

# GEOPOLITICAL COMPETITION IN MILITARY DOMAIN: HOW SHOULD NATO RESPOND TO RUSSIA AND CHINA?



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## KEY FINDINGS

- Any military dominance over China and Russia that the USA once had in the unipolar era is not achievable today. What the NATO needs is the capacity to resist successful rapid assaults on its members and partners.
- It means ensuring they cannot be occupied, especially in a *fait accompli*, or strangled by a blockade or coercion — a strategy that might be termed “denial defense.” Denying China and Russia the ability to take and hold the territory of Taiwan or one of the Baltic states will be hard, but it is feasible in today’s world of precision munitions and enormously capable intelligence, targeting, and data-processing capabilities.
- For Europe, the US necessary streamlining on Russia and China might be advantageous. While Washington will have to scale back its efforts in secondary and peripheral regions, the NATO Eastern Flank’s resilience will remain a priority.
- Gradually reducing the U.S. military’s exposure and engagement in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria — with the help of local proxies and a greater reliance on offshore forces — will free up further capabilities for contingencies relevant both for Europe and the Indo-Pacific region.
- Both Russia and China apply a tactic based on “**a fait accompli scenario**”. They seek to employ their capabilities quickly to achieve limited objectives and forestall a response from Western allies and partners. NATO working hand-in-hand with the US needs to make adjustments in their force employment, crisis response, force, and concept aimed to help address this critical challenge. It will have impact not only on the content of NATO strategic documents but on the NATO Defense Planning Process as well.
- Coping with Russia doesn’t contradict coping with China. Capabilities and tactics needed to counter “*fait accompli*” strategy are applicable in both cases. The solution to the great power competition with both Russia and China is a division of labor among allies.
- Europe’s position as a key ally for the USA is unquestionable. Russia will remain the most eminent threat for Europe. NATO’s naval capabilities to confront the Russian threat, wielded by the UK, Germany, Poland, Norway, or NATO partners like Sweden, show that these states have their potential role in the great-power competition.
- **Four key NATO tasks:**
  1. Substantially boost of the navy;
  2. Enhance the European level of ambition (including CS, CSS);
  3. Streamline the NDPP to technologies needed for near peer opponent with “*fait accompli* strategy” (rapid penetration from high-distance, long-range, stealth and unmanned capabilities);
  4. Bolster soft security/intelligence, hybrid capabilities, standards on 5G technologies, diplomacy for Taiwan and Honk Kong, recalibrate Japan — NATO summits, and harmonize the application of technological sanctions.

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## INTRODUCTION

During the last six years, NATO has deeply modernized its command structure and force posture. Three consecutive summits have proven NATO's adaptability to the new security environment set up by the Russian aggression on Ukraine and the increased assertiveness of Putin's regime. Two important strategic documents, the Political Guidance and Military Strategy, have been adopted. Preparation of a third one, defining deterrence and defense policy, is underway. However, the security environment is further evolving. The adaptive process is not finished yet.

NATO's topical challenges are manifold. The trans-Atlantic community faces a security challenge posed by the growing military might of China. The West is witnessing a substantive doctrinal gap between the USA and Europe with inevitable consequences for NATO. NATO Member States' resilience in the cyber domain has become more complex issue than ever before.

Within this context, it is of paramount importance that the Alliance remains **relevant for the United States in great-power competition, credible for members most exposed to the external threat, and politically cohesive at the same time.**

These three major tasks are interlinked. Last year the EVC conducted, in cooperation with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, very successful conference on the NATO Eastern Flank Resilience.<sup>1</sup> The basic assumption, elaborated in the text, is that the concept of great-power competition is not against the interests of the NATO Eastern Flank countries. On the contrary, if played right, the NATO Eastern Flank can gain from this competition.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Expertenkonferenz „Security of the Eastern Flank of NATO“ vom 18. bis 19.11.2019, Benjamin Fricke, 2019: <https://www.kas.de/en/veranstaltungsberichte/detail/-/content/expertenkonferenz-security-of-the-eastern-flank-of-nato-vom-18-bis-19-11-2019>

<sup>2</sup> The text deals mainly with land, air, navy and space domains. Cyber domain is subject to the second part of the conference.



Four key NATO tasks: 1.Substantially boost of the navy; 2.Enhance the European level of ambition (including CS, CSS); 3. Streamline the NDPP to technologies needed for near peer opponent with “fait accompli strategy” (rapid penetration from high-distance, long-range, stealth and unmanned capabilities); 4. Bolster soft security/intelligence, hybrid capabilities, harmonize the application of technological sanctions.



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## 1. NATO AND THE GREAT-POWER COMPETITION — NATO'S RELEVANCE FOR THE UNITED STATES

The dichotomy between NATO collective defense tasks and out-of-area operations has been discussed in Central Europe for years. The proper balance between collective defense, crisis management, and collective security is an issue of permanent debate. Should NATO stay relevant for the United States, it must tackle this balance from **the perspective of the great-power competition**.

No matter how **well-founded the conceptual disagreement with this concept** might be, we need to establish to what extent it offers opportunity for European NATO members. From the US perspective, the dual great-power challenges of China and Russia increase the necessity for an enormous boost of the NATO Eastern Flank's resilience because the increasingly overstretched US military cannot be everywhere.<sup>3</sup>

Managing near peer adversaries in China and Russia dictates the necessity of an actionable **division of labor among the United States and other NATO states**. Because the United States cannot even pretend to be able to balance both China and Russia by itself, it must ask more of its Allies and new partners, with insistence and real pressure if need be. US strategists know that if Washington generates political dissonance as to undermine alliance structures from within, it will put at risk its efforts to encourage greater material contributions from its allies.

