



NATO PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

DEFENCE AND SECURITY COMMITTEE (DSC)

THE ROLE OF NATO'S ARMED FORCES IN THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Draft Special Report

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091 DSC 20 E | Original: English | 18 June 2020

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Alliance reacted swiftly and effectively to do its part to mitigate the impact of the spreading coronavirus early in 2020. It continues to contribute to the fight that will lead to its ultimate defeat. To date, NATO has coordinated well over 350 missions to transport medical personnel and supplies, construct field hospitals, and furnish tens of thousands of treatment beds. Demonstrating their essential role in crisis response, Allied military forces are helping to save lives and stem the spread and impact of the deadliest pandemic in a century.

2. Over the past months the Alliance has been taking stock of valuable lessons learned in an effort to manage not only a potential second wave of the virus across Allied and partner populations, but also to increase broader Allied readiness to counter future pandemics. Success will require a whole of Alliance effort, wherein Allies must do their part to increase their own resilience, as well as that of partners. Cooperative efforts with other international institutions are also proving essential to help mitigate the devastating and widespread impact of the pandemic.

3. NATO's COVID-19 pandemic crisis response effort, however, is not detracting from the Alliance's ability to deliver credible and effective deterrence. NATO forces remain ready. Critical missions and operations are fully manned and focused on their objectives. As NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said succinctly: "Security challenges have not diminished because of COVID-19;" as such, maintaining force readiness has been a key priority.

4. Despite the broad-based goodwill of the billions of people working together as NATO Allies and partners to find solutions to such global health problems, the COVID-19 pandemic is unfortunately being manipulated to serve the narrow strategic political goals of both Russia and China. Both states are behind concerted efforts to reshape the narrative about the COVID-19 pandemic – Russia to undermine perceptions of Alliance effectiveness at crisis response; China to shift the narrative away from the country being considered the origin of the global pandemic to the nation capable of managing global needs in times of crisis. Both Russia and China are using today's diverse and superabundant communication platforms to spread willful disinformation and lend credibility to circulating misinformation.

5. NATO is taking the steps necessary to counter Russia's dangerous and divisive disinformation campaigns and China's insidious attempt to alter the narrative on the virus's origins and spread. NATO is also working to bolster internal resilience among Allies not only to help demonstrate the effectiveness and solidarity of democratic systems in times of crisis, but also to be prepared for a potential second wave of infection, as well as other potential crises over the horizon. Throughout it all, NATO is maintaining its focus on maintaining a credible, capable, and effective defence posture, no matter what sudden shocks may occur to the international system.

II. COVID-19 BACKGROUND

6. Today's COVID-19¹ pandemic originated in China in 2019. Local government officials in the city of Wuhan in Hubei Province first reported hospitals treating dozens of patients for a rare form pneumonia with an unknown cause on 31 December 2019 (Hernandez and Ramzy, 2020).

7. While the majority of cases exhibit mild symptoms, some progress to acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS), which can precipitate, among other potentially fatal illnesses, multi-

¹ The coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) is caused when an individual is infected by severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2).

organ failure and septic shock, resulting in death. There are currently no vaccines or antiviral treatments available for COVID-19. At the time of drafting, the number of diagnosed and reported cases worldwide was over 7 million, with the actual number likely much higher, and the number of deaths close to 400,000 – the numbers will certainly keep rising for the short to medium-term.

8. While the exact epidemiology of the disease continues to be understood, it is clear the COVID-19 pandemic is having a seismic impact at all levels across the globe. Efforts to contain the virus have triggered nationwide lockdowns, elicited unprecedented economic upheaval, and spawned dangerous disinformation campaigns. Despite often draconian policies, [global infections](#) continue to rise.

III. MILITARY READINESS AND CRISIS RESPONSE

9. As the COVID-19 pandemic turned into a global crisis situation, military forces around the world were among the first to respond. This is not surprising given the knack militaries have for executing large-scale logistical operations on command. Military training fine tunes command and control of lots of personnel and machinery that needs to interoperate, move quickly, and focus on achieving an assigned objective. Militaries train to operate in less than ideal conditions, making their forces flexible and innovative. Due to their experience in war and crisis response, military forces are also often repositories of critical medical supplies. All of these skills make militaries an ideal national resource to call upon in times of crisis.

10. Most nations across the globe have looked to their national militaries to assist civilian efforts to manage the COVID-19 crisis in some form or other. The range of tasks militaries are being asked to perform is wide – from assistance with law and order during lockdown and closed borders to widespread disinfection efforts, as well as even guaranteeing food and water supply in some cases. By far the most common use of military forces during the COVID-19 crisis has been to assist with crisis response logistics – from moving large amount of critical medical supplies and personnel to medical triage efforts, such as the rapid construction of field hospitals, treatment bed provision, and patient offloading. Militaries are now key support to civilian healthcare efforts, as well as goodwill ambassadors of the state to provide social welfare and humanitarian assistance.

11. Military ingenuity is already being tapped across the globe as states look to their armed forces to invent and produce new forms of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), new diagnostic means to identify the presence and spread of disease, as well as improve existing treatment mechanisms. Military planners are also being asked to help with local and national planning to ensure efficient supply chains to manage the flow of medical equipment and personnel, as well as patients.

12. Efforts by the Italian, Spanish, French, German, and US military are representative of common shared military tasks to help with national response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Italian and Spanish armed forces have been assisting with a similar range of tasks – emergency transport of supplies and personnel, EU repatriation efforts, public space disinfection, lockdown enforcement, border control and food and water distribution (De Cuia, 2020; Infodefensa, 2020). France has launched *Opération Résilience* to enable air, land, and sea forces to assist with the full range of civilian response efforts to the pandemic not only in Metropolitan France, but also out in French territories and dependencies across the globe from the Caribbean to the Pacific (*Ministère des armées*, 2020). Germany has deployed 15,000 soldiers to protect critical infrastructure, distribute medical supplies, establish medical hospitals; it has also flown critically ill patients in France and Italy to hospitals in Germany for treatment (Schmidt, 2020; Braw, 2020). The United States has deployed the National Guard in California, New York and Washington to deal with COVID-fighting supply logistics, as well as moved two naval medical ships to New York City and Los Angeles to offload pressure on local hospitals (Economist, 23 March 2020; Paris, 2020).

