REPORT

THE NATO EASTERN FLANK AND THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE REGION

Security Strategies Program 2019
EUROPEAN VALUES CENTER FOR SECURITY POLICY

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SECURITY STRATEGIES PROGRAM

A strategic program of the European Values Center for Security Policy which focuses mainly on security interests of the Czech Republic in the context of Trans-Atlantic Alliance, relations with Poland and increasingly aggressive behavior of Russia and China.

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## Contents

Introduction ......................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 4  
US Deployment To Poland as an Integral Part of the New American Strategic Doctrine ................................................................. 6  
The Us Military Presence as a Contribution to the Resilience of Poland Against External Threats .............................................................. 9  
The Meaning of the US and NATO Presence in Poland for The Resilience of the Eastern Flank of NATO ........................................ 11  
Nato-Ization of the US Presence in Poland .................................................................................................................................................. 14  
The Czech Republic and the US Military Presence in Poland. Recommendations for the Czech Armed Forces ..................................................................................................................................................................... 17  
Germany and the Resilience of NATO’s Eastern Flank. The German Stance Towards the Increased US Presence ................................................................. 20  
Not Only the Deterrence and Readiness, but the Future of NATO as Well ...................................................................................................................... 22  
Conclusion ......................................................................................................................................................................................................................... 23
INTRODUCTION

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. Where 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.

The new deployment to Poland or the Baltic states reflects the adjustments in the US force posture. The goal of the deployment is to strengthen the resilience of the Eastern Flank of NATO. At the same time, these redeployments fit into the new US global strategy that envisages updates in overall US defense and deterrence architecture.

A wide range of policy recommendations by the US strategic thinkers demonstrates the fact that the United States took the events in Crimea, eastern Ukraine, and the meddling into the US elections as a genuine game changer. The policy reflection of these recommendations is still evolving and so is the ultimate shape of the US military presence in Poland.

It should be a common endeavor of all countries on NATO’s Eastern Flank that the build-up of US troops in the region is eventually NATO-ized.
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. Where the USA changed also its strategic doctrine, Europe has not.
US DEPLOYMENT TO POLAND AS AN INTEGRAL PART OF THE NEW AMERICAN STRATEGIC DOCTRINE

The New American Strategic Doctrine

The latest US National Security Strategy, the National Defense Strategy or the Nuclear Posture Review represents a significant shift in American strategic thinking and policymaking. The adversaries, rather than terrorism, are the center of attention. The US is openly declaring a resolve to approach them from a position of strength and points out the need to rethink the policy of engagement with rivals. The new US strategic doctrine does not see military force just as an instrument of urgent crisis management. It attaches a significant role to the military in pursuing America’s national interests. At the same time, the wording of all these doctrinal documents clearly indicates the will to cooperate with partners while handling different security issues from a position of strength. Europe is identified as a key partner for the USA.

Some elements of the American strategic doctrine deserve attention since they pose both a challenge and a chance for NATO:

1. Peace through strength.

This means tailored sanctions as an effective political tool with coercive potential, arms sales’ role in international relations, or a substantial increase of the defense budget. American sanctions are linked directly with specific political agendas and are very well structured - mandatory ones or sanctions requiring administrative decision for implementation. Sanction legislation also includes active measures – the sale of unused military equipment to NATO’s partners, Countering Russia Influence Fund, or funds for Prague Civil Society Centre or National Fusion Center on Hybrid Threats.

2. US changes in nuclear doctrine and deterrence architecture.

The United States declares the need to react to the significant development of both the capabilities and the military doctrines of the adversaries. It argues for strengthening the integration of the nuclear and non-nuclear military planning with the aim to defeat the adversary’s strategy and to apply a tailored and flexible approach to deterrence of different adversaries. American strategists are also considering force posture changes like placing strategic bombers to European and Asian bases or deploying number of fighter aircrafts closer to the Russian strategic targets.¹

3. US skepticism against arms control

There is more than Moscow’s “material breach of INF” behind the decision of the US administration to withdraw from the Intermediate-range Nuclear Forces treaty. First is the Russian strategy of “escalate to deescalate”. Second, it is the need to fill the capability gap, mainly in tactical nuclear weapons. We are ahead of post-INF process which is a complex question, and a full analysis lies outside the scope of this paper. The USA comprehends that arms control is an integrated part of Russia’s military strategy: to advance its own military position while weakening that of its enemies. Russia is open to the arms control agreements that would entrench its military superiority in Eastern Europe and prevent the technological gap between Russia and the West from growing.²

¹ https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR3000/RR3063/RAND_RR3063.pdf
² https://www.ecfr.eu/publications/summary/under_the_gun_rearmament_for_arms_control_in_europe
4. Great power competition, not terrorism, as a primary global issue

This paradigm changes the US strategy in some particular regions. For instance, the Middle East is not simply a haven for terrorist and source of oil and gas anymore. The United States is competing there with Russia and China. Accordingly, recent US force posture change in Syria is in fact not a withdrawal, as many Europeans think. It is rather an application of “offshore balancing” in practice that includes keeping limited military presence, stabilization projects, maintaining pressure on the regime, cooperation with Syrian Kurds (YPD/PYD), negotiation on safe zones and readiness to apply sanctions against gulf countries that would incline to normalize their relations with the Assad regime. The US counts on the ability to control air space of Syria and to react kinetically from their naval assets if needed.

