

Political Consensus and Defence Preparations: Why NATO Needs a ‘Military Strategy’

by Stephan Frühling¹



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With the September 2014 Summit in Newport in Wales, the North Atlantic Alliance entered another chapter in its history. Following the annexation of Crimea by Russia, NATO governments gave the collective defence commitment in Article 5, and reassurance of its members, greater declaratory and practical priority than at any time since the 9/11 attacks. Over the past 12 months, implementation of the Readiness Action Plan (RAP) has been a focal point at NATO, as well as at the national level for many member states. In the context of Russia's threatening references to its nuclear capabilities, and its alleged violation of the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, there are signs that the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) is returning to strategic discussions of a kind it has not had for many years.² And the new four year cycle of the Alliance's Defence Planning Process (DPP) that began this year provides the opportunity to improve Alliance capabilities for collective defence in the longer term.

The implementation of the Wales Summit decisions, including 'reassurance' measures to strengthen NATO's military presence in the Eastern member states, and 'adaptation' of the Alliance to be better able to respond to threats to the Alliance, thus represents a very significant, ongoing body of work for NATO member states, the NATO commands and Headquarters alike. The Alliance is still learning and re-learning how to solve many practical issues of collective defence and deterrence, but the timelines set in Newport were deliberately ambitious. In July 2016, member states will have

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² Matthew Holehouse, "Nato updates Cold War playbook as Putin vows to build nuclear stockpile," *The Telegraph*, 25 June 2015, <www.telegraph.co.uk/news/predictions/politics/11697512/Nato-updates-Cold-War-playbook-as-Putin-vows-to-build-nuclear-stockpile.html> (accessed 14 September 2015).



the opportunity—and the need—to chart the future of both ‘reassurance’ and ‘adaptation’ at their next summit meeting in Warsaw.

This paper discusses the issues and constraints facing the Allies as they chart this future. It argues that NATO’s focus in recent years on new, but small instruments controlled by the Alliance itself—including the NATO Response Force (NRF), and more recently the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU)—has distracted from the fact that NATO’s power ultimately results from all the Allies’ national capabilities, when they are developed and employed for a common purpose and direction. NATO should therefore prioritize the development of a common strategic narrative and posture statement in the form of a public ‘Military Strategy’ for the Alliance, as guidance for national and Alliance measures to strengthen collective defence capability in years to come.

This strategy should highlight NATO’s ability, willingness and preparedness to reinforce and defend *all* frontline Allies, around the whole of the Alliance’s periphery. The strategy should lay out that NATO needs to be able to reinforce Allies under threat, but also the ability of the frontline states to hold the line and to receive reinforcements if required—and that the Alliance must therefore be ready to strengthen both of these abilities, if individual Allies require assistance. The strategy should not single out any possible adversaries, but emphasize that a threat could come from ‘tous azimuts’. Departing from NATO’s narrative of recent times that highlights deterrence of Russia, and singles out Eastern members for ‘reassurance’, provides the best hope for creating a lasting political consensus in Warsaw, around which the Alliance could align its preparations for collective defence.

One year after Wales: enduring challenges and constraints

The Wales Summit was held only six months after the annexation of Crimea, and many Allies were still harbouring hopes that NATO and Russia might be able to find a way back to a mutually acceptable relationship. Central to the discussions in Newport was their concern not to impede these hopes by giving the impression that NATO was preparing for a threat from Russia for the long term. Since that time, however, the barely concealed intervention of Russian forces in the conflict in the Donbas, separatists’ intransigence despite the two rounds of Minsk agreements, and continued Russian verbal threats and air and naval provocations, have significantly disillusioned many NATO capitals. Today, it is thus both more acceptable and more necessary than it was 12 months ago to think of the need for an active NATO presence in its Eastern member states as something that will be an enduring element on NATO’s agenda.³ While governments agreed to set NATO on a new trajectory in Wales, in Warsaw they will need to contemplate what this new trajectory should mean for NATO and national defence postures, capability priorities, and NATO-Russia relations in the longer term.⁴

In addition to these concerns about Russia’s behaviour in Eastern Europe, however, there is also great and seemingly irreducible volatility on NATO’s Southern flank. The instability that followed the ‘Arab Spring’ persists. If anything, the conflicts in Syria and Iraq are becoming even more intractable following Russia’s intervention, and several Allies, including neighbouring Turkey, are becoming ever more closely engaged in them. Failing or failed states in Northern Africa and the Sahel continue to pose threats of terrorism to the Alliance. The refugee crisis created by these conflicts, which has now spilled into

³ For example, despite its diplomatic investment into the Minsk process, Germany has decided to equip its Eurofighters conducting Baltic Air Policing in the second half of 2015 with full wartime armament, which was not the case in 2014. The German Chief of Air Force was reported in the German press as attributing this to the “political environment,” which had placed more emphasis on “de-escalation” last year, but saw this “less critically” now. “Deutsche Eurofighter erstmals voll bewaffnet über Baltikum,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 20 September 2015, <www.faz.net/aktuell/politik/ausland/europa/patrouillenfluege-deutsche-eurofighter-erstmals-voll-bewaffnet-ueber-baltikum-13813235.html> (accessed 21 September 2015).

⁴ See Michael Rühle, “NATO and the Ukraine Crisis,” *American Foreign Policy Interests*, 37:2 (2015), pp. 80-86.



Western Europe and the Balkans, is unlikely to abate any time soon. In addition, future relations with Iran remain a source of risk despite the agreement on that country's nuclear program.

NATO thus faces two major and enduring crises in the East and the South, in addition to the ongoing operations in Afghanistan, in Kosovo and off the Horn of Africa. Managing all of these, at the political as well as policy and planning levels, is taxing the ability of many states to devote attention to any one issue. NATO's tempo of operations since the surge in Afghanistan in 2009 and Operation 'Unified Protector' in 2011 remains high, and dealing with a series of crises has crowded out discussions on long-term strategy at most recent NATO Summits. Regardless of the discussion among Allies as to NATO's priorities, however, where the next NATO operation will take place will, to a large extent, be dictated by events outside the control of the Alliance.

In an Alliance of 28 countries, perceptions of threat and judgments about priorities will never fully align, but always reflect the specific geographic situations and historic characteristics of each member state. This would be the case even if there was agreement to give collective defence priority among the three tasks of the Strategic Concept.⁴ Although the Wales Summit decisions were taken in light of historic developments on NATO's Eastern flank, NATO adaptation to its new security environment (in the East and South) will have to continue to reflect the different concerns of all of its member states. Indeed, some senior officials see a possible split between 'Southern' and 'Eastern' members as a real and most concerning threat to the Alliance.

NATO's situation is made all the more difficult by enduring resource constraints, both at the national level and in NATO common funding. While the decline of defence spending has been halted or

reversed in many member states since 2013, most defence budgets are likely to remain below the NATO target of 2% for some time yet, and it will be years more before increased spending will result in increased capabilities. Even in the United States, the uncertain future of sequestration and competing demands on US military presence in the Asia-Pacific and the Middle East will remain significant constraints. Despite the high-profile, temporary deployments of F-22 fighters and 'reassurance' forces, the significant reduction of US forces in Europe that occurred since 2010 is not being reversed.⁶ Force structures have shrunk even faster than budgets in many member states, which remain engaged in a series of NATO, other multilateral and national operations. In a security environment far more stressful than was contemplated only a few years ago, there is little peace dividend from declining out-of-area operations that could provide major financial, institutional or force structure resources to address new priorities.

