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Building NATO Collective Defence Capabilities in Northeastern Europe I

Abstract

The basis of NATO's existence is the collective defence of Allies, its population and borders. Assurance and deterrence measures and activities implemented in Northeast Europe aim to build NATO's common defence potential and deter potential aggression against NATO members. Assurance activities began in 2014, defined at the NATO Summit in Wales. They respond to the changed security situation on NATO's eastern borders with Russian activities, the illegal annexation of Crimea, destabilisation activities and military involvement in eastern Ukraine. Increasing military activities and concentration of Russian military forces near NATO's eastern borders, accompanied by hybrid warfare activities against the Northeastern European NATO members, followed. After the NATO Summits in Warsaw (2016) and Brussels (2018), NATO assurance and deterrence measures have been launched as a response to perceived threat. They aim to strengthen the Eastern Allies' defence and deter and prevent any potential aggression while building Allied collective defence capabilities.

Keywords: *NATO, collective defence, assurance, deterrence, joint exercises, Northeastern Europe*

1. Introduction

The primary purpose of NATO is to ensure its members' security and freedom by all available political and military means, as defined in the North Atlantic Treaty, when founding the Alliance in 1949.

The Parties agree that an armed attack against one or more of them in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all and consequently they agree that, if such an armed attack occurs, each of them, in exercise of the right

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of individual or collective self-defence recognised by Article 51 of the Charter of the United Nations, will assist the Party or Parties so attacked by taking forthwith, individually and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area. Any such armed attack and all measures taken as a result thereof shall be immediately reported to the Security Council. Such measures shall be terminated when the Security Council has taken the measures necessary to restore and maintain international peace and security.[2]

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty is a key part that laid the foundation for the existence of the Alliance itself, the collective defence of members in the event of an attack within NATO borders, calling for the right to defence defined in Article 51 of the United Nations Charter.

The European area, important in geostrategic and geopolitical terms, has already suffered the horrors of two world wars in the 20th century; therefore, NATO's mission defined was securing the area of its European members and preventing potential new regional and global wars from erupting at the continent. In addition, at the time of its founding and during the Cold War, member states of the Alliance recognised a potential threat to their security in the Soviet Union. Therefore, the Alliance's focus was on strengthening collective defence and security capabilities within NATO borders to be able to protect and defend from this perceived threat.[3]

Even though collective defence is constant throughout NATO's existence, the focus from it decreased after the Cold War era, when the greatest potential threat to date, the Soviet Union, disappeared and the Alliance began to respond to emerging potential threats and changing security situation outside its borders. The focus on strengthening and maintaining a collective defence capability becomes shared with a conduct of stabilisation and security activities worldwide. After the terrorist attacks on the United States on 11 September 2001 and the accompanying terrorist attacks in Europe, NATO focused on extensive, counter-terrorist and counter-insurgency operations, along with peace support operations outside NATO borders.[4]

The focus returned to building collective defence capabilities in 2014, following Russia's military activities in Crimea and eastern Ukraine. These activities were accompanied by an increase in the concentration of Russian military forces and exercises near the borders of the Eastern European members of NATO, with the added constant implementation of hybrid warfare activities. Defining these activities as a potential threat to NATO, the Alliance responds by implementing measures and activities to strengthen individual and collective defence capabilities. NATO's assurance and deterrence measures are implemented throughout NATO members' territories in Europe bordering Russia, Belarus and Ukraine. They consist of the joint activities of land, air, naval and special forces.

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[2] NATO, 'The North Atlantic Treaty', 04 April 1949.
[3] Patrick T Warren, 'Alliance History and the Future NATO. What the Last 500 Years of Alliance Behavior Tells Us about NATO's Path Forward', 21st Century Defense Initiative Policy Paper, 30 June 2010.
[4] Sten Rynning, *NATO Renewed. The Power and Purpose of Transatlantic Cooperation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

This paper focuses on describing and analysing the implementation of these Alliance measures in the Northeast European area. Its core message is that these measures effectively demonstrate commitment to collective defence and strengthen capabilities.

The methods used in processing the paper are analysis and comparisons of the literature and a brief historical overview.