NATO should see this as an opportunity and opt for fair a division of labor. It will be linked with the necessity to change the very core strategy of the Alliance, as some leading strategist are already making clear.<sup>4</sup>

We are facing a growing doctrinal gap between USA and Europe. When Russia started military operations in eastern Ukraine and illegally annexed Crimea in 2014, both sides of the Atlantic reacted by force posture changes and economic sanctions. While the USA changed also its strategic doctrine, Europe has not. The Strategic Concept of NATO remains in place and basic doctrinal documents of decisive European powers witnessed tactical rather than strategic shifts. We need a profound political and expert debate on this problem. The outcome must not be adaptation of one side of the Atlantic strategic thinking to the doctrine of the other. **Instead, the profound division of labor reflected by NATO Strategic Concept might be the proper answer.**

### 1.1. The Nature of the Chinese threat

China's security threat for the West is determined by its growing armament and the evolving military strategy. Common wisdom says that if we want to defeat the enemy, we must also defeat its military strategy.

China, unlike Russia, does not have a comprehensive military strategy towards Europe at the moment. Even in the foreseeable future, it probably will not have one. Yet it already has the strategy to become the world's superpower in the long term. That is the reason why NATO must be concerned about China's fast-growing military power.

More than 2 million people serve in the Chinese armed forces (PLA) and its annual defense spending is \$225 billion. From submarines and over intercontinental ballistic missiles up to nuclear weapons, China commands the same equipment as the United States or Russia, even though they are not as sophisticated. As for tanks, China already outnumbers both the USA and Russia. It has the most armored combat vehicles in the world.

Chinese military, similarly to Russian one, still keeps significant limitations. One of them is the **low ability**

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<sup>3</sup> With Iran tensions high, a US military command pushes a dubious carrier strategy, David B. Larter, 2020: <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/03/24/with-iran-tensions-high-centcom-pushes-a-dubious-carrier-strategy/>

<sup>4</sup> NATO needs a new core task, Hans Binnendijk, 2020: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/07/22/nato-needs-a-new-core-task/>

**to project power over long distances.** PLA possess capable missiles and planes. Nevertheless, sending a substantial fighting force to the other side of the globe and keeping it there, is a different discipline. To do this, you need the appropriate strategy, logistics, interoperability of forces, tracking capabilities, efficient and fast communication, well-placed military bases and a strong navy. China as well as Russia have a significant navy, but the one that is able to operate in coastal waters. The only naval force capable of operating globally in the deep waters of the oceans — a so-called “blue water navy” — is the American one.

Because of these shortcomings, **China, like Russia, focuses its strategy on the initial phase of a possible conflict and the “limited warfare” tactics.** The goal is to quickly inflict a strategic shock on the enemy and then negotiate with him. Sometimes it is called a “**fait accompli strategy**”.

If longer warfare is expected, China can afford it primarily in areas adjacent to their own territory.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, the use of force is expected mainly in the Indo-Pacific region. China’s priority is to build a dominant military position in Asia by strengthening its military presence near Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan. Of course, the perimeter is growing, extending from Japan to The Philippines. It is no coincidence that Japan cooperates with the Philippines and send its ships patrol the Philippines with the strongest military garrison they are able to carry.

China is working to strengthen also civil-military strategic influence in Southeast Asia and is building strategic partnerships with Cambodia, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. It complements military strength with the targeted weaponizing of its economic influence, in the Persian Gulf, for example. It has a naval military base and port in Djibouti in the southern part of the Red Sea. It dispatches anti-piracy missions near Somalia. It is expanding its influence in sub-Saharan Africa. However, Korea, Taiwan, and the South China Sea remain key areas for potential classic military operations.

China’s influence operations and military cooperation with Russia is frequently discussed. It’s quite complicated. On the one hand, the two great-powers conduct joint military exercises. China purchases advanced equipment such as the Su-35 fighter aircraft and the S-400 surface-to-air missile system from Russia. In 2018, China participated for the first time in Russia’s annual strategic command and staff exercise, VOSTOK (East).

On the other hand, it is Russia’s key interest to maintain a military technological superiority over China. In all other technologies, it is already the weaker partner. Given China’s economic strength and ability to copy almost anything, it’s more and more difficult to maintain its edge in weapons capabilities.

As noted above, both countries rely on a “limited warfare” strategy. Russia’s limited warfare endangers the NATO Eastern Flank directly. NATO member states are contractually obliged to come to the aid of attacked Baltic states. China’s limited warfare affects us, too, though indirectly. There is an enormous risk for the alliance if China’s military might, growing assertiveness, and predatory behavior in the Indo-Pacific Ocean drives the capacities and financial means of the United States away from Europe. Nevertheless, there cannot be another of Obama’s Pivot to Asia because of the great-power competition concept, approved by the Congress, that counts with urgency of the Russian threat.<sup>6</sup>

Still, the US resources are not unlimited and NATO should take its portion of responsibility since the Chinese military threat concerns the whole Alliance. China’s impressive military buildup, now aimed at dominating Asia is predicated, in the long run, on projecting power throughout the world, accompanied by a massive

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<sup>5</sup> Limited warfare can also be accompanied by long-range strikes with precision super- or even hyper-sonic weapons to hit more distant lands. But classic combat operations simply cannot be conducted by PLA in areas too far away.

<sup>6</sup> In response to Russia’s aggression, the United States developed the so-called “European Assurance Initiative,” later renamed the “European Deterrence Initiative.” It has prepared billions of dollars and thousands of soldiers to increase the defenses of the vulnerabilities of the NATO, especially on its Eastern Flank. In light of China’s growing military potential, there is much discussion about the creation of an Indo-Pacific equivalent of the “European Deterrent Initiative” just to deter China.



effort to expand its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative and related projects.<sup>7</sup> The PLA effort to strengthen its ability to operate farther from China's borders is visible already.

