



REPORT

# CLOSING NATO'S BALTIC GAP

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## FOREWORD

This report was prepared as an input to the forthcoming Warsaw Summit. While there has been a plethora of such analyses, none have been written by high-level military leaders, who have knowledge of and experience in NATO. In this report, our challenges and solutions are analysed by three former NATO commanders with considerable experience of Allied strategy, operations and capabilities: a former Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR), a former Deputy SACEUR and a former Commander of the Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum. Political experience and context are provided by a former ambassador to NATO.

This group of authors brings to the table a pool of knowledge and experience that allows them not only to provide advice on strategy but, equally importantly, to analyse the actual feasibility of their proposed solutions; all the more so, as the generals have been either strategic or operational commanders in major operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan. The defence of the Baltic area is by no means a hopeless task, but many questions still need to be answered.

This report raises the crucial issue of political guidance and responsibility. The authors oppose vehemently any approach in which the military is not provided with enough political support, guidance and resources to implement the demanding task of strengthening deterrence on the eastern flank of the Alliance. They considered it important to remind that deterrence has two key pillars – the political and the military – which must complement each other. Political deterrence messages will lack credibility without military capabilities and an effective defence strategy; military deterrence will not work without the political will to use those capabilities. The authors are concerned that many gaps – strategic, political, military and even psychological – are present in NATO’s deterrence posture in the Baltic area and need to be urgently addressed in Warsaw and beyond.

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Tallinn, Estonia

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Under the present regime in the Kremlin, Russia poses a serious threat to NATO, particularly to its eastern-flank Allies. It has labelled NATO as an adversary, developed a mix of capabilities required for confronting it, created and exercised offensive plans targeting the Alliance, and is engaged in provocative and irresponsible military behaviour towards it. The regime has shown its willingness and ability to use military force, or the threat of it, to achieve its political objectives and, in the case of Ukraine, flagrantly violated the existing international order and fundamental principles of European security. It has also shown a taste for high-risk opportunistic gambling and the ability, time and again, to surprise the West. To prevent such a surprise from happening in the Baltic area, where the regional balance of conventional forces greatly favours Russia over NATO, the Alliance's strategy and posture need to be adapted. While NATO Allies have only company size units rotating through the Baltic states, Russia is creating new divisions and armies and fielding cutting-edge capabilities in their vicinity. This is not the Red Army of our grandfathers' time.

NATO's current posture, which is reliant on the reinforcement of the Baltic states, lacks credibility. The Alliance would be unable to deny Russia a military *fait accompli* in the region and, given Russia's "anti-access/area denial" (A2/AD) capabilities, to rapidly deploy additional forces there. While sharing about 1,400 km of land border with Russia and Belarus, the Baltic states are linked to the rest of the Alliance only by a 65 km-wide land corridor from Poland to Lithuania. Twenty-five NATO Allies can be reinforced by NATO even if Russia activates its A2/AD capabilities, while the three Baltic states cannot.

We therefore make the following proposals:

- The transition at the Warsaw Summit from assurance to deterrence must be made credible with a more substantial forward presence in the most exposed NATO Allies and an effective counter-A2/AD strategy. While the Baltics are sometimes compared to the West Germany of the Cold War, deterrence by denial is more important today than it was then. It is also feasible because deterrence by denial can be achieved without establishing parity with the opposing forces in the region. We do not need to match Russia tank-for-tank in order to have a deterrent effect.
- While we agree with both the former and current SACEURs, Generals Breedlove and Scaparrotti, who would prefer permanent forces in Europe, the debate about permanence should not be at the forefront if the continuous presence of combat-capable forces can be ensured through rotation.
- The Alliance must deploy, as a minimum, a multinational "battalion-plus" battle group with a range of enablers and force multipliers in each of the Baltic states, with one nation or an established multinational formation providing its core. Together with the additional US Army presence, which should also be built up to a battalion size in each Baltic country, such a NATO force would be able create a "speedbump" for Russia, and not act only as a "tripwire".
- The Warsaw Summit is not a final destination. NATO must continue efforts to ensure that this posture expands the range of its deterrence and defence options and limits Russia's freedom

of action. The Alliance should continue building its forward presence towards a multinational brigade in each of the Baltic states.

- While land presence has gained much attention in the run-up to the Warsaw Summit, the maritime and air dimensions of NATO's deterrent posture, as well as the availability of key enablers, have been less touched upon. After the Warsaw Summit, these issues need to be addressed.
- Quick reinforcement of the Baltic states by the Allies should be made more credible by pre-positioning equipment much closer to the frontline than 1,600 km away from it as currently planned. During the Cold War, this distance was only 300 km. We recommend that at least a battalion-worth of heavy equipment be pre-positioned in each Baltic state in order to be able to surge the presence of Allied troops rapidly when necessary. The former REFORGER exercises should be revived under the name REFOREUR (Return of Forces to Europe).
- NATO's nuclear deterrent should be strengthened by signalling to Russia that Moscow's strategy of using sub-strategic nuclear weapons to de-escalate conflict would be a major escalation and would warrant the Alliance's nuclear response.
- An approach should be adopted to cyber weapons similar to the existing one on nuclear weapons, stating that the Allies' offensive cyber capabilities have a deterrent role even if NATO as an organisation does not pursue an offensive cyber strategy. Removing cyber offensive option is tantamount to someone taking away kinetic options from an artillery commander on a battlefield.
- NATO must signal to Russia that, in case of aggression against any NATO Ally, there is no such thing as a limited conflict for the Alliance, and that it will contest Russia in all domains and without geographical limitations.
- North American and European Allies should state that they will act individually in anticipation of NATO, should the Alliance's collective military response be delayed. The Allies should underline that an individual response is, in fact, a legal obligation that they take seriously, and have plans and units allocated for this purpose.
- NATO's plans should take into account the possible contribution of Sweden and Finland. The Alliance should also conduct prudent planning for assisting these countries, as a way of reassuring them that their support for NATO would not leave them exposed to Russia's punitive military action.
- North American and European Allies should state that they will act in anticipation of NATO, should the decision to invoke Article 5 be delayed. The Allies should underline that an individual response is, in fact, a legal obligation that they take seriously, and have plans and units allocated for this purpose.

The Alliance must act with a sense of urgency when it comes to reinforcing its deterrence posture in the Baltic states, where NATO is most vulnerable. NATO has too often acted like a homeowner who sets the alarm once the burglars have left. A general change in mindset is needed—a culture of seizing the initiative and actively shaping the strategic environment should become the Alliance's modus operandi. The Alliance's decision-makers and general public must realise that the costs of credible deterrence by denial pale in comparison to the costs of deterrence failure.

*Knowing is not enough; we must apply.  
Willing is not enough; we must do.*

Goethe

## INTRODUCTION

The North Atlantic Alliance has played and continues to play a crucial stabilising role in Europe. Its policies, including a credible nuclear and conventional deterrent, were essential in avoiding military conflict during the Cold War. Due to major risks in the European security landscape, the Alliance has again been called upon to provide a credible counterbalance to those for whom peaceful development is not a value. The Baltic region is one of the areas where Allied capabilities need strengthening in order to protect Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania.

Of course, the Baltics are not the only sensitive area. We write this report at a time of great turmoil for NATO. To the south, the brutal acts by the Syrian regime and ISIL have led to the biggest flow of migrants and refugees since the Second World War, and ISIL has inspired many Europeans to join them in their fight and to attack Europe from within. To the east, the foundations of the European security order have been undermined and values and principles such as the integrity of borders blatantly violated.

Russia is a common destabilising denominator in the crises on both the eastern and southern flanks. It aims to revise the post-Cold War international order, undermine NATO and re-establish dominance over the so-called “near abroad”. To do this, it is willing to use methods ranging from annexing territories of sovereign countries to “weaponising” migration. At the same time, NATO’s behaviour has continued to be defensive, transparent and predictable. NATO did not and does not seek confrontation—on the contrary, for more than two dec-

*Russia is a common destabilising denominator in the crises on both the eastern and southern flanks*

ades, the Alliance has tried to engage with Russia as a partner. By signing the NATO–Russia Founding Act (NRFA) in 1997, it undertook unilateral commitments to reassure Russia. The latter, meanwhile, agreed to respect states’

“inherent right to choose the means to ensure their own security”, a promise it has broken while NATO continues to adhere to the NRFA.

The Baltic states have demonstrated that they take defence seriously. Estonia has been committed to the 2% defence spending pledge for years, and since 2015 has raised its budget above this benchmark. Latvia and Lithuania are making significant efforts to reach this goal by 2018–20 and are now increasing their defence budgets by 20–30% a year. Over the years, the Baltic states have also shown they are not security “free riders”, and demonstrated solidarity by participating in various NATO-led military operations, e.g. in Afghanistan.

The Alliance as a whole has proven it is determined to deal with the new challenges. Sanctions have been imposed by the European Union and the United States to show that Russia’s aggressive behaviour will not go without response, while NATO has renewed its focus on collective defence. As US President Barack Obama said in Tallinn in September 2014, “the defence of Tallinn and Riga and Vilnius is just as important as the defence of Berlin and Paris and London”. Since the 2014 NATO Summit in Wales, the Readiness Action Plan has been the main driver for change in improving the Alliance’s readiness. The Alliance has established the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF) and NATO Force Integration Units (NFI-U). It has also boosted Allied presence with enhanced Baltic Air Policing and more exercises, as well as with US rotational ground troops as part of the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI). The Obama administration has proposed quadrupling ERI funding to 3.4 billion US dollars. Furthermore, at the NATO Defence Ministers’ meeting in February 2016, an enhanced forward presence on NATO’s eastern flank was agreed upon. There is an emerging shift in the attitudes of major European Allies, who are indicating their willingness to share more of the burden with the United States.

