Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2024

Part III: NATO's Strategy for Deterrence and Defence towards 2030 — Matching Ambition and Capabilities

Albin Aronsson, Eva Hagström Frisell, Jakob Gustafsson, Robert Dalsjö, Karl Agell

FOI-R--5636--SE

November 2024

FOI

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Title	Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2024 Part III: NATO's Strategy for Deterrence and Defence towards 2030
Report No.	FOI-R--5636--SE
Month	November
Year	2024
Pages	77
ISSN	1650-1942
Customer	Ministry of Defence
Research Area	8. Security Policy
Project No.	A12402
Approved by	Malek Finn Khan
Division	Defence Analysis

Cover: Multinational troops representing Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the U.S. including the U.S. Army's Charlie Company 2nd Battalion, 69th Armored Regiment "Panther Battalion", 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division assigned to NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group Poland, stage their vehicles before a firepower demonstration, during the Iron Spear exercise conducted jointly with enhanced Forward Presence Battle Groups from Estonia, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania in Adazi, Latvia, Nov. 13, 2023. (POLARIS).

Abstract

This report examines NATO's evolving strategy for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe, covering the current situation and looking ahead to 2030. It focuses on how well NATO's adaptation efforts, strategic ends, operations plans, and force development align to achieve the core task of deterrence and defence.

The report finds that the ends and ways of NATO's strategy have become more aligned since 2014 and that the Alliance now has a more coherent politico-military approach to its core task of deterrence and defence. However, there are several gaps between NATO's political ambitions and the available means. Towards 2030, differing threat perceptions among allies, changes in the transatlantic relationship, and debates about the appropriate levels of forward defence are likely to challenge the implementation of NATO's strategy. Furthermore, allies must demonstrate the political will and financial backing to build the necessary capabilities for successful implementation. Given these challenges, NATO may, as several times before in its history, pursue alternate ways to achieve deterrence and defence towards Russia nonetheless.

This report is part of the broader study, *Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023–2024*, and contributes to a comprehensive analysis of the military strategic situation in Northern Europe.

Keywords: adaptation, command and control, defence, deterrence, deterrence by denial, deterrence by punishment, force planning, military capability, NATO, Northern Europe, operations planning, posture, regional plans, strategy.

Sammanfattning

I denna rapport undersöks utvecklingen av Natos strategi för avskräckning och försvar i norra Europa, idag och fram till 2030. Rapporten fokuserar på hur väl Natos beslut och åtgärder, strategiska målsättningar, operativa planer och styrkeplanering hänger ihop för att utföra kärnuppgiften avskräckning och försvar.

I rapporten konstateras att Natos mål och metoder har blivit mer samstämmiga sedan 2014 och att alliansen nu har en sammanhållen politisk-militär inriktning för kärnuppgiften avskräckning och försvar. Samtidigt finns flera diskrepanser mellan Natos politiska målsättningar och de tillgängliga medlen. Fram mot 2030 kan allierades skilda hotuppfattningar, förändringar i den transatlantiska relationen samt debatter om den tillräckliga nivån för framskjutet försvar försvåra implementeringen av Natos strategi. Därtill måste Natos medlemmar visa politisk vilja och ge finansiellt stöd för att bygga de nödvändiga förmågorna för att implementera strategin. Givet dessa utmaningar finns det, liksom flera gånger tidigare i Natos historia, olika vägar för alliansen att trots allt uppnå avskräckning och försvar gentemot Ryssland.

Rapporten är en del av den större serien av studier, *Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023-2024*, vars övergripande målsättning är att göra en samlad analys av den militärstrategiska situationen i Nordeuropa.

Nyckelord: avskräckning, avskräckning genom bestraffning, avskräckning genom förnekelse, försvar, ledning, militär förmåga, Nato, Nordeuropa, operativ planering, regionala planer, strategi, styrkeplanering.

Preface

The Northern European and Transatlantic Security Programme (NOTS) at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) analyses security and defence policy developments in Western countries and organisations that influence Swedish security as part of its assignment from the Swedish Ministry of Defence. Every three years since 2017, the programme has conducted a comprehensive analysis of Western military capability and the military strategic situation in Northern Europe. Building on previous efforts, this third iteration is our most ambitious undertaking to date.

This multi-part, comprehensive study, *Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023–2024*, progresses in two distinct phases. The initial phase establishes an empirical and analytical foundation through three separate reports. This is the third report in the series, focusing on how NATO's adaptation efforts, strategic ends, operations plans, and force development support the Alliance's ability to achieve its task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe through 2030. The next phase will amalgamate and use the results for net-assessment purposes.