For example, the PLA is reorganizing to improve its capability to conduct complex joint operations, and is also improving its command and control, training, personnel, and logistics systems. Key weapon systems deployed or in development, include: cruise and ballistic missile systems, modern fighter and bomber aircraft, aircraft carriers, modern ships and submarines, amphibious assault ships, surface-to-air missile systems, electronic warfare systems, direct-ascent, hit-to-kill anti-satellite missiles, and autonomous systems.

In its National Defense Strategy, its 2019 Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, and through other public statements, the U.S. military has made clear that its overriding concern today is defending Taiwan against a potential Chinese attack, especially one based on a *fait accompli* strategy, which involves seizing vulnerable territory, digging in, and making any counterattack too costly to envisage. In anticipation of such attacks, the Pentagon is shifting from the playbook it has used ever since Operation Desert Storm three decades ago — slowly and methodically surging forces to a threatened area and only counterattacking after total dominance is assured — to a force that can fend off Chinese (and Russian) attacks from the very beginning of hostilities, even if it never attains the kind of dominance the United States was once able to gain in such places as Serbia and Iraq.

The Pentagon's **budget requests have slowly begun to shift accordingly**. Short-range fighter jets and bulky amphibious vessels, both vulnerable to enemy attacks, are making way for stealthier long-range bombers and submarines, unmanned ships and aircraft, long-range ground-based missiles and artillery, and large stocks of precise, penetrating munitions. The military is also experimenting with how to use this new hardware — what the new force should look like, how it should operate, and where.<sup>8</sup> The NATO planners should follow this pattern and consider adjustment of the NATO Defense Planning Process so that the economic strength of Europe complements US resolve.

Coping with Russia does not contradict coping with China. **Capabilities and tactics needed to counter the “*fait accompli*” strategy are applicable in both cases.** The trans-Atlantic answer to the great-power competition is a division of labor. Key American strategists such as Ben Hodges, a former US commander in Europe, say this clearly and bluntly: “We need Europe to help us deter Russia.” This kind of thinking should be taken as a guarantee for the alliance's global relevance, no matter who is sitting in the White House.

A strong North Atlantic alliance, capable of taking care of its own security on the border with Russia, will help an Indo-Pacific alliance of democracies to face down China's military threat. It can be an alliance composed of the USA, Japan, Australia, Taiwan, the Philippines or South Korea. Such a coalition could be a mixture of formal alliances (Australia, Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea come to mind), quasi alliances (Taiwan), and deepening partnerships that do not involve formal security guarantees (India and Vietnam). Meanwhile, the smaller and more vulnerable states of Southeast Asia will likely be the focus of strategic competition with China.

In any case, the regional allies in the Indo-Pacific region will be exposed to the US demands to do more, just like Europeans were after the 2014. Japan will play a central role in any successful defense posture vis-à-vis China, yet its defense spending is approximately the same today as it was in 1996, whereas China's expenditures have increased by an order of magnitude. Taiwan — a place more threatened by the People's Liberation Army than anywhere else — has hardly increased its defense spending in the last 20 years.

This situation necessitates an effective division of labor between NATO on one side and the United States with their local Allies such as Japan, Australia, Taiwan, The Philippines, and South Korea on the other. This

7 China Military Power, Defense Intelligence Agency, 2020: [https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China\\_Military\\_Power\\_FINAL\\_5MB\\_20190103.pdf](https://www.dia.mil/Portals/27/Documents/News/Military%20Power%20Publications/China_Military_Power_FINAL_5MB_20190103.pdf)

8 The Age of Great-Power Competition, Elbridge Colby, Wess Mitchell, 2020: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/2019-12-10/age-great-power-competition>

division of labor should be reflected in the next document that will define NATO defense and deterrence policy or in a proclamation of NATO member states' leaders or even enshrined in the new NATO Strategic Concept.<sup>9</sup>

## 1.2. Russia in the geopolitical competition

The Russian specific threat for the NATO Eastern Flank is the subject of chapter II. As for the global competition, Russia is problematic because it surrounds NATO with its naval capabilities. It is building up a military stronghold in the Black Sea, sending submarines through the Turkish straits to the Eastern Mediterranean, building up its Arctic fleet, and increasing its presence in the Indo-Pacific region. It has also taken mercenaries around the globe. All these activities, based on relatively cheap capabilities, suggest the renaissance of the Cold War strategy. Given Russia's openly adversarial policy towards NATO and US, all NATO planners must react accordingly with some forward-looking planning.

The Russian Navy's Black Sea Fleet has been deploying submarines to the Mediterranean. Thus, Russia is now able to reestablish a permanent submarine presence in the Mediterranean. It is deploying quiet, modern, diesel submarines capable of launching Kalibr cruise missiles. A Kilo-class submarine can go anywhere in European waters and strike any European or North African capital from under the waves.<sup>10</sup>

A similar pattern applies to the Arctic. Russia announced that it will not tolerate any vessels coming through the Northern Sea Route unless there is 45 days of notification. Other countries are forced to pay a fee to the Russian Federation for a passage. Russia continues to grow its military presence in former Soviet Arctic bases, with full battalions at some of the bases, as well as icebreakers outfitted with Kalibr cruise missiles and stand-by fighter aircrafts patrolling the waters.

As for the Indo-Pacific, Russia is re-establishing its military presence by regularly flying bomber and reconnaissance missions in the Sea of Japan and conducting operations as far east as Alaska and the west coast of the continental United States. The Russian Navy has increased its operations and reach, with the Russian Pacific Fleet deploying ships to support operations in the Middle East and Europe, and the Russian Baltic and Black Sea Fleets deploying to the Indo-Pacific. Russian ballistic missile and attack submarines remain active in the region, while it is also undertaking efforts to modernize its conventional forces and nuclear strike capabilities there.