Following Russia’s aggression in Ukraine, NATO initially placed emphasis on reassuring vulnerable Allies rather than on deterring Russia. The answer to most eastern flank challenges was more exercises and training. Only recently has the policy been evolving towards deterrence. However, the geostrategic position of the Baltic states—their long borders with Russia and Belarus, their geographical isolation from the rest



of the Alliance, their smallness which does not permit trading time for space, and Russia’s increasingly robust and assertive military posture in their vicinity—places special demands on NATO’s deterrence and defence posture. This report therefore covers three major topics: the threat posed by Russia, the suitability of NATO’s

ly modest, particularly compared to Russia’s military potential concentrated towards the west.

Russia has demonstrated its penchant for risk-taking and surprising the West to keep it off-balance. It is continuously scanning for and exploiting the West’s weaknesses. Moscow

*The answer to most eastern flank challenges was more exercises and training. Only recently has the policy been evolving towards deterrence*

is aggressively opportunistic when advancing its interests, and its modus operandi is to seize the initiative and achieve a fait accompli.

strategy and posture, and measures necessary to enhance deterrence in the Baltic area.

It is weakness rather than strength that provokes Russia into action. This was the case with Crimea, when the Ukrainian state—weakened by domestic turmoil—was unable to mobilise itself to defend part of its territory. However, the regime respects a show of strength and tends to back down to avoid a direct confrontation with determined and resourceful opponents. A case in point is the US response to Russia’s invasion of Georgia in 2008, when Russia’s troops halted their march towards Tbilisi after the US deployed its warships to the Black Sea, while also promising substantial logistical support to the Georgian armed forces.

## I. RUSSIA’S THREAT

The ruling regime of Russia does not disguise its hostility towards the West and its main institutions, NATO and the European Union. After all, Western values such as democracy, pluralism, transparency, human rights and freedoms, and the rule of law would be a death-knell to a kleptocratic authoritarian regime. The Kremlin therefore viewed with great alarm the various “coloured revolutions” in Russia’s neighbourhood and the Arab Spring uprisings. Fearing that this is what lies in store for the regime in Russia, and accusing the West of instigating those upheavals, the Kremlin has set out to delegitimise, discredit and undermine Western policies and institutions as well as the entire post-Cold war norms-based security order. To all intents and purposes, the West has been declared by Moscow as Russia’s main adversary, as is explicitly stated in Russia’s revised National Security Strategy signed late last year by President Vladimir Putin.

There is no doubt that Russia is prepared and willing to use military force, or the threat of it, when exploiting weaknesses. This also involves provocative military behaviour to test the responses of the Alliance and individual Allies, as in the case of dangerous overflights of the guided-missile destroyer USS Donald Cook in the Baltic Sea in April 2016. It is a matter of great concern that, when it comes to the use of force, Moscow’s decision-making circle has shrunk to comprise President Putin and only a few of his most trusted members of the regime. When making decisions, President Putin is not constrained by constitutional checks and balances or the rule of law. He has the military and security apparatus ready to execute his will and has their requisite capabilities available any time.

Russia’s strategic aim, which underpins its regime’s domestic legitimacy, is focused on restoring Russia’s status as a great power with its sphere of privileged interests and domination. Bolstering its military power and using military force have become instrumental in achieving this aim. Furthermore, the regime increasingly uses military adventures abroad in order to deflect attention from Russia’s economic troubles and the regime’s growing repression, and to raise its domestic popularity. Paradoxically, Moscow accuses the Alliance of encircling Russia, even though NATO’s military footprint on its eastern flank has been extreme-

*Paradoxically, Moscow accuses the Alliance of encircling Russia, even though NATO’s military footprint on its eastern flank has been extremely modest*

Furthermore, the tools at the regime’s disposal are well integrated, both within the military—from “little green men” to conventional and nuclear forces—and between different agencies responsible for diplomacy, intelligence, prop-

agenda, civilian emergency management, and military, cyber and economic warfare. This provides Moscow with great flexibility and agility as well as the ability to act and achieve effects across multiple domains.

Russia's use of a wide range of instruments in recent conflicts has generated much discussion

*When making decisions, President Putin is not constrained by constitutional checks and balances or the rule of law*

within NATO concerning the numerous implications, not least on how best to deter future aggression. "Hybrid warfare" has become a moniker of Russia's approach to the West. It is often considered in NATO capitals that Russia would not dare to attack a NATO member by means of a direct and overt act of military aggression but would rather choose an indirect approach (as described by Russia's Chief of General Staff <sup>1</sup>), or hybrid warfare tactics, to challenge the Alliance and its collective defence guarantees.

However, without credible hard-power options at its disposal, Russia's other state power tools alone could not conceivably pose an existential or grave threat to a NATO Ally. Russia's doctrine invariably envisages the use of conventional military force, without which the gains obtained through the use of covert, indirect and unconventional means cannot be consolidated. Furthermore, in the wake of the annexation of Crimea, NATO has been sufficiently alerted to Russia's hybrid warfare approach. The Baltic states and other Allies have already put significant effort into bolstering their resilience and ability to respond to and deal with covert aggression. Furthermore, by initiating a conflict on NATO's territory through hybrid warfare tactics, Russia would lose its key advantages of speed and surprise. Any signs of such a conflict—instigated on the basis of false pretexts, as is usual for Russia—would serve as early

1 "The focus of applied methods of conflict has altered in the direction of the broad use of political, economic, informational, humanitarian, and other non-military measures—applied in coordination with the protest potential of the population. All this is supplemented by military means of a concealed character, including carrying out actions of informational conflict and the actions of special-operations forces. The open use of force—often under the guise of peacekeeping and crisis regulation—is resorted to only at a certain stage, primarily for the achievement of final success in the conflict." Valery Gerasimov, "Tsennost nauki v predvidenii" ("The value of science in prediction"), *Voyenno-Promyshlenniy Kurier*, No. 8 (476) (2013).

warning for NATO, thus making it far harder for Russia to pre-empt the Alliance.

While Moscow recognises that it cannot match NATO's military capabilities in general terms, it has sufficient combat capabilities to create a regional military balance favouring Russia in the Baltic area. Given the potential speed of Russia's actions and the lack of strategic depth in the Baltic states, this could allow the achievement of Moscow's aims. We therefore focus on Russia's military power as the hard currency underwriting its ability

to pose a serious or even existential threat to the most exposed of NATO Allies—the Baltic states. In this regard, five elements stand out: (1) Russia's military modernisation and build-up (particularly in the Western Military District), (2) anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) capabilities, (3) nuclear strategy, (4) continuous exercises and (5) the uncertainty surrounding the Kremlin's intentions.

## 1.1 MILITARY MODERNISATION AND BUILD-UP

Russia is undertaking its most ambitious military modernisation programme in recent history and has earmarked a total budget of around 19.3 trillion roubles to rearm its Armed Forces by 2020. Its priorities are modernising nuclear weapons, and introducing new hardware and weapons systems into the Aerospace Forces, the Navy and Ground Forces units, in that order.

This push for military modernisation, rearmament and build-up under President Putin is underpinned by significant investments in developing, producing and rolling out new weapons systems, or upgrading legacy systems, giving a new qualitative edge to Russia's Armed Forces. Given that rearmament spending has been ring-fenced against cuts necessitated by Russia's significant economic difficulties—and despite massive corruption, embezzlement and the impact of Western sanctions on Russia's defence industry—those investments are yielding significant results. Although economic problems might force Russia to reassess some of its choices, cuts in military spending would only be considered as a last resort, and their effect on the rearmament programme would only come after years of recession. Western sanctions that restrict access to certain technologies certainly act as a factor slowing down the military modernisation, but they are unable to completely halt it.

Russia’s ability to apply lessons learnt from past operations such as the war against Georgia in 2008 or more recent campaigns in Ukraine and Syria is also noteworthy. As a result, Russia has made steady advances in improving command and control, increasing Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, integrating various services, making various units and formations more cohesive and effective in war-

*Militarily, Russia is certainly no longer a decaying post-Cold War power with obsolete or vanishing capabilities*

fare, and improving logistics. Militarily, Russia is certainly no longer a decaying post-Cold War power with obsolete or vanishing capabilities.

