

PREVIEW

Permanent Deterrence: Enhancements to the US Military Presence in North Central Europe

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by General Philip Breedlove and Ambassador Alexander Vershbow

In September 2018, the Atlantic Council established a Task Force on US Force Posture in Europe to assess the adequacy of current US deployments, with a focus on North Central Europe. The Task Force is co-chaired by General Philip Breedlove, former supreme allied commander Europe, and Ambassador Alexander Vershbow, former NATO deputy secretary general. A full report will be completed in January 2019. This paper is a summary of the task force's conclusions and recommendations.

The force-posture recommendations have been approved by the two co-chairs as the appropriate response to the current and projected military and geopolitical situation in North Central Europe. All recommendations have been endorsed by the other members of the task force as steps that would strengthen the US posture in the region, in order to bolster NATO deterrence and political cohesion.

The Issue

North Central Europe has become the central point of confrontation between the West and a revisionist Russia. Under President Vladimir Putin, Russia is determined to roll back the post-Cold War settlement—to thwart US-led efforts to build a Europe whole, free, and at peace, and to undermine the rules-based order that has kept Europe secure since the end of World War II. Moscow's invasion and continued occupation of Georgian and Ukrainian territories, its military build-up in Russia's Western Military District and Kaliningrad, and its "hybrid" warfare against Western societies have heightened instability in the region, and have made collective defense and deterrence an urgent mission for the United States and NATO.

To strengthen deterrence and effectively defend against Russian aggression, the United States and NATO have taken significant steps

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since 2014 to enhance their force posture and respond to provocative Russian behavior. US efforts included rotating an armored brigade combat team (BCT) to Europe in “heel-to-toe” rotations every nine months, and prepositioning equipment for a second BCT that would deploy from the United States in a crisis. NATO efforts included deploying battalion-sized battle groups to each of the Baltic states and Poland through its enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) initiative; the United States leads the NATO eFP battalion based in northeastern Poland, near the Suwalki Corridor.

Despite these and other US and NATO efforts, the allies in North Central Europe face a formidable and evolving adversary, and it is unlikely that Russian efforts to threaten and intimidate these nations will end in the near term. The US military presence in the region is predominantly rotational, which offers both geopolitical and operational advantages and disadvantages. Looking forward, assessing whether the United States should transition to a more permanent deterrence posture in the region, one that features a mix of permanent and rotational capabilities, has become timely and urgent.

It was against this backdrop that the Republic of Poland submitted a proposal earlier this year offering \$2 billion to support a permanent US base in the country. The offer underscored Poland’s commitment to contribute to regional stability, burden sharing, and making the concept cost-effective for the US government. Still, the issue of an enhanced US presence in Europe is broader than Poland; it is fundamentally about NATO and defending all of Europe. Any decision about an enhanced US presence in Poland would have serious implications for the region, and for the Alliance as a whole.

The US Congress has expressed high interest in this Polish concept and, in the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2019, tasked the US Department of Defense with producing a report on the feasibility and advisability of establishing a more permanent presence in Poland, due March 1, 2019.

As underscored at the September 2018 summit between US President Donald Trump and Polish President Andrzej Duda, the US government is carefully considering the Polish offer and exploring concrete options. However, the discussions could significantly benefit from an independent perspective outside the US government. That is the goal of this Atlantic Council Task Force, established to consider the broader political and military implications of an enhanced US presence in Poland and the wider North Central European region.

The Need for Enhanced Deterrence

Over the past four years, the United States, together with its NATO allies, has taken important steps to bolster the level of deterrence needed to counter an increasingly aggressive Russia. As a result of the 2014 Wales Summit, the Alliance adopted the Readiness Action Plan, which called for the creation of a Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and expansion of the NATO Response Force (NRF) to increase the Alliance’s capacity to reinforce any ally under threat.

The United States simultaneously launched the European Reassurance Initiative (now called the European Deterrence Initiative), which has financed, among other things, a “heel-to-toe” rotation to Europe of an armored BCT, which exercises with allied forces from the Baltics to the Black Sea, and prepositioned equipment to fill out an additional armored BCT.