13. NATO has a long history of responding to crisis; both natural and manmade, from relatively small to large-scale. As a result, the Alliance was quick to assess the need for a coordinated use of Allied forces' knowhow for large-scale, rapid mobilisation and movement of personnel and equipment. Ready to the task at hand, a significant number of Allied forces responded to the needs of other Allies and partners quickly.

IV. ALLIED RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

A. MEASURES TAKEN TO FACILITATE EFFECTIVE CRISIS RESPONSE TO THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

14. As the coronavirus evolved into a global pandemic, governments focused on taking measures to allow for their civilian health sectors to treat the more severe cases of infection and to protect as much of their populations from contracting COVID-19 as possible. A principal initial concern was the potential for overloaded and under resourced hospitals among those Allies hardest hit by the virus. All Allies and partners were forced to quickly assess their available stocks of a range of key lifesaving equipment from ventilators for those patients faced with ARDS to the personal protective equipment needed for health professionals. It was clear that demand for resources and equipment would fluctuate across Allies as the virus took hold in scattered regions. As a result, Allies quickly came together to find a way to make sure the supply of urgently needed equipment would be where it was needed as fast and efficiently as possible.

15. As such, NATO professionals activated several key tools already available to Allies that would be applied to a large-scale crisis response. These tools deal with enabling more efficient logistics and end-to-end supply chain coordination, strategic airlift and rapid air mobility for ensuring the ability to move the quantity of supplies and personnel on time when needed, and command and control for the entire Alliance's military effort to support Allied and partner efforts during the crisis response.

B. LOGISTICS AND END-TO-END COORDINATION

16. In terms of logistics and coordination the EURO-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre (EADRCC) and the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) are essential tools available to the Alliance that are both well-honed over decades of crisis response experience.

17. The EADRCC is the Alliance's principal civil emergency response mechanism. It has a long track record of managing natural and manmade disasters and has become a key instrument coordinating relief effort between Allies and partners for over the past two decades.² The EADRCC serves as a clearing house for coordinating *requests for* and *offers of* international assistance

² The EADRCC was established in 1998 by the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) as a tool for cooperative outreach between Allies and partners on civil emergency planning, as well as for international disaster relief. The EADRCC played a key role in the coordination of humanitarian assistance to refugees of the Kosovo war. Over the last decades, the center has responded to many requests for assistance from both Allies and partners for assistance with natural disaster relief as well as the mitigation of the consequences of CBRN incidents (including terrorist attacks). The EADRCC's mandate allows for the Centre to respond to requests from all areas where the Alliance is involved militarily. In addition, countries of the Mediterranean Dialogue, Istanbul Cooperative Initiative, and partners across the globe have all been given access to the Centre. The EADRCC works closely with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which is the lead coordinator for any international disaster relief operation. For more information, see: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_52057.htm.

across a range of challenging tasks from natural and manmade disasters to crises to Article 5 response. The NSPA³ also plays an important role in the Alliance's immediate response. As NATO's life cycle management, acquisition and service provider, the NSPA is capable of making large purchases, stockpiling, and dealing with the logistics and organisation involved in the transport of key supplies.

C. STRATEGIC AIRLIFT AND RAPID MOBILITY

18. To assist with transportation efficiency, the Alliance has also activated several mission critical tools – the **Strategic Airlift Capability (SAC)**, the **Strategic Airlift International Solution (SALIS)**, and the **Rapid Air Mobility initiative**.

- Via the **SAC** programme 10 NATO Allies and two partner countries jointly own and operate three C-17 Globemaster heavy cargo aircraft.⁴ Nations participating in the programme share costs and, as a result, flying hours of the aircraft, which are principally operated out of Pápa Air base in Hungary.
- The **SALIS** programme provides a multinational consortium of participants⁵ access to five Antonov AN-124-100 cargo transport aircraft. Use of the SALIS programme is coordinated on a day-to-day basis by the Strategic Airlift Coordination Cell co-located at the **Movement Coordination Centre Europe (MCCE)**⁶ based in Eindhoven, the Netherlands.
- The **Rapid Air Mobility** process was put in place in 2018 to support the NATO's focus on increased force readiness. Any aircraft designated by SHAPE as necessary for crisis deployment is given a special call sign ("OAN") that allows for expedited flight planning and air space handling. The North Atlantic Council activated the Rapid Air Mobility initiative on 31 March 2020 for the first time to support Allied military aircraft carrying supplies and personnel critical to the fight against COVID-19.

19. Since the outbreak of the pandemic, the EADRCC has been working 24/7 to connect those countries requesting support with those able to provide it. The EADRCC network, supported by the Alliance's unique strategic airlift capabilities and the MCCE, made an immediate impact early in the crisis – coordinating requests from UN OCHA and 15 NATO and partner countries and counting (NATO, 25 May 2020). To date, the logistics support of the NSPA has permitted 12 Allies the necessary economies of scale to acquire large quantities of relief supplies. The agency is also taking the lead on innovative approaches to Allied response to the COVID-19 crisis, such as assistance with the production and donation of 3D printed medical supplies (NATO, 25 May 2020). All Allies are stepping up to do what they can to help those nations at their critical moments of need – and their ability to help one another is being facilitated by their armed forces.

³ For more information on the NSPA, go to <https://www.nspa.nato.int/en/index.htm>.

⁴ The ten Allies participating in the SAC programme are Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, The Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovenia, and the United States. Finland and Sweden are the two partner nations.

⁵ The consortium consists of nine NATO Allies: Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, Germany, Hungary, Norway, Poland, Slovakia, and Slovenia.

⁶ The MCCE coordinates the efficient use of airlift, sealift, and land movement assets of armed forces to permit for coordinated, efficient, and non-duplicated use of military forces. The Centre works with both NATO Allies and the EU.