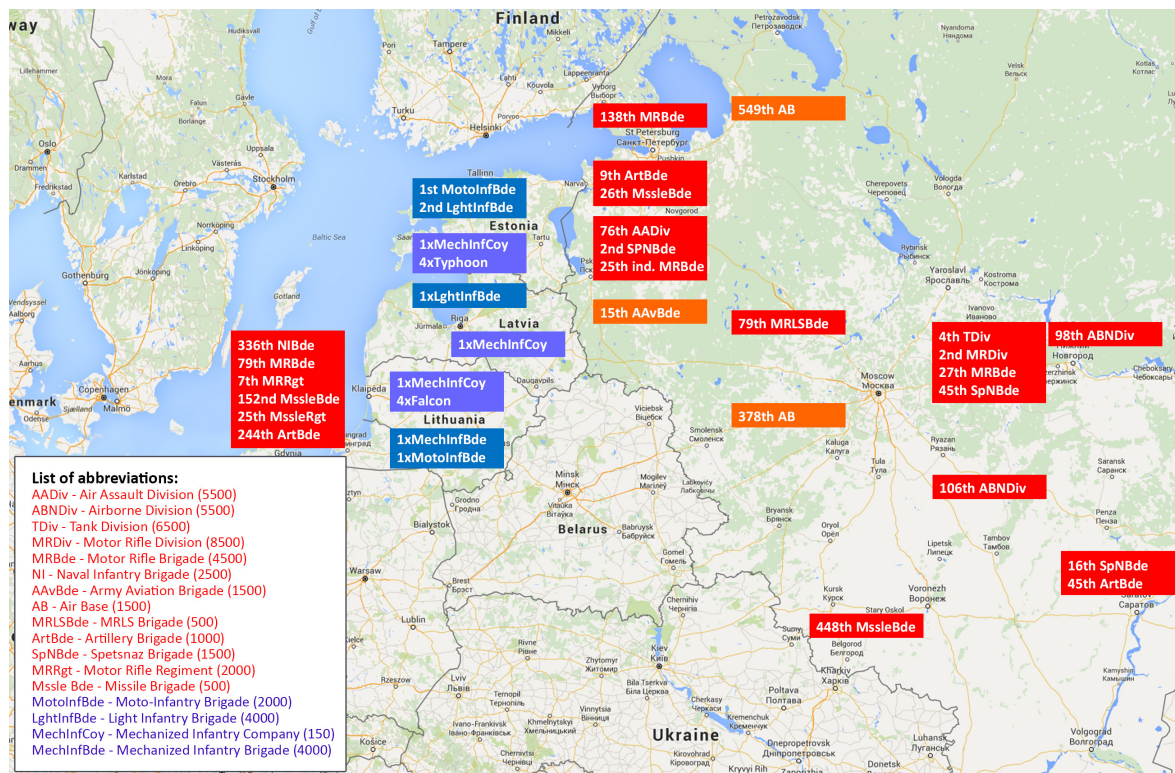
Qualitative improvements are accompanied by significant quantitative increases. The Ground Forces formed eight new brigades in 2015, and in January 2016 the defence minister, Sergei Shoigu, announced the re-activation of the 1st Guards Tank Army and plans for the formation of three new armoured divisions in the Western Military District adjacent to the Baltic states. These changes signal a move back to a Cold War-like military posture, central to which was preparation for high-intensity, large-scale combined arms warfare. Although at the Munich Se-

curity Conference Russia’s Prime Minister Dmitri Medvedev accused NATO of “pushing us toward the emergence of a new Cold War”, it is Russia itself that continues to do this.

Some of the most capable formations in Russia’s Armed Forces are located in the Western Military District. In any actions involving the Baltic states they could quickly bring considerable force to bear. In addition to the existing manoeuvre brigades and the announced formation of new divisions, a number of other force developments are also relevant to the Baltic region. These include greater focus on the potential use of Special Forces; lightly armed but more rapidly deployable airborne forces; naval infantry and other specialist units combined with support from battalion-strength tactical groups; reformed Aerospace Forces; and ongoing development of C4ISR<sup>2</sup>. This increases the speed, agility and flexibility of the forces that can be employed against the Baltic states.

Many of these units and capabilities are positioned in the immediate vicinity of the Baltic states, rendering unnecessary any visible mobilisation, long-distance power projection and

2 Command, Control, Communications, Computers, Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance.



Current balance of conventional forces: the Baltic states (including NATO’s forward presence) compared to a part of Russia’s Western Military District

force assembly in the area should the Kremlin decide to launch a short- or no-notice attack on one or all three of the Baltic states. Even if a larger concentration of forces were deemed necessary for a large-scale attack, Russia’s recent military campaigns (i.e. Syria and Ukraine) and exercises have amply demonstrated its ability to move substantial forces across vast distances at speed and to sustain them for prolonged periods of time. Its forces in the Western Military District can therefore be quickly and substantially reinforced by units and formations from other parts of Russia.

## 1.2 ANTI-ACCESS/AREA DENIAL (A2/AD)

Russia has harnessed an array of stand-off weapons systems including multi-layered air defence, mobile coastal defence, land- and sea-based as well as air-launched cruise missiles, and tactical ballistic-missile platforms that give it an ability to implement the so-called “anti-access/area denial” (A2/AD) approach. With the help of such systems, in conjunction with its naval surface and submarine forces, electronic and cyber warfare and other capabilities, Russia can turn areas falling within the range of these weapons into strategically and operationally isolated zones (“bubbles”). The “A2” part is a strategic and game-changing problem as it means that those zones are very difficult to penetrate—by land, sea or air—to deliver reinforcements; the “AD” part is the operational side of the problem as it makes it more difficult to operate forces inside such a bubble. Countering A2/AD is fraught with a high risk of escalation as well as with significant loss of time and capabilities.

The Baltic states, parts of Poland and Finland and large parts of the Baltic Sea form one such area under A2/AD threat due to Russia’s capabilities in the Kaliningrad exclave and near Russia’s border with Estonia and Latvia, as well as Russia’s alliance with Belarus. Russia’s advanced S-300 and S-400 air defence systems<sup>3</sup> deployed in the Kaliningrad exclave and near St Petersburg in Russia, and the integration of these systems with the corresponding air defence systems in Belarus, create an overlapping air defence engagement area over the Baltic states capable of putting at risk most, if not all, aircraft flying in their airspace. Their mobility means that it is very hard to target and destroy the launchers

without the presence of ground troops inside Russia’s borders. Given the importance of air superiority in any conventional conflict, A2/AD is a very serious impediment to reinforcing and

*Countering A2/AD is fraught with a high risk of escalation as well as with significant loss of time and capabilities*

defending the Baltic states. In addition, Russia’s Baltic Fleet, based in St Petersburg and Kaliningrad, is capable of contesting, if not fully closing, maritime lines of communication between the Baltic states or Poland and the rest of NATO.

Russia’s short-range *Iskander*<sup>4</sup> (SS-26 Stone) ballistic missiles, if positioned permanently in Kaliningrad, are capable of targeting infrastructure, bases and troop concentrations in Poland, Lithuania and southern Latvia. In conjunction with the same type of system based on the western fringes of the Western Military District, this capability extends to targets in Estonia and the rest of Latvia. Such systems along with Russia’s air- and sea-launched cruise missiles can destroy critical nodes (ports, airports) and infrastructure required for the reception, staging, onward movement and integration (RSOI) of Allied forces deployed to the Baltic states, thus further complicating NATO’s rapid deployment operations.

In the event of conflict, Russia’s land forces operating from the Kaliningrad exclave and Belarus could attempt to close the so-called “Suwalki Gap”. While sharing about 1,400 km of land border with Russia and Belarus, the Baltic states are linked to the rest of the Alliance only by a 65 km-wide land corridor from Poland to Lithuania. This strip of land between the Kaliningrad exclave and Belarus has only two roads and one railway line passing from Poland to Lithuania. Establishing control over this gap would cut the Baltic states off from the rest of the Alliance and turn their reinforcement by a land route into an extremely difficult undertaking.

In the context of A2/AD, it is also worth pointing out that Russia would be capable not just of sealing off the Baltic states in the “bubble” that covers air, sea and land dimensions, but also of fiercely contesting other spaces of critical importance to military operations—in the electromagnetic spectrum, cyberspace, and even

3 NATO codenames: for the S-300 family, SA-10 *Grumble*, SA-12 *Giant/Gladiator* and SA-20 *Gargoyle*; for the S-400, SA-21 *Growler*.

4 *Iskander* missiles come in three variants (E, M and K), including one which can be nuclear-tipped. NATO sources believe that there are currently no permanently stationed *Iskander* systems in the Kaliningrad exclave, although they are occasionally brought in for exercises.

outer space (by using anti-satellite capabilities). Geographically, and farther afield, Russia could also use its capabilities to interrupt the flow of reinforcements from the United States to Europe by targeting them in the so-called GIUK gap (Greenland–Iceland–UK), where NATO’s presence and posture have declined over the years. This would be combined with a massive information warfare campaign and psychological operations to degrade the morale of the forces and populations sealed off inside the A2/AD zone covering the Baltic states, as well as undermine the will of the governments and people of the rest of the Alliance.

### 1.3 NUCLEAR STRATEGY

Moscow continues to put great stock in its nuclear deterrent, with long-term plans in full swing to modernise its nuclear triad. In its declared policy, Russia reserves the right to use nuclear weapons when it perceives that the existence of the state is threatened, including when the opposing side is using only conventional forces. It seems, however, that Russia’s thinking about the utility of nuclear weapons extends well beyond such extreme circumstances. Moscow talks about nuclear weapons in almost the same way that we talk about helicopters.

First and foremost, Russia’s nuclear arsenal is instrumental in its strategy of dissuading its opponents from intervening directly in conflicts where Russia has important interests at stake (e.g. in Ukraine) or from pursuing policies seen as detrimental to Russia’s geopolitical interests (e.g. targeting states hosting US missile defence system elements or cooperating closely with NATO). Frequent public references to nuclear weapons by various Moscow officials and simulated nuclear strikes on such targets as Warsaw, Stockholm and Denmark’s Bornholm island show Russia’s penchant for using nuclear weapons for “nuclear blackmail”. President Putin explicitly referred to Russia’s nuclear potential during the annexation of Crimea, in order to keep foreign powers in check.