The National Defense Strategy calls for “dynamic force employment” in an effort to prepare the US military for the transition from focusing on fighting terrorist groups to a possible great-power conflict with about the same force size. It calls for greater agility, more lethality, less operational predictability, higher readiness, irregular deployments, and maximum surge capacity.

Is NATO ready to align with the US in a great power competition? Is it ready to cooperate with locals or to build substantially more naval capabilities?

The situation of NATO and its European Members

On the other side of the Atlantic, the situation looks much different after 2014. NATO has decided not to change its Strategic Concept from 2010. The basic document defining the defense and deterrence posture of the Alliance (“Defense and Deterrence Posture Review”) is from 2012 and is simply outdated. For instance, in the text of DDPR, the primary role assigned to the tactical nuclear weapons is in disarmament policy. This is in sharp contradiction to Russia’s strategy on tactical nukes. No country is considered as an adversary according to the DDPR and NATO seeks “cooperation on missile defense with Russia”.

This year though, the Alliance adopted two new strategic documents: The “Political Guidance” that defines the level of ambition of NATO and the “military strategy” that reflects upon a new character of threats. Both these documents are classified. What a different approach to the “messaging” role of doctrine from the American!

As for the military aspect, the last three summits in Wales, Warsaw and Brussels proved NATO’s adaptability on a changed security environment, emerged adversary threat and the new warfare. NATO’s military structures work intensively and diligently on the necessary adjustments (deterrence, command and control, readiness and forward presence). Nevertheless, there are still some weak points of the Alliance: first, the fragile political cohesion due to the divergent threat assessments. Second, an insufficient European level of ambition within NATO. And third, the pace of the adaptation of NATO.

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4 NATO’s current level of ambition is for the entire alliance to maintain the capabilities for collective defense against a near-peer competitor, in what is called a Major Joint Operation-Plus (MJO+), or to conduct concurrently eight less demanding missions, two at the Major Joint Operation (MJO) level and six Smaller Joint Operations (SJO). The problem is, that European capabilities within NATO are weak in terms of Combat support and Combat support service i.e. logistics, life support etc. Most of the NATO combat teams (brigades) are actually European ones. Yet, their readiness and deployability without the US support is rather low.
**Modular approach to NATO security**

The Alliance plans to adjust its whole force structure to strengthen the security of the European theatre. The plan foresees three stages. The first two, covering the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force and the entire NATO Response Force, have their timeline until 2021. The third one, that will entail the force posture change of the entire European Theatre, should be ready by 2024. The same applies to the pace of the defense planning. For instance, the commitments of the Czech Republic from the latest NATO Defense Planning Process envisage the creation of a mid-armored brigade by 2025 and the full-fledged heavy-armored brigade by 2026.

All this is happening against the backdrop of the extremely high readiness of the Russian forces. This readiness is regularly checked in massive scale exercises with a highly problematic scenario. The Alliance estimates that the Russian troops are combat-ready within 1-2 days; Within 3-4 days they can conduct limited military operations in the territory of Baltic states, and within 8-10 days major ones. This means that the conflict can start tomorrow, regardless of the pace of the NATO multilateral adaptive processes.

How can the puzzle of Russian readiness on one side and the rather slow process in NATO on the other be solved? Apart from multilateral initiatives, like the NATO Readiness Initiative, individual or bilateral solutions are needed. This I call a “modular approach” in this paper.

**Reaction time is a decisive factor. The deployment in Poland is the key solution.** The US forces in Poland have shorter response times for contingencies on the Eastern Flank compared to the forces that are stationed in the United States or in Western Europe. They can start degrading the Russian anti-access/area-denial capabilities and maneuvering to defend threatened points along NATO’s eastern frontier right in the initial phase of the conflict. Poland’s geographical depth would leave the U.S. forces less vulnerable to an initial salvo by Russian area-denial capabilities than if they were positioned in the Baltic States. Such forces could hold Kaliningrad at risk, particularly if accompanied by capabilities designed to counter Russian artillery advantages over NATO units, such as multiple launch rocket systems or high-mobility artillery rocket systems. Their effectiveness will be multiplied by the substantive increase of the readiness of the Polish army.

Other European NATO members should accept this modular approach. It is in full harmony with the Article 3 of the Washington Treaty. The Czech Republic with its experience from difficult NATO debates accompanying the ballistic missile defense plan on its territory, should be supportive of Poland. In 2008, the U.S. Secretary of State and the Czech Foreign Minister signed an agreement on hosting a radar base for a planned U.S. missile-defense system. Only later, after the Alliance took its time to discuss implications of the project for the defense of the Alliance and to resolve diverging opinions as to “how”, was the territory “NATO-ized”.


THE US MILITARY PRESENCE AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE RESILIENCE OF POLAND AGAINST EXTERNAL THREATS

The military presence of the United States in Polish territory is in the interest of Poland, the region of Eastern Flank, as well as in the interest of the United States. The New American strategic doctrine says the US needs Europe for the deterrence of Russia, one of the four main adversaries of the United States.

The resolve of Poland, its commitment to contribute to regional stability, burden sharing, facilitative and cost-effective approach to the US deployment, strength of its own armed forces, support of the public and its adjacent position to the most vulnerable part of NATO – all this speaks in favor of deploying additional US capabilities to Polish territory. Hosting the US forces on very high readiness as well as an increase in readiness of its own army might also prove valuable for contingencies beyond the borders of NATO.