After two decades of out-of-area operations, however, many of which were directed against non-state actors, NATO's perceived and actual preparedness for collective defence operations in the East remains far weaker than that for crisis management operations in the South.⁷ How to conduct collective defence operations against other states, or deter threats from them, received very little practical attention from most Allies until 2014. Since then, a large effort has begun, at both the national and NATO levels, to study and exercise the practical aspects of reinforcing NATO's Eastern flank. Some 'muscle memory' from the Cold War remains in the organization, but many nations also have found that they need to re-build significant institutional experience and expertise.⁸ This will require significant planning effort, regular exercises, as well as institutional adaptation, political attention—and time.

⁵ These are collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security.

⁶ Luis Simón, "Understanding US Retrenchment in Europe," *Survival*, 57:2 (2015), pp. 157-172.

⁷ See John R. Deni, "NATO's New Trajectories after the Wales Summit," *Parameters*, 44:3 (2014), pp. 57-65.



‘Adaptation’: a long-term process

NATO thus faces two related but distinct challenges: first, to find political agreement on the balance between the tasks of (and potential threats to) the Alliance; and, second, to adjust NATO’s strategic posture so that the Alliance’s military means align with the political consensus about tasks and threats.⁹ In both regards, NATO has been on an ongoing journey for several years. NATO’s increased focus on Article 5 pre-dates Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. The argument that collective defence requires specific preparations and planning was part of a more recent debate between the Allies as early as 2008/09.¹⁰ The 2010 Strategic Concept and the 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review (DDPR) were important milestones in the search for political consensus on NATO’s purpose and priorities. Seen in this context, the main achievement at the Wales Summit last year was less the renewed emphasis on Article 5 as the bedrock of the Alliance, than the strong affirmation by member states that all three core tasks should also be reflected in its actual defence preparations.

The RAP that was adopted in Wales has as its

two components, ‘reassurance’ and ‘adaptation’. ‘Reassurance’ is not a new strategic concept, but its meaning in the NATO debate has shifted over time.¹¹ In 2010, a group of high-ranking former officials argued that ‘reassurance’ steps should “improve the alliance’s ability to respond in case of a conflict in Europe,” and help address the failure of NATO to develop sizeable forces for the reinforcement of its new Eastern members. Their recommendations included the rehearsal of contingency plans, repositioning of materiel, strengthening air defence and reforming the NRF, and were thus very similar to what NATO members would announce as NATO ‘adaptation’ four years later.¹²

In the meantime, NATO’s use of the term ‘reassurance’¹³ had shifted to reflect a more recent US tradition, where the ‘assurance’ of Allies has come to be seen as a separate task from deterrence, dissuasion, or defeating an adversary.¹⁴ In this perspective, there is a strong emphasis on the communication of US guarantees as the core of ‘assurance’,¹⁵ in particular by demonstrating US strategic interest, attention and commitment through the temporary deployment of small, but highly visible forces.¹⁶ Hence, as the

⁸ For example, large-scale movement of forces by rail is now more difficult than it was during the Cold War, since rail companies have been privatized and are thus not subject to direction by governments any more. Interview with German officials, 20 July 2015.

⁹ In that sense, NATO’s challenge is not unlike that confronting individual nations who need to develop force structuring approaches matched to perceptions of threat. See Stephan Frühling, *Defence Planning and Uncertainty*, Abdingdon, Routledge, 2014.

¹⁰ At that time, the Norwegian ‘Core Area Initiative’ and the decision, following the 2008 war in Georgia, to begin contingency planning for the defence of the Baltic countries both drew attention to the issue. Paal Sigurd Hilde, “Nordic-Baltic security and defence cooperation: the Norwegian perspective,” in Ann-Sofie Dahl and Pauli Järvenpää, *Nordic Security and Global Politics*, Abdingdon: Routledge, 2014, p. 99.

¹¹ The ‘Healey theorem’ coined by UK Secretary for Defence Denis Healey, who posited that it took 5% credibility of US guarantees to deter the Soviet Union, but 95% credibility to reassure the Europeans, demonstrates the close link between reassurance and deterrence in NATO thinking during the Cold War (Denis Healey, *The Time of My Life*, London, Michael Joseph, 1989, p. 243). In general, ‘reassurance’ or ‘assurance’—both terms are often used interchangeably—are far less clearly defined as stand-alone concepts. (See Jeffrey W. Knopf, “Varieties of Assurance,” *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, 35:3 (2012), pp. 375–99.) In particular, both terms have been used to refer to influence directed at Allies as well as at adversaries. In Norway, for example, the term ‘reassurance’ was traditionally used in relation to its policy aimed at reducing tensions with Russia. (See Geir Lundestad, “The evolution of Norwegian security policy: Alliance with the West and reassurance in the East,” *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 17:2-3 (1992), pp. 227-56.) In 1992, the *NATO Review* carried an article on “Reassuring Eastern Europe,” situating the term in the Alliance’s nascent neighbourhood and enlargement policy. (Otto Pick, “Reassuring Eastern Europe,” *NATO Review*, 40:2 (1992), pp. 27-31. See also Ronald D. Asmus and F. Stephen Larrabee, “NATO and the Have-Nots: Reassurance After Enlargement,” *Foreign Affairs*, 75:6 (1996), pp. 13-20.)

¹² Ronald Asmus, Stefan Czumr, Chris Donnelly, Aivis Ronis, Tomas Valasek and Klaus Wittmann, *NATO, new allies and reassurance*, CER policy brief, London, Centre for European Reform, 2010.

¹³ While NATO refers to ‘assurance,’ the United States and Canada continue to use the term ‘reassurance’ in relation to their national contributions.

¹⁴ See, for example, US Department of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review Report 2001*, Washington DC: US Department of Defense, 2001, p. 11.

¹⁵ Justin V. Anderson and Jeffrey A. Larsen, for example, wrote that “The United States must convince its allies and partners they are protected by credible U.S. security guarantees. This requires consistent, constant, and visible demonstrations of U.S. political resolve and military capabilities to reinforce the communication of assurance messages.” Justin V. Anderson and Jeffrey A. Larsen with Polly M. Holdorf, *Extended Deterrence and Allied Assurance: Key Concepts and Current Challenges for U.S. Policy*, INSS Occasional Paper 69, Colorado: USAF Institute for National Security Studies, USAF Academy, 2013, p. 6.