Furthermore, Moscow sees the political and strategic value of the first use of nuclear weapons as a “demonstration strike” during an escalating conflict in order to “de-escalate”. Holding out the threat of further escalation, such a signal could be used to dissuade NATO Allies from getting involved or attempting to further reinforce the Baltic states. The Alliance would be confronted with the dilemma of either honouring its collective defence commitments and thus possibly entering an escalating nuclear

war, or stepping back and negotiating a settlement under terms dictated by Moscow.

This strategy is also backed by capabilities, planning and training. Russia has maintained its arsenal of lower-yield sub-strategic nuclear warheads and their means of delivery, which creates for Moscow a range of options below the level of full-scale strategic nuclear exchange. There are also abundant indications that Russia integrates nuclear weapons into its overall military planning and routinely exercises their possible use. Large-scale military exercises featuring offensive scenarios involved practising for a nuclear strike and for prevailing in a conflict that has turned nuclear.

### 1.4 EXERCISES

Russia’s politico-military leadership actively uses its military to intimidate and coerce its neighbours, and exercises are instrumental to this

*Moscow talks about nuclear weapons in almost the same way that we talk about helicopters*

purpose. In addition, exercises represent a convenient way of camouflaging the intent should Moscow decide to launch a surprise attack. Most recently, this approach was employed during “Tsentr” (“Centre”) 2015 to support Russia’s operations in Syria that followed shortly afterwards. Turning such exercises into an operation against one or several of the Baltic states would give very little or no early warning to NATO.

The frequency of exercises by Russia’s military, even though this peaked in 2014 and has plateaued since then, shows that it is continuously readying itself for conflicts. These exercises demonstrate Russia’s improving ability to move forces over large distances, assemble them quickly in areas of operation and sustain them for long periods of time. A lot of attention is being paid to improving interoperability with the armed forces of Belarus. Furthermore, the extent to which force integration and cooperation with civilian agencies has become a feature of exercises demonstrates very serious efforts to enhance civil-military cooperation in ways that have no parallels in Western countries today.

### 1.5 RUSSIA’S INTENTIONS

Many of the military exercises conducted by Russia are organised on the basis of offensive scenarios, targeting the Baltic states, Poland

and the Nordic countries. Even if Moscow currently has no immediate intention to challenge NATO directly, this may change and can be implemented with great speed, following already prepared plans. The capability to do so is, to a large extent, in place.

It is hard to predict what may trigger Russia's action. This might come at a time when NATO and the EU are distracted by another crisis, or it might relate to some particular high-profile event the outcomes of which Moscow wants to shape. It might relate to political cycles in key NATO countries or to pressures inside Russia itself. It might also result from a misperception of NATO's activities and miscalculation of the Alliance's resolve. Or it might come as retribution for United States action in some other part of the world. Whatever confluence of circumstances might trigger the action, Moscow would come up with any pretext that suited its propaganda narrative—from "defending the oppressed Russian-speaking population" to "pre-empting NATO's military attack" or "defending access to Kaliningrad".

However, the intention would not materialise in the face of a convincing show of strength, cohesion and solidarity by NATO. Credible deterrence is thus key, but the critical question is how NATO's deterrence posture would fare in its most vulnerable spot—the Baltic states.

## II. NATO'S STRATEGY AND POSTURE

Following the demise of the Soviet Union, the Allies assumed that Russia was interested in a partnership with NATO and therefore sought a dialogue. However, as Estonia's President Toomas Hendrik Ilves has pointed out, dialogue itself is not a policy. Despite the progress made since 2014, NATO currently lacks a coherent strategy and suitable deterrence and defence posture to deal with a resurgent Russia. The problem is most severe in the Baltic area. We point out four fundamental challenges that must be addressed by the Alliance.

### 2.1 STRATEGY

NATO's current Strategic Concept, adopted in 2010, while not perfect, is adequate. Furthermore, the Allies have made it abundantly clear that NATO's main focus is on collective defence, further reducing the need to open this document up to time-consuming discussion. NATO's

strategy towards Russia, however, needs more attention. The Alliance is returning to the dual-track approach of deterrence and dialogue first introduced by the Harmel Report in 1967. While the notion of combining dialogue and deterrence is still valid, the circumstances we face today differ significantly. Both the deterrence and dialogue parts need to be adapted to take account of contemporary circumstances.

In the 1960s, the biggest threat to NATO was of the Soviet Union overrunning the entire European continent. Given Russia's relative weakness compared to NATO, this is no longer the case. The biggest threat today is a miscalculation by Russia that it could create a quick but limited fait accompli inside NATO's borders while avoiding triggering an Article 5 response or rendering such a response ineffective. This is based on the Kremlin's assumption that Russia has a significant time advantage over NATO and that the Allies could, through intimidation, uncertainty and disinformation, be influenced not to escalate a limited conflict into a fully-fledged one. Therefore, NATO's focus needs, more than ever, to be on deterrence by denial: Russia's military aim is no longer to overrun the entire continent, so today's defence-in-depth/deterrence-by-punishment approach has to be changed<sup>5</sup>. Due to Russia's more limited military aims compared to the Cold War period, deterrence by denial is also more feasible today than it was then. NATO's Russia strategy (as well as the associated posture and messaging) must address these issues, leaving no room for doubt that an aggression against a NATO Ally could ever be a limited conflict with quick gains. The centrepiece of NATO's strategy vis-à-vis Russia must be to ensure that the Alliance is both committed and able to prevent this.

A dialogue with Russia is necessary to communicate the Alliance's unequivocal resolve to defend all its members. Strengthening deterrence does not automatically require expanding dialogue. The dialogue part of the new Russia strategy needs to be strictly conditions-based, i.e. dependent on the behaviour of Russia. Dialogue cannot expand from its current form (ambassador-level discussions in the NATO–Russia Council and military hotlines) and evolve into cooperation as long as Russia does not return

<sup>5</sup> Deterrence by denial entails persuading an adversary that he will not be able to achieve his military objectives. It manipulates the benefit side of the cost/benefit calculus of an adversary by diminishing the likelihood that those benefits would be secured. Deterrence by punishment means being able to convince an adversary that achievement of his military objectives will be followed by retribution. It manipulates the cost side of the calculus by inducing certainty that costs will outweigh the benefits of aggression.

to fulfilling its obligations under the treaties of the existing European security architecture.

There are fears that strengthening deterrence would increase the likelihood of escalation, while history tells us a different story: weakness emboldens Russia and strength deters. Russia uses this misperception in its attempts to deter the West. It employs an aggressive anti-Western narrative and accuses NATO of escalating the situation and encircling Russia—a claim that is unfounded but sometimes effective in influencing some NATO Allies. The bottom line is that Russia continues to portray NATO as its main enemy, which means that tensions between NATO and Russia are likely to continue regardless of what actions the Alliance takes. The safest course for NATO is to demonstrate, both in word and deed, its resolve and ability to defend every Ally against every form of aggression while remaining open for dialogue.

## 2.2 STRATEGIC ANTICIPATION

There is both a cognitive and a resource-related side to NATO's limited strategic anticipation. On the cognitive side, the Alliance often appears to be surprised by Russia. This is partly understandable due to the difficulties associated with reading the immediate intentions and plans of the Kremlin regime. On the other hand, Russia rarely disguises its true intentions. On the contrary, it has proclaimed them very publicly on various occasions, but the West has chosen not to believe Russia's declarations and its willingness to carry them out.

The West misunderstands Russia by thinking that it will obey the rules even if we are not willing to enforce them. We essentially project on Russia our own way of thinking about international relations and security. However, Moscow's logic is that, when given a chance to further its interests, it will use the opportunity to carry out its plans without hesitation. Taking such actions is rational behaviour for Russia as long as it can assume the West will opt for cooperation rather than confrontation. The effectiveness of deterrence depends on the accuracy of Allies' assumptions, and wishful thinking would be dangerous in this context.

Regarding the resources, since the end of the Cold War the Allies have shifted their priorities away from trying to read and understand Russia. It has become plainly evident—for instance, from the number of Russian-speaking analysts

in the Western intelligence community—that not enough resources have been allocated to intelligence collection and analysis to fully understand Russia's strategic thinking and intentions and to anticipate its actions.

## 2.3 NATO'S DETERRENCE AND DEFENCE POSTURE

NATO's general posture is not sufficiently robust and tailored to project unequivocal strength and credibility to deter Russia. The Alliance's decision-making will always be slower than

*The West misunderstands Russia by thinking that it will obey the rules even if we are not willing to enforce them*

Russia's. This can be compensated for by a larger forward presence, greater automaticity and adequate delegated authority, which so far has not been carried out at the level required.<sup>6</sup>

There is a lack of coherence in the deterrence continuum. Part of the problem is that NATO has tied its own hands by declaring that it would not use all tools available to it. For example, its posture is undermined by the fact that offensive cyber operations have been eliminated as a tool for NATO. Removing cyber offensive option is tantamount to someone taking away kinetic options from an artillery commander on a battlefield.

Based on the assumption of a Europe safe from war, many capabilities for collective defence and deterrence have been drastically reduced or lost entirely. This applies to NATO's nuclear forces as well as conventional ones. As a result, the Alliance's range of options has shrunk and its ability to tailor its approach to respond to Russia's has decreased.