Future modality of the US military presence in Poland: Rotational/Permanent

The current U.S. posture in Poland includes a mission command element, an Armored Brigade Combat Team on a rotational basis, a Stryker infantry battalion serving as the Poland eFP battalion, limited combat support enablers, a US aviation detachment and a sustainment task force. The number of U.S. troops in Poland is on annual average about 4,500.5

American strategists have been advocating for an enhancement of this posture for quite a while. Discussions focused on the combination of the division headquarters in Poland and the corps command headquarters in Germany, a permanent placement of long-range artillery, air and missile defense, prepositioned hardware stocks or an armored brigade combat team boosted by fire and combat support.

The question of whether these enhancements will consist of strengthened rotational presence with prepositioned equipment, of a more permanent presence, or of an enormous boost for readiness and capabilities of the Polish army, is still open.

The composition of the enhanced military presence in Poland must correspond to the new American doctrine, mainly the National Defense Strategy. Congressional approval of the necessary funds is crucial. Concrete tactical considerations within the new American doctrinal approach are still evolving. The emphasis on the rotational character of the US deployment has its advocates, such as Gen. B. Hodges or Air Force Lt. Gen. Tod Wolters at the U.S. European Command. Others like Gen. Curtis Scaparrotti, Wolters’s predecessor, advocate rather a mix of enhanced permanent and rotational presence.

A recent declaration of Presidents Trump and Duda suggests that we will probably be witnessing some mix of all the three above mentioned components.6

The final shape will be known after further US-Polish negotiations that might last up to one more year. One of the crucial elements is the location of the Armored Brigade Combat Team. Looking closely at the presidential declaration, four tactical elements seem interesting:

1. An open question about the naval component. The presidential declaration doesn’t speak about this. Yet, the “US dynamic force employment” counts on an increased naval posture. The situation in the Baltic Sea presents a particularly interesting opportunity. The

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5 https://www.defense.gov/explore/story/Article/1874143/us-polish-leaders-agree-to-increased-american-presence-in-poland/

NATO naval forces, including the Polish ones, already have both numeric and capability advantages over the Russian assets. They can challenge the Russian improvements in A2/AD capabilities that threaten the ability of surface and aviation forces to operate freely.

2. Interesting point is the establishment of a U.S. Air Force MQ-9 Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance squadron in Poland. The United States intends, the presidents claimed, to share information derived from this squadron’s operations, as appropriate, in support of “our defense objectives”. It is remarkable because it fits to general US strategic thinking, counting on autonomous unmanned aircraft for overcoming existing Russian A2/AD capabilities.

3. An open question of further shifts (after the command structure) of forces from Germany to Poland. Experts like Gen. Breedlove or former NATO DSG Wershbow do not recommend this. According to them, further enhancements should largely build on the significant US capabilities already deployed in Poland and could be complemented by capabilities from other NATO Allies.

4. Question of possible integration of the Polish “Homar” program into the US enhanced force posture on the Polish territory. Poland, similarly to Romania, is going to buy a Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS) with the range of 300 km. American strategists are of the opinion that the investment in the capabilities and capacity of long-range fires could undermine Russian the advantage in fires capabilities. Programs to further develop long-range precision fire for the multiple launch rocket system up to 500 km a having a significant role in these considerations.

NATO context

A mandate of the US- Congress encourages the administration to take into account political consequences for NATO. Polish diplomacy is well aware of the importance of the Alliance context. Positions of the key European Allies, besides the stance of the NATO structures as such, will play an important role. Recent Polish top-level meetings in Brussels as well as the language of the presidential declaration stressing the importance of the NATO context, are symptoms of this awareness.

The support of the Czech Republic and other Allied countries on the Eastern Flank within the expected NATO debate on the US deployment to Poland should be regarded as relevant. The US deployment to Poland, as well as increased combat potential of the Polish armed forces, are about their security. With its current configuration, the United States could overcome Russian A2/AD systems with existing capabilities given enough time. But investing in new capabilities that would allow the United States and the Allies to more rapidly degrade Russian A2/AD systems could even more effectively limit Russia’s ability to achieve its goals on the ground. This would undermine Russian tactics to cause a strategic shock to the adversary and then to offer a “political solution” or some “reasonable agreement”. Such agreement might be very inconvenient for small countries on the Eastern flank of NATO. They will not be among the negotiating parties, like in 2008 during Russian-Georgian war. Thus, it poses extreme challenge for political cohesion of NATO.
THE MEANING OF THE US AND NATO PRESENCE IN POLAND FOR THE RESILIENCE OF THE EASTERN FLANK OF NATO

For countries most exposed to the Russian threat, strengthening of the defense and deterrence posture of NATO is among their highest priorities. Indeed, the best way to defend our states is to secure a state of affairs in which the enemy will not launch an attack. We have to ask ourselves whether our present contribution to the deterrence in the Eastern flank of the Alliance is sufficient. A potential enemy of the Alliance will not come to believe our resolve by simply reading NATO’s Strategic Concept. The whole picture comprises of military doctrines and preparedness of individual NATO members.

The worst possible scenario on NATO’s Eastern Flank

The most relevant crisis scenario on the Eastern Flank is a possible Russian attack on the Baltics. Russia has capabilities needed for its realization (the actively built Anti-Access/Area-Denial concept covering the whole Baltics; sufficient firepower of armored brigades; and elite parachute division in the Pskov Oblast; regular exercises).