¹⁶ For example, though long-range ‘Bomber Assurance and Deterrence’ missions.



situation in Ukraine deteriorated in early 2014, several Allies deployed small air, maritime and land force components to Eastern Europe on a national basis. In addition, some of these deployments also fell under NATO's auspices, including the deployment of NATO AWACS aircraft, the augmentation of the Baltic Air Policing mission, and increases to NATO's maritime standing forces and exercise program.¹⁷

In the Wales Summit Declaration, it was these latter deployments that were then collectively referred to as NATO's "assurance measures." "Adaptation" measures, on the other hand, included changes to NATO's readiness and preparedness, including the creation of the VJTF as part of a reform of the NRE, the establishment of NFIU in several Eastern member states, increased staffing of the Multinational Headquarters North-East in Szczecin, enhanced planning and exercises, and infrastructure adjustments.¹⁸ Importantly, both components of the RAP were a political compromise that helped the Allies to bridge the demand of Eastern member states, in particular Poland and the Baltic countries, for permanent stationing of Allied forces on their territory, with the demand of others, including Germany, that any changes to NATO's posture should remain consistent with the NATO-Russia Founding Act.¹⁹ In addition, the Wales Declaration explicitly emphasizes that the RAP contributes to the capability for collective defence as well as to crisis management, to managing "the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications" as well as "the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighbourhood."²⁰

How will we know whether the 'adaptation' process that began in Wales has succeeded? The practical preparations of the Alliance will always have to evolve in line with NATO's security environment, and with the political consensus on tasks and threats. In that sense, the need for 'adaptation' will never go

away. There is no reason, however, why there should also be an enduring need for the 'assurance' measures of Allies in the East. In general, NATO's capabilities and preparations in regard to all three of its core tasks should match the Alliance's political ambition, *and be seen to do so by Allied governments, populations and potential adversaries*. NATO's members have pledged themselves to consider an attack on one as an attack against them all. That they had to create a new policy instrument to 'assure' those same members was an indictment of the earlier balance between the Alliance's tasks and its practical preparations. If the Alliance makes 'reassurance' an explicit objective, it creates the unhealthy impression that it is its own members that need to be influenced, or that they are the cause of tension and strategic risk, rather than potential adversaries. Ultimately, reassurance should naturally flow from NATO's steady-state posture. The success of NATO adaptation will thus be signalled by a consensus among member states that 'reassurance measures' have lost their political and practical relevance as a separate NATO instrument.

Symbolism, substance and strategy in the Readiness Action Plan

What NATO's future steady-state posture should be, however, remains the major question facing the Allies in the lead-up to the Warsaw Summit. The Wales Summit decisions on the RAP were dominated by the need to find a short-term answer to the new strategic environment, and involved a strong dose of creative ambiguity—a proven foundation on which many a political compromise has been built in the Alliance's history. The RAP itself is not a public document, which makes it even easier for every Ally to emphasize its own interpretation of what NATO has actually decided in Wales. The question remains, however, whether the mix of symbolism,

¹⁷ NATO, *NATO's Readiness Action Plan*, Fact Sheet, December 2014.

¹⁸ NATO, *NATO's Readiness Action Plan*, Fact Sheet, December 2014.

¹⁹ Ulrich Speck, 'German Power and the Ukraine Conflict,' Carnegie Europe website, <<http://carnegieeurope.eu/2015/03/26/german-power-and-ukraine-conflict>> (accessed 10 September 2015).

²⁰ NATO Heads of State and Government, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014, para 5.



substance and strategy that underpins the RAP has been as successful in matching the Alliance's defence preparations to the political consensus it helped to form in Newport.

If allied populations, governments or possible adversaries look for a public explanation of how the measures included in the RAP will actually fulfil all of the objectives that are associated with it in the Wales Summit Declaration, they could be forgiven for being somewhat confused. The Declaration states that “assurance measures ... will provide the fundamental baseline requirement for assurance and deterrence.”²¹ But how would NATO determine what this ‘fundamental baseline’ of Alliance deterrence might be? For the Declaration also states that “Adaptation measures ... will ... *facilitate reinforcement* of Allies located at NATO's periphery *for deterrence and collective defence*.”²² On the other hand, “Allied forces maintain the adequate readiness and coherence needed [for] deterring aggression against NATO Allies *and* demonstrating preparedness to defend NATO territory,”²³ which suggests that deterrence might be separate from the preparedness for collective defence after all.

Despite the political effort at negotiating the Alliance's goals and posture in the 2010 Strategic Concept, in the 2012 DDP, and at the 2014 Wales Summit, there is thus still no clear articulation of how NATO's defence preparations will achieve the security of its members, or how NATO members should determine from this the priorities for common and national capability development in the short, medium and long terms. Instead, NATO's reaction to changes in its security environment in recent years has been driven by focusing on the creation of

new conspicuous tools, without a clearly articulated framework explaining how these will achieve the Alliance's objectives, or how they relate to the other means that are at the disposal of the Allies.²⁴

In Wales in 2014, the political imperative for ‘announceables’ dished a hefty amount of political symbolism onto the creation of the VJTF and NFIU.²⁵ Indeed, there are uncanny similarities to the NRF, which was announced at the 2002 Riga Summit when NATO also had to demonstrate its relevance to the epochal change resulting from the 9/11 attacks. The NRF was conceived as a tool for rapid military response to crises around the world, but never employed in that role. While it turned out to have useful effects in testing transformation and strengthening interoperability, the point remains that NATO placed significant political emphasis on a concept that, ultimately, was unable to meet the expectations placed on it.²⁶

Today, the VJTF is often placed in the tradition of the Allied Mobile Force of the Cold War era.²⁷ Its strategic role, however, remains vague, and is described by different observers and officials as part of Allies' ‘trip-wire’ to raise political risk for an aggressor, as a force to secure entry for follow-on forces, or as a first responder force to contain a threat against the Alliance.²⁸ While it is always possible to imagine scenarios where the force could fulfil any of these roles, demonstrating the usefulness of the VJTF in various scenarios is not the same as demonstrating that NATO has a coherent response to a threat to one of its members overall. At higher levels of threat, it is also easy to imagine how adversaries could impede the rapid deployment of the VJTF, how little difference the capabilities in the

²¹ NATO Heads of State and Government, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014, para 7.

²² NATO Heads of State and Government, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014, para 8. Emphasis added.

²³ NATO Heads of State and Government, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014, para 8. Emphasis added.

²⁴ A situation that is not unique to NATO. See Hew Strahan, “The lost meaning of strategy,” *Survival*, 47:3, 2005, pp. 33-54; Christopher J. Fettweis, “Threatlessness and US Grand Strategy,” *Survival*, 56:5, 2015, pp. 43-68.

²⁵ This is not least the case since both embody well the DDP's comment that “NATO will continue to seek security at the lowest possible level of forces,” NATO, *Deterrence and Defence Posture Review*, 20 May 2012, para 3.

²⁶ See Guillaume Lasconjarias, *The NRF: from a Key Driver of Transformation to a Laboratory of the Connected Forces Initiative*, Research Paper no. 88, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2013; Jan Abts, *NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force*, Research Paper no. 109, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015.



force might make to large-scale operations, or how attempts at deploying it might increase the political tensions that its creators had hoped to minimize.