Having operated in theatres where air superiority was a given, the Allies lack sufficient capabilities for the suppression of enemy air defence. Only limited numbers of air defence systems remain in the inventories of NATO military forces. While NATO has no general shortage of tactical fighter aircraft, skilled personnel and basing infrastructure, the number of fighter aircraft available for missions at any particular time is just a fraction of the total pool. The Alliance is also hamstrung by critical shortages of aircraft for strategic and

<sup>6</sup> While SACEUR has the right to stage and prepare forces, authority to deploy and commit those forces has not been granted.

tactical airlift, air-to-air refuelling, ISR, maritime patrol, electronic warfare, suppression of enemy air defence (SEAD) and anti-submarine warfare

*Removing cyber offensive option is tantamount to someone taking away kinetic options from an artillery commander on a battlefield*

missions, all of which are essential for its ability to project its military power to crisis regions and operate there successfully.

The decrease in Allied Land Forces has been particularly remarkable. Combat forces with sufficient firepower have been replaced with light capabilities better suited to expeditionary crisis response and counter-insurgency operations. NATO has limited capacity to conduct a combined arms battle at brigade level, let alone divisional or corps level.

NATO's maritime efforts have been refocused to the southern flank, while all commands dealing with the northern part of NATO have been abolished. NATO's maritime component is routinely undermanned and also lacks capabilities that would be needed to counter Russia's A2/AD strategy.

Our nuclear deterrence suffers from a lack of means between B-61 gravity bombs delivered by increasingly ageing dual-capable aircraft (DCA) and strategic nuclear missiles, thus limiting options in response to the potential use of nuclear weapons by Russia. Even then, given that the DCAs would be unable to penetrate the A2/AD zone, the only response option for NATO to Russia's limited nuclear "de-escalation strike" would be to use strategic nuclear forces. This lacks the credibility needed to serve as a deterrent to Russia's nuclear blackmail. In addition, nuclear deterrence is undermined by some European nations insisting on the complete removal of US tactical nuclear weapons from Europe.

There are serious shortcomings in the capabilities of individual Allies. For example:

- In the United States, high-ranking defence officials openly admit that only one-third of the US Army is at acceptable levels of readiness when it comes to conducting ground combat across the full spectrum of operations and that most leaders of combat formations have very limited experience of combined arms operations against conventional forces. In addition, the numbers do

not stack up, particularly in Europe: there are currently fewer US Army soldiers in Europe than policemen in New York City, and

the total of 65,000 US military and civilian personnel stationed in Europe must do a job which, during the Cold War, was assigned to a

force almost ten times as large. The European Command (EUCOM) headquarters has shrunk in size over the years and is now the second-smallest of all US combatant commands.

- In the UK, the strength of the regular army has been slashed by nearly 20%, making it dependent on undermanned and under-trained reserves; the Royal Navy scrapped numbers of its escort ships, and its new carriers are being built with no aircraft to fly from them for some years; and the island nation scrapped its maritime patrol aircraft. The UK armed forces have been hollowed out to the extent that deployment of a brigade, let alone a division, at a credible level of readiness would be a challenge. The UK government has taken the welcome decision to increase defence spending. However, implementing this new policy will require overcoming the deep effect of the severe cuts enacted by the previous coalition government.
- Germany has, since the early 1990s, focused on out-of-area crisis response as a first priority. The Armed Forces have been reduced, in the period of 1990-2011, by 240,000 soldiers. Many of the existing units are undermanned and ill equipped, and conscription has been suspended. The last restructuring, which took place between 2012 and the present day, reduced the manpower of the Armed Forces by another 70,000 soldiers. Germany's land forces have thus lost the capability to run the combined arms battle at the brigade level. The country also lacks maritime assets suited to operations in the waters of the Baltic Sea. As a result of the war in Ukraine, the German government has declared its intention to enhance Germany's defence capabilities. However, to provide forces with the necessary equipment, manpower, training and equipment, a long-term commitment to increased defence spending is required.

Defence spending across NATO member states is currently not sufficient to rebuild the range



of capabilities necessary to deter a resurgent and aggressive Russia.<sup>7</sup> Consequently, there is a tendency in some parts of NATO to make the

*There is a tendency in some parts of NATO to make the threat fit the Alliance's existing posture and capabilities. This is a dangerous path*

threat fit the Alliance's existing posture and capabilities. This is a dangerous path. NATO must look at the adversary as objectively as possible and make its posture fit the threat, not the other way round.

While the tasks of the NATO Command Structure have proliferated since the end of Cold War, its size has shrunk drastically— it once comprised around 65 headquarters. Today NATO is left with just two strategic and two operational level headquarters, with component commands that only in exceptional cases run combined and joint operations. Given a resurgent Russia and various asymmetrical threats, the Command Structure is not sufficiently large, sustainable or responsive to face challenges from both the south and the east, while simultaneously holding exercises and ensuring the necessary level of awareness and readiness. It is not sufficiently manned even for peacetime tasks and would certainly be unable to cope with the tasks associated with a large-scale war. Furthermore, it is too top-heavy, and questions remain about its deployability.

NATO exercises are focused more on assurance, rather than on deterrence. It is questionable whether they are adequately integrated and coordinated across various domains and capabilities, and they do not include enough high-end capabilities and large-scale formations employed in non-permissive environment. Furthermore, SACEUR lacks the authority to conduct snap readiness exercises without the approval of the North Atlantic Council (NAC), which reduces the deterrence effect that could be achieved from conducting such exercises.

Due to the focus on waging counter-insurgency campaigns and conducting crisis response or peacekeeping operations, the ability of NATO Allies to wage large-scale, high-intensity con-

ventional war has decreased. This is marked not only by the decline of relevant military capabilities and mastery of the art of this kind of war in the military, but also by the lack of appreciation of the full range of implications of such a war by the societies and political elites of NATO countries. Unlike in Russia, there is no evident psychological readiness to cope with such a war.

Last but not least, deterrence depends on communication—signals, messages and information campaigns to continuously reinforce the image of resolve, capability and credibility. Russia is waging a full-scale information campaign against the West and persistently trying to decrease the legitimacy and credibility of NATO and its actions. Meanwhile, the Alliance's efforts to counter this vicious campaign are modest, with all the attendant consequences to the deterrent value of what NATO is doing or is planning to do on its eastern flank.

## 2.4 NATO'S POSTURE IN THE BALTIC STATES

Combined host-nation and Allied forces in the Baltics are currently far inferior in numbers and firepower to Russia's forces in the Western Military District. The Baltic states lack strategic and operational depth, which makes giving up space for time impossible. A limited incursion creating a quick fait accompli in the Baltic states could be undertaken by Russia with the forces already stationed in the vicinity of their borders and hence with extremely limited early warning. This becomes an ever bigger problem dur-

*The Alliance's conventional weakness in the Baltic area enables Moscow's strategy of creating a military fait accompli and using nuclear deterrent to protect it*

ing exercises where the real intent (operation or exercise) is not known. Without a robust and adequately postured forward-based conventional force, NATO is presently unprepared to prevent or counter such an incursion. Indeed, the Alliance's conventional weakness in the Baltic area enables Moscow's strategy of creating a military fait accompli and using nuclear deterrent to protect it.

<sup>7</sup> During the Cold War, most European countries spent 3–5% of GDP or more on defence.

NATO’s conventional military posture in the Baltic states should be capable of convincing Russia that it is able to delay and bog down an invading force and inflict unacceptable damage on it. This force is not required to win the

*Twenty-five NATO Allies can be reinforced by NATO even if Russia activates its A2/AD capabilities, while the three Baltic states cannot*

war, but it must be able to fight alongside the host-nation forces to buy NATO more time for reinforcement. NATO’s presence in the Baltic states is currently not large enough to achieve this. The US Army companies, while strengthening reassurance, are insufficient for credible deterrence and defence; they can be bypassed and neutralised, and thus not even act as “trip-wires”, let alone delay advancing Russian forces. The length of the shared border between Russia and the Baltic states offers Russia the ability to claim territory possibly without even having to fire a shot at NATO forces, thus rendering the current forward-based forces worthless. Another factor undermining the deterrent value of these forces is the fact that most of them do not constitute a fighting force but are meant, rather, for peacetime activities and training. For example, the Baltic Air Policing mission would be of little or no use if war broke out.

Given NATO’s current reliance on the reinforcement of the Baltic states, Russia’s A2/AD capabilities and its ability to block or severely impede these reinforcements is a complete game-changer for NATO. The problem of A2/AD is neither new nor unique to the Baltics, but nowhere else on NATO’s territory is it as acute. Twenty-five NATO Allies can be reinforced by NATO even if Russia activates its A2/AD capabilities, while the three Baltic states cannot. NATO currently does not have a strategy to counter this threat. Consequently, the current reinforcement-based strategy is not credible in the Baltic region, where the local balance of forces is strongly in Russia’s favour.

Further complicating the reinforcement is the fact that the present state of quick-reaction forces, prepositioning and follow-on forces falls short of what is needed. The VJTF is not large enough or fast enough, and might be unable to enter or operate effectively in a non-permissive environment. Any plan for its use must be driv-

en by the capability and intentions of the enemy if it is to be credible. NATO has not paid enough attention to what Russia might do to pre-empt or forestall the Alliance. The timelines for getting the VJTF to full operating capability take no

account of what Russia might do, now or in the immediate future. Both notice-to-move timelines and notice-to-effect timelines are too long. Furthermore, it

is impossible to pre-position VJTF equipment in the Baltic states due to its multinational nature; contributing nations, which may differ in each force generation cycle, use different types of equipment. The VJTF is not regionally aligned, so if a conflict in the Baltic area erupts at the same time as another crisis requiring a NATO response, the VJTF might be unavailable.<sup>8</sup>

Land forces’ movement is further complicated by the need to acquire the necessary permits from countries on the transit route (although this might be less of a problem during times of crisis) and due to infrastructure-based constraints. For instance, a VJTF land component from Spain would have to switch to two different gauges of railway track in order to get to the Baltics. The US administration’s current plan, whereby equipment for one brigade would be pre-positioned about 1,600 km from the potential front line, is far from ideal as it cannot be quickly deployed to the Baltic states. During the Cold War, the equipment was positioned just 300 km from the front line.