We must analyze the question of why Russia would conduct an attack even though it knows that its fight with NATO in the Baltics would eventually be lost. There are various factors in Russian reasoning, such as the stability of the Russian regime or an opportunity to significantly boost Russian national pride by a quick overrun of the Baltic states and a subsequent agreement with the West, like the “six-point peace plan” of the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. By launching a risky venture in the Baltics, Russia would assert its position in the international arena even more than in Syria. The Baltic states would be given a lesson and a clear message would be sent to all other countries thinking about NATO membership: “Even though the membership in NATO will provide you a guarantee of aid (Article 5 of the Washington Treaty), it will not prevent you from ever being attacked.”

In such scenario, the Alliance would be confronted with the necessity to carry out an operation liberating the Baltic countries. Even in the best course of action, the liberation operation would require certain time to gather forces. Some military simulations estimate this time to be 35 days. The closure of the Suwalki Corridor by Russian forces would create a very hard obstacle for the Alliance to overcome. These facts, plus the eventual-ity of Russian limited nuclear de-escalatory strikes, the long range highprecision strike danger would make any counteroffensive from NATO very difficult.

In addition, the liberation operation would demand launching strikes against targets (surface-to-air, surface-to-surface) that are located in close proximity to the Baltics, i.e. on Russian soil. It poses a risk of further escalation and increases the political sensitivity even more. Russia’s offer of a “political solution”, during the course of a conflict, would give a further spin to an extreme political challenge for NATO’s political cohesion.

The probability of this scenario is not high. Nevertheless, we must be prepared for even a low-probability scenario. The legitimacy of working with such scenarios is evident by simply looking at the current numbers of Russian forces in the region or at their, regularly practiced, readiness.

There are other possible modalities of a potential attack, as it can be waged sub strategically (cyber domain; attacks on vessels or aircrafts or on important railroads), accompanied by massive information campaigns. From the political point of view, an attack under the Article 5 threshold could be even more dangerous for the Alliance than a conventional attack above it. It can fuel extreme sensitive political discussion about what should be the appropriate reaction.
In any case, the argument of those who oppose further strengthening of eFP—that Russia must reckon with the possibility of a “devastating conventional defeat” when considering an attack against the Baltics, doesn’t seem plausible. In truth, it is hard to believe that the Western political representation, much less the public, would countenance such thing as inflicting a “devastating conventional defeat” on Russia. On the contrary, there would be enormous pressure calling for closing a deal with Russia (in the manner of the six-point peace plan of the Russo-Georgian war) as the liberation operation got underway. Russians must know this very well, therefore the political vulnerability of the West will play a much bigger role in Russian calculations than the possibility of suffering a “devastating conventional defeat”.

The response of the West comes from NATO’s Eastern Flank itself

If these adventurous thoughts are really in the heads of Russian strategists, we must ask ourselves whether we are able to reduce their attractiveness. Polish forces, as well as US forces on high alert on Polish soil, together with the armed forces of the Baltic states, help with this.8

The Baltic states are continuously and consequently expanding their heavy forces. All three of them have made purchases that considerably boosted their military capabilities. Especially the progress in building heavy armored units and self-propelled artillery is of great importance. On top of that, regardless of their size, the armies of Lithuania, Estonia, and Latvia are well-trained, and their staff is characterized by patriotism and high motivation.

Thus, the three Baltic countries and Poland are increasing their contribution to the Alliance’s deterrence capabilities. While assessing the Czech contribution to NATO’s defense and deterrence capabilities, we have to distinguish between assurance measures and deterrence measures. The Czech Armed Forces must focus more on high readiness and deterrence capabilities. The deployment of a mortar platoon to the Canadian-led eFP battalion in Latvia or a mechanized company in Lithuania, under German-led eFP, on stand-by regime are such examples. Yet, a plan to build a new airborne regiment, as the Czech General Staff suggests can have its reasons as well. It will have a deterrence meaning only if it is trained and equipped for snap contingency in the Baltic territory. It applies similarly to the Czech participation in the building of follow-on forces within German “Nation Framework Concept”. Robust follow-on forces of NATO are needed, but this effort must go in parallel with a contribution to the readiness and the deterrence on the frontline.

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7 A truly “devastating conventional defeat” would mean the NATO forces would keep going 100 km further after liberating the Baltics and would seize some land from Russia – as a punishment and as a clear proof of Russia’s defeat.

8 The Baltic states and Poland form a single operational space connected with the vulnerable Suwalki Corridor. It is prudent to assume that the territories represent a single integrated operational-strategic challenge in the Russian eyes too.
The new deployment to Poland or the Baltic states reflects the adjustments in the US force posture. Strengthening the resilience of the Eastern Flank of NATO also fit into the new US global strategy that envisages updates in overall US defense and deterrence architecture.
NATO-IZATION OF THE US PRESENCE IN POLAND

As mentioned above the acceptance of the “modular approach” to the collective security is the preferred outcome of US military presence in Poland and the Baltic states. It should be a common endeavor of all countries on NATO’s Eastern Flank that the build-up of US troops in the region is eventually “NATO-ized”. This means that close, multiple, and mutually reinforcing links have to be established between the US forces and NATO’s defense and deterrence posture. While capable of operating independently, these forces must be seen by allies and adversaries alike as a linchpin of NATO’s response.

If NATO-ized, the US military presence’s contribution to NATO can be twofold. First, it strengthens the resilience of NATO’s most vulnerable part. Second, it increases the readiness and effectiveness of the entire Alliance. The first element was described in the previous chapter. The second one is more complex. It includes items like the command structure, force mobility, the planning, strengthening multilateral character of forces and exercises.