Many individuals generously contributed their knowledge and expertise to the fulfilment of the study. We extend our gratitude to the officials of the member states and NATO who shared their perspectives on the Alliance's adaptation. We especially thank Sara Bjerg Møller, who reviewed an earlier draft of the report.

The study relies on FOI expertise, both within and outside of the NOTS programme. Our distinct gratitude extends to Alina Engström, Jan Henningsson, Carina Gunnarson, Karl Sörenson, Emelie Thorburn, and Mike Winnerstig for sharing their invaluable expertise to improve the report. We especially thank Björn Ottosson and Krister Pallin, who edited the other volumes in the series and contributed to parts of this report.

Richard Langlais reviewed and edited the language of all texts with outstanding diligence and attitude. Karin Blext provided tenacious and infallible proficiency for the report's layout.

Our heartfelt gratitude extends to each of you. Without your support, we would not have completed the study. The responsibility for any remaining mistakes is entirely ours.

Stockholm, November 2024
Eva Hagström Frisell
Deputy Research Director & Programme Manager
Northern European and Transatlantic Security Programme

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Abbreviations

ACO	Allied Command Operations
ACT	Allied Command Transformation
AEW&C	Airborne Early Warning and Control
AIRCOM	Allied Air Command
AJP	Allied Joint Doctrine Publication
ALCM	Air-launched cruise missile
APC	Armoured personnel carrier
ARF	Allied Reaction Force
ATACMS	Army Tactical Missile System
AWACS	Airborne Warning and Command System
C2	Command and Control
CAP	Comprehensive Assistance Package
CSG	Carrier Strike Group
DCA	Dual Capable Aircraft
DDA	Concept for the Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area
DEAD	Destruction of Enemy Air Defences
DIA	Defence Intelligence Agency (USA)
eFP	enhanced Forward Presence
EPF	European Peace Facility
EUCOM	European Command (USA)
EUMAM	European Union Military Assistance Mission
FGA	Fighter Ground Attack
FLF	Forward Land Forces
FOI	Swedish Defence Research Agency
FSC	Force Sourcing Conferences
FSR	Force Structure Requirements
G7	Group of Seven
GIUK	Greenland Iceland United Kingdom
GRF	Graduated Response Forces
GRP	Graduated Response Plan
HIMARS	High Mobility Artillery Rocket System
HRF	High-readiness Forces
IAMD	Integrated Air and Missile Defence
IFV	Infantry Fighting Vehicle

ISR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Reconnaissance
ISTAR	Intelligence, Surveillance, Target Acquisition, Reconnaissance
JAS	Jakt, Attack, Spaning (Sweden)
JFC	Joint Force Command
JSEC	Joint Support and Enabling Command
LANDCOM	Allied Land Command
LoA	Level of Ambition
LRF	Lower-readiness Forces
MAP	Membership Action Plan
MARCOM	Allied Maritime Command
MBT	Main Battle Tank
MC	NATO Military Committee
MDO	Multi Domain Operations
MNC-NE	Multinational Corps North East
MPA	Maritime Patrol Aircraft
NAC	North Atlantic Council
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NCA	National Command Authority (USA)
NCS	NATO Command Structure
NDPP	NATO Defence Planning Process
NFIU	NATO Force Integration Units
NFM	NATO Force Model
NFS	NATO Force Structure
NMS	NATO Military Strategy (2019)
NOTS	Northern European and Transatlantic Security Programme at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI)
NPG	Nuclear Planning Group
NRF	NATO Response Force
NRI	NATO Readiness Initiative
NSATU	NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine
NWCC	NATO Warfighting Capstone Concept
PG	Political Guidance
PRC	People's Republic of China
RAP	Readiness Action Plan
RP	Regional Plan
RPAS	Remotely Piloted Aircraft System
SACEUR	Supreme Allied Commander Europe
SASP	SACEUR's Area of Responsibility-wide Strategic Plan

SC	NATO Strategic Concept
SDP	Standing Defence Plan
SEAD	Suppression of Enemy Air Defences
SHAPE	Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe
SNMG	Standing NATO Maritime Group
SOFCOM	Allied Special Operations Forces Command
SSD	SACEUR's Strategic Directive
SSP	Subordinate Strategic Plan
STRATCOM	Strategic Command (USA)
tFP	tailored Forward Presence
ToA	Transfer of Authority
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UDCG	Ukraine Defence Contact Group
VJTF	Very High-readiness Joint Task Force
WMC	Western Military Capability in Northern Europe