D. MISSION CRITICAL INTER-ALLIED SOLIDARITY⁷

20. After an extraordinary meeting of NATO Foreign Ministers⁸ on 2 April to review the Alliance's response to the COVID-19 crisis, NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), General Tod D. Wolters, was tasked to coordinate military efforts to ensure an effective and efficient response. General Wolters delivered his initial progress report at an extraordinary meeting of NATO defence ministers on 15 April 2020: The combination of NATO's crisis response tools, particularly NATO's strategic airlift capabilities, were reported to be moving "hundreds of tons of urgently needed equipment [...] quickly and efficiently" (NATO, 15 April 2020(a)). The Secretary General's remarks at the press conference following the meeting made clear the degree to which the Alliance had proven its crisis response *bona fides*: Allied military forces had already flown over 100 missions supporting the provision of medical personnel and supplies to Allies and partners; including over 25 field hospitals, 25,000 treatment beds, and 4,000 military medical personnel to support civilian efforts (NATO, 15 April 2020(b)). By the end of May, these had essentially quadrupled – to 350 missions, 100 field hospitals, and other assistance measures (NATO, 25 May 2020).

21. The use of military capabilities and logistics has delivered critical assistance to the well over one billion people of Allied and partner nations in need. It has saved lives and dampened the spread of the virus. In parallel, Allied forces have seen to the seamless continuity of essential defence and security missions and tasks. The following are some examples of the assistance delivered by military forces since the beginning of the pandemic.

22. **Turkey** fielded early requests for assistance in the Western Balkans, a region that has been particularly hard hit by the pandemic: North Macedonia, Montenegro, and Bosnia and Herzegovina were among the first to receive Turkish supplies of PPE and test kits. In a clear demonstration of solidarity with their new Ally, many other Allies also moved quickly to help North Macedonia: **Hungary** and **Slovenia** donated PPE; in addition to direct financial aid, Norway donated a field hospital permitting Skopje to double the amount of beds available for infectious disease reaction; and, the **United States** government provided an emergency assistance fund of \$1.1 million.

23. **Estonia**, the **Czech Republic**, **Lithuania**, **Luxembourg**, **Norway**, **Slovakia**, and Turkey all responded quickly to the EADRCC requests from both Italy and Spain for PPE and other kinds of supplies needed to fight the spread of COVID-19 when those countries were especially hard hit. **The Netherlands**, Turkey, and the United States have been essential contributors to the Montenegrin government's fight against the spread of the virus as well.

24. The Turkish Air Force sent two A-400M military transport aircraft to the United States over several days in late April to deliver essential medical supplies to the United States. **Poland** also sent a medical mission to the United States from Warsaw's Military Institute of Medicine to work with hospitals in Chicago to assist with the fight against COVID-19, and to exchange lessons learned and best practices. The same institute had previously worked with Italian doctors in Lombardy, and with Slovenian doctors in Ljubljana.

⁷ The following examples of Allied and partner solidarity are drawn from the NATO's newsfeed on the Alliance's COVID-19 response. More details on the wide-ranging, significant, and timely assistance delivered by Allies to one another and to partners can be found here: <https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/174592.htm>,

⁸ The ministers were joined by partners Finland and Sweden, as well as the EU High Representative, Josep Borrell.

E. CRITICAL EADRCC SUPPORT TO PARTNERS

25. EADRCC requests have also been coming in from partners hard-pressed to find the means to handle the challenge of the pandemic on their own. The following are just a few examples of the significant assistance efforts by Allies to partners:

- **Afghanistan:** Forces supporting NATO's *Resolute Support* Mission in Afghanistan organized critical donations of PPE to units of the Afghan Army and National Police in volatile and difficult to access regions such as Helmand, Nimroz, Panjshir, Parwan, and Nuristan provinces.
- **Bosnia and Herzegovina:** Hungary and Slovenia responded early to BiH assistance requests to deal with COVID-19 challenges; Hungary supplied emergency PPE, while Slovenia oversaw its own donation of tents and field beds. Both the United States and Turkey also donated much needed medical equipment.
- **Kosovo:** US-led KFOR Regional Command East facilitated the delivery of critical medical supplies to local mayors in Mitrovica North and South in early April. Beyond the supply of medical equipment, the Italian-led Multinational Specialized Unit deployed with NATO's KFOR mission coordinates, along with local charities and the Red Cross of Kosovo, direct food and clothing assistance to 14 Kosovo municipalities on a weekly basis, which have an immediate and much needed impact on the ground during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has stretched the resources of the government in Pristina.
- **Republic of Moldova:** Hungary donated significant supplies of PPE to the Moldovan authorities. The United States, meanwhile, added a critical delivery of ventilators to a shipment of PPE to Moldova.

F. PREPARING FOR THE SECOND WAVE

26. The extraordinary meetings of the foreign and defence ministers raised the issue of Alliance readiness for a potential re-emergence, or 'second wave', of the virus in the coming months or year. The challenges of a second wave of the virus are many, but the first steps to increasing preparedness levels focus on increased societal resilience across the Alliance. NATO institutions are working with Allies to think together about how to best preposition the types and volume of equipment that would be needed in the instance of a resurgence. Allies are also thinking about how to have the appropriate NATO-wide systems in place for an even faster, more coordinated response. One key instrument in thinking about how to handle the second wave (as well as other potential future pandemics) is the vast scientific knowhow available within the Alliance.

27. NATO has the largest pool of defence scientists in the world. The Alliance activated this network of over 6,000 specialists with a distinct challenge from the NATO Chief Scientist, Dr. Bryan Wells, to find innovative solutions to virus detection, improved situational awareness, decontamination, resilience, and the post-COVID-19 future. The Chief Scientist will work to match the capabilities of NATO Allies, partners, and staff to find the ways and means to turn proposals into actionable tools to fight today's and tomorrow's potential future pandemics. The NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme has already begun to bear fruit, as a Czech-Serbian collaborative effort has developed new protective equipment, and Italian and Swiss scientists are developing faster means of testing for COVID-19 (NATO, 25 May 2020). Other Allies' armed forces are working on vaccination development and testing; for example, the UK's Defence Science and Technology Laboratory is working on vaccine testing and disease spread mapping, and the United States Army is collaborating with the private sector on 24 vaccine candidates (Economist, 23 March 2020).