Command structures in Europe are well suited for dual-use, which could serve to the purpose of the NATO-ization of the US enhanced presence.

The Supreme Allied Commander Europe, SACEUR, is the commander of the NATO Allied Command Operations (ACO) and head of ACO’s headquarters, Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE). SACEUR, a United States Flag/General officer, leads all NATO military operations and is dual-hatted as Commander United States European Command. SACEUR is the second-highest military position within NATO, after the Chairman of the NATO Military Committee. US forces in Europe are under the command of COM-EUCOM and these are usually earmarked for the use in NATO structures. The US enhanced contingent should be likewise earmarked for NATO.

There is a precedent for the recommended dual-hatted solution. The originally American Aegis Ashore System is now integral part of NATO missile defense systems as a voluntary US contribution to NATO. Deployment of this US system was negotiated bilaterally by Romania and Poland with the United States. The first site in Romania was declared operational in 2016 and the second, in Poland, in 2018. Aegis Ashore System consists of land-based SPY-1 radars (placed in Turkey) and a battery of Standard Missile-3 interceptors. The system was NATO-ized only after the negotiations with Poland and Romania were finished in 2008/2010. During Chicago Summit in 2012, NATO leaders declared that the NATO missile defence system has reached “interim capability”. It means that a basic command and control capability has been tested and installed at NATOs Headquarters Allied Air Command in Ramstein, Germany, while NATO Allies provide sensors and interceptors to connect to the system. The same pattern might be applied in case of new US deployments in Poland using the SHAPE as a dual-hatted command and control structure.

Such solution will not be a measure just for the sake of the NATO Eastern Flank. It can provide incentive for further NATO command structure adaptation. Command structure reform will cost money. Today, the command structure copes with the Graduated Response Plans only because Allies reinforce the structure with voluntary national contributions. Wider reform cannot be dealt with ad hoc but should channel new resources into a modernized command structure. Why not use new US deployments as an incentive for common US-European endeavor to support NATO command structure with additional personnel?
Making full use of NATO’s support and mobility capabilities

US forces should be able to fully rely on NATO support and force mobility structures, which would save money and create mutual dependencies. A special role should be given to the new NATO headquarters in Ulm. Established in 2018, NATO command in Ulm is responsible for troop support and logistics. The command in Ulm’s task is to ensure NATO can move troops more quickly across Europe in a crisis situation. Ulm is already home to Germany’s Multinational Joint Headquarters, which plans and exercises command and control of crisis management operations for NATO, the European Union and the United Nations. In peacetime, the new Joint Support and Enabling Command has 160 personnel in total and is expected to be fully staffed by 2021. During a crisis, the command will be able to draw on as many as 600 personnel. Apart from providing security, freedom of movement, and support for NATO forces moving across Europe, it will also ensure rapid forward deployment of allied reinforcements. This is exactly what is needed for the defense of the Eastern Flank. The Ulm command is also under the responsibility of SACEUR. Therefore, it should become central for rotating, moving, supplying, and reinforcing US troops deployed to Poland.

Including the new US troops into the Gradual Response Plans can provide room for enhancing the linkage between operational and the defense planning of NATO

NATO, in order to deter the adversary on the Eastern Flank, must deliver a string of conventional forces that are deployable and fit to fight. This means the VJTF, NATO Response Force (NRF) as well the Follow-on Forces forming the bulk of national forces. It also means a plan for mobilizing and commanding them. New types of these plans, the Graduated Response Plans, vary according to geography: there are scenarios for Northern Norway, the Baltic area, Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey or the Mediterranean. The GRP demonstrates the layered approach to force mobilization, while plans for deploying the VJTF are quite specific. In contrast, projections for the NRF are broader and less detailed, and those of the Follow-on Forces are quite broad and lacking in detail.

At the same time, the NATO Defense Planning Process defines just general forces in the form of capability targets according the current level of ambition. In case of crises, the mechanism of force generation process is applied, 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. These contributions may be subject to some national limitations (known as “caveats”). These restrictions influence NATO’s operational planning. Moreover, the 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 relevant most for the Eastern Flank (i.e. Szczecin and Elbląg), are “equipped” in peacetime with a substantial US and 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

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10 In a form of enhanced affiliation i.e. active cooperation during peacetime, including command post a live exercises.
generation process in case of crisis. Such innovative solution would also contribute to the fair and realistic burden-sharing during NATO-led operations on the Eastern Flank.

Last but not least, the US presence in Poland would create opportunities for creating multinational forces and strengthen training capacities

The establishment and joint use by the U.S. Armed Forces and Polish Armed Forces of the Combat Training Center (CTC) in Drawsko Pomorskie, and eventually in a few other locations in Poland is envisaged. Poland will thus possess a training center that allows for full training of special forces as well as the armored brigades, certification included. This could be potentially used by other NATO Allies. The question of who will finance this center/centers, and whether NATO can support it, is still open. Prepositioned hardware stock in Powidz funded by NSIP (NATO Security Investment Program) can serve as an example. The U.S. division-size Defender 2020 exercise should be used to test the potential of joint training not only between the U.S. and Polish forces, but with other NATO countries. Ultimately, the training of the U.S. forces in Poland should include a strong component of NATO operations.