Filling the concept of the VJTF with practical meaning has catalysed useful work on related force generation, contingency plans, movement and logistics, command and control, and political decision making. But addressing these issues in relation to the VJTF is not sufficient to prepare for the management of a collective defence or crisis management operation overall: Given some Allies' parliamentary processes for approving operations, for example, there is a risk that some components of the VJTF may not be able to deploy as fast as intended. At the same time, however, many member states maintain other national high-readiness forces that could arrive in theatre in a shorter timeframe.²⁹ NATO is revisiting the concept of the NRF as a whole, but in any real crisis, members will also volunteer forces not previously assigned to its stand-by pool. The VJTF will certainly need commanding, but so will other Allied forces in the theatre, as well as national forces of the frontline Allies who, in a conflict with Russia, would have good reason to seek early Transfer of Authority (ToA) over their national forces to NATO. And insofar as the VJTF might serve as a 'trip-wire', so too would all the other Allied forces that are present in the Eastern member states as part of the 'assurance' measures. So far, however,

these forces are not assigned any clear role in NATO's approach to crisis management.³⁰

The arguments for strengthening NATO's defence in the East

It is thus not surprising that the debate about a more radical 'adaptation' of NATO's posture continued unabated after the Summit in Wales. Some argue that NATO should return to a more coherent approach to deterrence, including a more realistic assessment of what can and cannot be expected of it,³¹ and a re-appraisal of the value of nuclear weapons for the Alliance's security.³² The proposition that NATO should 'get ready' for a 'new Cold War', given Russia's belligerence and the coercive potential of tactical nuclear weapons,³³ sparked debate on the recent pages of *Survival*.³⁴ Many analysts, allied officials and governments would like to see a stronger conventional defence posture in NATO's Eastern member states.³⁵ Overall, the call for the deployment of more substantial allied combat forces, in particular to the Baltic countries, is based on three different arguments.

Firstly, Russia's conventional superiority is such that timely reinforcement by NATO may be impossible in case of a major attack, as Russia could prevent the transfer of allied units,³⁶ could destroy prepositioned

²⁷ See Christian Nünlist, *NATO's "Spearhead Force,"* CSS Analyses in Security Policy no. 274, Zürich, Center for Security Studies, ETH Zurich, 2015).

²⁸ Author's discussions with officials and analysts in several European capitals, July to September 2015.

²⁹ Indeed, this was demonstrated by the rapid deployment of 'reassurance' forces, on a national basis, to Eastern Europe in 2014. One notable agreement in this regard, at the sidelines of the Wales Summit, was agreement by Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands and Norway, to join the UK in the development of its Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF). Ministry of Defence, 'International partners sign Joint Expeditionary Force agreement,' 5 September 2015, <www.gov.uk/government/news/international-partners-sign-joint-expeditionary-force-agreement> (accessed 11 September 2015). NATO members also continue to maintain sizeable airborne forces, which could be used for collective defence operations. See *The Future of Airborne Forces in NATO*, NDC Research Report, Rome, NATO Defense College, 2013.

³⁰ Interviews with defence officials in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, July-August 2015.

³¹ Michael Rühle, "Deterrence: what it can (and cannot) do," *NATO Review*, 20 April 2015, <www.nato.int/docu/review/2015/Also-in-2015/deterrence-russia-military/EN/index.htm> (accessed 15 September 2015).

³² See for example, Karl-Heinz Kamp, *Nuclear implications of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict*, NDC Research Report, Rome: NATO Defense College, 2015.

³³ Matthew Kroenig, "Facing Reality: Getting NATO ready for a new Cold War," *Survival*, 57:1, 2015, pp. 49-70.

³⁴ Steven Pifer, Lukasz Kulesa, Egon Bahr, Götz Neuneck, Mikhail Troitskiy and Matthew Kroenig, "Forum: NATO and Russia," *Survival*, 57:2, 2015, pp. 119-144.

³⁵ See for example Elbridge Colby, "Stand up to stand down," *Foreign Affairs*, 13 August 2015, <www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/poland/2015-08-13/step-stand-down> (accessed 15 September 2015); Geoffrey Pridham, "Time to bolster the Baltic states," *The World Today*, August & September 2015, pp. 40-41;

³⁶ Martin Hurt, "Deployment of Allied Forces in Baltics in Significant Numbers is Only Way to Ensure Sufficient Deterrence," *ICDS blog*, 15 June 2015, <www.icds.ee/blog/article/deployment-of-allied-forces-in-baltics-in-significant-numbers-is-only-way-to-ensure-sufficient-deterrence/> (accessed 15 September 2015).



equipment in place,³⁷ and could overrun local defence forces within a matter of hours.³⁸ If Russia was, however, denied the option of a ‘fait accompli’ by stronger local conventional defences, its nuclear superiority in the theatre would also become much less relevant.³⁹ In this perspective, it is the size and combat potential of the allied forces deployed to the frontline states that matters most, which therefore should be increased from the current companies, to battalions or brigades in each country.

Secondly, the decision at the Wales Summit to keep NATO adaptation within the confines of the 1997 NATO Russia Founding Act—which was adopted before Poland and the Baltic countries joined the Alliance—perpetuates a special status for these members. This in itself is seen by some to weaken the value of NATO membership (and NATO deterrence) for the Allies in the East. One important consequence of the restrictions in the Act is that NATO continues to emphasize that the ‘reassurance’ measures of the RAP create a ‘persistent’ presence on a rotational basis—not a ‘permanent’ one. In this perspective, it is therefore important that NATO’s posture should signal a clear break from the restrictions in the NATO-Russia Founding Act. This leads to calls that emphasize the need for NATO to establish ‘bases’, and to agree on ‘permanent’ rather than rotational deployments.⁴⁰

Thirdly, there are concerns about the ‘credibility’ of

NATO’s commitment to Article 5,⁴¹ in particular about the willingness of West European countries to stand up to Moscow. A continuous presence of allied forces would thus create a trip-wire that also ‘entangled’ those reluctant Allies. In this perspective, it is particularly important for European Allies also to maintain a continuous presence in the Alliance’s frontline states, and to reduce the scope for political reticence by ‘pre-delegating’ authority over the use of allied forces to SACEUR. In general, those concerned with the Alliance’s credibility tend to regard Western European’s willingness to bear the financial and political cost of peacetime defence preparations in the East, as an indication of their behaviour should a NATO country come under attack.

As compelling as all of these arguments are in isolation, however, there are also significant problems to translate them into Alliance consensus at the 2016 Warsaw Summit and beyond. Politically, accepting that more needs to be done to increase the ability of the Alliance to conduct large-scale collective defence operations, does not necessarily translate into support for a political-strategic posture that is likely to antagonize Russia,⁴² or even designates Russia as a de-facto adversary that NATO should deter. If the extent to which countries contribute to peacetime NATO presence in Eastern Europe is regarded as a test of the ‘credibility’ of their commitment, legitimate differences about priorities and the use of limited resources morph into a moral test that the

³⁷ Terrence Kelly, “Stop Putin’s Next Invasion Before It Starts,” *US News & World Report website*, 20 March 2015, <www.usnews.com/opinion/blogs/world-report/2015/03/20/stop-putins-aggression-with-us-forces-in-eastern-europe> (accessed 15 September 2015).