Similarly to China's threat, Allied forces are needed that can deploy quickly enough to contest any Russian land grab from the outset. Given how many U.S. resources will be tied down in Asia, the European NATO allies will need to augment their militaries' ability to integrate with U.S. forces to deter or blunt a Russian assault. Otherwise, land theatre as well as waters in the Euro-Atlantic region may be lost to Russian anti-access tactics and weapons.<sup>11</sup>

Admiral James Foggo, Commander of U.S. Naval Forces in Europe and Africa, has two suggestions to push back Russia's cold war tactic: more U.S. ships operating in U.S. 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet,<sup>12</sup> either as their primary destination

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9 The United States Indo-Pacific Strategy report says: The US will uphold our commitments and will act to defend our interests and those of our allies and partners. At the same time, we maintain our expectation that our allies and partners will contribute their fair share to security by: 1 Resourcing and investing sufficiently for their own defense to ensure deterrence and mitigate vulnerabilities, and 2. Cooperating in building partner capacity for third party partners in the region .

10 Russian Black Sea Sub Deployments to Mediterranean Could Violate Treaty, H. I. Sutton, 2020: <https://news.usni.org/2020/07/08/russian-black-sea-sub-deployments-to-mediterranean-could-violate-treaty/>

11 Foggo: Russia Seeking More Control of Black Sea, Mediterranean, Arctic Megan Eckstein, 2020: <https://news.usni.org/2020/07/17/foggo-russia-seeking-more-control-of-black-sea-mediterranean-arctic>

12 6<sup>th</sup> Fleet is headquartered in Naples, Italy. The officially stated mission of the Sixth Fleet in 2011 is that it "conducts the full range of Maritime Operations and Theater Security Cooperation missions, in concert with coalition, joint, interagency, and other parties, in order to advance security and stability in Europe and Africa." It has been continually engaged in world affairs around the Mediterranean, and, on occasion, further afield.

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for a rotational deployment, or conducting exercises and a **new NATO maritime strategy** that will identify priority areas and the resources needed to operate successfully in the geopolitical competition.

The last NATO Maritime Strategy was written in 2011 — before the Russian submarine fleet resurged, before the annexation of Crimea, and before China started making moves in Europe and the Arctic through its One Belt/One Road initiative. It means the document is as outdated as the NATO Defense and Deterrence Posture dating back to 2012. The new maritime strategy should guide NATO defense planning process is so that NATO can manage the new paradigm set by great-power competition. It can be quite a demanding and expensive task. For instance, US and NATO trips up to the Arctic, considered unnecessary for surface ships since the Cold War, need to be resumed. This will not be possible without some costly burden-sharing within the Alliance. The U.S. technically has 11 carriers, but only 8 are available for tasking at any given time. Among these eight carriers, the fleet must provide under normal circumstances a carrier for the Middle East and a carrier for the Asia-Pacific region.

It is important to bear in mind that for **NATO to gain ability to confront Russia at sea, it is not just about freedom of navigation. It's about its own safety.** New naval activities help Russia to project power and hold remote territories at risk. Thus, Tripoli could become the next Crimea, where Russia can support ships and submarines carrying long-range land attack missiles and anti-ship cruise missiles from their Syrian hub.

There is no doubt that this state of affairs threatens European security. This topic should be on the agenda of the next NATO summit. While chiefs of general staff already know the risks, the European NATO states' political leaders, who allocate defense budgets, must understand the new map as well.

NATO's attention needs to be direct also to space. Keeping NATO's military superiority will depend to some extent on the use of space capabilities. Russia continues to bolster its military space assets. Specifically, it is working to expand its anti-access/area denial approach in outer space in the form of electronic warfare, increasing the sustainability of its communication systems and developing offensive capabilities against ground-based space infrastructure.

According to the Union of Concerned Scientists' satellite database and space-launch reporting, there are more than 2,200 satellites in orbit, and over 1,000 of them belong to American companies, government services, and scientific institutions, including 189 military satellites. Russia has more than 160 satellites, including 100 military spacecraft. This shows that the Russian military is almost as dependent on space assets as the United States.

The biggest part of Russia's military satellite constellation involves 51 communication spacecraft, with 16 Earth-observation satellites. This differs from the American, Chinese, and European ones, where Earth-observation satellites dominate. For instance, the U.S. has 56 Earth-observation satellites and 49 communication satellites and China has 57 Earth-observation satellites and only three communication satellites. We can see that China and Russia have a different focus for their space operations, and the US and NATO must accordingly to tailor their responses in space.

As in other domains, the West needs to focus on Russian vulnerabilities. Russian state-owned factories are faced with sanctions that affect their technological capabilities. And in contrast to other space powers, Russia's armed forces cannot rely on commercial space systems because the domestic market of commercial space services is poorly developed. Furthermore, Moscow's focus on communication and navigation capabilities creates a gap in space intelligence capabilities.

This imminent industrial weakness inevitably drives Moscow to try to nullify the advantages of the U.S. and other leading powers. However, Russia's actions toward this effort — like the strange orbital maneuvering of experimental Russian satellites or the testing of air defense missiles with potential anti-satellite capabilities — should not be overestimated. There is no sense in targeting hundreds of satellites in many orbits, and it is

impossible to target them reticently.

Fields in which the Russia's effort to improve its military space capabilities should be matter of concern are: opportunities for jamming and radio intelligence; sustainability of its command, control and communication systems, and offensive capabilities against ground-based space infrastructure should all be areas of concern. The Russian goal here is to prevent its adversaries from using their space-related infrastructure.<sup>13</sup>

Within this context, **concerted and coordinated technological sanctions could go a long way to hinder the further increase of Russia's military might in space.** Since dual use technologies play an important role in the space military capability development, an effective coordination mechanism on tailor-made sanctions between the USA and other NATO Allies would be welcomed. In any case, great power competition in the space domain requires increased intelligence sharing focused on the transfer of technologies.