The first part provides an overview of the history of NATO, as well as its strategic focus over time. It gives an insight into the current situation and the environment that has led to ongoing NATO activities in building defence capabilities. Part two describes and elaborates activities and measures implemented to build and strengthen collective defence capabilities against the existing potential threat. The third part analyses possible factors and scenarios that could potentially hinder and affect the effectiveness of collective defence. The fourth part presents the effects of implementing these military activities on NATO defence capabilities. The conclusion summarises the results of an analysis of the effects of assurance and deterrence measures on NATO's collective defence potential, as well as an assessment of the future situation and the further execution of these activities.

2. History of the role and strategic orientation of NATO

In order to understand the current reorientation and the need to implement activities to ensure and strengthen NATO's collective defence capabilities in Northeast Europe, this chapter will present the impact of historical, geopolitical and military factors on the strategic focus and address NATO's development and political-military activities since its foundation.

2.1. NATO from its foundation until the end of the Cold War (1949–1989)

In the time after World War II, the key elements for the establishment of NATO for the countries of Western Europe and the United States were the desire to avoid a possible future war in Europe and the prevention of a potential threat from the Soviet Union to Western European democracies.

The Soviet Union's geostrategic positioning in Europe, the establishment of hegemony over Eastern European countries, and the deployment of significant military forces in the area were recognised as a potential danger for European democratic countries. The perceived threat led to strained relations between former allies in World War II, the United States and Western European countries on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other. The political and military presence of the United States of America on European soil was seen by the countries of Western Europe as a necessity. At the same time, it was the geostrategic interest of the United States of America. Thus, with the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty in Washington in 1949, the NATO Alliance was established with 12 member countries: Belgium, Canada,

Denmark, France, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Great Britain and the United States. Lord Ismay's statement 'to keep the Soviet Union out, the Americans in, and the Germans down'[5] vividly described the political environment in Europe and the reason for the forming of NATO.[6]

The primary purpose of NATO defined in the North Atlantic Treaty is to ensure its members' security and freedom by all available political and military means based on collective defence and security policy. The orientation of NATO was on building defence capabilities and capacities for defence action within NATO's borders.

After the founding of NATO, the Cold War era began, and the Warsaw Pact (the Soviet Union in lead, with Eastern European communist countries) as a counterweight to NATO was established in 1955. The division into 'Western' (NATO) and 'Eastern' (Warsaw Pact) blocs lasted until 1989 when the fall of the Berlin Wall occurred. This was followed by the withdrawal of the Soviet Union from Eastern Europe, the reunion of Germany, and the formal dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and the Soviet Union in 1991. The period of the Cold War was characterised by an arms race between two blocks, including the development of nuclear capabilities, the deployment of large numbers of conventional military forces on both sides in Europe, the imposition of mutual economic sanctions, and the constant clash of communist ideology and democratic values on the political and diplomatic level.[7]

Through this period, the only and greatest potential threat to NATO was the Soviet Union. NATO's development of collective defence capabilities and defence plans, joint military exercises, concentration and deployment of forces aimed at deterrence and defence from potential conventional and nuclear attack by the Soviet Union.

Political relations between the two sides remained, more or less disturbed over time, but were used as a tool to calm tensions. Therefore, starting in the 1960s, NATO developed initiatives for political dialogues with the Eastern bloc to reduce tensions and eliminate the danger of armed conflict. Agreements addressing the issues of arms race and arms control were gradually implemented in the 1970s. The most remarkable results and agreements in this area were realised in the 1980s.[8]

2.2. NATO after the Cold War (1989–2001)

Following an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union with leaders such as Bush and Gorbachev in Malta in 1989, the Soviet Union gradually returned sovereignty to Eastern European countries. This process led to the end of the Warsaw Pact and the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The threat and strategic rival of NATO disappeared. As there was no longer a direct danger to its territory, NATO was turning to military transformation, reducing military forces in Europe, and started an

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[5]   Lord Hastings Lionel Ismay, first Secretary General of NATO.
[6]   James Sperling, 'NATO and the transatlantic community, 1949–2019', in *Contemporary European Security,* ed. by David J Galbreath, Jocelyn Mawdsley and Laura Chappell (New York: Routledge, 2019), 48–67.
[7]   Tomáš Čižik and Peter Novák, 'North Atlantic Treaty Organization', 25 January 2018.
[8]   Stanley R Sloan, *Defense of the West: NATO, the European Union and the Transatlantic Bargain* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

accession processes with the admission of former Warsaw Pact members to NATO. Security threats with potential wider consequences were identified in emerging inter and intrastate conflicts worldwide, including terrorism, international crime, and the proliferation and distribution of weapons of mass destruction. Additionally to the defence of its territories and populations and the security of its member states, NATO focused on operations to respond to these crises.[9]

NATO Strategic Concepts from 1991 and 1999 depict the response to such crises as one of the Alliance's key tasks.[10] Doctrines, tactics, techniques and procedures were developed for crisis response operations, including peace support operations. The result was more involvement of NATO members in peace support operations in Africa and Europe, for example in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and a military intervention against Serbia in 1999 to end the conflict in Kosovo.