NATO’s “*existential deterrence*” created by the Wales Summit initiatives relied heavily on the existence of these relatively small spearhead units. This limited rapid-reaction capability was judged to be insufficient to deter Russian aggression, whether large-scale conventional attack or a scenario involving ambiguous “hybrid” methods, such as those Moscow demonstrated in Crimea and eastern Ukraine.

At the 2016 Warsaw Summit, the Alliance took the next step in building deterrence by agreeing to deploy four multinational NATO battle groups of about 1,200 troops in each of the Baltic states and Poland. This enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) adds a more effective element of “*deterrence by trip wire*,” making clear to Russia that any aggression would be met immediately—not just by local forces, but by forces from across the Alliance. However, while the NATO battle groups and the US rotational brigade combat team both have warfighting capabilities, they lack a comprehensive and coordinated battle plan between NATO and the United States, as well as adequate enablers—including intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets; air and missile defense; and long-range fires. A determined Russian conventional attack, especially if mounted with little warning, could defeat these forward-deployed NATO and US forces in a relatively short period of time, before reinforcements could be brought to bear. Deterrence rests on the certainty that NATO would respond to an attack quickly, because allied soldiers would be killed in the attack. Yet, concerns have grown that a quick Russian land grab might present the Alliance with a *fait accompli*, dividing the Alliance and paralyzing decision-making before reinforcements could arrive.

To ameliorate this problem, NATO sought at the 2018 Brussels Summit to shorten the period of time that it would take for substantial forces to reinforce North Central Europe in time of war. The NATO Readiness Initiative, the so-called “Four 30s” plan, would designate thirty ground battalions, thirty air squadrons, and thirty major naval combatants to be ready to deploy and engage an adversary within thirty days. Other steps were taken to bolster the NATO Command Structure and reduce mobility problems through Europe. This effort has promised to further strengthen the credibility of NATO’s deterrence and improve the defense of NATO’s eastern frontier, creating what might be called “*deterrence by rapid reinforcement*.”

Notwithstanding this progress, the Alliance’s deterrence posture could be improved further. Even after the “Four 30s” Readiness Initiative has been implemented, the thirty-day gap between an initial attack on the Alliance and the time when major reinforcements arrive would be significant. Closing this gap would rely heavily on airpower to prevent or slow advances by enemy ground forces until allied reinforcements could arrive. But, deterrence may still lack credibility. A 2018 RAND report concluded:

In the event of a ground attack on a NATO member in the Baltic region, Russia would have a substantial time-distance advantage in the initial days and weeks of its ground campaign because of its strong starting position and ability to reinforce with ground and air units from elsewhere in Russia.¹

Additional steps can, and should, be taken to reduce this thirty-day readiness gap and enhance US and NATO capacity to deter, defend, and, if necessary, retake Alliance territory.

Striking the Right Balance

The members of the task force believe that significant enhancements to the existing US presence could be undertaken, while maintaining the framework of deterrence by rapid reinforcement reaffirmed by allied leaders at their 2018 summit. A carefully calibrated mix of permanent and rotational deployments in Poland and

the wider region could bolster deterrence and reinforce Alliance cohesion, while avoiding a divisive debate on whether such deployments are consistent with the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.

In 1997, seeking to reassure Russia that NATO enlargement would not pose a military threat to it, allies agreed that “in the current and foreseeable security environment, the Alliance will carry out its collective defense and other missions by ensuring the necessary interoperability, integration, and capability for reinforcement rather than by additional permanent stationing of substantial combat forces.” The Alliance has not explicitly renounced the Founding Act, despite Russia’s repeated violations of its commitments under that agreement. Allies have deployed the eFP battlegroups and other enhancements to NATO’s deterrence posture, on the understanding that “additional permanent stationing” of forces up to the level of a brigade per country is consistent with any reasonable definition of the limits implied by “substantial combat forces.”²

With a view to maintaining the current allied consensus, the task force began by establishing a set of eight principles that should guide deployments of US forces to Eastern and North Central Europe. Then, the task force designed a set of proposed additional US deployments consistent with those principles.

Principles for Enhanced Deterrence

In considering the proposed forward deployment of additional US military forces into Eastern and North Central Europe, the United States should be guided by the following principles.