The presence of the U.S. divisional HQ, combat brigades and enablers would also open up the possibility of using the elements of the ‘framework nation’ approach. One can envisage embedding U.S. units into the Polish forces, or incorporating e.g. British, German, or other NATO nation’s brigade-size units or enablers into a U.S.-led division. This would assuage the U.S. expectation that it would not be the only NATO country providing substantial forces to the Eastern Flank defense.

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11 The training facilities, like this in Drawsko Pomorskie, are undergoing modernization now. Already now it is used for the purpose of training NATO forces, the US forces included. Procurement procedures have been launched with regards to digitalization of the training systems, setting up of laser training solutions and other hardware that would enhance the training realism and effectiveness.
THE CZECH REPUBLIC AND THE US MILITARY PRESENCE IN POLAND. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE CZECH ARMED FORCES

The crucial strategic precondition for dealing with the defence of the Czech Republic is to identify who specifically poses an external military threat to our country and what their intentions are. At the same time, it is evident that the military defence of the Czech Republic would not be possible without the help of Allied states from the very beginning. I believe that given the size of our contribution to the Alliance, we should distinguish between contributing to assurance, crisis management, or deterrence. This exactly is where the core focus of this text is. One of the debate’s objectives must be to identify how specifically our army can contribute to the Alliance’s deterrence capabilities (especially those responding to scenarios which are relevant to the Czech Republic). After all, the last-mentioned American study (Army War College) emphasizes that the development of military capabilities of individual NATO members should contribute to the deterrence capabilities of the Alliance as a whole.

The Czech Republic has adopted many aspects of NATO’s adaptation into its own strategic documents and planning and capabilities development. Nevertheless, for the Czech Republic supporting the new US strategic doctrine means complementing NATO obligations with bilateral and multilateral arrangements, in line with the ‘modular’ approach explained above.

When it comes to the “forward deployment” and “high readiness/fast reinforcement” aspects of the US strategy, the obvious option is a forward positioning in Poland, in close cooperation and regular exercising with Polish and US forces. The Czech Republic earmarks the 7th Mechanised Brigade for the collective defense task and for this purpose it is affiliated with the Multinational Division North-East Headquarters in Elbląg. This affiliation currently encompasses only a provision of exercise plans for the brigade as a member of a larger multinational formation. However, the level of cooperation could be upgraded substantially to an actual rotational deployment of the brigade’s battalion-sized task force in the Elbląg’s area of responsibility, with essential combat support and combat service support. Besides an actual rise of the number of troops in the area, thus directly contributing to the need to deploy more forces in the area for deterrence, regular rotation of the task group to its home brigade would also greatly expand the brigade’s knowledge of the area and main reinforcement routes, thus also contributing to the credibility of NATO’s reinforcement approach. Such a measure would certainly be very costly but given the planned increase of the Czech defence budget, the priority of the collective defence task, and the likely future redeployment of forces from crisis management operations, necessary resources should be found.

Other options include increase in exercises in the Eastern Flank. The new airborne regiment (to be ready by 2020) could also contribute to this task. The new unit is intended for rapid deployments to address quickly emerging crises. The Czech Republic plans that this unit will be ready for deployment in a matter of hours. As explained above, this ability should be frequently exercised on the Eastern flank, joining other multinational units operating in the area. The Special Forces of the Czech Armed Forces are too expected to be employable in a full spectrum of conflicts, including those of high intensity. Since the Special Forces has no practical experience with these scenarios, they could exercise regularly with its US and Polish counterparts – some analysts have proposed for the US 10th Special Forces Group activities with the Polish Special Forces Command in Krakow to be made 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.

In addition to supporting deterrence through 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 Allies through the non-military aspects of the hybrid warfare. This is something that Moscow has been doing for years: supporting anti-NATO and pro-Russian parties and pressure groups, using economic projects to bind influence groups or whole governments to itself and attempting to delegitimise 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 – protests of Russian sympathisers, blockades of reinforcing troops, and many more would play a significant role, precisely to prevent fast and resolute decisions.

Deterrence can be built up against hybrid campaigns by credible attribution of the source; naming and shaming; and designing proportionate responses showing that hybrid attacks will be consistently answered and 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 its 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. Czech services should therefore step up their efforts to uncover and disrupt Russian malicious activities and degrade Russian influence network, making its effective use in a crisis with NATO less likely. Likewise, a rather robust Czech institutional base for combating cyber and information threats should prioritize working against Russian hybrid threats and the military Cyber and Information Operations Command should also focus its activities on exercising operations in support of national and Allied effort in the Eastern flank.

One rather daring option that would address both aspects of deterrence (forward deployment resp. reinforcement, and preventing Russia’s non-military disruptions) is to make the 7th Mechanized Brigade (and possibly other force elements, such as a Gripen air defence detachment) to be put on alert and ready to start the movement to Poland automatically based on certain Russian threat indicators. A bilateral defence agreement with Poland would be concluded that would specify events which would 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 – for example after the first land military incursion into NATO’s territory. Since this would be agreed by the sides and mandated by the parliaments in advance, Russia would not be able to disrupt at the time of NATO’s contemplation of a counter-attack. In line with the “modular approach”, this has to be later coordinated with NATO collective defence plans.