### 1.3. Necessary adaptation of NATO doctrine and capabilities

As shown above, NATO, besides collective territorial defense, needs to focus on the deterrence of Russia in a broader perimeter<sup>14</sup> and on assistance US deterrence on China.

The NATO Cold War doctrine put emphasis on rapidly gaining air superiority. After the Cold War, the crises in the Balkans and Libya have shown the limits of this tactic. Russia's A2/AD strategy adds further doubts about the calculation that NATO can count on quick air superiority in case of conflict. If NATO should be a player in global competition, it must invest more in capabilities that are relevant for facing near-peer-adversary. A robust navy is one of them.

For the Europeans, building a strong Navy that can effectively defend NATO southern and northern flanks against potential Russian harassment is imperative especially in the context of the defense and deterrence at the NATO Eastern Flank and Russian strategy of double decoupling. One of the elements of the strategy is to hold western Europe at risk to complicate the decision-making of the western European powers when they are determining a response to incursion. If combined, the European and the US naval assets are strong and capable enough to counter this Russian leverage at sea. Therefore, it is likely they will be more willing to participate in the defense of the Eastern flank. Their intention to do so could be also much more credibly communicated to Russia with a capable navy at hand, thus strengthening the NATO deterrence.

The resilience of NATO southern and northern flanks against the potential Russian harassment, when increased by a powerful navy, is a remarkable contribution to the great-power competition. The US needs to have Europe safe to be able to focus on China.

At the moment, NATO's navy is more reactive than proactive. The last NATO Maritime Strategy was written in 2011. NATO should adopt a new maritime strategy — outside of the multi-domain strategies NATO has worked on since 2011 — to guide NATO allies and partners in making investments.<sup>15</sup> The aim would be to spare USA capacities in the Mediterranean and the Arctic for other tasks. Nowadays, the US leadership repeatedly faces the difficult decision whether to send vessels either to the Mediterranean, the Arctic, the Indo-Pacific region, or to the Middle East.

A new maritime strategy will be important for burden-sharing agenda. Planning increased investments ought to be guided by a strategy to successfully counter the most relevant adversaries. Specifically, NATO needs more mine-sweeping and mine-countermeasures capabilities; more intelligence, surveillance and

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<sup>13</sup> Russia is behind in military space capabilities, but that only drives its appetite, Pavel Luzin, 2020: <https://www.defensenews.com/opinion/commentary/2020/04/02/russia-is-behind-in-military-space-capabilities-but-that-only-drives-its-appetite/>

<sup>14</sup> The region where NATO directly encounters Russian strategy and capabilities covers Scandinavia, Baltics, the Black Sea, but also the Mediterranean and the Arctic.

<sup>15</sup> Foggo: Russia Seeking More Control of Black Sea, Mediterranean, Arctic, Megan Eckstein, 2020: <https://news.usni.org/2020/07/17/foggo-russia-seeking-more-control-of-black-sea-mediterranean-arctic>

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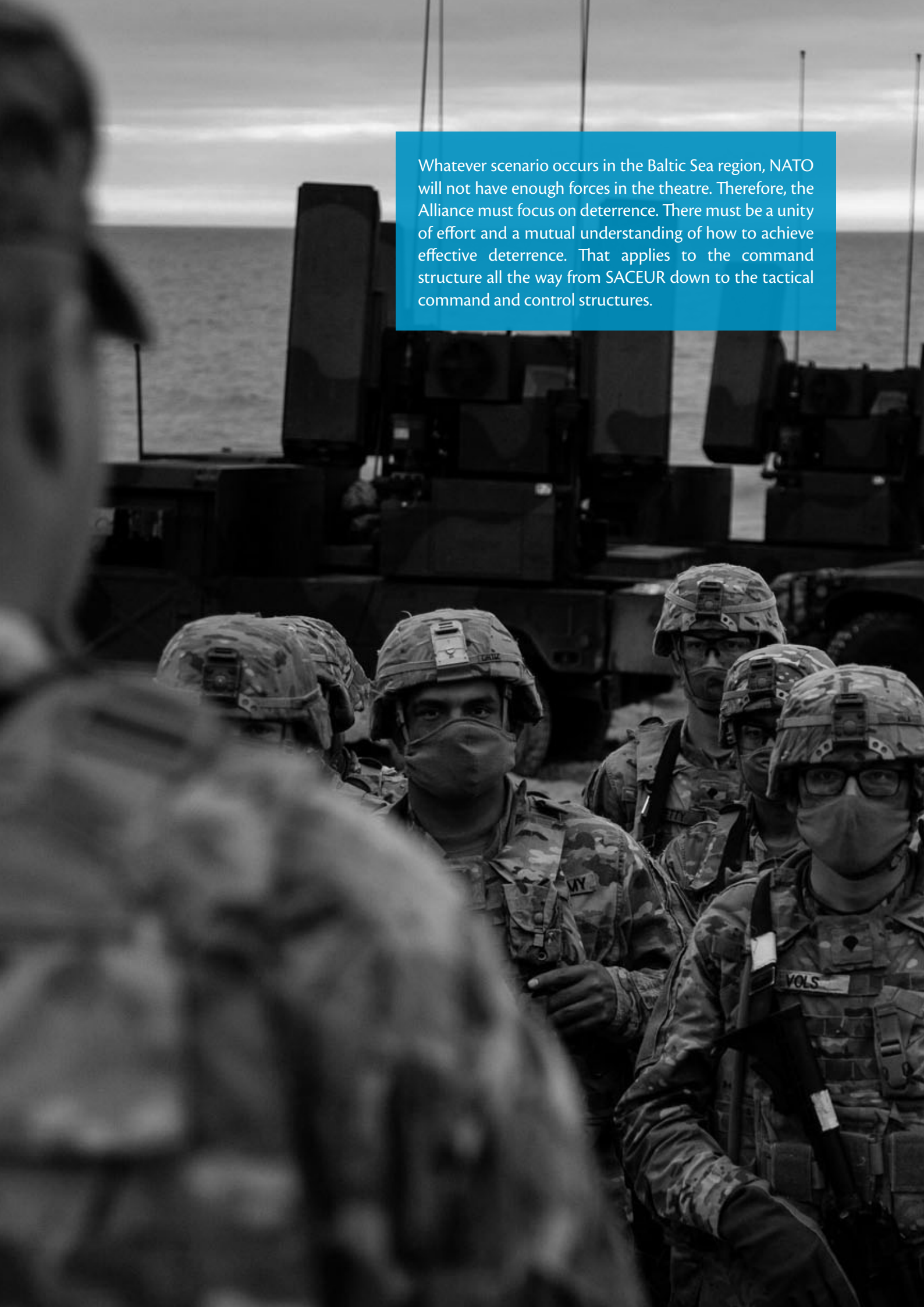
reconnaissance (ISR) assets, including unmanned ISR assets; and more interoperability, so that countries big and small can share information and collaborate at sea. Building maritime capacities in bilateral cooperation, like Poland does with Sweden or Norway, is a model for contribution to the NATO maritime strategy.<sup>16</sup>