³⁸ “Estonia President Toomas Ilves seeks permanent Nato force,” *BBC news website*, 12 April 2015, <<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-32274170>> (accessed 15 September 2015).

³⁹ Henrik Praks, “Rethinking Deterrence and Assurance for the Baltic Region—Forward Conventional Deterrence and Defence is the Key,” *ICDS blog*, 18 June 2015, <www.icds.ee/blog/article/rethinking-deterrence-and-assurance-for-the-baltic-region-forward-conventional-deterrence-and-defence-is-the-key-1/> (accessed 15 September 2015).

⁴⁰ Kjetil Malkenes Hovland, “Estonian President Calls For Permanent NATO Base in Country,” *Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2014, <www.wsj.com/articles/estonian-president-calls-for-permanent-nato-base-in-country-1409666754> (accessed 15 September 2015); Poland has traditionally been a very strong voice for this concern. New President Duda’s reported comments that NATO considered his country a “buffer state” indicate that this will remain the case in the lead-up to the Warsaw summit. Henry Foy, “Nato treats Poland like a buffer state, says new president,” *Financial Times*, 13 August 2015, <www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/d6749156-410e-11e5-b98b-87c7270955cf.html#axzz3lndn6k64> (accessed 15 September 2015). In contrast, see for example the comments by Lithuanian officials reported in “Lithuania: NATO Keeps Mum On ‘Baltic Brigade’ Request,” *Defense News*, 1 July 2015, <www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/europe/2015/07/01/lithuania-nato-keeps-mum-baltic-brigade-request/29595545/> (accessed 16 September 2015).

⁴¹ These concerns pre-date the 2014 developments in Ukraine, as the ‘credibility’ of Article V was already debated in the lead-up to the 2010 Strategic Concept. See Pål Jonson, *The debate about Article 5 and its credibility: What is it all about?*, NDC Research Paper no. 58, Rome, NATO Defense College, 2010.

⁴² See John R. Deni, “Is Nato treating Poland like a buffer state?,” *War on the Rocks blog*, 18 August 2015, <<http://warontherocks.com/2015/08/is-nato-treating-poland-like-a-buffer-state/>> (accessed 15 September 2015).



Allies could only hope to pass by satisfying every demand. Moreover, suggestions that NATO faces a binary choice between a posture that trades space for time, and one based on ‘forward defence’ akin to the Cold War Central Front,⁴³ ignore that both are in reality part of a spectrum and context-dependent. Even during the Cold War, NATO relied on strategic warning to bring in crucial reinforcements.⁴⁴ A power that is armed with a large nuclear arsenal, if it is sufficiently determined, could overcome *any* conventionally held forward line of defence. Whether a local defence posture is ‘credible’ or ‘sufficient’ is thus a question of the political risk and cost that both sides—NATO and the adversary—are willing to bear, which in the end is a political judgment to which there is no right or wrong answer.

NATO needs a strategic framework, not more tactical tools

There are thus good reasons to doubt that the current arguments for increasing NATO’s military presence in the East are suitable to create an enduring and meaningful political compromise in Warsaw, and that they could be the basis for further adaptation of its practical defence preparations. Regardless of the merit of the concerns of Eastern Allies, and of the strategic logic of their proposals—and regardless of the understanding and sympathy both find elsewhere—the fact remains that other Allies’ priorities will not necessarily be the same. Framing the tasks and challenges for NATO as a threat from (and deterrence of) Russia would raise the counterpoint that Russian cooperation would be needed elsewhere, in particular in Syria. Focusing the Alliance’s preparations on the reinforcement

of specific Allies would also raise concerns about increasing regionalization in the Alliance—the danger that both practical preparations and judgments about the value of the Alliance as a whole will become dominated by local, parochial concerns. At the same time, however, strengthening NATO’s posture in the East does, of course, require close attention to the geographic context and the challenges that arise from it,⁴⁵ in the Baltic countries and Poland, the Black Sea region, and also the high North.

NATO Allies thus need to find a way to reconcile two conflicting, even contradictory demands. On the one hand, they need to address specific challenges in different regions to ensure that the ‘indivisibility of security’ in the Alliance is reflected in meaningful defence preparations for all Allies. On the other hand, they need to avoid a narrow regional perspective to defence preparations, and cannot ignore the broader views on relations with Russia that are held by many Allies in Western Europe. In that sense, the RAP is misaligned on both accounts, as its ‘reassurance’ forces were dedicated to the Eastern Allies alone, but ‘adaptation’—especially insofar as it is centred on the VJTF—also remained manifestly inadequate to address the conventional imbalance that exists in the Baltic region in particular. How can NATO then do better in Warsaw than it did in the past, and avoid a situation where political consensus might only be found by negotiating tactical measures such as the placement of a company here, or a small headquarters there?⁴⁶

Key to success in Warsaw in that sense will be clarity on what the Summit should seek consensus on. NATO should place more emphasis on overarching narrative

⁴³ See Jakub Grygiel and A. Wess Mitchell, “A Preclusive Strategy to Defend the NATO Frontier,” *The American Interest*, 2 December 2014, <www.the-american-interest.com/2014/12/02/a-preclusive-strategy-to-defend-the-nato-frontier/> (accessed 15 September 2015).

⁴⁴ Indeed there were questions whether the United States was really committed to this posture. In 1977, to the consternation of the German government, a Presidential Review Memorandum (PRM-10) was leaked to the public which suggested that the United States planned for NATO to fall back on Weser-Lech line, but that it should not acknowledge a change to ‘forward defence’. David N. Schwartz, *NATO’s Nuclear Dilemmas*, Washington DC, Brookings Institution, 1983, pp. 213-14.

⁴⁵ See Luis Simón, “Assessing NATO’s Eastern European ‘Flank,’” *Parameters*, 44:3, 2014, pp. 76-79.

⁴⁶ An approach that in any case has its limits in creating the desired ‘reassurance’ effect. In August 2015, for example, the reduction of the number of air policing aircraft in the Baltic attracted attention and political significance that was arguably quite out of proportion to the material importance of the measure itself. See Richard Martyn-Hemp, “NATO scales back Baltic air policing,” *The Baltic Times*, 2 September 2015, <www.baltictimes.com/nato_scales_back_baltic_air_policing/> (accessed 22 September 2015).



and strategy, rather than think of summit success in terms of agreement on practical, but overall limited and minor measures. NATO's power and ability to influence events does not derive from small integrated units akin to the VJTF or the NRF, but from national forces that are developed for a common purpose in peacetime, and wielded to a common direction in war.⁴⁷ Likewise, summit consensus does not create or move forces between countries: Any practical strengthening of East European defences through pre-positioning, permanent or rotational presence is ultimately due to individual Allies' decisions to do their share to support NATO's overall posture.⁴⁸ It is worth remembering that this was always so, and even NATO's impressive presence on the Cold War's Central Front was the result of countless national decisions (and bilateral agreements) that aligned national efforts with NATO's needs.