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12 [https://www.europeanvalues.net/vyzkum/russia-and-china-through-eyes-of-nato-and-eu-intelligence-agencies/]
For the Czech Republic supporting the new US strategic doctrine means complementing NATO obligations with bilateral and multilateral arrangements. When it comes to the “forward deployment” and “high readiness/fast reinforcement” aspects of the US strategy, the obvious option is a forward positioning in Poland and regular exercising with Polish and US forces.
GERMANY AND THE RESILIENCE OF NATO’S EASTERN FLANK. THE GERMAN STANCE TOWARDS THE INCREASED US PRESENCE

The German debate on the topic is influenced by the fact that foreign policy is one of the frontlines between CDU/CSU and SPD. Transatlantic ties or relations with Russia are an integral part of these debates. Both have their own relevance for the Alliance’s reassurance and deterrence policy on its Eastern flank. The views of the CDU, such as the ones represented by the appearances of Chancellor Merkel at the last three NATO summits, are quite clear. The Chancellor has also promised that Russia will not “get away” with “annexing” Crime. Still, it is questionable whether there is room in the German political landscape for such a principled stance. All the main German political parties currently view the policies of Putin’s Russia negatively. However, the difference lies in the consequences drawn from this negative assessment of Russia, specifically concerning the resilience of the Eastern Flank of NATO against external threat. Both CDU and CSU take the security concerns of the Eastern Flank’s countries seriously, unequivocally support the Alliance’s measures aimed at reassuring these states, and the strengthening of the Baltics’ own defense capacity. By contrast, there are many voices in the SPD that say that besides retaliatory measures motivating Russia to change its behaviour and measures aimed at strengthening NATO’s defensive capacity, it is necessary to seek opportunities for a dialogue with Russia, which would lead to increased mutual trust. Despite the fact that the SPD supports boosting the Eastern flank’s defensive capabilities, it also holds the view that such development should not be to the detriment of dialogue and trust-building with Moscow. In that sense, for example, it argues against the permanent deployment of troops from Western NATO members in the Eastern flank. Other measures, which are mainly a response to the military-security aspect of the issue, are met with reserve (as “sabre-rattling”) amongst the members of the SPD. Frank-Walter Steinmeier, the current President of Germany and former Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, once criticized the Allied exercise Anaconda 2016, whose aim was to demonstrate the readiness of NATO members to defend the countries of the Eastern flank. As a result, Steinmeier was then criticized by CDU.

Despite the discrepancies within the political scene, the German security-military position on the Eastern Flank of NATO is a very solid one. The eFP-Battalion in Lithuania is led by Germany as a framework nation. Germany is also, together with the USA, UK, Sweden, Belgium, Norway, and Israel one of the biggest suppliers of military equipment to the Baltics. The official German stance in terms of sanctions on Russia has been consistent and rather resolute, especially at NATO or EU meetings.

14 Stenographic records from a Bundestag session on July 7, 2016 and September 9, 2016 (Plenarprotokoll 18/183, Plenarprotokoll 18/190).
15 Stenographic records from a Bundestag session on July 7, 2016 and September 9, 2016 (Plenarprotokoll 18/183, Plenarprotokoll 18/190).
A solid base for the Polish-German security cooperation is also represented by the rich network of contacts between the military of both countries. The Germany and Polish officers are on common duty in commanding structures relevant for the Eastern Flank like MNC-NE Szczecin or MND-NE Elbląg. There is also direct cooperation among the combat units up to the level of armoured brigades. Polish soldiers are exercising along their German colleagues within Allied exercises and such cooperation is also envisaged on bilateral basis. 17

Still, when it comes to the eventuality of further strengthening the western military presence in Baltic States or in Poland above the already approved eFP framework, the discussion on the validity of the NATO-Russia Founding Act from 1997 plays a role. Even though it is stratified as well, the debate in Germany still very much differs from those in Czech Republic or Poland. There is a prevailing consensus in the Czech Republic and unanimous consensus in Poland that the Founding Act is not valid anymore.18 The strategic environment changed, and Russia has breached its obligations from a range of disarmament treaties. Moreover, the NATO-Russia Founding Act, signed in Paris, was merely a political agreement and not a legally binding international treaty. It ceased to apply at least in 2014 when Russia illegally annexed the Crimean Peninsula, drastically violating provisions of the Paris agreement.

At the same time, the cohesion of NATO is a matter of utmost importance that binds Germany, Poland, the Czech Republic, and other countries of the Eastern Flank, regardless of political and legal differences. No doubt, the cohesion is also in the interest of the United States. As already seen, the mandate of Congress for the increased US presence is quite clear on this.

Within this context, the NATO-ization of the US presence in Poland and calming down any unnecessary political tension on the question whether it will require any hardware shift from Germany is a common interest of the countries of the Eastern Flank, Justyna Gotkowska from Ośrod Studiów Wschodnich, a known Polish expert on security, is drawing exactly in this line: She reminds the public that the majority of the US installations in Germany (USEUCOM, USAFRICOM, USAEUR, USAFE-FAFRAFICA, LRMC, centers Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels) serve for the US power projection in Europe, Africa, or the Middle East. All potential financial, infrastructural, and overall military consequences hardly make it possible to move this military infrastructure somewhere else. On the other hand, Gotkowska claims that moving some combat units would be much easier. In any case, a possible increase in the US military presence in Poland is about 1000 troops. This would not be any significant shift for the US force posture in Germany that amounts almost forty thousand US soldiers.19