NATO’s air presence in the region is meant only for a peace-time mission (air policing) and exercises. In the maritime domain, Allies lack a persistent combat-capable presence in the Baltic Sea.

*Should Russia be able to compel Stockholm and Helsinki to stay out of a conflict in the Baltics, NATO’s response options would be limited even further*

<sup>8</sup> Given Russia’s ability to block Allied reinforcements with very little early warning, the Allies’ own national high-readiness forces—even the US Global Task Force from the 82nd Airborne Division, which is ready to be on the ground anywhere in the world in 18 hours—might likewise be too slow to be able to enter the operations area under still-permissive conditions. Their high deployability also comes at the expense of heavier capabilities required for high-intensity combined arms battle.

The stance of non-NATO countries in the region—Sweden and Finland—matters too. The uncertainty surrounding their decisions and actions complicates NATO’s plans and response options in the Baltics. Without these two countries in NATO, the Alliance lacks strategic and operational depth in the region as well as the ability to exercise greater control of maritime and air space in the Baltic Sea. Should Russia be able to compel Stockholm and Helsinki to stay out of a conflict in the Baltics, NATO’s response options would be limited even further.

### III. STRENGTHENING DETERRENCE

There is no doubt that the easiest way to maintain stability in Europe would be in cooperation with Russia. Unfortunately, Moscow does not

*While the Wales Summit concentrated on reassurance measures, the Warsaw Summit should concentrate on deterrence. Warsaw, however, is not the final destination*

show any readiness to be a constructive partner for NATO. While diplomatic interaction should continue and negotiating channels should be kept open, our dialogue should be based on concrete and verifiable evidence rather than on abstract emotional exchanges. Since Russia has walked away from the CFE Treaty regime, there have been very few avenues left for this.<sup>9</sup> One of them could be a NATO–Russia agreement to avoid incidents at sea and in the air (including the requirement to fly with activated transponders). Updating the Vienna Document could be another tool, especially for increasing transparency when it comes to exercises. However, Moscow’s posture and behaviour thus far show that NATO has to place greater emphasis on deterring Russia.

While the Wales Summit concentrated on reassurance measures, the Warsaw Summit should concentrate on deterrence. Warsaw, howev-

<sup>9</sup> The Baltic states also had bilateral arrangements with Russia concerning notification of military activities below Vienna Document levels and additional verification visits outside the Vienna Document quotas. Thus they had additional opportunities for transparency with regard to Russia’s military activities in their immediate vicinity (the Kaliningrad exclave and the fringes of the Western Military District). However, Russia has unilaterally withdrawn from these arrangements.

er, is not the final destination. Strengthening deterrence on all flanks must continue. NATO must convincingly demonstrate, first and foremost, its will and capability to deny Russia the achievement of its political and military objectives, while also making the costs of military aggression prohibitively high. We need to bolster both the political and military aspects of deterrence. Part of this entails adopting a forward defence posture, because only credible forward presence can ensure deterrence by denial in the Baltic area.

#### 3.1 STRENGTHENING THE POLITICAL ASPECTS OF DETERRENCE

NATO’s aim is to ensure an equal level of security for all its member states, thus signalling that there are no tiers inside the Alliance. If this is not made crystal clear, the Kremlin might still calculate that a limited territorial grab or even occupation of the Baltic states, upheld through nuclear deterrence, could be possible in some circumstances. Likewise, NATO must signal that it takes seriously and is addressing Russia’s A2/AD threat, the hostile use of its cyber capabilities, nuclear sabre-rattling and military build-up threatening NATO and its eastern flank. This should be done in the following ways:

- Adapt the dual approach of deterrence and dialogue to contemporary circumstances by placing more emphasis on deterrence by denial and ensuring that enhancing dialogue remains strictly dependent on Russia’s actions. Ensure that the decisions on dialogue are discussed and made at the highest level, by the Alliance’s heads of state and government.
- Make clear that, despite the Alliance’s current commitment to maintaining it, the NRFA is not sacrosanct and that the Alliance would be ready for a thorough review, or even abolition, of the document, should it hinder NATO in ensuring the defence of each and every Ally.
- Increase NATO’s efforts to fight Russia’s disinformation campaign by publicising Russia’s destabilising activities and demonstrating, by comparison, the defensive character of Allied actions and responses. The work of NATO’s Strategic Communica-

tion Centre of Excellence in Latvia is instrumental in achieving this.

- Signal to Russia that, in case of aggression against any NATO Ally, there is no such thing as a limited conflict for the Alliance, and that it will contest Russia in all domains and without geographical limitations.
- Communicate readiness to actively exploit Russia's political, strategic and military weaknesses and vulnerabilities (e.g. by engaging Belarus in a dialogue which could lead to Minsk staying neutral in a potential conflict).
- Signal that NATO's defence of the Baltic states will start at their borders with Russia, and that the requisite posture is being developed for this.
- North American and European Allies should state that they will act individually in anticipation of NATO, should the Alliance's collective military response be delayed in practice. The Allies should underline that an individual response is, in fact, a legal obligation that they take seriously, and have plans and units allocated for this purpose.<sup>10</sup>
- Explicitly state that any nuclear strike by Russia will mean a counterstrike by NATO Allies and would not lead to de-escalation, while also reiterating the existing policy on the individual nuclear deterrent of the Allies.
- Communicate a new declaratory policy on offensive cyber operations by mirroring the policy on nuclear weapons from the Strategic Concept.<sup>11</sup> NATO's policy should state that the offensive cyber capabilities of NATO's member states have a deterrent role even if NATO as an organisation does not pursue an offensive cyber strategy.
- Make it clear that NATO has every right to enhance its forward presence as a response to Russia's actions. Underline that Russia

will not be allowed to use the Kaliningrad exclave as an outpost for aggression.

- In the light of the incidents such as with the USS Donald Cook in the Baltic Sea, the Alliance must continue exercising the right to freedom of movement in "global commons".
- Enhance dialogue and cooperation with other countries (e.g. Australia, Japan) who face an A2/AD problem in order to exchange know-how and develop concepts required to successfully counter A2/AD capabilities.
- Further enhance NATO cooperation with Sweden and Finland as well as with the European Union, especially given that the Baltic states, after invoking Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, would also be likely to invoke Articles 42.7 and 222 of the Lisbon Treaty in the event of aggression, which would then require close coordination and synchronisation of the NATO and EU responses.
- Release a strong Warsaw Summit communiqué which takes into account the above-mentioned proposals.
- The new US administration should communicate its strong and continuing commitment to NATO. To underline this message, an out-of-cycle NATO summit could be held in 2017.
- Enhance appreciation by the political leadership and general public in NATO countries of the consequences of deterrence failure. Promote the understanding that strengthening deterrence—and bearing the associated costs—is the best way to avoid making a calamitous choice between waging a devastating war or surrendering the European security order.

### 3.2 STRENGTHENING THE MILITARY ASPECTS OF DETERRENCE

- The Alliance should move towards a more threat-focused, rather than a capability-focused, approach. It should concentrate on what capabilities are needed to counter Russia, not what capabilities are available and how we can make the problem fit them. In addition, we must look at asymmetric, conventional and nuclear weapons as part of a single strategy, and strengthen NATO–EU cooperation to make deterrence

<sup>10</sup> Article 5 of the Washington Treaty commits every NATO member to assist the attacked Ally or Allies "by taking forthwith, **individually** and in concert with the other Parties, such action as it deems necessary, including the use of armed force, to restore and maintain the security of the North Atlantic area" (emphasis added).

<sup>11</sup> On nuclear weapons, the current Strategic Concept states: "The supreme guarantee of the security of the Allies is provided by the strategic nuclear forces of the Alliance, particularly those of the United States; the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France, which have a deterrent role of their own, contribute to the overall deterrence and security of the Allies."

more credible. This integrated approach must be reflected in planning and exercises.

- Allies must regain capabilities lost since the Cold War and develop new capabilities taking into account Russia’s military modernisation and build-up. They must invest in the necessary R&D and cutting-edge technology, especially in the framework of the US “Third Offset” Strategy, in which a link with the European Allies should be developed. The Allies must step up their investment in capabilities which are required to counter the A2/AD challenge and conduct large-scale combined arms warfare.
- To resource this regeneration of capabilities, defence spending must be increased. Eastern-flank states should consider going above the 2% benchmark in their defence spending, as Estonia is doing. This would send a message to the US that these countries facing the most acute threat are prepared to share more of the burden. Other Allies should make a clear statement of intent to move towards the 2% benchmark significantly faster than the promise of trying to do so within a decade.
- Nuclear deterrence has to be strengthened by modernising US tactical nuclear weapons in Europe, developing new low-yield warheads and introducing a range of means for their effective delivery. Particularly in the Baltic theatre, the risk of Russia’s nuclear “de-escalation strike” would be considerably reduced by the continuous forward presence of conventional force able to prevent a *fait accompli* which Russia would have every incentive to defend with nuclear means.
- Allied forces must be postured and equipped in a manner which would, in time of conflict, credibly limit Russia’s access to and freedom of action in all theatres of the North Atlantic area. NATO should have a robust counter-A2/AD posture, involving a combination of capabilities to defeat this threat by offensive and defensive measures, both kinetic and non-kinetic.
- NATO’s plans should be synchronised and quickly executable. They should also take into account the possible contribution of Sweden and Finland. It will be necessary to work with Sweden and Finland in order to secure overflight permissions, gain assured

access to the use of their airbases and develop Host Nation Support arrangements in peacetime. The Alliance should also conduct prudent planning for assisting Sweden and Finland, as a way of reassuring them that their support for the Alliance would not leave them exposed to Russia’s punitive military action.