These decisions and agreements, however, were taken and agreed within a common strategic framework (comprising containment, flexible response, forward defence, and the need for timely reinforcements in case of a crisis) that was well understood and supported by allied governments, planners and the public at large. Even though the whole framework was never laid down in a single, let alone unclassified document, it did provide genuine strategic guidance, and explained how individual national decisions contributed to the whole.⁴⁹ Where there was then a useful role—politically or operationally—for integrated capabilities, a need to shift forces geographically, or to adjust the command structure to implement this strategy, Allies repeatedly agreed to address these issues (e.g. through the creation of the Allied Mobile Force, or the NATO AWACS fleet). Starting with such tactical instruments and building a strategy around them, however, as NATO

has done in the more recent past, is putting the cart before the horse.⁵⁰

The development of a new strategic framework must start from the realization that the way a political consensus is framed on the tasks and threats to the Alliance is inseparable from the way that the Alliance might translate that consensus into actual defence preparations. Explicitly acknowledging a threat from Russia, and actual defence preparations that support the Eastern Allies, have both a political and financial cost for Allies elsewhere. Since these Allies will weigh the cost of either against other results of any summit, there is a trade-off between practical preparations and declaratory policy. Hence, although allied deliberations must be informed by the analysis of requirements for 'deterrence' in the East, or for 'containment' in the South, a NATO compromise on tasks and practical preparations that reconciles the two, might have to look very different than a mere combination of the two.

If NATO is to find consensus on a new strategic posture, it must thus embrace the paradoxes of its situation: to strengthen NATO's defence posture in Eastern Europe, its practical preparations should not be specific to Eastern Europe. Its cohesion against a threat from Russia would be strongest if it did not discuss it as a threat. Strengthening the Alliance's defence posture in specific areas should normalize the Alliance's posture in them, rather than single out those areas as being of particular importance or of a particular status. And in that sense, the most valuable contribution of Southern Allies to strengthen the collective defence capabilities in the East might be to highlight and demonstrate their willingness and capacity to defend their own home territories.

⁴⁷ See Martin Zapfe, *Efficacy, not Efficiency: Adjusting NATO's Military Integration*, NDC Research Paper no. 118, Rome, NATO Defense College, 2015.

⁴⁸ And in that sense, NATO's commitments in the NATO-Russia Founding Act are less restrictive in practice than they might seem, as Allies remain free to decide their own cooperation on a bilateral basis.

⁴⁹ See for example Robert P. Haffa, *Rational Methods, Prudent Choices: Planning U.S. Forces*, Washington DC: National Defense University Press, 1988.

⁵⁰ This does not mean that NATO's proverbial horse-cart was ever a very seemly one, even during the Cold War. Richard Kugler, for example, pointedly writes that "For decades, the bedrock of NATO military strategy made no good sense, but no alternative could be found that would not divide the alliance. The key to the apparent success of NATO strategy (winning the Cold War without firing a shot) was obfuscation of the strategy's bad sense." Richard Kugler, *U.S. National Security Strategy: Lenses and Landmarks*, Princeton, Princeton Project on National Security, Princeton University, 2004, pp. 22-23.



A new 'Military Strategy' for NATO's collective defence 'tous azimuts'

How could NATO fit a new strategic framework for collective defence into its strategic guidance? Some Allies argue that NATO should decide in Warsaw to re-write its Strategic Concept, and in the process give explicit priority to collective defence. Most others, however, including some who also support the priority of collective defence, are of the view that what the Alliance does on this in practice, rather than in its rhetoric, is what is most important. On balance, the description of the Alliance's three core tasks in the Strategic Concept is still seen by most Allies as relevant, useful and appropriate. Overall, there seems little to be gained by drafting a new Strategic Concept, which would be a lengthy and acrimonious process that itself would do little to address the future of 'adaptation'.

The nature of the strategic concepts has, however, noticeably changed with the end of the Cold War. As public documents, the last three concepts⁵¹ have focused far more on NATO's view of its environment and the Alliance's tasks, than on strategy in the sense of how the Alliance's military means should be developed and used to achieve these tasks. Although the exact text of the two Cold War concepts⁵² remained classified for many years, their basic principles were widely known, debated and understood (if not always unanimously interpreted) at the time. Today, however, no similar, public explanation exists of how NATO will deter attacks, or how the Alliance should collectively prepare for the defence of one of its members.

There is no public document, or even common narrative, that explains the basic approach and

principles of how the Alliance should develop and employ its forces to achieve the tasks that are set in the Strategic Concept. Hence, there is no coherent explanation given to the public of why and how the 'reassurance' presence actually helps increase the security of NATO's Eastern member states, beyond its mere political symbolism, nor of what NATO would seek to achieve by increasing national defence expenditure to 2% of GDP. Even in the classified setting, there is a gap between the Strategic Concept as the Alliance's top politically-endorsed, public document on the one hand, and the (classified) work on the RAP, the DPP, or nuclear posture on the other hand, which are largely stovepiped activities that are coordinated more or less ad-hoc by the (also classified) Political Guidance, as well as by implicit and unwritten common understandings.

As a priority for the Warsaw Summit, the Allies should thus develop a new, public 'Military Strategy',⁵³ which would provide a general framework to align the readiness and posture of conventional forces (in the RAP), but also nuclear adaptation, long-term capability priorities (in the DPP), adjustments to the command structure, and contingency planning for crisis management, and collective defence operations. Given the high-level and long-term nature of such a strategy, a coherent and compelling narrative is more important than specific details (which could be delegated to classified annexes and subordinate documents, including the Political Guidance). Instead, the strategy should explain in general terms how NATO will prepare to maintain the security of all of its members, no matter their geographic position. To do so, it would focus on how NATO would reinforce any of its members in case of

⁵¹ The three post-Cold War Strategic Concepts were adopted in 1991, 1999, and 2010.

⁵² NATO had only two strategic concepts during the Cold War, MC14/2 of 1957 which was based on the strategy of 'massive retaliation,' and MC14/3 of 1968 which incorporated 'flexible response'.

⁵³ It needs to be acknowledged that the 'Military Strategy' proposed herein does not fulfil most of the criteria for being a 'strategy' in the traditional sense of the term (in light of which 'Military Strategy' also is somewhat a nonsensical concept). However, it is a title that is used in some allies' national context (especially the United States); it emphasizes that the document seeks to link means to ends, and describe ways of using force; and deliberately seeks to reduce 'political' obstacles to consensus by emphasizing the material, 'military' logic of NATO's defence preparations; and it needs to be clear that the new document is a complement to, but not replacement of, the existing 'Strategic Concept'.



an attack (or warning thereof),⁵⁴ and explain what this means for the required peacetime posture.