Military units — Categories and sizes

Army

Army group/Front	2 armies or more/Ground force of a region
Army	2 corps or more, personnel strength 100,000 or more
Army corps	2 divisions or more, personnel strength 20,000–50,000
Division	3–6 brigades, personnel strength 6,000–25,000
Brigade	1–2 regiments/3–6 battalions, personnel strength 3,000–6,000
Regiment	2–5 battalions, personnel strength 1,000–3,000
Battalion	3–6 companies/squadrons, personnel strength 300–1,000
Company/Squadron	2–6 platoons, personnel strength 80–250

Helicopter

Brigade/Regiment	2 battalions or more
Battalion	2–3 squadrons/companies
Squadron/Company	8–16 helicopters

Navy

Fleet	Two task forces or more/Maritime force of a region
Task force	2 flotillas or more, including major warships, for example, a carrier or a cruiser
Flotilla	2 squadrons or more
Squadron	2–6 ships

Air Force

Air force/Air army	2 groups or more/Air force of a region
Group	2 wings or more
Wing/Regiment	2–4 squadrons
Squadron	12–24 aircraft

NB: The intervals above should be seen as normal variations, taking into account both Russian and Western practice, although other partitions often occur. Furthermore, the denominations vary between countries, and in some cases, the terms above are used for other purposes, including base, training, and administrative entities. The terms “group” or “task force” are common for all types of formations designed for a particular mission. Larger formations — typically brigades, flotillas, or wings and above — include considerable support assets. Normally, these assets are only partly included organically in the manoeuvre units, and their compositions vary considerably.

1. Introduction

Albin Aronsson, Jakob Gustafsson, and Eva Hagström Frisell

Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine on February 24, 2022, was a turning point in modern European history and a critical juncture for NATO. Large-scale conventional war has returned to Europe. Russia perceives itself as being in a long-term conflict with the West, and the Russian leadership has shown a high propensity to take risks.[1] This has consolidated European threat perceptions, necessitating that NATO develop ambitious plans to strengthen its deterrence and defence posture against Russia.

NATO's transformation toward the collective defence of allied territory began before 2022. Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and proxy war in eastern Ukraine in 2014 caused concern among several allies. NATO therefore gradually adapted its posture to reassure exposed allies and deter Russia. However, the allies' lingering differences in their perceptions of the threat from Russia and the urgency of undertaking reforms resulted in a fragmented approach to deterrence and defence. In 2018, NATO's political and military structures began to outline a more coherent strategy for the Alliance. The concentration of Russian forces on Ukraine's borders in 2021 and the subsequent February 2022 invasion tested NATO's strategy and posture. NATO activated existing defence plans and undertook so-called vigilance activities, e.g., air patrols and naval exercises. Allies, moreover, reinforced NATO's forward presence in the Baltic States and Poland and more widely on the eastern flank while significantly increasing military support to Ukraine.

Russia's war on Ukraine, particularly the atrocities revealed in occupied territories, prompted further NATO adaptation. Finland's and Sweden's applications and subsequent accessions to NATO altered the Alliance's military geography. At the Madrid summit in June 2022, NATO allies adopted a new strategic concept to guide the Alliance's future development and planning. The Strategic Concept stated that "the Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace" and envisaged a more robust defence posture, including more forward-deployed forces on the eastern flank. The summit communiqué's new "baseline" for NATO's deterrence and defence posture was expressed as "defend every inch of Allied territory at all times."[2]

NATO's new goal signals a significant increase in ambition. It suggests that the Alliance aims to counter and deny, with force, an adversary's attempts to achieve any military objectives directed at the Alliance and its members. This represents a significant departure from NATO's strategy up until 2022, which was based on the threat of nuclear retaliation and punishment.[3] For NATO to realise its new baseline to "defend every inch of Allied territory" would be a serious undertaking.[4]

Future NATO efforts will need to address the uncertainty concerning the character of the threat posed by Russia. This will be dependent on the evolution of the war in Ukraine. In the short term, Russia's armed forces remain engaged in the war, resulting in a degraded operational capability. At the same time, Russia maintains less-degraded and capable nuclear, missile, air, and naval forces; Moscow has also demonstrated its willingness to operate below the threshold of armed conflict.[5] Assessments differ on how and how quickly Russia may reconstitute its capabilities depleted in the war, but it is clear that this will depend on several factors, such as Russia's access to modern technology.[6]