2.3. NATO after 11 September 2001

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, a call for collective defence, has been activated so far only once in the history of NATO, after the terrorist attack on the United States of America on 11 September 2001. Terrorism was defined as a major security risk, and NATO orientated towards coalition counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency fighting outside its territory and developed related doctrines, tactics and procedures.[11]

NATO launched and continued counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan, followed by the NATO-led ISAF mission, a peace support operation established and approved by the United Nations Security Council.[12]

The Alliance also continued with active participation in crisis response operations and humanitarian operations outside its territory (for example, in Northern Macedonia, Kosovo, Iraq, Sudan, Libya).

The admission of new members continued, as well. At the NATO summit in Bucharest in 2008, where at the initiative of the United States and following the expressed political ambitions of Ukraine and Georgia, NATO discussed the invitation of these countries to the Membership Action Plan for possible future membership. Shortly afterwards, Russian military intervention supported the secession of the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia and Russia unilaterally recognised the independence of these regions. The Georgian defence capabilities were severely downsized by this intervention. Although NATO responded by establishing a NATO–Georgia commission and announcing a transition program for possible future accession of Georgia and Ukraine to NATO, a clear message from Russia has been received.[13]

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[9] Tamás Péter Baranyi, 'The evolution of NATO against a European Geopolitical Background', in *NATO in the 21st Century: A Central European Perspective,* ed. by Tamás Péter Baranyi and Péter Stepper (Budapest: Antall József Knowledge Centre, 2019), 13–26.

[10] NATO, 'Strategic Concepts', s. a.

[11] Rynning, *NATO Renewed.*

[12] UN, 'United Nations Security Council Resolution 1386', 20 December 2001.

[13] Ivan Dinev Ivanov, 'European Security at the Crossroads after Ukraine?', in *NATO's Return to Europe,* ed. by Rebecca R Moore and Damon Coletta (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 150–159.

Having NATO members and NATO influence in that part of Eurasia especially in Russia's "backyard", was not acceptable for Russia.

Russia's involvement in the conflict in Georgia was interpreted as a sign of Russia's more aggressive strategy and foreign policy to revive a regional and international leader's status. Moreover, Russia's attitude towards NATO and its foreign policy initiatives was becoming critical and antagonistic, clearly emphasising its political and military influence in the former Soviet Union region and the neighbourhood.[14]

By that time, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia had considerably renewed and built its military capacities and capabilities, with less and less visible shortcomings in the professionalism of personnel and capabilities.

The 2010 NATO Strategic Concept recognised aspirations in the neighbourhood and emphasised collective defence, crisis response and cooperative security as crucial tasks. Collective defence and deterrence were underlined as central elements of NATO's future orientation. With this concept, NATO committed to maintaining and building its capabilities to conduct large joint operations and several smaller ones and maintained a pool of robust, mobile response forces, the NATO Response Force. More preparations and an increase in the number of joint Allied exercises were also planned to strengthen interoperability and collective defence capabilities.[15]

2.4. NATO since 2014

The change in the political climate in Ukraine in 2013 brought about a turn in Ukraine's foreign and economic policy and a turn to the West. The new situation threatened Russia's strategic and economic interests. The main features were the possible loss of political influence, control of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Crimea, and the flow of Russian gas through Ukrainian territory, with the inevitable issue of protecting the status of Russian minority in Ukraine, which mostly inhabited the Eastern part of the country.[16]

It resulted with the illegal annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014, its destabilising activities, incitement to conflict and military support to the Russian minority in the conflict in eastern Ukraine.[17]

It became evident that Russia possesses significant military power and is prepared to carry out hybrid warfare activities and operations, too.