The deployment should

- enhance the United States’ and NATO’s deterrent posture for the broader region, not just for the nation hosting the US deployment, including strengthening readiness and capacity for reinforcement;
- reinforce NATO cohesion;
- promote stability with respect to Russian military deployments;

1 Scott Boston, Michael Johnson, Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, and Yvonne K. Crane, *Assessing the Conventional Force Imbalance in Europe Implications for Countering Russian Local Superiority* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2018), https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR2402.html.

2 The United States and NATO, in order to maintain flexibility, never agreed to a precise definition of “substantial combat forces” (SCF). However, during NATO deliberations on an enhanced Forward Presence in 2016, they referred to Russian proposals during negotiations in the late 1990s on the Adapted CFE Treaty as providing a reasonable benchmark. In those negotiations, Russia sought to set a limit of one army brigade per country as the definition of SCF. See William Alberque, “*Substantial Combat Forces*” in the Context of NATO-Russia Relations (Rome: NATO Defense College, 2016), <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=962>.

- be consistent with the US National Defense Strategy and its concept of “dynamic force employment;”³
- include increased naval and air deployments in the region, alongside additional ground forces and enablers;
- promote training and operational readiness of US deployed forces and interoperability with host-nation and other allied forces;
- ensure maximum operational flexibility to employ US deployed forces to other regions of the Alliance and globally;
- expand opportunities for allied burden-sharing, including multilateral deployments in the region and beyond; and
- ensure adequate host-nation support for US deployments.

In addition, US and NATO decisions should be made in a way that strengthens the foundation of shared values and interests on which the Alliance rests.

Possible Enhancements to US Force Posture in North Central Europe

The following enhancements to the current US force posture would be consistent with the eight principles articulated above. Many of the recommended enhancements would take place in Poland, because its size and geographic location make it a key staging area for most NATO efforts to defend allied territory in the three Baltic states. These enhancements would largely build on the significant US capabilities already deployed in Poland (see Appendix 1) and could be complemented by capabilities from other NATO allies.

Recommended enablers would also strengthen the ability of US forces currently deployed in Poland to defend themselves. The recommendations would not move currently deployed US forces from the territory of another NATO ally to Poland.

The package would make certain elements of the current US deployment in Poland permanent, strengthen other elements of that deployment by reinforcing the BCT deployed there with various enablers, assign another BCT on a permanent or rotational basis to Germany, reinforce the impact of US forces on defense and deterrence for the Baltic states, where US presence has been limited since the deployment of the

NATO eFP Battle Groups, and do so while maintaining NATO cohesion.

Specifically, the task force recommends the following changes.

Headquarters

- Upgrade the existing US Mission Command Element in Poznan to a US Division HQ to serve as the hub for ensuring the mobility and rapid flow of US reinforcements from Europe and CONUS to Poland and the Baltic states in time of crisis. Make the HQ a permanent deployment without dependents. Maintain close coordination between this HQ and MNC-NE (Szczecin) and MND-NE (Elblag).

Ground Forces

- Commit to maintaining a continuous rotational presence of one BCT in Poland centered at Żagań, along the Polish-German border, with some elements deploying for exercises throughout North Central Europe and, as necessary, to other regions. This might be called a “continuous rotational presence based at a permanent installation.”
 - o The US rotational armored BCT currently operates out of several training sites near Żagań. US troops are housed in Polish barracks, or sometimes in tents. The Polish government has indicated a willingness to upgrade these facilities if the United States plans to stay. With a US commitment to a continuous rotational presence of one reinforced BCT, the Polish government should undertake providing the funds needed to upgrade and expand these facilities and, more importantly, to modernize and expand associated training areas to meet US standards. The upgraded training facilities should be made available for both allied and US use.
 - o Under the European Deterrence Initiative (EDI), the United States will enlarge the runway at Powidz, build up railheads to offload equipment, build a prepositioning site to store a brigade set by 2023, create new fuel-storage sites, and build new ammunition-storage sites. As part of a package of enhancements, the United States should accelerate these plans as much as possible.

3 Dynamic force employment is an effort to prepare the US military to transition from a focus on fighting terrorist groups to a possible great-power conflict with about the same force size. It calls for greater agility, more lethality, less operational predictability, higher readiness, irregular deployments, and maximum surge capacity. See Department of Defense, *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), p. 7, <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>.