Another priority for NATO's global role is an increase in the European level of ambition within NATO. Under a new European level of ambition, NATO defense planners could be instructed to develop European capabilities needed to conduct one MJO (major joint operation) and three SJOs (small joint operations) for crisis management with limited or no American support. Alternatively, NATO's European members could commit to providing half the combat capabilities including combat support and combat support service needed to conduct an alliance wide MJO+. This would be best achieved by 2024, when European nations have committed to deliver on their 2 percent of GDP defense spending pledge. Creating this additional burden-sharing goal might also make it easier for the United States to accept less than complete compliance with the 2 percent goal by 2024. Although the budget pledge deserves to be met, a new, ambitious sense of direction based on actual capabilities would be more admirable and valuable.

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<sup>16</sup> Poland buys Swedish submarines and developed a mutual plan on closing the Barents Sea if necessary. Norwegian missiles launched from its vessels and Polish launching platforms targeting Russian fleet in St. Petersburg.





Whatever scenario occurs in the Baltic Sea region, NATO will not have enough forces in the theatre. Therefore, the Alliance must focus on deterrence. There must be a unity of effort and a mutual understanding of how to achieve effective deterrence. That applies to the command structure all the way from SACEUR down to the tactical command and control structures.

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## 2. CREDIBILITY FOR MEMBERS MOST EXPOSED TO THE EXTERNAL THREAT

The Baltic is and will remain the most vulnerable point for NATO. Whatever scenario occurs in the Baltic Sea region, NATO will not have enough forces in the theatre. Therefore, the Alliance must focus on deterrence. There must be a unity of effort and a mutual understanding of how to achieve effective deterrence. That applies to the command structure all the way from SACEUR down to the tactical command and control structures.

The measures adopted by the Baltic states themselves and deployment of NATO eFP increased the resilience of NATO Eastern Flank. But the mission is not completed yet. More needs to be done by Member States most exposed to Russia's military threat, as well as by the entire Alliance.<sup>17</sup>

### 2.1. Interoperability

Not only a further increase of the number of combat units in the Baltics, but also an enhancement of the **interoperability** of the international forces, is needed. Effective deterrence requires interoperability of the Baltic armies with the remaining capabilities of the rest of NATO. Air policing serves Baltic States' resilience. However, they also need NATO air support and air defense. If needed, well-motivated Baltic troops on the ground should get very rapid and quick NATO air support; the lack of it is a current significant weakness for them.

There is a need for **more advanced planning** on the NATO's Eastern flank. This would allow a phased reaction and coordination of air, maritime, and land lines in which NATO would be engaged. MNC-NE in Szczecin and MND-NE HQ in Elbląg represent the backbone of the eFP brigades. They will be in forefront in case of contingency. As well, national contingency plans must be synchronized with NATO plans. Recently established NFIUS are the key sensors that provide information about the situation on the ground.

The US military presence in the region is welcomed by all states in the Eastern Flank. The NATO context of the new US troops and equipment in Poland is important. Improving **synchronization of the US plans with the NATO plans as well as interoperability** of NATO and US forces is of paramount importance for the Eastern Flank. While the NATO eFP 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 as well as air and missile defense, and long-range fires.

The recent decision made within U.S.-Poland Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement to reestablish the US Army's V Corps and to deploy its Corps Forward Deployed Headquarters to Poland will allow for much more flexible control and command of multiple divisions, including Marine and Army divisions and brigades. It can act as a multinational Land Component headquarter. This means the U.S. Army can prepare to command "Army, joint, and multinational forces engaged in crisis response, limited contingency operations, major operations, and campaigns."

LTG(R) Ben Hodges, former Commanding General, U.S. Army Europe, and CEPA's Pershing Chair underlines: "The V Corps HQ (FWD) is another important manifestation of American commitment to our allies. This HQ will improve coordination between U.S. and other allied forces on NATO's eastern flank, enhance intelligence cooperation, and greatly improve the logistical efforts, especially mobility, essential to effective deterrence."