### 3.3 PRESENCE

The only way to guarantee the security of the Baltic states against Russia’s conventional military threat is by having a sufficiently large and capable military force in these countries. The Baltic states are too small to rely on a strategy of defence in depth. In times of crisis, NATO is seriously hampered in rapidly deploying additional units to the Baltics. Hence a largely reinforcement-based strategy is not credible in the Baltic states, and should be adapted.

Allied forward-based forces must have not only a “tripwire” effect but also a “speedbump” effect. They must be able to prevent a *fait accompli* by Russia and, should an attack occur, delay the opposing forces for NATO to be able to deal with the A2/AD threat and deploy additional units and capabilities to the region. While we agree with both the former and current SACEURs, General Breedlove and General Scaparrotti, who would prefer permanent forces in Europe, the debate about permanence should not be at the forefront if the continuous presence of combat-capable forces can be ensured through rotation.

#### 3.3.1 LAND FORCES

The US companies presently rotating through the Baltic states, while strengthening assurance, are not sufficient for credible deterrence and defence. They can be bypassed and hence

*Allied forward-based forces must have not only a “tripwire” effect but also a “speedbump” effect*

neutralised, and not even act as “tripwires”, let alone “speedbumps”. Ideally, this would require one brigade in each of the Baltic states which would, along with host-nation forces, be able to significantly delay the opposing forces and help counter Russia’s A2/AD threat. If Russian forces are unable to act with impunity on land, they are more vulnerable to Allied air power. Allied brigades in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

would be able to cover more territory by having their constituent battalions conduct simultaneous independent operations. This would make a quick fait accompli by Russia very complicated and unlikely. Furthermore, since VJTF is not regionally focused, an equivalent-sized force in each of the Baltic states would hedge against the possibility of VJTF being unavailable due to its deployment elsewhere.

The expected commitment of some NATO Allies to deploy a battalion in each of the Baltic states is a step in the right direction, but it should meet the following requirements:

- These units should be “battalion-plus” battle groups. They should have full manpower, combined arms, high firepower, high tactical mobility, a robust anti-armour capability, and organic Combat Support and Combat Service Support such as artillery and tactical missiles, ground-based air defence, attack helicopters and other enablers. These units should have detailed and immediately executable plans (essentially, Standing Defence Plans), Rules of Engagement and the pre-authorisation to respond to Russia’s aggression immediately.
- None of these units should be a “battalion-minus”. They should not include companies from the host nations, as this would signal that the Alliance is not able even to provide a battalion for each threatened nation. Host nations, however, should support these battalions by bringing certain combat service-support elements to the table.
- Multi-nationality must be ensured in this kind of presence, but the cohesion and combat capability of the battalions must not be compromised as a result. The last thing we need is ineffective “Frankenstein” battalions. Therefore, each battalion should have a core nation.
- The presence of US forces remains key, regardless of the proposed NATO battalions. This strengthens the deterrent effect and would be especially important if the NATO battalions had to wait for a decision by the NAC before being employed. The American units should be able to act in anticipation of Article 5, and hence signal to Russia that even if NATO’s collective military action is delayed, this will not mean that Allied soldiers will not fight. The size and capabilities of the US units should be increased in a manner that increases their

deterrent effect—ideally to at least a battalion combined arms group in each of the Baltic states.

Nevertheless, given Russia’s plans to strengthen its armed forces and presence in the Western Military District, NATO should build towards a brigade in each Baltic state following the Warsaw Summit. An additional brigade-size force in each of the Baltic states will have a greater

*The last thing we need is ineffective “Frankenstein” battalions*

military and political effect in ensuring a more credible deterrence by denial posture.

3.3.2 AIR FORCES

Air force capabilities are needed to provide protection for Baltic and Allied forces and prevent Russian aircraft from operating freely over NATO territory. During conflict, the Alliance’s aim must be to maintain or establish conditions for local and then general air superiority in the airspace of the Baltic region.

- Air policing is insufficient for this task. The mission should, therefore, transition into an air defence mission, with the required tasks and authorisation given in peacetime, and capabilities positioned in a way that ensures sufficient protection and freedom of manoeuvre. In the event of a crisis and Russia’s activation of its A2/AD assets, it would be very difficult to bring in counter-A2/AD assets. Some of these must be based in the region in peacetime.
- Before the Wales Summit, President Obama introduced his initiative for the Ämari airbase to become a regional training hub. This airbase has indeed seen a significant surge in training and exercises. However, in Warsaw, the aim is to move from assurance to deterrence, and the role of the Ämari airbase should therefore also change. Ways should be studied for using the airbase in case NATO transfers to an air defence mission.

3.3.3 NAVAL FORCES

As significant Allied reinforcements are brought by sea, it is crucial that access to the Baltic Sea is maintained or quickly re-established.

- NATO needs capabilities in and adjacent to the Baltic Sea that could effectively limit

Russia's freedom of manoeuvre and degrade its capabilities. This requires a continuous combat-capable presence with high firepower, high survivability and the plans, rules of engagement and authorisation to act immediately in response to aggression. To counter Russia's A2/AD effectively, for example, sea-based air defence (SBAD), anti-submarine warfare capabilities, and surface ships and submarines with long-range strike capabilities are needed. Allocating an Aegis-equipped ship for the Baltic Sea area would significantly enhance deterrence.

- In terms of NATO's capabilities, the presence of the NATO Standing Naval Forces (SNF) in the Baltic Sea should be increased. The SNF also needs to be fully manned and include long-range strike-capable vessels, and self-defence measures and capabilities that can degrade Russia's A2/AD capabilities.
- As the Baltic Sea is significantly different to other maritime environments in which the US Navy is used to operating, it is important that different US naval platforms and their crews gain more experience and know-how about operating in the Baltic Sea. The presence of a mix of US naval assets in the Baltic Sea would allow for this, while also contributing to deterrence.

### 3.3.4 MARINES AND SPECIAL OPERATIONS FORCES

The marines and special operation forces are among the most capable fighting forces in NATO. They would be of great importance in defending the Baltics and their presence would therefore send a strong deterrent signal to Moscow.

- As the Baltic states are in the most vulnerable situation in NATO, we propose relocating some of the US Marines' Black Sea rotational force to the Baltic states.<sup>12</sup> In the Baltics, the footprint and familiarity with local conditions of the US Marines is modest, and gained mainly through the BALTOPS exercise.
- Special Operations Forces would have a significant and early role in any counter-A2/AD mission in the Baltic states and an important role in uncovering actions

<sup>12</sup> This force was, in fact, meant for use in both the Baltic and Black Sea regions.

which Russia might try to conceal as "little green men" or "soldiers on vacation". As SOF troops are able to operate behind enemy lines and conduct special reconnaissance missions, they should be instrumental in providing adequate information to both the Allied defence establishments and the wider public.

### 3.3.5 INTELLIGENCE, SURVEILLANCE AND RECONNAISSANCE (ISR)

Even with the additional presence, NATO will still need to rely to a significant degree on reinforcement in order to get all the forces necessary for the defence of the Baltic states into the area of operations. Shared situational awareness and enhanced early warning are therefore of crucial importance, especially during Russia's exercises. We propose:

- Increasing expertise on Russia in the NATO Command Structure and intelligence community. Consider establishing a new fusion cell dealing only with the threat from Russia.
- Ensuring continuous presence of ISR assets in the region for better early warning and to fight Russia's attempts to create ambiguity.
- Quickly surging assets during exercises (including SNAPEXs), which would require basing these assets in or very close to the region.

### 3.3.6 COMMAND AND CONTROL (C2)

C2 elements need to be robust enough to manage a real-time crisis, lead a joint response across the services and be present on the ground, not imported in the event of a crisis.

- As the Baltic states might be cut off from the rest of NATO, a decision should be taken in Warsaw to establish a NATO brigade headquarters in one of these states or to place these battalions under the command of the Estonian, Latvian and Lithuanian brigades. Should the presence grow to a brigade in each of the Baltic states, a brigade headquarters should be established in each of these countries.
- Divisional headquarters could be based in Poland, with the Multinational Corps North East providing a corps headquarters.

## 3.4 REINFORCEMENT

### 3.4.1 VJTF AND FOLLOW-ON-FORCES

NATO's high-readiness forces need to be more robust to stand the rigours of war. This means a well-trained and highly cohesive force able to operate in a non-permissive environment with proper enablers, well-drilled and taut command and control, and the soundest logistical foundations. Above all, it requires the right mindset.

- The VJTF must be less focused on hybrid conflicts and more suited for high-end warfare.
- Its deployability must be enhanced and timelines for both notice-to-move and notice-to-effect should be shortened.
- SACEUR should be given the authority to deploy the VJTF. If no such authority is given, the importance of forward presence becomes even greater.
- Allies need to strengthen capabilities across the board rather than just providing rapid-reaction elements. NATO must build up real follow-on forces, just as Russia is doing. The German idea of developing larger formations through the Framework Nations concept is a welcome development in this regard. NATO has the command and control structures on which forces suited for major combat operations can be built. However, the Alliance needs to force generate and exercise major combat formations.