Although Russia initially denied direct involvement in the conflict, the later excuse for 'limited' actions was to help the endangered Russian minority in Ukraine. This sent a worrying signal to Northeast Europe's countries that border Russia and have ethnic Russian minorities. An increase in Russian forces, military exercises, along with Belarus and the deployment of conventional weapons near NATO's Northeastern borders followed, and were accompanied by numerous activities featuring hybrid warfare (information operations, cyberattacks and propaganda) and airspace violations

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[14] Bettina Renz, *Russia's Military Revival* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2018).
[15] NATO, 'Strategic Concepts', s. a.
[16] Hrvoje Barberić, *Suvremeni oružani sukobi:1945. – 2018* (Zagreb: Tiskara Zelina d.d., 2018).
[17] Richard Youngs, *Europe's Eastern Crisis: The Geopolitics of Asymmetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

of NATO's Northeastern European members. An additional concern was the later published Russian military doctrine, which saw NATO as the adversary. More than enough for the significant concern of Northeastern European members of NATO, who by joining NATO, rely on assistance in the form of collective deterrence and defence in the event of such a threat.[18]

Demonstration of Russian military power, frequency of territorial violations (airspace) and aggression and propaganda in the information space of Eastern European members of the Alliance posed a danger and security threat. In response to the Ukraine crisis and the situation on NATO's borders, NATO decided on an additional package of measures to secure NATO areas that have already lasted to a lesser extent in Northeast Europe and the Baltic region. The presence of air and naval assets and equipment and naval and air space surveillance measures have been strengthened.

The NATO summit in Wales in 2014 brought additional, assurance measures to build collective defence capabilities in the form of the Readiness Action Plan. The NATO Response Force was enhanced and an additional Very High Readiness Joint Task Force was established. The number of air and naval forces and activities in the region increased. Decisions to further increase the number of military exercises with collective defence scenarios were adopted and implemented. Furthermore, NATO Force Integration Units in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, with tasks of coordinating efforts with host nations and facilitating the reception, deployment and integration of NATO joint forces, were established.[19]

The NATO Summit in Warsaw in 2016 further strengthened the measures to deter potential threats by ordering the NATO Multinational Corps Northeast in Poland to be highly prepared for conducting land and joint defensive operations, and by establishing an enhanced Forward Presence by deploying four multinational battle groups within the national brigades in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, the multinational division in Poland and the NATO Force Integration Units in Slovakia and Hungary.[20]

NATO's response is orientated on engaging conventional military capabilities and countering and neutralising hybrid threats. The potential threat of nuclear capabilities is also considered. However, there is a general belief that both sides are deeply aware that the use of nuclear weapons means the end of the world as we know it. The impression is that it represents the capability only and certainly not a possibility of use.

The decisions were supplemented in 2018 with the establishment of an additional multinational division in Latvia, at the NATO Summit in Brussels.[21]

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[18] Lidija Čehulić Vukadinović et al., 'NATO in Europe: Between Weak European Allies and Strong Influence of Russian Federation', *Croatian International Relations Review* 23, no 80 (2017), 5–32.

[19] NATO, 'Wales Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Wales', 05 September 2014.

[20] NATO, 'Warsaw Summit Communiqué Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Warsaw 8–9 July 2016', 09 July 2016.

[21] NATO, 'Brussels Summit Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in Brussels 11–12 July 2018', 11 July 2018.

The London Declaration from the North Atlantic Council meeting in 2019 reaffirmed the commitment to collective defence and perseverance in implementing measures to build these capabilities.[22]

3. NATO activities in the building of collective defence potential in Northeastern Europe

The North Atlantic Treaty's fundamental commitments put implementation of assurance and deterrence measures in the current context.

Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, a synonym for collective defence, is elaborated as a symbol and a cornerstone of NATO's existence. Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty directs and obliges members to individually and with mutual assistance develop and maintain their capabilities to respond to and defend against an (armed) attack. Article 4 of the North Atlantic Treaty recommends and states that when Alliance members' security and territorial integrity are threatened, collective counselling and support from Alliance members should ensure that appropriate deterrence measures are taken and the preparation and build-up of adequate defence capabilities.[23]

Through these principles, all mechanisms of protection and defence against potential aggression are activated, which result in the implementation and conduct of assurance and deterrence measures. Just deployment of Alliance forces as a demonstration of military power in the area is not sufficient. It is amended with many continuous military activities, based on multinational rotations that demonstrate military capabilities, with the primary goal of enhancing NATO troops' collective defence capabilities.

