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Conventional Deterrence on NATO's Eastern Flank after the Warsaw Summit

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The groundbreaking decision at the NATO Summit in Warsaw on the forward deployment of combat forces on the Eastern Flank significantly strengthens the credibility of the Alliance's deterrence against Russian aggression. However, further adaptation to the threat posed by Russia is necessary, especially through enhancement of NATO's ability to rapidly mobilise and deploy larger reinforcements to Central and Eastern Europe. The continuation of the Alliance's adaptation efforts will be dependent on Allied assessments of further Russian actions, the internal dynamics in key NATO countries, and sustenance of the wider increase in defence spending that only took hold in Europe in 2015 after years of cuts.

The decisions taken at the NATO Warsaw Summit have strengthened the Alliance's abilities to respond to various threats, including uncontrolled mass migration, terrorism, and cyberattacks. Enhancement of the security of NATO's Eastern Flank is one of the most important outcomes of the meeting. In comparison to the 2014 summit in Newport, a much stronger emphasis has been put on deterrence of Russia, as evidenced especially by the decision on the first-ever deployment of NATO combat forces to Poland and the Baltic States in the form of four battalion-sized battlegroups. In the final communique of the summit, the Alliance openly pointed at the negative impact of Russia's actions on the security of the NATO members (paras. 5 and 10) and stressed more explicitly that it would not be intimidated by nuclear threats and would respond to any such attack (paras. 53-54). At the same time, NATO expressed its readiness for a dialogue with Russia on the conflict in Ukraine, the prevention of military accidents, and increasing military transparency. This does not mean, however, a return to partnership and practical cooperation, which will be not possible as long as Russia continues to violate international law by, among other actions, its occupation of Crimea and destabilisation of eastern Ukraine.

NATO Forward Presence. Each of the four multinational battalion-sized battlegroups for the Eastern Flank will be comprised of around 1,000 troops, posted on a rotational basis, and constantly present from 2017 on the national bases of the host-nations. Battlegroups will be led by framework nations which will provide the largest contributions of troops: in Poland, the U.S. will provide about 1,000 troops; in Lithuania, Germany will send about 600 troops; in Latvia, Canada will deploy about 450 troops; and, in Estonia, the UK will place about 500 troops. These forces will be equipped and prepared for combat operations and will also regularly participate in exercises. They will fall under the NATO command structure and operate directly under a new multinational division headquarters, based on one of the Polish headquarters. Although battalion-sized battlegroups are not able to stop a full-scale Russian invasion on their own, their presence and combat readiness are key to the credibility of NATO deterrence. An attack against Poland and/or the Baltic states and the Allied forces deployed there would immediately trigger other NATO members to join the conflict. In October, Allied defence ministers will determine further details of the enhanced forward presence, a multinational brigade in Romania formed from an existing Romanian brigade, and the possible strengthening of the air and maritime presence in the Black Sea region.

The NATO actions will be complemented by the U.S. through bilateral cooperation with regional countries. Heel-to-toe rotations of a U.S. Army armoured brigade are planned to start from 2017, and its headquarters will be located in Poland. According to preliminary plans, the brigade units are to exercise in Poland, the Baltic States, Romania and Bulgaria. Moreover, equipment for another armoured brigade, an artillery brigade and division headquarters will be prepositioned in Germany, Belgium and the Netherlands. That would allow swifter deployment of these units in case

of a conflict. The U.S. presence on the Eastern Flank will be also strengthened by Aegis Ashore sites in Romania (already operational) and Redzikowo, Poland (operational by 2018), constituting a part of the NATO Ballistic Missile Defence Capability. The system is aimed at intercepting ballistic missiles from the Middle East and its initial operational capability was declared at the Warsaw Summit.

The Need for Further Adaptation. The credibility of the deterrence concept adopted by NATO depends on proper implementation of the enhanced forward presence. These forces should be deployed in as close proximity as possible to the areas most threatened by the aggression and NATO commanders should have the authority to move them in a crisis without the need for permission from the North Atlantic Council (NAC). This prior authorisation would ensure that an adversary would have to engage Allied forces at the early stage of a conflict, and such a prospect is crucial for effective deterrence. The Allies also ought to establish a long-term schedule of rotations within the battlegroups.