NATO, despite uncertainties, must account for potential high-impact events, and the Alliance is currently translating its new ambitions into comprehensive operations and defence planning. This report addresses the journey on which NATO has embarked. It provides an overview and context for the multitude of decisions and measures the Alliance adopted between 2014 and 2024 and their future implications. Furthermore, the report assesses how ongoing efforts will affect NATO's ability to achieve its deterrence and defence tasks in Northern Europe through 2030.

1.1 Study design

This report is part of a series of comprehensive analyses of the military strategic situation in Northern Europe regularly conducted by the Northern European and Transatlantic Security (NOTS) Programme at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). The principal objective of this comprehensive analysis — the third in the series, conducted during 2023 and 2024 — is to

deliver a net assessment of Western and Russian military capability in Northern Europe.

The present analysis unfolds in two phases. The first phase establishes the empirical and analytical foundation necessary for the portion of the net assessment that deals with the Western nations. It comprises three separate parts:

- Part I, published earlier, examines the national capabilities of twelve key Western countries, encompassing security and defence policy, military expenditures, armed forces, current operational military capability, and expected developments up to 2030.[7]

- Part II, also completed and published earlier, examines the evolving European security landscape, focusing on identifying political tensions that could affect NATO's ability to achieve its task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe in a 5- to 10-year perspective.[8]

- Part III, the present report, examines how the evolution of NATO's strategy, including its strategic ends, operations plans, and force development, supports the Alliance's ability to achieve the task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe in a 5- to 10-year perspective.

The second phase, currently still in progress, will amalgamate and leverage the results and insights from the first phase, together with an analysis of Russian capability, to produce a comprehensive net assessment, which will include the entire study's overall conclusions.

1.2 Part III — Aim and research approach

The present report focuses on NATO both as an organisation and the collective measures agreed upon by all its members. The Alliance's role is essentially to coordinate the capabilities and efforts of the member states' armed forces. NATO's strategy, operations plans, joint capabilities, and common nuclear planning are thus of fundamental importance for Western deterrence and defence against Russia.

The aim of this report is to examine how the evolution of NATO's strategy supports the Alliance's ability to achieve its task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe. The status of NATO's preparations in 2024 is used as a baseline for assessing developments in the coming 5 to 10 years. The following research question guides the ensuing analysis:

- How well do the ends, ways, and means of NATO's strategy align to achieve the task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe?

Analytical approach, key concepts, and delimitations

This report aims to evaluate NATO's evolving strategy. This is primarily done by assessing how NATO's stated ambitions regarding deterrence and defence match with the Alliance's operations plans, force development, and available resources at present and up to 2030. Accordingly, NATO's ability to achieve the task of deterrence and defence is examined essentially independent of Russian strategy and capabilities. We are more interested in whether NATO can accomplish the goals it has set for itself than how or to what extent those goals will contribute to deterrence and defence towards Russia. The upcoming fourth part of this study series aims to conduct a comprehensive analysis taking the dynamic effects of NATO-Russia interaction into account.

The report combines a historical perspective on the culture and peculiarities of NATO strategy-making and the process of aligning ambitions and capabilities, which shape the organisation to this day, with a bottom-up and top-down examination of developments in recent years. The analysis primarily uses a qualitative approach, which involves analysis of a variety of texts, complemented by interviews. However, we also compile and analyse quantitative data, mainly relating to allied forces and capabilities.

Strategy, at its most overarching and simple level, consists of ends, ways, and means. The ends are politico-military goals that an actor aims to achieve, expressed most prominently in high-level documents. The ways represent how an actor aims to achieve its goals; they are often expressed in defence reviews, military strategies, defence concepts, and operations plans. The means are the resources by which an actor aims to achieve its goals, primarily an actor's armed forces. Notably, this framework is well-suited for the study's effort to assess how NATO's ambitions (strategic ends) match with its operations plans (ways) and force development and available capabilities (means). To fully capture NATO strategy-making, however, we also use a wider understanding of strategy, in which NATO activities and patterns of behaviour are also seen as expressions of, or building blocks for, strategy even if they are not

part of a preconceived plan. This is elaborated upon in Chapter 2.