G. CHINA AND RUSSIA – COVID MILITARY DIPLOMACY

28. At the peak of the virus-related challenges there, China sent over 10,000 military personnel into Hubei province. In Wuhan, control of medical and essential supplies was handed entirely to the PLA. Outside of domestic needs, China has also been using its military across the globe to shuttle medical supplies to every continent. Chinese supplies have been arriving in great volume across Europe – particularly aimed at countries that may already be disenchanted with Euro-Atlantic institutional response to the crisis, or in region's in which China sees potential for future strategic investment.

29. China jumped at the occasion to be seen as lending a helping hand to Europe almost as soon as it was clear the region would be the hardest hit early in the crisis. The Chinese military was instrumentalised by the Communist Party to be the means by which China would be able to bolster its image, both abroad and at home, after dangerously mishandling information about the outbreak of the disease in Wuhan. The Chinese delay directly impacted nations' ability to prepare and prevent the worst impact of the virus, dramatically escalating the costs of the current crisis both in terms of lives and economies (Erlanger, 2020). Chinese 'mask diplomacy', as some have referred to it, has been seen as a deliberate attempt to revise the narrative about the origin of the virus and the Communist Party's (mis)handling of it.

30. China's 'mask diplomacy' consists of planes full of medical staff, ventilators, and, of course, masks and other protective equipment – and planeloads have been landing all over Europe. On 13 March 2020, for example, a Chinese medical team and 30 tons worth of masks and respirators in boxes adorned with the Chinese flag landed in Rome (Brattberg and Le Corre, 2020). Greece, Belgium, the Czech Republic, France, and (especially) Serbia have all been key targets of Chinese largesse in terms of medical supplies and knowhow during the crisis. In parallel, countries currently with open bids for 5G contracts, such as Spain, Italy, Poland, and the Netherlands⁹ have also been recipients of masks from Huawei (Brattberg and Le Corre, 2020). The list goes on.

31. Russia has also been using its military to engage in a form of pandemic era diplomacy. On 22 March 2020, Russia began sending a large supply of medical equipment and personnel to Italy – the Russian military transport vehicles drove across Italy to reach contaminated areas with Russian flags waving and strewn with banners reading "From Russia with Love" (Economist, 23 March 2020). Russian efforts in Europe have also been clearly targeted directly at states it believes are politically vulnerable to new Russian influence. For example, Russian aid to Serbia during the crisis has been significant – in addition to medical equipment and personnel, Russian military personnel have also been deployed to assist with Serbian counter-pandemic efforts. Russian troops have assisted Serbian military with disinfecting public spaces and organising treatment centers (Goble, 2020).

32. Despite the fact that China and Russia remain very obscurantist regarding their military forces, increasing evidence is coming to light about the impact the virus is having on their forces. Joint service exercising in the People's Liberation Army (PLA) were put on hold during peak outbreak in China (Nouwens, 2020). Russia finally reported COVID-19 among its military ranks only recently, but it is likely the disease was present well before, and Moscow delayed its May 9 military parade due to COVID-19 concerns – one Russian source noted that at least 376 Russian

⁹ The Netherlands, Spain, and Turkey all later rejected the majority of the masks, as well as other products, they received from China due to the equipment being substandard. These countries' complaints, as well as others, have raised doubts about the quality of the supplies China is sending. See, for example, Michael Peel, et. al., "Countries Reject China Pandemic Product Batches," The Financial Times, 29 March 2020. <https://www.ft.com/content/f3435779-a706-45c7-a7e2-43efbdd7777b>

cadets had tested positive to the virus after participating in rehearsals for the Victory Day parade in Moscow's Red Square (Moscow Times, 2020). Both Russian and Chinese defence industries have been slowed due to workers getting sick, the related temporary shuttering, or at least partial shuttering, of factories has disrupted supply chains (Boulegue, 2020; Nouwens, 2020).

V. FORCE READINESS: IMPACT ON OPERATIONS AND MISSIONS

33. The COVID-19 crisis has the potential to impact all military forces – it has clearly reached into some Allied forces, as made evident by the highly publicised outbreaks on both the French and US aircraft carriers – the *Charles de Gaulle* and the USS *Theodore Roosevelt*. Despite these incidents, Allied forces are clearly demonstrating continued readiness. As is made clear by NATO and international reporting, Allied operations, missions, and tasks have not suffered as a result of the pandemic. As Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg stated clearly at the press conference after the extraordinary meeting of defence ministers on 15 April 2020: “Our operational readiness remains undiminished, and our forces remain ready, vigilant, and prepared to respond to any threat” (NATO, 15 April 2020(b)).

34. The Alliance has taken effective measures to ensure Allied forces are protected from the virus. Allies have been working to increase the testing capacity for all deployed NATO forces on missions and operations. For example, the NSPA recently facilitated the delivery of GeneXpert and BioFire machines, as well the TaqPath testing kits, to allow medical experts within NATO's *Resolute Support* Mission in Afghanistan (Air Force Technology, 2020). The arrival of the machines allows for onsite testing to identify infections quickly and take measures necessary to contain the spread of the virus among the forces. The new equipment initiative is funded by the United States, Norway, and Australia. Similar measures have been taken at other operations and missions, from Kosovo to Iraq. NATO Allies are even assisting parallel missions, for example, a Slovenian medical unit has been taking the lead testing EUFOR personnel in Camp Butmir in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NATO, 28 April 2020).

35. NATO's multinational battlegroups, Air policing missions, and maritime deployments also remain undiminished. In fact, rather than experiencing a reduced capacity to act in the era of the pandemic, NATO's ongoing adaptations of the past few years have delivered a noticeable increase in available forces and equipment. As a result of these efforts, NATO forces maintain a higher level of readiness today than they did just two years ago.

36. Since Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO has implemented the biggest collective defence overhaul and reinforcement in over a generation: Alliance posture from the Baltic to the Black Sea is stronger; collective action is increasing the ability for transatlantic force and equipment movement; European political and security cooperation is allowing for greater mobility of NATO forces from West to East; Command and control structures are being modernised; and, NATO is focused on increased resilience to cyber and hybrid threats.