The ‘Military Strategy’ should thus lay out the basic roles and relationships between the national forces of the Alliance’s frontline states, Allied forces already in the theatre (which include the various ‘reassurance’ forces in the East, but also the standing maritime forces, forward-based US forces, especially in the Mediterranean, as well as other forces that might be in the vicinity for training or on Article 4 deployments), the VJTF, other national rapid response capabilities (including long-range US air power), and follow-on forces. The strategy should affirm that although state-on-state conflict is not the most likely threat to the Alliance, it is by far the most consequential, and the one where individual members would most depend on allied assistance. The language of the DDPR would provide a useful basis for some general observations on how missile defence and the Alliance’s nuclear forces also contribute to its overall defence posture.⁵⁵

Although such a ‘Military Strategy’ does not exist in explicit form today, in practice the Alliance would not have to start from a blank sheet of paper. Making explicit what are today implicit or disconnected tenets of NATO’s approach to collective defence would already help develop the Alliance’s public narrative, narrow what differences remain between the Allies, and highlight where practical preparations clearly fall behind strategic ambition. Acknowledging that NATO’s reaction to any threat materializing must be based on reinforcement would be a mere statement of fact. This requires the ability of Allies in the rear to provide reinforcements, as well as the ability of frontline Allies to receive these reinforcements, and to hold out long enough for them to arrive. All three of these requirements are essential for the collective defence of the Alliance, and stating

them explicitly would be a useful starting point to develop the detail of the Alliance’s overall posture for collective defence. The difference between frontline states, and those bordering other Allies alone, has been understated in the past two decades, when the Alliance’s focus was on ‘out of area’ operations. This difference needs to be explicitly recognized, however, before the Alliance can even discuss how much it should find expression in, for example, the DPP, or how the Alliance might handle ToA of national forces as part of crisis management.⁵⁶ There remains a political need for all Allies to contribute to all tasks, of which the Allies in the East are very conscious. At the same time, however, there is also a strategic need for the Alliance to ensure that frontline states’ forces receive the support that might be necessary for them to fulfil their role in collective defence—just like the Alliance is already providing support to some members in the peacetime task of air policing.⁵⁷

As part of its ‘Military Strategy’, NATO should explicitly state that having a military presence on each other’s territories anywhere (and not merely in Eastern Europe) has a direct strategic benefit—in addition to the economic and interoperability benefits that arise from international cooperation as part of the ‘smart defence’ or the ‘connected forces initiative’. Almost all member states have chosen to welcome an allied presence on their soil in one form or another, and any such presence is based on, and hence signals, the commitment to collective defence in the Alliance. Allies should agree to look favourably at requests by NATO to use the forces that are already present on or near the territory of an ally under threat to manage a crisis, regardless of their formal status or reason why they are there in the first place. A general statement along these lines would

⁵⁴ Credible preparations for reinforcement even under attack are an important element of NATO deterrence. Since deterrence however implies that NATO sees itself in an adversarial relationship, it would be useful to place less emphasis on this concept in the ‘Military Strategy’, than on the ability to reinforce, and to defend, its members.

⁵⁵ In general, there is an inverse correlation between conventional defensive strength in the theatre, and the pressure for early nuclear escalation by NATO in case of a major attack. Attempting to address this issue in a public document would be ‘courageous’, in Sir Humphrey’s sense, but this line of analysis could subsequently be picked up in the NPG in a classified setting.

⁵⁶ The only comment that touches on this whole complex of issues in the Wales declaration was the statement that “Adequate host nation support will be critical” for the reception of reinforcements. NATO Heads of State and Government, *Wales Summit Declaration*, 5 September 2014, para 8.

⁵⁷ For example, there is probably a need for significant investment in infrastructure before the Baltic states could host brigade-size or larger forces.



not create new formal obligations on member states, but it would reinforce the deterrence value of what might even be a coincidental presence of allied forces on the territory of other Alliance members; lessen the perception that the Alliance could be split by attacks that are limited to individual Allies; and open the door for a discussion of the role of such forces in crisis management. For although the strategic value of an allied presence in the Baltics is greatest for these countries because of their deterrent effect towards Russia, this also remains the narrative that makes it most difficult politically for other countries to support such a posture.

NATO 'Military Strategy' should therefore provide a broader narrative about the strategic environment than the threats that prompted the development of the RAP in Wales. It should emphasize the unexpected nature of threats to the Alliance over the last 20 years, from 9/11 and the discovery of nuclear programs in Iran, the failure of the Arab spring, to the return of state-on-state conflict in the East, as this reinforces the importance of collective defence of NATO's periphery overall. NATO should avoid the political problems of identifying possible adversaries for collective defence of the Alliance territory, and instead develop its posture as a response to a threat that could come from anywhere. This could be framed as an approach of 'tous azimuts', in de Gaulle's parlance, or as planning 'without a threat.'⁵⁸ In either case, the geographical situation of its member states would have to become the main focus and frame of reference for the defence preparations of the Alliance.

Portugal, Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, the Baltic countries, Norway, Iceland and Canada are the main frontline states where NATO needs the ability to maintain (and reinforce) local defences. These defences will always be based on locally available force structure, headquarters, the symbolic value of an allied presence, and existing plans and capabilities for reinforcement, and should

be tested and demonstrated through exercises across all of NATO's periphery. In the Mediterranean, the Alliance's territorial defence primarily rests on air and naval capabilities—of which regional Allies hold significant numbers, and which other Allies could also quickly deploy from elsewhere. In the case of countries with significant land borders (namely Turkey, Romania, Poland, the Baltics and, to some extent, Norway), a logic of planning purely based on geography might lead to a rough 'standard' for the force density that NATO might seek to be able to deploy at short notice. Having available a minimum of a regular or reserve brigade per 200km of external land border, for example, might make a nice numerical alliteration to NATO's equally arbitrary political commitment to spending 2% of GDP on national defence. Like any simplistic goal, there would be a lot of wriggle room in practice, such as the definition of brigade-equivalents (especially in a joint context), or the extent to which it would be considered aspirational and balanced against other commitments.

The key consideration, however, is that while Turkey could easily fulfil such a political goal from its national resources alone, the case for reinforcing the Baltic countries could rest on their low population density and relatively small national forces alone. In addition, NATO's explicit acknowledgment of its reinforcement-based posture would require it to address the security of lines of communication, including air- and sea-ports of debarkation where land transport is unfeasible due to local geography or adversary threat. Again, NATO should expect that frontline member states develop the capabilities required to safely receive reinforcements, such as for air defence or mine countermeasures, to support NATO's military strategy. At the same time, however, it should also signal the willingness of other Allies to provide support where such capabilities are either too expensive for individual Allies to acquire, or will take time to do so. Giving more prominence and greater

⁵⁸ Paul Dibb, *Planning a Defence Force Without a Threat*, Canberra: Strategic and Defence Studies Centre, Australian National University, 1996. In the 1970s to 1990s, Australia planned 'without a threat,' which meant in practice that it focused on the defence of its own territory against an adversary that could only have come from or through Indonesia. See Stephan Frühling, *A History of Australian Strategic Policy Since 1945*, Canberra: Defence Publishing Service, 2009, pp. 1-50.



clarity to the role of the standing maritime forces in this regard might highlight that the Alliance can do more in this regard (and is already doing so) than the current focus on the RAP suggests.