Russian activities that NATO is countering in the area since 2014 cover several areas. On the one hand, there are cyberattacks on communications installations in the Baltic countries, unauthorised entries into airspace, and unauthorised entries into territorial waters, information operations and general propaganda. Furthermore, constant propaganda campaigns against NATO troops and individuals deployed, containing false crimes and misconduct, which seeks to convince the population of the harmful effects caused by Allied forces' activities and presence on society is also present. Cyberattacks are targeting military and civilian, but also private communications. More obvious Russian activities include additional deployment of forces, equipment and techniques in the framework of large scale military exercises near the borders of NATO countries, including joint exercises on the territory of Belarus, without notice and contrary to the Vienna Document of 1990. These activities were accompanied by deployment of ISKANDER (short-range missiles capable of carrying nuclear warheads) missiles in the isolated Russian region of Kaliningrad and deployment of medium-range missiles near the eastern borders of NATO member states.[24]

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[22] NATO, 'London Declaration Issued by the Heads of State and Government participating in the meeting of the North Atlantic Council in London 3–4 December 2019', 04 December 2019.
[23] NATO, 'The North Atlantic Treaty', 04 April 1949.
[24] Michael E O'Hanlon, *Beyond NATO* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 2017).

Through common consultations and consensus of all members, the NATO Summit in 2014 brought the activation and implementation of assurance measures. They were complemented by the activation and implementation of measures to deter potential aggression at the NATO Summit in 2016. By further collecting information and reviewing the situation on the ground, these frameworks for a collective response to potential threats to its members are under constant update.

3.1. NATO assurance and deterrence measures

Assurance measures aim to prevent various forms of infringement of territory without the physical entry of potential enemy military forces into the country. They contribute to a stable and secure environment for the population; the goal is to assure Allies and their population. NATO deterrence measures aim at a potential adversary or aggressor in preventing and deterring possible attacks on NATO members. Ongoing assurance and deterrence activities are as follows:

Baltic Air Policing. Protection of the Baltic states' airspace (over Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland). Assurance activities conducted through continuous airspace surveillance with combat aircraft conducting interception and escort of aircraft, which entered the national airspace without authorisation, out of the area.[25]

Joint Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance. Data collection, surveillance and reconnaissance by air, naval, land and cyber assets. Assurance measures aim to ensure the provision of timely information about potential adversary activities.[26]

Standing Naval Forces. Assurance activities for securing the territorial waters of the Baltic States.[27]

Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) patrols over Eastern Europe. Assurance measure of aerial radar systems providing air surveillance, battlespace management, communications and supporting air policing activities.[28]

NATO Force Integration Units. Specialised units within assurance and deterrence measures. Their purpose is to prepare the conditions and facilitate the smooth transition of NATO troops into the host nations' area and their integration into exercise and defence activities.[29]

NATO Response Force (NRF) and Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF). NRF is a deterrence force consisting of land, air, naval and special forces components. It is flexible, adaptable and mobile, capable of rapid deployment to address the crisis and conduct collective defence tasks. NATO Readiness Action Plan envisions a rapid generation of up to 40,000 troops for the purpose, with rapid reinforcement capabilities. VJTF is part of an NRF, being the initial response force to the potential threat capable of performing its tasks after one week's notice.[30]

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[25] NATO, 'Deterrence and Defense', s. a.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.
[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

NATO's enhanced Forward Presence (eFP). Multinational battle groups are part of national brigades that are part of multinational NATO divisions. They are contributing to national defence potential and collective defence capabilities while strengthening the deterrence potential. From 2016 to the present, four multinational battle groups (reinforced battalions) with Great Britain, Canada, Germany and the United States of America as lead nations, are deployed in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland, within the national brigades. Establishing two multinational divisions in which these brigades are incorporated followed, and the command over these military structures is assigned to the NATO Multinational Corps Northeast in Poland, under the NATO Joint Force Command in Brunssum. The process of joining two more multinational divisions to the NATO Multinational Corps Northeast is underway.[31]

With the associated equipment and techniques involved in these activities, the forces are regularly exercising defence scenarios on joint (land, maritime, air and cyber domain) level. Assurance and deterrence measures are, in a way, a strategy of intimidating a potential adversary or aggressor through a display of military power, determination, and collective defence capacity. Their goal is to send a message about measures and consequences for a potential aggressor if it attacks Allied territory.[32]

Communication with a potential perpetrator is vital for effective deterrent policy. It is ultimately about influencing the potential aggressor and, in this context, trying to make the potential attack less feasible.[33]

Building and improving capabilities in all domains (land, sea, air, cyber) and their developed and effective synergistic, joint action, in this case, contributes to such communication and message transmission.

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