17 https://www.deutschesheer.de/portal/a/heer/start/aktuell/nachrichten/jahr2019/september2019/ut/p/z1/hU7LDolwEPwjtIDPlqgB_BBlQX00CDGxzU4kHP941Rm_EOLyvM7OTAQYnYJKPcxNpyTv8abMP_uRm2dORYq1ny_ItvL3QvJehHgEDnD8F2FokwnEBKpGAMWOYLrDhgoysCsf-MalDa9MBav3xuXfrhsrFrdfwRMNgflq1YSM8hG5NMht5obpX_f9V1rdKyUArsnMGMhX9jPjPNWse7nrRGme7GCLC4LcOy9NoXRrQ9gN/d5/L2dBfSEvZOFBI59nQSEH/eZ_6941GZ50OM6fEQS6U78MA0051
18 https://biznesalert.com/nato-russia-relations-warsaw-institute/
NOT ONLY THE DETERRENCE AND READINESS, BUT THE FUTURE OF NATO AS WELL

There are two basic tasks ahead of the “friends of NATO”. The first, a very topical one, is the need to further strengthen the resilience of NATO’s Eastern flank. The second, an equally important one, is about NATO’s future and relevance.

Since the most tangible risk for the NATO Eastern Flank stems from the increased readiness of the Russian army, the emphasis of the West must be on deterrence and on the ability to disrupt A2/AD system right in the very initial stage of a potential conflict. For solving these two tasks, the enhanced eFP, as well as US presence in Poland, are the key.

In order to guarantee the Alliance’s future, the growing doctrinal gap between the United States and the European Allies needs to be addressed, together with the question of political coherence and, last but not least, with the European level of ambition.

There is still a technological gap and structural weaknesses on the Russian side. The Russian army, heavily reliant on conscription, has low reserve mobilization readiness. Russia also has a limited ability to project power in the global scale due to the weakness of its navy. Its system of military is outdated and economically inferior to the West. Therefore, in a conflict with NATO, Russia -as a centralized state- would have to target the political cohesion of the Alliance at its initial phase. The ability of the Russian leadership to maneuver its own public is the most significant tactical advantage of Russia in case of conflict. This enables to inflict a strategic shock to the enemy and to apply an approach based on the controlled escalation.

How to strengthen political cohesion is a question that has a political, rather than a pure military, answer. We need to increase the level of mutual understanding with our Western European partners. Czechs, Poles, and the Baltics must accept the fact that the German or French 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. To accept the threat assessment of the Ally doesn’t mean sacrificing one’s own.

As for the European level of ambition - the problem addressed in the second chapter of this paper - the Framework Nation Concept (FNC) can be a part of the solution. FNC is a demonstration of the German decision to take greater responsibility for the European part of NATO. Germany, the second largest contributor to the Alliance missions and operations, aims on building-up “capabilities clusters” and on a preparation of the follow-on forces within FNC. A declared ambition is also to provide for one-third of the level of NATO’s ambitions. Even though the FNC is not the sole solution of the problem of the insufficient level of European ambitions, its potential for increasing interoperability of the German, Czech, and Polish forces should be further explored. One concrete step is the planned affiliation of the Czech 4th Mechanized Brigade to the 10th German Armored Brigades.

20 Since the Georgian war in 2008, Russia made an enormous progress in its capability to rapidly deploy forces. The Russian armed forces are prepared for combat in 1-2 days from the declaration of emergency. In 3-5 days, the Russian army is able to generate enough forces to execute limited combat operations in the Baltics, and in 10 days it is able to carry out extensive operations in the region.
CONCLUSION

The year 2014 meant a genuine change for the United States. Its main doctrinal documents call Russia a competitor with revisionist ambitions. No change in this is expected any time soon. Some experts even call the current situation “Cold War II”. We, the Europeans, do not only need to thoroughly analyze the new American doctrine, but we also need a frank strategic debate on political level to determine whether this trend in the US foreign policy represents an opportunity for Europe, or not.

Coherence of the Alliance and complementarity between NATO and US armies are 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; air and missile defense, and long-range fires. A Russian conventional attack on a very short warning could defeat these forward-deployed NATO and US forces before reinforcements could even be brought to the theatre. Increasing the capabilities of NATO ground forces in Europe—through an enhanced U.S. presence, boosted readiness of European NATO forces, and large-scale exercises—will strengthen the Alliance’s ability to deter Russia.

The United States may also seek a few European partners to participate beyond their contributions to the US-led NATO eFP battle group in Poland. Allies could contribute to the force posture in Poland in several ways: increased rotational presence (e.g., the UK, Germany, or another ally could deploy forces with the current US rotational BCT), deployment of enablers, deployment of special forces units and their own aviation and naval detachments to support exercises and training. Such eventualities should be debated among Allies. The Eastern Flank countries must welcome and support the US presence in the region.

Any future collective defense posture in NATO must involve massive investments in new technologies, modern reconnaissance, fire, and logistics with the aim to have fewer but highly trained forward-deployed troops. The central point of this text is that the planned enhanced architecture of the US presence in Poland pose a chance to Germany and the Czech Republic to be player of adaptive NATO arrangement that will ensure the future of the Alliance.

As for the regional context, the countries on the Eastern Flank most exposed to the Russian threat need to become “agenda setters” in the overall NATO scene. One of the strategic issues that might be addressed is the growing doctrinal gap between Europe and the USA. The aim of it is to come up with a constructive agenda for the transatlantic bond and for the Eastern Flank of NATO while keeping the political cohesion and solidarity of the Alliance.

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21 https://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/pdffiles/PUB1362.pdf
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