Conclusion: The future of NATO adaptation

Framing a new summit consensus and Alliance posture in the way proposed here would not reduce the cost of deploying additional forces to the Baltic states, of greater investments in infrastructure, of prepositioning of equipment, or the creation of more high-readiness, mobile forces by Allies who are geographically in the rear. Even though there is a legitimate expectation and realistic chance that Allies can do more to support the Allies in the East, not all wishes will be fulfilled. But while NATO as an organization has a role in supporting such a posture through adjustments to its commands, the exercise program, cobbling together the VJTF, and making use of the standing maritime forces, it must also not lose sight of the fact that the heft of any allied presence will always have to derive from the decisions of individual Allies to send forces to the East, to preposition equipment, or to raise new forces that might become available for reinforcement. The approach as suggested here would, firstly, make such national measures more politically palatable by providing a narrative that governments could use to argue for adjustments to their own defence preparations and spending levels back home. Secondly, it would restore priority to NATO's role in achieving common purpose and direction for the member states' defence preparations, rather than on administering politically symbolic but ultimately minor tools in the Alliance's force and command structure.

NATO 'adaptation' should thus demonstrate the ability of the Alliance to defend all Allies, not merely

those in particular geographic areas. This would run counter to the narrative of 'reassurance' that NATO created as a short-term measure in Wales. But in the end, the legitimate demand of Eastern European Allies to feel as safe, and be as protected, as other Allies elsewhere, would always be at odds with a posture that singled them out as a particular cost or commitment for the other Allies. To this end, making NATO's approach to collective defence operations explicit in a 'Military Strategy' as suggested herein would provide the basis for the Alliance to address the following, practical considerations during the next phase of NATO adaptation:

- *The role of allied forces in frontline states as part of NATO crisis management and collective defence.* By definition, the coincidental presence of allied forces in a particular region will be difficult to plan for (and this includes today's 'reassurance' forces in the East). This does not, however, mean that such forces do not have a role in crisis management or collective defence. Regardless of their composition, they could for example support deterrence by high-visible deployments into the likely conflict areas, could become a reserve for the affected Allies' national forces, or help secure and expedite the entry of reinforcements. Articulating these and other options is the first step to narrowing allies' differences on what 'military credibility' might mean in practice, and to create greater understanding at the national level of how each Ally might be able to contribute.⁵⁹
- *The way the Alliance conceives of its high-readiness forces.* The history of the NRF suggests that there are significant problems with the proposition that high-readiness forces can be stitched together, pre-committed, and actually be used.⁶⁰ There are powerful national capabilities that are

⁵⁹ For example, some commentators argue that a 'battalion'-sized force in the Baltics should be a composite force, including specialists in logistics, intelligence, cyber, and close air support controllers, rather than a manoeuvre unit. See Pauli Järvenpää, "On deterrence and defense: the case of Estonia," ICDS blog, 20 March 2014, <www.icds.ee/blog/article/on-deterrence-and-defense-the-case-of-estonia/> (accessed 23 September 2015).

⁶⁰ A proposition that is also supported by the experience with the EU battlegroups.



not part of these artificial constructs, and likely never will be—not least US long range air power. Therefore, NATO should not further place itself into a position where the willingness of member states to contribute to the VJTF becomes a sign for a country's willingness to provide forces, should another NATO member comes under attack. The fact that NATO must ultimately rely on the faith that all Allies will indeed come to the aid of another cannot be avoided by any amount of institutional creativity. The most convincing and useful role of the VJTF for NATO adaptation would be to help member states increase their ability to maintain forces at high readiness, and less as an operational instrument.

- *Differentiation between frontline Allies and those in the rear.* Politically, it is essential for the continued 'indivisibility of security' that all Allies maintain some capacity and willingness to contribute to all three tasks of the Alliance. But when the collective defence posture of the Alliance as a whole depends on a few frontline states to hold the line, if only for a few days, this raises the question of what other members should do in support of that function. In practice, this might lead to greater matching of 'reassurance' forces to local Allies' capability gaps in the short term and, in the longer term, differentiation of national forces' roles in the DPP, or making strategic use of pooling and sharing arrangements to help frontline states acquire costly capabilities, for example in air defence. In the Cold War, the United States provided direct military assistance that funded national capabilities which were critical for the collective defence of the Alliance as a whole, for example in the Norwegian Navy. If capability gaps persist even once the Baltic Allies consistently spend the agreed 2% of GDP,

such direct subsidies for the acquisition of materiel (and not just infrastructure) might be another instrument that the Alliance needs to revisit once more.

- *Demonstrating preparedness for collective defence everywhere.* Politically, NATO does not make it easier for itself to prepare for the defence of the Baltics, if there are no similar and visible preparations elsewhere. In practice, almost all of the elements that are required to implement the reinforcement-based defence posture described herein are already present in the 'old' member states.⁶¹ But NATO's strength in this regard is latent and seldom demonstrated, thus undercutting any attempt to portray its increased focus on the defence of the East as a normalization of these Allies' situation. Defence plans also exist for only some of NATO's frontline states. Hence, NATO should from time to time conduct reinforcement exercises throughout all of its frontline states – including in the Mediterranean – that visibly rehearse the reinforcement of national active and reserve forces.⁶² Besides the political benefit, this would also spread practical understanding of issues involved in collective defence operations on home territory to allies that otherwise have less reason to engage with this alliance task.

- *The importance and role of national operational commands in collective defence.* As part of the reforms of the NATO command structure of the last decades, many 'old' member states have lost third-tier joint headquarters and command positions that were the source of influence and pride in the past. There is an understandable reluctance therefore to re-open this matter, espe-

⁶¹ With the possible exception of the weakness of Norway's defences in Finnmark, which are an issue that NATO already grappled with throughout the Cold War.

⁶² The 2015 NRF exercise Trident Juncture, for example, large parts of which took place in Spain and in Portugal, was based on an out-of-area scenario, not one testing the defence of NATO's Mediterranean members.



cially as it would inevitably be bound up in the question of the self-imposed restrictions in the NATO-Russia Founding Act on extending the command structure to the new member states. More recently, much attention has instead been paid to the Alliance's Corps-level headquarters, and the way they might be used to command the VJTF. Most national forces of the frontline Allies would, however, enter any crisis under national commands, which would need to grow into, or transfer forces to, NATO commands as reinforcements arrive. In this sense, even the creation of the NFIU can be seen as a measure that in the end normalizes the situation of the Eastern Allies: whereas most old member states used to host and staff regional joint headquarters, the national operational headquarters of the new members do not have the benefit of the experience, expertise and capacity that results from this historical legacy.

At their upcoming Warsaw Summit, NATO governments must chart no less than the future of Alliance 'adaptation.' But charting the future is not the same as providing answers to everything, or attempting to decide the Alliance's final posture. Rather, the Alliance needs a new strategic narrative that will be longer-lasting than the short-term measures around which the RAP was built in Wales, that provides direction beyond just the next summit, and that can serve as a political basis for NATO to further work through the practical challenges of collective defence over the coming years. NATO needs to focus more on achieving unity of effort than on instruments under the direct control of the Alliance; adopting a 'military strategy' that explains how it will prepare for, and conduct, collective defence operations 'tous azimuts,' in any and all of the frontline states of the Alliance, should be a priority for doing so.