- Commit to maintaining the US lead for the NATO eFP Battle Group at Orzysz, near the Suwalki Gap, for the indefinite future. (The Battle Group currently consists of about five hundred and fifty US soldiers from an armored unit, together with troops and equipment from Croatia, Poland, Romania, and the UK.)
- Deploy a new armored BCT to Germany on a permanent or rotational basis, and deploy one battalion of that BCT to Poland and one to the Baltic states on a regular basis for training/exercises.
- Deploy some of the short-range air-defense units and rocket-artillery units now slated for stationing in Germany (to be completed by 2020) to Poland on a rotational basis.
- Station a mid-range air-defense capability in Poland to protect US forces, to train with Polish Patriot units, and to reinforce the Baltic states in a crisis.
- Station enablers such as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) and engineers in Poland on a continuous basis.

Special Operations Forces (SOF)

- Make the 10th Special Forces Group near Kraków a permanent platform for training Polish SOF, and expand the group to support US SOF training in the Baltic states in tandem with Polish SOF.

Aviation

- Establish a new HQ for one Combat Aviation Brigade (CAB) in Poland to support a rotational CAB for training missions throughout the region.
- Enlarge and make permanent the US aviation detachment at Łask Air Base to facilitate rotational deployments of US fighter and cargo aircraft, as well as possible aviation deployments by other allies.
- Make permanent the US aviation detachment at Mirosławiec Air Base in support of the squadron of US MQ-9 reconnaissance drones.
- Commit to a higher level of US Air Force exercises in the region.

Naval

- Establish a new, small naval detachment in Gdynia, Poland, to facilitate more frequent US Navy visits to Poland and to other Baltic Sea ports.
- Home-port US destroyers in Denmark, with continuous patrols in the Baltic Sea and port visits to allied ports in the region. The mission might include anti-submarine warfare, maritime domain awareness,

amphibious operations, and counter-A2AD (anti-access/area denial).

Missile Defense

- Recommit to the NATO Aegis Ashore missile-defense site at Redzikowo, which is already considered a permanent site.

NATO Coordination and Multinational Participation

- As the plans for enhanced US deployments develop, there should be close consultations and full transparency with NATO allies. While these are US bilateral efforts, they affect the security interests of all allies and need to be compatible with NATO decisions.
- It should be stressed that the enhanced deployments would not exceed the agreed understanding of “substantial combat forces” mentioned in the NATO-Russia Founding Act, since the deployment remains a reinforced brigade plus some enablers. While the division HQ might be in Poland, most of the division itself would not be deployed there.
- The supreme allied commander Europe (SACEUR) should develop plans to transfer authority over US European Command (EUCOM) forces in Poland to NATO command in the event of an emerging Article 5 situation, and should be delegated standing authority to prepare and stage those forces by the North Atlantic Council.
- The United States should seek a few European partners to participate beyond their contributions to the US-led NATO eFP battle group in Poland.
 - Allies could contribute in several ways: increased rotational presence (e.g., the UK, Germany, or another ally could deploy forces with the current US rotational BCT), deployment of enablers, deployment of SOF units, and deployment of their own aviation and naval detachments to support exercises and training.
 - NATO should be encouraged to create an air-operations HQ at Powidz Air Base.

Funding of New Infrastructure and Long-term Sustainment

- While some of the deployments and facilities proposed above will be funded by the US EDI or the NATO Security Investment Program (NSIP), the United States should look to Poland and other host nations to shoulder a share of the burden—both upfront construction costs and long-term sustainment.

- o The Polish offer of \$2 billion is a good starting point and, as noted above, could be used to construct more permanent facilities for the US rotational BCT and upgrade associated training facilities to US standards. The overall cost of the required construction, however, is likely to exceed \$2 billion.
- o Poland could also fund some, or all, of the cost of facilities for the proposed division headquarters and naval detachment, the Combat Aviation Brigade HQ, the MQ-9 squadron, and the rotating mid-level air-defense unit.
- o Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania could help fund new facilities or sustainment costs associated with increased US-led SOF training and other rotational deployments in the Baltic states.
- This would mirror the host-nation support provided by other US allies in Europe and Northeast Asia.