The study aims to take stock of how well NATO performs its task of deterrence and defence. NATO seldom, or never, officially differentiates between deterrence and defence or elaborates on the relationship between them. This is understandable, as the capabilities for deterrence and defence are closely interlinked: a strong defence tends to create a strong deterrent. Moreover, during the Cold War, whether the Alliance should aim for deterrence or defence was a long-running, contentious issue (see Section 2.4), a debate the Alliance might not want to reopen. Nonetheless, this issue looks likely to resurface, and there are trade-offs between the two and, thus, analytical value in separating them. The literature traditionally differentiates between how deterrence concerns efforts to influence an adversary's intentions, while defence concerns efforts to reduce an adversary's capabilities. Capabilities and concepts well-suited for deterrence may not be equally apt for defence, and vice versa.[9]

This study views deterrence as the act of discouraging or restraining an opponent from taking unwanted action. Furthermore, academic literature commonly identifies two separate types of deterrence: deterrence by denial and deterrence by punishment.[10] Historically, NATO has aimed to uphold elements of both deterrence by denial and punishment, but the balance between the two has shifted over time.

Deterrence by denial implies that an actor attempts to deny a potential aggressor's ability to achieve its objectives. In other words, an actor means to persuade its adversary *ex ante* that aggression will fail or prove too costly. A common way to attempt a posture of deterrence by denial is to possess capable and robust conventional defence capabilities.

In employing deterrence by punishment, an actor attempts to deter an opponent by threatening to punish it for its transgression. This type of threat can comprise severe economic sanctions, military confrontation, or nuclear escalation. The aim of the punishment strategy is to convey that aggression will be too costly *ex post*, prompting the potential aggressor to refrain from choosing it in the first place and maintain the status quo. The threat of nuclear retaliation is the starkest example of deterrence by punishment. However, conventional deterrence can also be designed to punish.

This report has some important delimitations. As with the previous publications in the Western Military Capability (WMC) series, we focus on examining NATO's preparations for high-intensity warfare against a peer or near-peer adversary, or, in NATO language, the core task of deterrence and defence. Specifically, we concentrate on the task of deterring and defending against potential Russian military aggression in Northern Europe up to 2030.[11] The description of NATO's evolving strategy considers the period 2014–2024, but we briefly consider historical examples to illuminate contemporary issues and gauge what the Alliance may accomplish by 2030.

We use the terms "NATO" and "Alliance" interchangeably; in most cases, they both refer to the organisation and the collective formed by all the allies. When analysing forces and capabilities, we include NATO's command structure, the limited joint assets, and the forces and capabilities of individual allies. However, the report does not assess all relevant capabilities in detail. Important joint capabilities, such as nuclear deterrence, strategic communication, ISR/ISTAR, cyber, and space planning, are only briefly touched upon. As to national capabilities, the analysis of allies' forces and capabilities focuses on twelve countries of particular importance for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe, as defined in the first part of this report series.[12]

However, the report does not consider force enablement and exercises, which are also important for deterrence and defence.[13] We also exclude the analysis of NATO's force employment in a potential war, including doctrine, force morale, and other intangible factors. The most important delimitation, as noted above, is that we exclude the balance of military forces between NATO and Russia. While this is essential for evaluating the extent to which NATO is able to deter and defend against Russia in Northern Europe, we leave that to the fourth report in this study series.

1.3 Sources

This report relies on open sources. The analysis builds on official documents and communication from NATO and the examined countries, complemented by research reports and articles from academic institutions, think tanks, and media. In order to assess ongoing developments, we held 12 semi-structured interviews with officials from relevant directorates in NATO's International Staff and from national delegations in Brussels in October 2023. The respondents provided valuable background information, but we have attempted to avoid direct quotes due to the sensitivities involved. Appendix 1 lists the respondents' institutional affiliations.

As important parts of NATO's operations and defence planning, as well as the readiness and capability of national armed forces, are not public, the assessment of NATO's evolving strategy is our interpretation

of the publicly available sources. The cut-off date for data gathering was 15 August 2024. Both internal and external experts have reviewed the report.

1.4 Structure of the report

The report answers the research question in five steps that align with its overall structure.

Chapter 2 provides a historical perspective on NATO strategy-making and studies the often slow and cumbersome processes of change within NATO. The chapter outlines and analyses important features and dilemmas in NATO strategy-making, which provides additional perspective to the Alliance's ongoing adaptation.