Upon arrival, the **V Corps can coordinate and integrate with the U.S. division forward deployed**

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<sup>17</sup> The Significance and Modalities of Deterrence: The Current Military and Strategic Situation in the Baltics, Martin Svárovský, 2020: <https://www.europeanvalues.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/The-Significance-and-Modalities-of-Deterrence.pdf>

**headquarters in Poznan and with NATO's 9 other standing Land Corps around Europe — importantly with NATO's MNCNE, Szczecin which is NATO's Land Corps specifically focused on NATO's northeastern region.** V Corps should integrate closely with Poland's Operations Command, which includes Poland's Land Component Command C2 capability — Poland's "Corps-level" equivalent in Kraków. Additional coordination can be done with regional NATO Multinational Division Headquarters (MND): in Elbląg, in Latvia, in Romania, and the nascent MND-Central Europe. Finally, V Corps can help spur rapid establishment of the developing and vital, Multinational Corps Southeast (MNCSE) in Romania, responsible for NATO C2 in the vulnerable Black Sea region.<sup>18</sup>

## 2.2. Innovative way of deterrence of Russia

NATO needs to concentrate on Russia's vulnerabilities to strengthen its deterrence. The effectiveness of the deterrence is not only a question of capabilities but also of credibility. This requires proper messaging. NATO needs to show that it can cause high losses, both human and material, to both to Russia's military leadership and public to reduce the risk of a severe miscalculation on the part of the Kremlin.

Russia's most significant tactical advantage is the malleability of its public opinion. Russians accept the inevitability of war much more than Westerners. But Russia may not have as much latitude as imagined. Russians are never encouraged to consider the psychological or economic impact of significant losses or even a defeat. Could NATO change that through delicate communication channels to engaged Russian publicists?

US air intervention in Deyr ez-Zor provides a good example how sensitive the issue of Russian victims might be for Kremlin. The battle where Vagner's Private Military Group, engaged by the Kremlin, lost more than one hundred troops within hours forced the Russian administration to conduct major logistic operation. Then, the transfer of bodies to their relatives was extremely sensitive, especially in a presidential election campaign.

To leverage Russians' tolerance of the costs of war, its military strategists must act very quickly, hence the likelihood of the *fait accompli* path to war. NATO should pursue a shock and awe campaign from the outset of a conflict; the Admiral Kuznetsov, Russia's only aircraft carrier, and non-nuclear Russian assets would be excellent targets to brandish the alliance's raw power. But way before a brutal campaign unfolds, NATO should set a uniform criteria for sanctions. With either a big bang or the slow, annoying pain through consistently-applied sanctions, the objective must be to get Russians to doubt the security of their own regime.

NATO should encourage Moscow to view Kaliningrad as a vulnerable outpost surrounded by NATO territory, isolated from Russia, and with little chance of resupply in the event of war. Russian forces are "anchored" to this location and cannot risk losing it, while their access in and out of the Baltic Sea can be completely controlled by NATO and Sweden. NATO can exploit this potential vulnerability by making it clear that in case of armed conflict Kaliningrad would be a prime target for alliance air, missile, and artillery attacks, just as the Baltic states are depicted by Moscow as a prime target for Russia's assault.

## 2.3. The modular approach to NATO deterrence

NATO's Eastern Flank became in fact NATO's eastern front. It stretches from Svalbard in the north to the eastern Mediterranean in the south. Russia's strategy of limited warfare combined with general mobilization of state resources means that local conflict will be accompanied by escalation along its entire eastern front. Therefore, further integration of NATO's Nordic, Baltic, and Black Sea operational dimensions would be welcomed.

**The modular approach to NATO deterrence, where individual states along this front are contributing voluntarily, is required. The Czech Republic should consider boosting bilateral cooperation with Poland**


<sup>18</sup> America's "Kościuszko Corps," is on the way to Poland, Ray Wojcik, 2020: <https://defence24.com/americas-kosciuszko-corps-is-on-the-way-to-poland-opinion>

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in the context of a strengthened US presence in Poland and NATO deterrence on the Eastern Flank. The new airborne regiment (to be stood up from 2020) could also contribute to this task. The new unit is intended for rapid deployments in addressing quickly emerging crises. The Czech Republic plans that this unit will be ready for deployment in a matter of hours. This ability should be frequently exercised on the Eastern Flank, joining other multinational units operating in the area.

The Czech special forces are, too, expected to be employable in the full spectrum of conflicts, including those of high intensity. Since the special forces have no practical experience with these scenarios, they could exercise regularly with their US and Polish counterparts. The US 10th Special Forces Group activities with the Polish Special Forces Command can provide for a permanent training platform for SOF of Polish and Baltic countries. Czechs could join such an effort and jointly exercise the employment of SOF in high intensity scenarios.





The global geopolitical competition might well serve the interests of the NATO Eastern Flank countries. But only in case if the Alliance remains relevant for the United States in great-power competition, credible for members most exposed to the external threat, and politically cohesive at the same time.



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### 3. POLITICAL COHESION OF NATO

Vast Russian military might is a fact. Still, Russia is weaker than the Alliance. Therefore, if in a conflict with NATO, Russia must target the political cohesion of the Alliance at its initial phase. The topical task is to boost the political cohesion, NATO's weakest point. The solution suggested is twofold. During peacetime, political cohesion needs to be cultivated and the period of extreme political vulnerability of NATO during the conflict needs to be shortened.

#### 3.1. Political cohesion in the peacetime

We, central Europeans, need to find a way how to get our western European partners on board. We must accept the fact that French or Italian threat assessment is different from the countries on the Eastern flank of NATO, bordering with Russia. One of the reasons is that Russia is not threatening them on the same scale. Because of the substantial difference in the threat assessment, we can appeal mainly to the European solidarity. However, this solidarity is not a one-way street.