### 3.4.2 PRE-POSITIONING

Pre-positioning of stocks of armaments and munitions is needed to speed up Allied reinforcement.

- We recommend that at least a battalion-worth of heavy equipment be pre-positioned in each Baltic state in order to be able to surge the presence of Allied troops rapidly when necessary. As a priority, heavy manoeuvre vehicles, artillery, anti-armour and air defence assets, and munition stocks should be pre-positioned.
- The risk that this pre-positioned equipment will be taken or destroyed by Russian forces could be mitigated if (a) it were dispersed and placed in hardened infrastructure, and (b) the defence forces of the

Baltic states were given the authority and training to use it. This could be an advantage in situations where soldiers of the respective nations are not available in sufficient numbers. Trained soldiers of the host nation may have a bridging function.

## 3.5 EXERCISES

Better coordination of exercises is not only beneficial but required so that they are not a burden on host nations. The focus of exercises should also move from assurance to deterrence. We therefore propose the following measures:

- Authority should be granted to SACEUR to conduct snap readiness exercises of NATO forces without NAC approval.
- Exercises in the Baltic region should be timed so that they are “heel-to-toe”—whenever one exercise in the region ends, another should start. In this way, a continuous presence would be enhanced, as a complement to the recommended forward-positioned units or formations in the Baltic states. Allied exercises should especially be aimed at periods when the readiness of countries in the region is lower, in order to boost presence.
- The deployment and employment of larger formations should be exercised on a regular basis. The past examples of Allied Command Europe (ACE) mobile force exercises in Norway and Turkey, as well as the REFORGER exercises, should be emulated by the VJTF and REFOREUR (Return of Forces to Europe) exercises.
- Exercises should be conducted based on the “train as you fight” principle, and concentrate on missions that would need to be undertaken in the event of Russia's attack. In particular, they should aim to rebuild the Allies' ability to fight a large-scale conventional war, where higher-order formations are engaged. Various other elements—from irregular warfare to cyber operations, from countering A2/AD capabilities to responding to nuclear attack—should also be integrated into exercise scenarios.
- Sweden and Finland should be included in more collective defence exercises in the Baltic Sea area.
- Amphibious landing exercises by the US Marines, using equipment pre-positioned



in Norway, should be conducted in the Baltics, with these exercises taking place more frequently—especially to practice securing vulnerable but strategically vital areas of the Baltic states’ coastline.

- Regular NATO or US–Polish–Lithuanian exercises should be conducted in the Suwalki Gap in order to practise how to keep the NATO land bridge to the Baltic states open.

### 3.6 AUGMENTING THE BALTIC STATES’ DEFENCE CAPABILITIES

The Alliance’s success in defending the Baltic states depends on the efforts of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania as much as on the contribution of other Allies. These three countries form a single operational theatre. The so-called “porcupine” strategy should be employed by their armed forces. They should act as “speedbumps with spikes” and gain time for incoming Allied forces.

- Development of self-defence and RSOI capabilities of the Baltic states should be supported both financially and by offering favourable conditions for purchasing the necessary armaments, equipment and supplies.
- In addition to the acquisition of defensive assets such as anti-armour, air defence and anti-ship weapons, the Allies should also support development of the Baltic states’ offensive capabilities and help increase the survivability of their forces.
- Support and technology transfers to develop their offensive cyber capabilities should be pursued, as this is the only strategic offensive weapon which the Baltic states could own themselves.
- A substantial increase in US financial assistance to the defence needs of the Baltic states should be considered. This could be done either by increasing Foreign Military Financing (FMF) funding for the Baltic states (which is currently very modest and has not changed since the start of Russia’s aggression against Ukraine) or by making adjustments in the allocation of ERI funds.
- As the most exposed and vulnerable NATO Allies, the Baltic states should be ready to steadily increase their defence spending above the 2% benchmark (as Estonia has already done).

- Particular attention should be paid to the development of the infrastructure necessary for the reception and movement of Allied forces in the event of crisis in the Baltic states. Since most of this (airports, harbours, railways, roads and bridges) is the responsibility of the civilian authorities, they should pay greater attention to the additional requirements for handling the movement of large and heavy military forces. As fulfilling these requirements can be very costly and since a lot of civilian infrastructure development is done with the help of EU funding, there should be an agreement on the permissibility of including those requirements in projects co-funded by the EU.

The Baltic states should continue to do their part. This entails continuing efforts to synchronise their operational level defence concepts; ensuring higher states of readiness of their defence forces; conducting frequent exercises to test this readiness; investing in new capabilities; and working to facilitate freedom of movement of Allied forces into and between the Baltic states and Poland.

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

### WESLEY K. CLARK

In 38 years of service in the United States Army, Wesley K. Clark rose to the rank of four-star general as NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). Since retiring from the military in 2000, he has become an investment banker, businessman, commentator, author and teacher. Wesley K. Clark graduated first in his class at West Point and completed degrees in philosophy, politics and economics at Oxford University (B.A. and M.A.) as a Rhodes Scholar. While serving in Vietnam, he commanded an infantry company in combat, where he was severely wounded. He commanded at the battalion, brigade and division level, and served in a number of significant staff positions, including service as the Director Strategic Plans and Policy (J-5). Wesley K. Clark finished his career as NATO commander and Supreme Allied Commander Europe where he led NATO forces to victory in Operation Allied Force, saving 1.5 million Albanians from ethnic cleansing. His awards include the Presidential Medal of Freedom, Defense Distinguished Service Medal (five awards), silver star, bronze star, purple heart, honorary knighthoods from the British and Dutch governments, and numerous other awards from other governments, including award of Commander of the Legion of Honour (France). Wesley K. Clark is the author of three books, "Waging Modern War: Bosnia, Kosovo and the Future of Combat," "Winning Modern War: Iraq, Terrorism and the American Empire" and "A Time to Lead: For Duty, Honor, Country".

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Jüri Luik has been Director of the International Centre for Defence and Security since August 2015. Prior to this, he held a number of posts both as a cabinet-level politician and a professional diplomat. Between 2012 and 2015 he served as Ambassador of Estonia to the Russian Federation. From 2007 to 2012 he served as the Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Republic of Estonia in the North Atlantic Council. He assumed the post after serving for four years as the Ambassador of Estonia to the United States co-accredited to Mexico and Canada. In the Estonian Government, he served as Minister of Foreign Affairs (1994–1995), twice as Minister of Defence (1993 and 1999–2002), and as Minister without Portfolio, Head of the Government Delegation for negotiations with Russia over the withdrawal of Russian troops (1992–1994). He was elected to the Estonian Parliament in 1992. Mr Luik holds the diplomatic rank of Ambassador. He graduated from the University of Tartu with a degree in journalism in 1989 and in 1995–96 was a Visiting Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in DC.

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as Chief of the Central Branch of the Army Staff. From there, in 1996, he took command of Logistics Brigade 1 in Lingen/Ems. In 1998, he assumed the position Deputy Chief of Staff, Armed Forces Staff V, Logistics, Infrastructure and Environmental Protection in the German Armed Forces. In 2000, he was appointed as Director of Armed Forces Staff, Federal Ministry of Defence. He was assigned as Commander of the Multinational Corps Northeast (Stettin, Poland) in February 2004 and took up his post as Commander Allied Joint Force Command Brunssum on 26 January 2007. His main effort in this position was focused on the NATO-led ISAF mission in Afghanistan as its operational commander. He finished his duty in the Federal Armed Forces and retired from the military service on 30 September 2010.

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General (retired) Sir Richard Shirreff is a former NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR). He was born in Kenya in 1955 where he spent his early years. Educated in England at Oundle and Exeter College, Oxford (Modern History), he was commissioned from Sandhurst into the 14th/20th King's Hussars in 1978. His regimental service was spent in Germany, Canada, the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, the Gulf and, while attached to 6th Queen Elizabeth's Own Gurkha Rifles for a year, Hong Kong and Brunei. He commanded The King's Royal Hussars 1994-1996. He attended the Army Staff Course at Camberley in 1987, the Higher Command and Staff Course in 1999 and the Foundation Term of the Royal College of Defence Studies in 2003. Staff posts have included: Chief of Staff, Headquarters 33 Armoured Brigade; Military Assistant to the last Commander-in-Chief, British Army of the Rhine and Commander Northern Army Group; Colonel Army Plans in the Ministry of Defence; Principal Staff Officer to the Chief of Defence Staff; and Chief of Staff HQ LAND Command. He commanded 7th Armoured Brigade 1999-2000, amongst other things forming the core of a multinational brigade in Kosovo and 3rd (UK) Division from 2005-2007. During this time the divisional HQ deployed as HQ Multinational Division South East in Iraq between July 2006 and January 2007. He has commanded on operations at every level from platoon to division. This has included combat in the Gulf War of 1991 as a tank squadron leader, counter-insurgency operations in the infantry role in Northern Ireland (three tours), together with Iraq and Kosovo. He qualified as a military parachutist in 2005. Assuming command of the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps in December 2007, apart from preparing the Corps for deployment in support of NATO-led ISAF in Afghanistan, he also oversaw the relocation of the Corps from Germany to the United Kingdom. He served as the 27th NATO Deputy Supreme Allied Commander Europe (DSACEUR) from 3 March 2011 until 1 April 2014.

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