37. Allies have also delivered on the ambitious Readiness Initiative declared at the 2018 Brussels Summit of Heads of State and Government, which challenged Allies to maintain 30 battalions, 30 air squadrons, and 30 naval combat vessels ready to use in 30 days, if needed. The Readiness Initiative comes on top of a series of steps taken to build out the Alliance's force readiness and response capacity. For example, since 2014, NATO has tripled the size of the NATO Response Force to 40,000 and outfitted it with a 5,000-strong high-readiness spearhead force (VJTF). It has also deployed four multinational battle groups to the Baltic States and Poland and built a forward presence in the Black Sea.

VI. INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION – NATO-EU

38. As noted above, NATO has been inclusive in its efforts to work with partners and other international organisations in its efforts to overcome the destructive impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. While, for example, the EARDCC coordinates with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs to deliver humanitarian aid to areas its forces are operating, far more efforts to coordinate policies and align tasks is happening between NATO and the EU.

39. In both extraordinary meetings of foreign and defence ministers, NATO invited EU High Representative/Vice-President Josep Borrell to attend their meetings. The understanding is that both the EU and NATO have clear common cause to work together to stop the spread of the virus and mitigate its impacts. There have been two key issues upon which NATO and EU officials have been concentrating their efforts; **military mobility** and **countering disinformation**.

A. MILITARY MOBILITY

40. Focusing on increasing military mobility has been a key priority for the Alliance over the past several years. Dated infrastructure, antiquated laws and bureaucratic procedures continue to impede the Alliance's ability to move forces quickly across Europe in peacetime, crisis, or conflict. The topic continues to be one of mutual concern between the organisations; and it was the main focus of the meeting between NATO Secretary General and EU defence ministers when they met in March. Both organisations understand the critical role they each play in achieving the goal of a region outfitted with infrastructure and laws that would allow for the quick movement of forces to any corner of their territory if necessary.

41. A 5-19 June planned exercise in Poland, *Allied Spirit*, will be one of several key exercises testing Allied military mobility this year and next year. The exercise falls in line with a common theme of such mobility testing exercises – moving Allied forces from Germany to potential flashpoints along NATO's eastern flank with challenging terrain in between, particularly a series of large rivers or marshlands to cross (Sprenger, 2020). As former Commander, United States Army Europe Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges¹⁰ (retired) noted recently, NATO Allies certainly have the ability to build ad hoc bridges for heavy vehicle passage, there just is not enough equipment available to allow for the movement of the necessary volume of forces at the speeds necessary (Sprenger, 2020).

42. Over the past months, various iterations of the potential new EU budget have surfaced – proposals by the Commission, the Finnish Presidency, Council President Michel, as well as the Commission's technical document. A key figure that has ridden up and down with the various proposals is the defence budget. While the February technical document had actually brought the amount earmarked for military mobility down from an initial high of 6.5 billion Euro to zero, the most recent Commission proposal of 27 May 2020 allocates 29.1 billion Euro to 'Resilience, Defence, and Security' over the next seven years – in this the European Defence Budget and military mobility receive 8 and 1.5 billion Euro respectively (Brzozowski, 2020). Most experts believe 1.5 billion Euros is far below what is necessary to complete the task (Brzozowski, 2020).

43. Clearly, the issue will continue to evolve as European officials hammer out a final budget for the next 7-year cycle in the coming months.

¹⁰ LTG (Ret.) General Hodges currently holds the Pershing Chair in Strategic Studies at the Center for European Policy Analysis.

B. COUNTERING DISINFORMATION – RUSSIAN AND CHINESE CAMPAIGNS

44. The COVID-19 pandemic is the first major global health event in which digital platforms are playing a critical role in the dissemination of information about the spread and impact of the disease. The convergence of widespread and global communications platforms and rising great power geopolitical strategic competition has created a wash of willful disinformation about COVID 19. Both NATO and the European Union have been key targets of disinformation broadly pushing an anti-Western agenda. Russia and China, and, to some extent, Iran, have been driving these disinformation campaigns.

45. Disinformation campaigns have clouded the truthful narrative surrounding the provenance, impact, and efforts to mitigate the damage done by the spread of the pandemic. As evidenced by the stream of press conferences and direct media interviews since the beginning of the pandemic, NATO international staff, often the Secretary General himself, work to provide a reliable, consistent, and fact-based source of information about any particular aspect of the disease's impact upon Allies or the Alliance's broader efforts to assist with the efforts to dampen its effects and eventually defeat the disease. As Secretary-General Stoltenberg said: "The free and independent press is the best way to counter propaganda and disinformation;" journalists ask the challenging questions, verify sources, and have the reputable platforms to disseminate information to the broader public (NATO, 1 April 2020). As such, the Alliance's various bodies should be considered a clearinghouse of fact-based information.

46. NATO is also working to coordinate its efforts with the European Union to identify, monitor and expose disinformation. While not all disinformation merits response, as that may conversely give undesirable attention and false credibility to a non-Ally false narrative, NATO makes a concerted effort to counter disinformation by sharing information and insight with Allies and partners.

47. Russian and Chinese disinformation is not altogether the same, though the outcomes each is hoping to achieve converge around the notion that anything done to weaken or tarnish the image of the United States, NATO, or the EU is a benefit to China and Russia. Both disinformation campaigns make it clear that Russia and China would like to promote their countries' handling of the health crisis as more effective, and, in parallel, to denigrate the deficient Western response, which ultimately stems from the inherent failures of democratic systems today. Essentially Russia and China are trying to tell Allied populations and the world: "The Euro-Atlantic Institutions are failing you, while Russia and China do the real work – our governance models keep you and the world safer."