A more significant challenge for NATO is to strengthen its ability to reinforce the forward-deployed troops with larger units. This will include rebuilding the overall NATO force structure, which has for several years been oriented towards out-of-area operations and weakened by cuts in defence budgets. The NATO Response Force (NRF), the Alliance's basic rapid-reaction tool, is insufficient to repel a full-scale invasion by Russia. Following the reform agreed at the Wales Summit, the NRF consists of 40,000 troops with specific forces assigned every year, including three land brigades (each with around 5,000 troops). A brigade attached to the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), a part of NRF, is deployable within 5-7 days after a decision by NAC, while two other NRF brigades (part of the Initial Follow-on Forces Group, or IFFG) can deploy within 30 and 45 days, respectively. Moreover, the ties between the forward-deployed units and the VJTF and NRF have yet to be worked out. Therefore, NATO's ability to project forces to an area of potential conflict is still significantly inferior to Russia's, which has used unannounced exercises to mobilise as many as 100,000 troops to near NATO's borders within a couple of days. It should be a priority for NATO to increase the readiness of member forces and to rebuild specific types of units, such as heavy armour, in line with the commitment by Allies from the Warsaw communique (para. 45).

Effective deterrence and defence also requires NATO to be able to neutralise Russian Anti-Access/Area Denial systems (A2/AD), which could impede or prevent the deployment of Allied reinforcements to conflict areas. Among other capabilities, these systems include air defence and anti-ship weapons and are primarily located in Kaliningrad Oblast and Crimea but are also present in the Arctic and in Syria. While the summit communique (para. 44) stresses that the Alliance will not "accept" such constraints on the freedom of movement of its forces, NATO still faces the task of developing operational concepts and adequate offensive and defensive capabilities to counter them. Part of its efforts could include turning the Baltic Air Policing mission (BAP) into an air defence mission. It would be supplemented by the deployment—as in Turkey—of additional land-based systems to Poland and the Baltic States to counter aircraft, cruise missiles, and short-range ballistic missiles. Regional capabilities in this regard could be enhanced later by the implementation of NATO members' plans to purchase such systems.

Improved mechanism of reinforcement of NATO's eastern flank should also entail an expansion of infrastructure to receive reinforcements and the prepositioning of additional combat equipment in forward locations. Moreover, it is necessary to shift more intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance (ISR) assets to the region (including AWACS and AGS Systems) and create an Allied regional intelligence analyses centre in Poland. NATO needs more frequent, complex exercises (analogous to *Anakonda 2016*), with scenarios that take into account an adversary's A2/AD systems. The Alliance must effectively implement adequate response mechanisms to non-military dimensions of the Russian threat as well. In Warsaw, the Allies committed to "enhance their resilience" against hybrid threats and NATO and the EU also signed a joint declaration to counter such tactics. The NATO members also pledged to develop national defences in cyberspace and recognised it as an operational domain.

Challenges to Adaptation. NATO agreed that it must continue to adapt to changes in the security environment (paras. 38 and 52), but the tempo and scale of adaptation on the Eastern Flank will be determined mainly by Russia's actions and assessments by the Allies. If Russia returns to more conciliatory rhetoric, the further strengthening of deterrence might be seen by some NATO members as unnecessary and impeding cooperation with Russia on global issues (such as resolving the conflict in Syria) or pulling Alliance resources away from the Southern Flank. In Warsaw, NATO demonstrated unity, but it was the result of a difficult compromise with countries, that even if they recognise the threat from Russia, they also seek to limit the Alliance's presence on the Eastern Flank due to the perceived risk of escalation of tensions with Russia. Eastern Flank countries could also face adverse policy changes with regard to Russia even by key allies as a result of upcoming elections, namely for president in the U.S. in 2016 and in France in 2017, and for parliament in Germany in 2017.

Faced with these challenges, Poland should stress the long-term character of the threat to NATO posed by Russia, which has continued hostile actions against the Alliance despite numerous efforts by NATO and its members to ease tensions, such as the U.S. attempted "reset" of relations in 2009. The success of further NATO adaptation also will be dependent on the defence budgets of the Alliance members. Currently, only five countries—Estonia, Greece, Poland, the UK, and the U.S.—meet the NATO goal of spending at least 2% of GDP on defence. A promising sign is, however, that the downward trend in overall European defence expenditures stopped in 2015, and they are estimated to grow by around 3% in 2016.