The countries on the Eastern flank of NATO must have the ambition to shape the European strategic debate with the aim to find a consensus between the European and American narratives. At the same time the states of the Eastern flank of NATO must provide solidarity with the Western Europe, be it NATO or EU agenda. Only this will entitle them to demand the reciprocity.

Thorough debate on the US-Europe doctrinal gap would fit to this field as well. Formats like the Bucharest Nine are well-suited platform for such a debate. The debate must be free of any prejudice and its ultimate goal should be to comprehend the practical impact this dichotomy between both sides of Atlantic has. The well-known division on "new" and "old" Europe, as Donald Rumsfeld put it, does not serve the interest of the NATO political cohesion.

#### 3.2. Period of extreme political vulnerability

The NATO Defense Planning Process only envisions the deployment of general armed forces at the outbreak of conflict. defines only general forces in the form of capability targets according to the current level of ambition. In case of crises, the mechanism of force generation process is applied and handled by the Allied Command Operations, Force Generation Branch, and national military representatives. At the Force Generation Conference, NATO and partner countries make formal offers of personnel and equipment to support the operation or mission. This process might prove too slow in time of real crises. Taking into account the substantially boosted readiness of Russian forces, such crisis can start on extremely short notice and its very initial phase might be the decisive one. If the two commands most relevant to the Eastern Flank (i.e. Szczecin and Elbląg), are "equipped"<sup>19</sup> in peacetime with a substantial US and enhanced Allied enhanced presence in Poland (i.e. US BCT plus national contribution from other Allies), it would grant the alliance robustness and high readiness — both necessary elements for responding to the nature of Russian threat. This should also be reflected in the GRP's. Thus, the NATO readiness would be increased by skipping the necessity of a standard force generation process in case of crisis.

Here, again, bilateral contributions to the NATO resilience are conceivable. One option that can shorten the period of extreme political vulnerability of NATO during the conflict is to make the Czech 7<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Brigade (and possibly other force elements, such as a Gripen air defense detachment) to be put on alert and ready to start the movement to Poland automatically based on certain Russian threat indicators. **A bilateral defense agreement with Poland could be concluded, which would specify events to trigger putting the brigade on alert** — such as full mobilization of Russian Western Military District- and the brigade's movement to reinforce the Eastern Flank, perhaps after the first Russian breach of NATO's territory. Since this

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19 In a form of enhanced affiliation i.e. active cooperation during peacetime, including command post a live exercise.

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would be agreed upon by the sides and mandated by the parliaments in advance, Russia would not be able to disrupt it while NATO contemplates a counter-attack. **In line with the “modular approach”, this has to be later coordinated with NATO collective defense plans.**

### **3.3. Resilience against the hybrid warfare**

In addition to supporting deterrence through the forward deployment and high readiness/reinforcement, Russia’s possible attack would count on the inability of the Alliance to agree on a swift and overwhelming response. The Kremlin has been stoking the indecisiveness of NATO as a whole and individual Member States through non-military aspects of the hybrid warfare for years, supporting anti-NATO and pro-Russian parties and pressure groups or using economic projects to bind influence groups or whole governments to itself and attempting to delegitimize opponents. Such a long-term campaign alone could significantly affect resolve of some allies. And it is likely that in the event of a Russian military adventure against the Eastern flank of NATO, the non-military aspect would play a significant role, precisely to prevent fast and resolute decisions. All the infighting and delays would embolden Russian sympathizers, blockades of reinforcing troops, and inviting many more problems.

So, deterrence can be built up against hybrid campaigns by credible attribution of the source, naming and shaming, and showing that proportionate responses will be unsheathed and mischief will be consistently answered in a collective and united way.

Here, the Czech Republic also has an important role to play. It is a known fact that Russian intelligence is very active in Prague and makes effective use of diplomatic cover: the Russian Embassy in Prague is by far the largest in terms of diplomatic personnel, and it is confirmed in public reports of Czech intelligence agencies that a substantial number of this personnel are intelligence officers. It is also believed that Russian intelligence uses Prague as a hub for its operations in the region of central Europe, including Germany. Czech services should therefore step up their efforts to uncover and disrupt Russian malicious activities and degrade the malign Russian influence network, sapping its efficacy when a crisis emerges. Alternatively, the Czech authorities can monitor it and be prepared to “roll-up” these Russian assets during a crisis as part of Western deterrence efforts.

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## CONCLUSION

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has stressed the importance of political unity and argued for **making NATO a more global alliance to defend democratic values in a world of increasing global competition**. Now the alliance must translate this vision into a new set of missions and find concrete ways to begin implementing them.

It is important to bear in mind that there are other options on the table in terms of the division of roles. It is “coalition of willing” for fight with Russia as well as in the Indo-Pacific area. We see this pattern of bilateral cooperation of some European powers with the USA on the global security already now.

For example, the United Kingdom has increased deployments and operations in the Indo-Pacific region since 2017. It contributed to the coordinated, multinational initiatives to enforce UNSCR sanctions on North Korea and performed its first naval operation aimed at asserting navigational rights and freedoms in the South China Sea in 2018 with the transit of its frigate HMS SUTHERLAND, the transport of its amphibious HMS ALBION, and the passage of its frigate HMS ARGYLL in 2019. France has restarted the Indo-Pacific Security Dialogue with the United States and recognized the significance of the extended deployment of the aircraft carrier FNS CHARLES DE GAULLE to the Indo-Pacific in 2019, accompanied for portions of its deployment by ships from other NATO countries, Australia, and the United States.

It is up to the countries on the NATO Eastern Flank, including Germany, whether they capitalize on great-power competition or let it fall to French and British interests.

The assumption elaborated on the text is that **the global geopolitical competition might well serve the interests of the NATO Eastern Flank countries. But only in case if the Alliance remains relevant for the United States in great-power competition, credible for members most exposed to the external threat, and politically cohesive at the same time.**