Conclusion

Measures along the lines proposed by the task force would build on the existing US presence in Poland, strengthen deterrence for the wider region, and promote greater burden-sharing among allies. While adding important military capabilities and increasing NATO's capacity for rapid reinforcement, the scale of the proposed measures should remain within the NATO consensus, thereby ensuring continued NATO cohesion and solidarity. The task force strongly recommends that the United States, Poland, and the rest of the Alliance move forward on this basis.

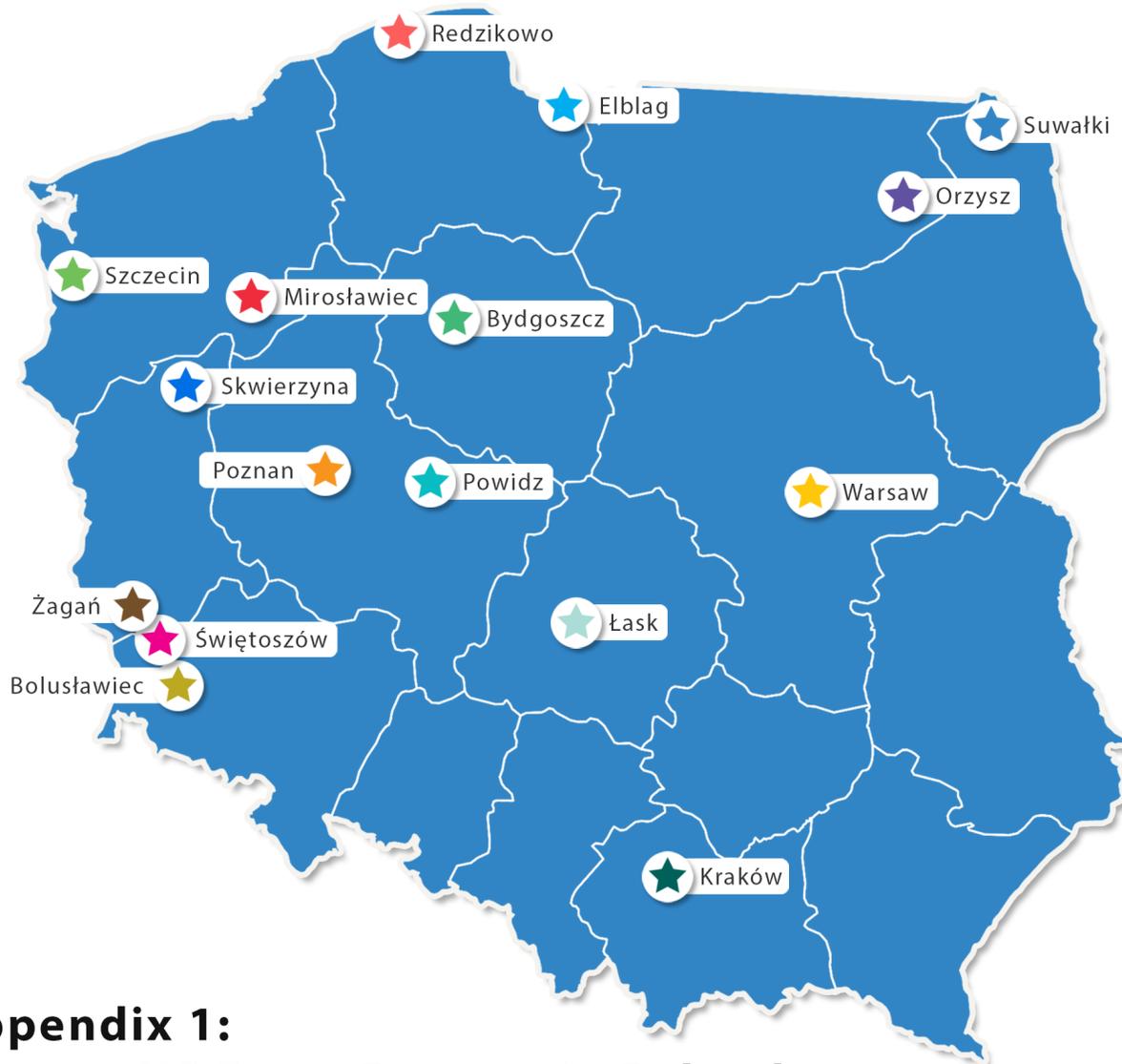
Appendix 1: Current US Force Posture in Poland

