

DAN GOURE FOR THE LEXINGTON INSTITUTE

BUILDING A MORE CREDIBLE AND CAPABLE NATO DETERRENT IN THE EAST

Findings of the NATO Working Group

SEPTEMBER 13, 2019



On September 13, 2019, the Lexington Institute hosted a working group on the subject of building a more credible and capable NATO deterrent in the East. In attendance were more than 50 defense experts, government officials, military officers and industry representatives from across the Alliance. The discussion covered a range of subjects including: threats to NATO security, NATO's evolving defense strategy, the redeployment of forces towards the Alliance's eastern flank, the U.S.-Polish agreement on the stationing of forces, investments in modernized capabilities, logistics requirements and the post-INF security environment.

Key Findings:

1. The growing threat from Russia requires a new NATO strategy that directly addresses the range of challenges Moscow presents. At the December London Summit, NATO will address enhancing forward presence, further improving readiness and the post-INF security environment. Working group participants expected the new NATO military strategy to closely mirror the key points of the U.S. National Defense Strategy with its emphases on readiness, lethality and alliance cooperation.
2. NATO must continue to transition from a tripwire deterrent built around relatively small forward presence units and toward a more credible combined arms deterrent. NATO and the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force to a new, more capable, force design known as 30-30-30-30. This plan requires NATO to have 30 land battalions, 30 air fighter squadrons and 30 ships ready to deploy within 30 days of being put on alert. In addition, greater emphasis is being placed on enhanced forward presence not only in the Baltics and Poland but also in the Balkans and the Black Sea.
3. All members of the Alliance must strive to meet their obligation to devote two percent of GDP to defense and to spend an increasing share of their defense budgets on procurement. The working group acknowledged the attainment or exceeding of this goal by some NATO members including the U.S., U.K., Greece, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. It was also recognized that most Alliance members had increased their defense spending over the past several years.



Polish President Andrzej Duda reviews NATO troops after joint exercises in Elblag, Poland, December 2018. *Photo: U.S. Army.*

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Recommendations:

1. NATO members need to focus more attention and resources on modernizing military equipment. Greater investments are needed in critical capabilities such as air and missile defenses, modern aircraft, armored fighting vehicles, networks and cyber. The investment of a number of NATO allies in the F-35 is an excellent example of the desired modernization. Moreover, the F-35 program promotes a degree of interoperability that has heretofore been unattainable.
2. Washington needs to continue to build up the presence of U.S. forces along NATO's eastern flank. The deployment of additional U.S. forces eastward is critical to deterring Russian aggression. It is increasingly clear that the U.S. and NATO allies in Central and Eastern Europe will be called to move forces east even in a crisis. The European transportation infrastructure is not capable of supporting the rapid movement of large numbers of forces eastward. There are a few key bridges and chokepoints that if interdicted will halt the flow of forces. The Suwalki corridor currently has one main road and one rail line between Poland and Lithuania. The only forces on which NATO can count in the event of conventional aggression by Russia are those positioned forward prior to the onset of hostilities.

For the foreseeable future, a credible conventional deterrent and defense must be based on forward deployed NATO forces. While NATO maintains a large military posture, most forces are mal-deployed for the defense of the Alliance's eastern border or stationed too far away to intervene in a timely manner. Moreover, the lack of adequate transportation infrastructure and logistics support makes it unlikely that any but forward deployed formations will be able to respond to a Russian threat to Eastern Europe.

The recently signed U.S.-Polish defense declaration is an important step forward in supporting this objective. The working group approved of the decision to expand the U.S. presence in Poland, in particular the rotational deployment of an Armored Brigade Combat Team and the

addition of a division headquarters and critical enablers. Several working group attendees argued for an even more robust forward deployment, including additional heavy armor formations and long-range fires units.

3. Poland must continue to pursue military modernization. A credible Polish military capability is critical to NATO's forward defense. Poland has made a commitment to acquire eight Patriot air defense missile batteries and has taken delivery of two. There are concerns that Warsaw has not moved forward on the Wisla II portion of this acquisition which involves the other six Patriot batteries. It has also committed to acquiring 32 F-35 Joint Strike Fighters. It was pointed out that Poland could do more to enhance its military capabilities by investing in modernized armored forces, in particular by replacing its obsolescent Soviet-era main battle tanks with the U.S. M-1 Abrams.
4. Greater use should be made of the ERIP Program. The State Department's European Recapitalization Incentive Program (ERIP), developed in consultation with the U.S. European Command, is intended to speed the process of getting allied nations to replace Russian equipment with Western gear. The current plan is to spread \$190 million to six countries: Albania, Bosnia and North Macedonia, plus the EU member states of Croatia, Greece and Slovakia. The ERIP program could be used to provide seed money for the purchase of U.S. military hardware.



Members of the U.S. 1st Cavalry Division arrive in Drawsko-Pomorskie, Poland, complete with M1-A1 Abrams tanks and M-2 Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles in tow. *Photo: Wikipedia.*

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5. NATO and the European Union must make investments in logistics and transportation. The ability to move Alliance forces and supplies rapidly eastward is vital to a credible deterrent. NATO needs to be congratulated on its efforts to address these subjects. The standing up of the Joint Support Enabling Command to provide centralized logistics management for NATO is an important step. In addition, there was discussion of an increased role for the European Union in funding the development of militarily-relevant transportation capabilities in Central and Eastern Europe. The EU is investing in nine transportation corridors between Central and Eastern Europe. It is important to ensure that the physical infrastructure developed for these corridors will support NATO operations.

In addition, the expansion of investments in rail and road links between Central Europe and the Balkans, particularly Romania and Bulgaria, would support a rapid response in the event of a crisis. The European Union's efforts in this regard primarily focus on East-West transportation. There needs to be expanded North-South connections established, particularly into the Balkans.

6. NATO nations must revise their policies and procedures with respect to the movement of military forces and equipment through their territories and across borders. The current procedures are too cumbersome and slow to permit the rapid deployment of high readiness forces in the event of a crisis.

