessels and improve the transit of personnel and military supplies. In light of Russia's use of natural gas as a political tool in eastern Europe, important steps forward for regional energy security are being taken. Polish and Lithuanian gas transmission operators have approved a grid connection agreement this year, which, when completed in 2022, will provide a strategic energy link between Poland and the Baltic States (Ministry of Energy of the Republic of Lithuania, 2018).

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

79. Certainly, conventional forces are only a part of NATO's defense and deterrence posture. NATO's nuclear forces are also a core component of the Alliance's overall capabilities. The purpose of any deterrence posture, however, is to convince an opponent that any potential benefit to be gained from a military action would be wiped out by the overwhelming costs of such an action – thereby making the action unthinkable.

80. The conventional imbalance in NATO's eastern territories provides an unnecessary hypothetical temptation. If Russia were to test Alliance resolve, quick escalation would be disastrous.

81. Much can and should be done to bolster the balance of conventional forces in the region to erase any such temptation, no matter how slight or improbable it may be.

82. NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence and Tailored Forward Presence revolve around three central messages. The first is signaling Alliance solidarity in the face of Russian regional aggression and threats. The transatlantic security imperative of the new defense and deterrence efforts in the region is underscored by Canada and the United States leading the multinational battlegroups in Latvia and Poland. The second is the resolve to deter further aggression by demonstrating more robust capabilities in the region. The third is NATO's resolve to counter a limited incursion in the area.

83. *These messages can be strengthened in the following ways; Considerations for NATO Parliamentarians:*

84. **First**, the deployment of additional ground forces and equipment to the east remains an imperative. By doing so, the mobilization dilemma identified above would be mitigated: the increased numbers of troops and weapons stocks would greatly reduce deployment times.

85. **Second**, all Allies can support the NATO-EU initiatives to strengthen infrastructure and reduce legal and bureaucratic hurdles to military equipment and personnel transfers to the east. NATO parliamentarians can act domestically in their own Parliaments to move such legislation and funding initiatives forward. Such investments would clearly have an impact ranging far wider than just the transfer of military materiel – better roads, bridges, communication infrastructure, ports and airports, etc. can all have far-ranging economic impacts and demonstrate the political will to share Allied burdens.

86. The burden-sharing debate often overlooks the positive security and defense impacts such investments can have, not to mention the political will to demonstrate unity of purpose by regional Allies to "do their part". As Lieutenant General Carsten Jacobson told the delegation at the February 2018 Joint Committee Meetings: "When vital equipment cannot cross borders without intense bureaucracy and lengthy procedures – and we have seen delays not just for days, but for weeks in recent exercises – we simply cannot show Alliance capabilities across Alliance territory. This subject needs to be addressed urgently; it is a political task."

87. **Third**, European Allies should have faster deployment times than those outlined above. They should also have the resources necessary to sustain these deployments. All Allies should be able to contribute in a substantive way. Targeted investments to address force deficiencies are an imperative.

88. Regional Allies also need to invest in modern low-tier air defense systems, capable intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) systems, sensors and radars to give Allies a more complete air picture, as well as in defense capabilities that are more difficult to track, such as man-portable air-defense systems (MANPADS). In the absence of larger air defense systems,

investing in capabilities like Stinger missiles would be a clear means to change Russian calculations about their ability to dominate the air and ground if there is a contingency, even in the short-term.

89. **Fourth**, Allies must invest in the means to overwhelm and degrade Russia's A2/AD systems. This means investing in 5<sup>th</sup> generation fighters like the F-35, jamming systems, as well as longer-range precision missile systems to target and destroy any Russian attempts to degrade the Allies' ability to operate inside Allied territory.

90. **Finally**, as mentioned in the 2017 Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Cooperation (DSCTC) report on burden sharing, the North Atlantic Council determined that the Alliance requires a new, modern, dynamic and mobile deterrence posture. The necessary means to implement this new posture must follow. This translates to increased Allied defense spending in the right kind of equipment and force structure to ensure NATO can respond to today's evolving security challenges and threats to international stability. Ultimately, however, NATO's ability to do so will be addressed only when the political will is present for a whole-of-Alliance solution to deliver the necessary capabilities in terms of personnel and resources.



APPENDICES

NATO Enhanced Forward Presence



Map of Exercise Trident Juncture 18



The Suwalki Corridor



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