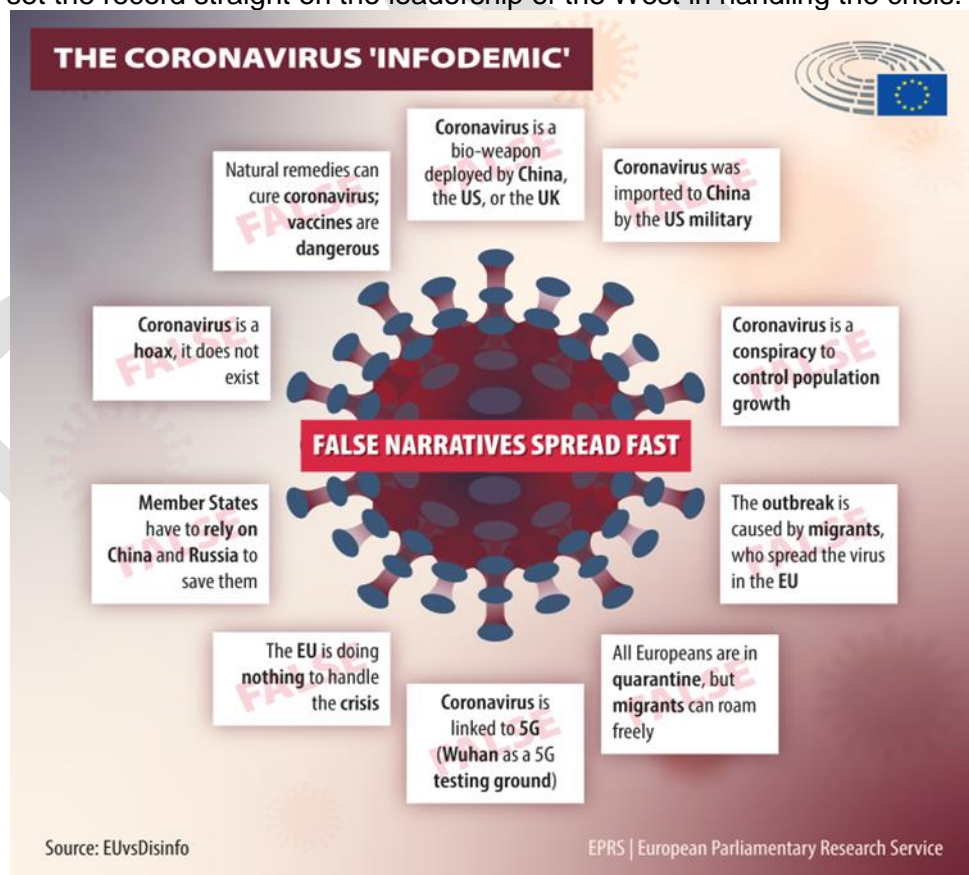
48. Russia has been promulgating essentially five main false narratives about NATO and COVID-19: The COVID-19 pandemic will prove to be the fatal blow to the Alliance; NATO is failing its member states in their time of need; COVID-19 is in fact a NATO-created bioweapon; NATO's increased and widespread exercising is spreading the virus; and, NATO's campaign to increase defence spending has come at the cost of healthcare investments (NATO, April 2020). These messages centre on Alliance malfeasance and ineffectiveness toward not only their populations, but the outside world as well.

49. NATO forces have also been a direct target of Russian disinformation during the pandemic. The most evident being a fake letter, allegedly from the NATO Secretary General, sent in April to the Lithuanian Defence Minister, Raimundas Karoblis, announcing the intended withdrawal of NATO's multinational battalion from Lithuania. As the Secretary General noted at the time, the fake letter "demonstrates that we have seen state and non-state actors trying to utilise the coronavirus, the COVID-19 crisis, to spread disinformation to create confusion and to undermine the resolve and the unity of NATO Allies" (LRT, 2020).

50. China's disinformation campaign is slightly different in focus and intent. As noted above, Beijing is focused on shifting the narrative away from China being considered the origin of the global pandemic to the nation capable of managing global needs in times of crisis. As several analysts have underscored, China's use of disinformation and propaganda has a three-fold purpose: first, as noted above, to recreate the narrative about the origin of the virus and obscure the fact that the Communist Party's initial reaction was to deny its existence; second, to exploit the slow start of the West to counter the virus to gain political and economic leverage with countries it is able to succor; and, demonstrate that China is a responsible and benevolent rising hegemon (Bratteberg and Le Corre, 2020).

51. Central messaging of China's propaganda campaign toward NATO Allies is relatively straightforward and, currently, often a repeated one: *China is a strong global leader, while the United States is a weak Ally*. This message was central to the recent visit of the DSCFC to China in June 2019 (NATO PA, 2019). The United States State Department recently reported there is a level of coordination between Russia, China, and even Iran to use the pandemic as a means to amplify their anti-US and, by extension, anti-Western propaganda and disinformation campaigns – the anti-Western messaging is produced and promoted by either state-run media outlets directly, or by state-supported media outlets (Swan, 2020).

52. The EU has been combatting the false information about the pandemic via a creative, and, seemingly effective central hub for information on COVID-19 disinformation, *EUvsDISINFO*. Some of the key narratives trending on social media platforms are identified below in the chart from a recent report by the European Parliamentary Research Service. The Commission has developed teaching tools and a website to help European populations differentiate between fact and fiction – and to help set the record straight on the leadership of the West in handling the crisis.



Source: Naja Bentzen, "COVID-19 Foreign Influence Campaigns: Europe and the Global Battle of Narratives," European Parliamentary Research Service, 6 April 2020

53. The European Union has announced a major 2.4 trillion Euro recovery plan to target a sound recovery across all sectors – citing a will to ‘repair and prepare for the next generation’ (EC, 27 May 2020). The EU has also been quite generous with regional partners and aspiring members. For example, in the Western Balkans, the EU announced a 3.3 billion Euros aid package to help the region’s needs; the biggest tranche of the aid was allocated to Bosnia and Herzegovina (EC, 2020). On 4 June 2020 the EU also announced a pledged 300 million Euro to Gavi, the Vaccine Alliance, for the period of 2021-5, which will help immunise children around the world and finance vaccination stockpiles for future prevention measures (EC, 4 June 2020).

VII. MAINTAINING FOCUS ON LONG-TERM RESILIENCE AND BURDEN SHARING

54. Attention to maintaining long-term resilience is literally written into NATO’s DNA. Article 3 of the Washington Treaty states: “In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack” (NATO, 2019). Article 3 is logically complimentary to Article 5’s collective defence provision, as Allies need to be ready to provide the Alliance the means it needs to fulfill its core tasks of collective defence, crisis response, and cooperative security. By extension, therefore, member state investment in their own national resilience is in itself a core task.