Appendix 2: US Force Posture in Europe by the Numbers

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Members of the Atlantic Council Posture Task Force

- **General Philip Breedlove (Ret.)**, is a board director at the Atlantic Council. Previously, he served as commander of US European Command and NATO's supreme allied commander Europe. Prior to that, he commanded US Air Forces in Europe and Africa and NATO Allied Air Command.
- **Ambassador Alexander Vershbow (Ret.)**, is a distinguished fellow at the Atlantic Council. Previously, he served as deputy secretary general of NATO, US assistant secretary of defense for international security affairs, as well as US ambassador to NATO, the Russian Federation, and the Republic of Korea.
- **Mr. Ian Brzezinski**, former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Europe and NATO Policy (project director)
- **Dr. Hans Binnendijk**, former senior director for defense policy and arms control, US National Security Council
- **Ambassador Paula Dobriansky**, former undersecretary of state for democracy and global affairs
- **Dr. Evelyn Farkas**, former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Russia/Ukraine/Eurasia
- **Ambassador Daniel Fried**, former assistant secretary of state for Europe and Eurasia
- **Mr. Robert Nurick**, senior fellow, Atlantic Council
- **Mr. Barry Pavel**, former senior director for defense policy and strategy, US National Security Council
- **Ms. Lauren Speranza**, deputy director, Transatlantic Security Initiative, Atlantic Council (rapporteur)
- **Mr. Jim Townsend**, former deputy assistant secretary of defense for Europe and NATO policy
- **Mr. Damon Wilson**, former senior director for European affairs, US National Security Council



Appendix 1: Current US Force Posture in Poland

- ★ ★ Armored Brigade Combat Team (BCT): four maneuver battalions totaling about 3500 soldiers at 4-6 training sites (HQ at **Zagan**, elements at **Skwierzyna**, **Boluslawiec**, and **Swietoszow**)
- ★ Leadership of NATO enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) Battle Group: 550 soldiers from 278th Armored Cavalry Regiment (**Orzysz**)
- ★ Battalion of 4th Combat Aviation Brigade and Air Base (**Powidz**)
- ★ ★ US Command personnel at NATO's MNC NE (**Szczecin**) and MND NE (**Elblag**)
- ★ US Mission Command Element: about 90 rotational personnel from 1st Infantry Division (**Poznan**), serves as HQ for US rotational deployments under Operation Atlantic Resolve.
- ★ Aegis Ashore: about 100 US military and civilian personnel at construction site (**Redzikowo**)
- ★ US Aviation detachment to support US Air Force flights via Air Base (**Lask**)
- ★ US Aviation detachment for MQ9 ISR reconnaissance unit (**Miroslawiec**)
- ★ 10th Special Forces detachment (**Krakow**)
- ★ Reserve transportation battalion and combat service support unit (**Powidz**)
- ★ US personnel at NATO Force Integration Unit (**Bydgoszcz**)
- ★ Defense Attaché Office at US Embassy (**Warsaw**)

Additional facilities under construction

Building storage to preposition one Army brigade set

Building fuel and ammunition storage sites

- ★ Enlarging runway (**Powidz**) and building up railheads

Appendix 2: US Force Posture in Europe by the Numbers

Baltics

Country / Total Troops	Key Capabilities	Rotational	Permanent
Poland ~4,400	1 armored BCT (15+ Paladins, 85+ Abrams, 130+ AFVs) ¹ 1 eFP armored battalion ² Transportation battalion and combat service-support unit ³		Army aviation detachment—8 Black Hawks, 4 Apaches ⁴ Operation Atlantic Resolve Mission Command Element ⁵ Special Forces Group detachment
	Personnel at NATO Force Integration Unit ⁶ Personnel at NATO MNC NE and MND NE 2 aviation-support detachments for ISR and Air Force flights ⁷		Aegis Ashore missile-defense facility (ready 2020) Prepositioned brigade-level armor and artillery (ready 2021) ⁸