55. Resilience can mean many things and apply to different levels of power – an Ally can bolster their military means for self-defence, and, thereby, be ‘strong’ link in the chain of 30 Allies: The same Ally, in the absence of the ability for large-scale military investment, can find the means to combine its economic, civilian, and private sector knowhow to develop capabilities NATO may need in more niche areas such as, for example, cyber security. Ideally, baseline investments will consider a range of crises or security challenges which may test an Ally’s resilience and, identifying those risks, prepare for them accordingly.

56. Civil planning and infrastructural investments to deal with national and Alliance level crises fell off significantly in the wake of the Cold War (Roepke and Thankey, 2019). The 2016 Warsaw Summit, however, revisited the issue and reaffirmed seven baseline requirements for Allies to meet: continuity of government, energy supply resilience, population movement, water and food supply guarantees, ability to handle mass casualties, civilian communication systems resiliency, and transport system sustainability. Defence ministers at their extraordinary meeting on 15 April agreed that Allies need to review and update Allies’ requirements for civil preparedness given the challenges various Allies faced with the onset of the pandemic, which proved a significant test of Allies’ national resilience.

57. While the EADRCC is the mechanism that is focused on consequence management, there is a large effort and body of work focused on enhancing resilience through civil preparedness. NATO, through the Civil Emergency Planning Committee (CEPC), has recently developed two focused assessments on the impact of the COVID-19 outbreak on Alliance resilience and enablement and on the issues and measures national authorities are considering for the recovery from the current phase of the COVID-19 crisis. The assessments also focus on preparation for possible subsequent waves of virus outbreak. The CEPC supports national authorities to enhance resilience through civil preparedness over time, in line with Art. 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty and the Commitment made by Heads of State and Government at the 2016 Warsaw Summit. Over the last five years, and in support of national authorities, Allies through CEPC, have developed over 500 pages of guidelines and policy across the seven baseline areas to facilitate their preparedness in an all-hazards approach. However, this will need to be a continuous, whole-of-government effort, as indicated also in the Secretary Generals’ reflection process on ‘#NATO2030’.

58. In light of the recent challenges related to the COVID-19 pandemic, Allied focus on prepositioned stocks has been a key focus of planning for a second wave or potential future pandemics. US Ambassador to NATO, Kay Bailey Hutchison, noted recently that Allies had been discussing making warehouse facilities available to stock non-perishable equipment, such as that of which some Allies were short of during the recent crisis (Tigner, 2020). NATO officials have also announced that Allies will establish a Pandemic Response Trust Fund to assist Allies and partners in need (NATO, 16 June 2020).

59. In the aftermath of the pandemic the consensus among ministers and defence officials is that Allies' critical infrastructure will need increased attention in the post-pandemic economic environment, as it will be exposed to potential predator acquisition strategies by China. Attention to Chinese strategic investments has been growing in recent years as China has consolidated its grip on a range of port, road, and rail infrastructures as well as energy suppliers across Europe – most often cited are acquisitions by Chinese government-owned shipping power COSCO, which has controlling or significant minority stakes in port infrastructure in Greece, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Spain (Schultz, 2020). The highest profile, however, has been concern about Chinese telecommunications giant Huawei dominating 5G networks and the challenge this may pose to the security of Allied communications.

60. Allied leaders are particularly concerned about increased vulnerability of strategic state assets in the predicted economic downturn post-corona. Critical infrastructure in Allied member states is essential to maintaining resilience, not only for continuity of governance and energy supply, but also for the means of production to find a way out of a crisis – something that was made clear by the initial shortage of masks and other PPE, which, Allies discovered is principally made in China today. As the NATO Secretary General stated after the meeting with defence ministers, “[the] geopolitical effects of the pandemic could be significant” if economic challenges make “some Allies more vulnerable for situations where critical infrastructure can be sold out” (NATO, 2020(b)).

A. BURDEN SHARING AND THE CORONAVIRUS/POST-CORONAVIRUS ERA

61. There are increasing questions in policy circles and media about whether or not NATO will relax its defence spending expectations in the wake of the Coronavirus. When dealing with the substantial economic fallout, the concern goes, how will member states be able to still meet the Alliance's expectations agreed upon at the 2014 Wales Summit – 2% GDP dedicated to defence spending, 20% of which being allocated to new equipment purchases. The current consensus is that not only will the defence investment pledge remain but renewed Allied focus on resilience will be a means to diversify and further strengthen their commitment to the Alliance's future defence and security posture.

62. It is clear NATO's defence capabilities have proven their worth during the health crisis; Allied forces' actions have delivered just-in-time surge capacity to national health infrastructures that were initially overwhelmed by the crisis. As this draft report clearly demonstrates, military personnel have been key to assisting a range of vital civilian response tasks, from medical care to law enforcement to public service provision, such as disinfection efforts to guaranteeing water and food supply. Further, as the pandemic has played out over the last several months, it has become clear that attention to Allied defence and deterrence posture is more important than ever as international security challenges not only continue to exist, but it is clear they continue to become more complex challenging.

B. INTERNATIONAL DEFENCE AND SECURITY CHALLENGES CONTINUE DESPITE THE PANDEMIC

63. In the months since the outbreak of the pandemic, great power security competition has continued. China and Russia have been probing in regions across the world to test limits and attempt to expand their interests. Iran and North Korea have increased activities related to their nuclear programmes, and non-state armed groups continue to sow unrest with their violent terrorist tactics in places like Afghanistan, across the Middle East and the Sahel.

64. Russia has used the time to test NATO forces readiness on multiple occasions, and to demonstrate new conventional and hybrid capabilities. Russia has conducted large-scale snap exercises, and continued with air, land, and sea brinkmanship with its forces along NATO's eastern flank and beyond.

65. NATO's air policing mission in the Baltic Sea witnessed a noticeable uptick in the number of scrambles necessary to observe questionable Russian flight patterns near NATO air space. For example, in the Baltic in April, Polish and Danish jets had to escort Russian T-160 bombers, while the Belgian Air Force, on multiple occasions, intercepted several different Russian fighter jets close to US Naval vessels. NATO jets were forced to intercept Russian jets three times between 28--29 April alone (Peterson, 2020). Reckless flying by Russian military aircraft has also had to be monitored in the Mediterranean and Black Seas (Sanger, et. al, 2 June 2020).

66. In a demonstration of its new capabilities, Russia also tested an anti-satellite weapon system. The test of the direct-ascent anti-satellite missile followed the on-orbit test maneuvers of two Russian satellites exhibiting space weaponry characteristics, according to experts (Gohd, 2020). Russia's new space assets and testing is clearly a signal to the NATO Allies that Moscow is capable of disrupting vital communication systems, such as GPS or Galileo, which are essential not only for military forces ability to operate, but also vital for everyday functioning of basic economic and civilian needs.

67. Russia also continues to interfere in the Syrian civil war and is decidedly increasing its efforts to help the offensive of Libya's eastern-based military leader Khalifa Haftar against Tripoli. It was reported in early May that Russia was working with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to transfer militia fighters and equipment from the Syrian battlespace to Libya (Pamuk, 2020). A UN report confirmed that between 800 to 1,200 Russian mercenaries from the Wagner Group are supporting Haftar's ranks (RFE/RL, 8 May 2020). At the end of May, Russia sent an additional 14 fighter jets to Haftar's operation (Sanger, et. al, 2020).

68. All of these challenges and many more, underscore the importance of maintaining focus on defence and deterrence, as, despite the coronavirus crisis, other problems do not just go away.

VIII. INTERIM CONCLUSIONS FOR NATO PARLIAMENTARIANS

69. The COVID-19 pandemic is clearly a significant shock to the international system. Management of the epidemiology of the disease will have profound long-term economic, political, and security consequences. Efforts to mitigate the impact of the disease and to find the means for its ultimate defeat are crucial and require a global effort. NATO Allies and their partners are working together tirelessly to rise to this unprecedented challenge.

70. As demonstrated in this draft report, Allies have stepped up to the challenge of the coronavirus pandemic. Allied forces have been crucial force multipliers to the heroic civilian efforts to stop the spread of the virus and mitigate its impact. Established practices and well-honed logistical networks are allowing for the rapid movement of necessary medical equipment and

personnel when and where needed. Allied forces are performing a range of vital tasks from assistance with law enforcement and border control to disinfection efforts to assisting with patient care and offloading.

71. Allied response to the COVID-19 pandemic demonstrates NATO's ability for dynamic response in a crisis. Crisis response is one of NATO's three core tasks, along with collective defence and cooperative security. Recent Alliance adaptation, increased investments, and decades of critical experience allow for NATO Allies to deliver on all three simultaneously – the current focus on crisis response does not diminish the Alliance's ability to deliver on its collective defence responsibilities.

72. In addition to Allied forces' superlative crisis response, they remain focused on the myriad missions, operations and tasks. The Alliance is fit for purpose for the challenges of today and is constantly innovating to adapt to those of tomorrow. Still, there are plenty of initial lessons learned from the early months of the crisis.

73. **Allies must work together to project the strength of our democratic systems as the most effective means of meeting our population's interests.** Continuing to strengthen Allied democracies is fundamental to the functioning of the Alliance. Not only is democracy a founding idea of the Alliance, written into the preamble of the Washington Treaty, but it also has imbued the spirit of the Alliance's work for over 70 years now. Strong, democratic Allies are also vital for the future, as the 21st century's great power rivalries will be about championing divergent governance models as a way of determining future norms of cooperation and action – the authoritarian, state-led capitalist models of Beijing and Moscow have clearly decided to pit their systems against the Western model of democracy, which supports freedom of the individual, trade, and the open exchange of ideas.

74. **Increased self-sufficiency is necessary going forward, not only for individual Allies but among Allies** – inter-Allied efforts can significantly reduce dependence on external suppliers of goods and services that may be necessary for the next crisis. Such renewed domestic attention will likely help bring in the investment necessary to help protect Allied critical infrastructure from predatory investment efforts from external actors.

75. **NATO can work harder to deepen its cooperation with the EU.** Despite getting off to a wobbly start, the EU has proven it can be an effective actor to help with response to crises that have an outsized impact on the civilian sector. The EU will be an essential partner with NATO on military mobility; its investment efforts to build new, modern infrastructure and align bureaucratic policies across the union will be vital to the movement of Allied forces across Europe.

76. **NATO must find a way to be more effective in the information space to counter disinformation campaigns.** The increasing number of communication platforms are being ruthlessly exploited to send a wash of messages to confuse the truth on any given issue these days. The pandemic has seen disinformation campaigns go into overdrive. A key goal of truth dislocation by Moscow and Beijing is to undermine Allied interests and unity of purpose and understanding. Allies must not let this happen.

77. **Burden sharing remains a priority and defence investments must remain on the same upward trajectory.** This pandemic is demonstrating the diverse function set of military forces – they have been critical to effective response by Allied governments at home and among Allies and partners. At the same time, international security challenges have not diminished in the slightest; they even have likely amplified as competitors have been probing Allied readiness. This underscores the importance of continued investment in modern forces capable of maintaining a credible and effective defence and deterrence posture for all Allies.

78. Allies have been making considerable progress at reaching the Wales Defense Investment pledge – nine Allies are now investing 2% or more of their GDP on defence; and real growth in defence investment has increased for five years straight. This momentum must be maintained: collective security certainly does not come for free.

79. **Finally, the NATO PA should support and invest in the Secretary General's reflection group which will look into the ways and means for the Alliance to expand its political role.** Heretofore the Alliance has always been perceived as a small p big M political-military Alliance, this crisis has underscored the Alliance's key political role to play. In March, the Secretary General appointed 10 experts to support this work – the group will consider recommendations to reinforce Alliance unity, increase political consultation and coordination between Allies, and to strengthen NATO's political footprint.

80. The NATO Secretary General made it clear during the Joint Committee Meetings this past February that the NATO PA is a key stakeholder in this process. All NATO PA members should work to help shape and strengthen the NATO PA contribution to this process.

DRAFT

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