Central / Eastern Europe

Country / Total Troops	Key Capabilities	Rotational	Permanent
Bulgaria ~300	2 armored cavalry companies ⁹		
Hungary ~100	1 armored cavalry company ¹⁰		
Kosovo ~675	1 infantry battalion ¹¹		1 helicopter fleet—UH-60 Black Hawks ¹²
Romania ~1,000	1 armored cavalry battalion ¹³ Black Sea rotational force ¹⁴		1 Army aviation detachment—8 Black Hawks ¹⁵ 1 engineer battalion ¹⁶
	Aegis Ashore missile-defense facility ¹⁷		
Ukraine ~300	1 armored cavalry detachment ¹⁸		

Western Europe / Turkey

Country / Total Troops	Key Capabilities	■ Rotational	■ Permanent
Belgium ~900	Strategic signals battalion ¹⁹		Prepositioned brigade-level sustainment equipment ²⁰
Germany ~37,500	2 armored cavalry battalions ²¹		1 combat aviation brigade ²²
	1 cavalry regiment ²³ 1 infantry battalion ²⁴ 1 combat aviation brigade ²⁵ 1 special-forces battalion ²⁶ 1 fighter wing—28 F-16s ²⁷ 1 airlift wing—14 C130s ²⁸ EUCOM		US Army Europe 1 theater logistics command ²⁹ 1 signals brigade ³⁰ 1 military-intelligence brigade ³¹ 1 missile-defense command ³² Prepositioned munitions center—25,000 tons and 400 vehicles
Greece ~400	MQ-9 Reaper drones ³³		
	Naval support facility		
Italy ~12,000	1 airborne brigade combat team ³⁴ 1 fighter wing—21 F-16s ³⁵ 1 ASW squadron—4 P-8A Poseidons ³⁶		Southern European task force HQ US Navy Europe HQ
Netherlands ~400	Prepositioned field-support-brigade equipment		(M1 Abrams tanks, M109 Paladins, and additional armored and support vehicles) ³⁷
Norway ~700	Marine Rotational Force—700 Marines ³⁸		
	NALMEB prepositioned equipment and 30 days' supply for a Marine expeditionary brigade ³⁹		
Spain ~3,200	Naval station Rota 4 US Navy destroyers		USMC SPMAGTF—crisis-response unit ⁴⁰
Turkey ~2,700	1 attack squadron—12 A-10 Thunderbolts ⁴¹ 1 tanker squadron—14 KC-135s ⁴² 1 CISR squadron—MQ-1B Predator ⁴³		1 ELINT fleet—EP3 Aries II ⁴⁴ 1 AN/TPY-2 X-band radar station ⁴⁵
United Kingdom ~8,300	1 fighter wing—47 F-15s ⁴⁶ 1 ISR squadron—OC-135s ⁴⁷ 1 tanker wing—15 KC-135s ⁴⁸		1 special-operations group—8 CV-22 Ospreys and 8 MC-130s ⁴⁹ 1 early warning and spacetrack radar facility

Notes

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Appendix 3: Index of Acronyms

A2AD—Anti-access/area denial

ABCT—Armored brigade combat team

AFV—Armored fighting vehicle

AN/TPY-2—Army Navy Transportable Radar Surveillance

ASW—Anti-submarine warfare

BCT—Brigade combat team

CAB—Combat aviation brigade

CISR—Combat intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

CONUS—Continental United States

EDI—European Deterrence Initiative

eFP—enhanced Forward Presence

ELINT—Electronic intelligence

EUCOM—European Command

HQ—Headquarters

ISR—Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance

MNC-NE—Multinational Corps Northeast

MND-NE—Multinational Division Northeast

NALMEB—Norway Air-Landed Marine Expeditionary Brigade

NDAA—National Defense Authorization Act

NRF - NATO Response Force

NSIP—NATO Security Investment Program

SACEUR—Supreme allied commander Europe

SOF—Special operations forces

SPMAGTF—Special Purpose Marine Air-Ground Task Force

USMC—United States Marine Corps

VJTF—Very High Readiness Joint Task Force



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Atlantic Council

1030 15th Street, NW, 12th Floor,
Washington, DC 20005

(202) 463-7226, www.AtlanticCouncil.org