Chapter 3 uses a bottom-up approach to outline NATO decisions, measures, and activities undertaken to strengthen its force posture since 2014 and the new ambitions it has adopted for deterrence and defence. It covers NATO's gradual adaptation between 2014 and 2022, as well as NATO's early response to Russia's 2022 invasion of and the West's support to Ukraine. The chapter finishes by summarising the Alliance's most important decisions for 2022–2024 and outlining some challenges to their implementation.

Chapter 4 adopts a top-down approach, initially describing and analysing the contents of the Alliance's strategy documents. It then discusses the analytical lens through which the Alliance views its relationship with Russia. The chapter then covers NATO's operations planning. In other words, the chapter explores how NATO's ends and ways align.

Chapter 5 analyses the Alliance's means and empirically evaluates how they align with the Alliance's ends and ways. It starts by covering force planning, i.e., the new force model (NFM) and the defence-planning process (NDPP). Then it covers NATO's adaptation of its command and control structure. Finally, it draws upon this study series' work on the national capabilities of 12 countries particularly relevant for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe and analyses the extent to which the allies fulfil NATO's force requirements.

Chapter 6, the concluding chapter, ties the report's pieces together and assesses how well the ends, ways, and means of NATO's strategy align to achieve the task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe. It first considers the gradual alignment of NATO's strategy between 2014 and 2024 and the more coherent politico-military approach the Alliance has developed. Second, it addresses the remaining gap between NATO's political ambitions and the available resources. Third, it explores the most important challenges to achieving an aligned strategy for deterrence and defence towards 2030. The report concludes by discussing some alternate ways NATO may proceed to better align its strategy for deterrence and defence against Russia. ■

Endnotes

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2. Strategy-making in NATO

Jakob Gustafsson and Robert Dalsjö[1]

With NATO in the midst of major strategic change, this chapter steps back and reflects on what strategy is and where it comes from. It seeks to analyse what NATO's history can tell us about processes of strategic change within NATO and the constant work on aligning ends, ways, and means. In doing so, the chapter provides context for the subsequent assessment of NATO's emerging strategy and adaptation efforts. Looking back before looking ahead may serve to temper both expectations and misgivings regarding NATO's ability to successfully implement its emerging strategy. If history is a guide, achieving an aligned strategy will take time, and not all goals will be met, but successful deterrence might still be achieved.

2.1 The sources of Alliance strategy

As noted in the previous chapter, the conventional understanding of strategy usually revolves around an ideal type consisting of three parts: ends, ways, and means. An actor formulates the desired ends and the ways and means that are necessary to achieve those. Applied somewhat roughly to NATO, its Strategic Concept defines the ends, while military concepts, as well as strategic and operations planning, elaborate on the ways. NATO's command structures, joint capabilities, and member states' armed forces represent the means.

This ideal type contributes important pieces to understanding NATO strategy formulation and implementation, but the top-down emphasis risks obfuscating other important parts of the puzzle. We show below that NATO's Cold War history reveals that a more complete perspective on NATO strategy needs to account for what NATO does, not only what it says, and the interplay between the two. Thus, this chapter complements the ends, ways, and means framework with scholar and business strategist Henry Mintzberg's view that both plans and patterns of behaviour are important parts of strategy.[2]

Plan refers to the conscious and systematic direction of action beforehand. An actor clearly specifies what ends it strives toward and what ways and means it will use, or develop, to achieve these ends. This is a common understanding of strategy, in line with the above-introduced top-down ends, ways, and means framework. Much of NATO's work since 2022 has followed this logic, as is analysed further in Chapter 4.

Patterns of actual behaviour, however, are equally relevant to consider as expressions of strategy. In this sense, strategy is assembled by building upon behaviour that proved successful, whether or not it was intentional or part of an overarching plan. This follows more of a bottom-up logic and is a useful way of understanding much of NATO's history and its initial reaction to Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and subsequent adaptation efforts, as elaborated upon in Chapter 3.

2.2 NATO's plans and patterns in conjunction

The North Atlantic Treaty, NATO's foundational document, mostly covers the Alliance's overall purpose, some important and unifying ideas that should govern its behaviour, and some practical aspects of membership. In other words, it describes the Alliance's core activity, which is collective defence and the preservation of peace and security, and how the organisation wants to be viewed internally and externally. The treaty also touches upon NATO's role in the international system, in particular with respect to the United Nations and its geographical area of responsibility.

An actual strategy is expected to elaborate on how to achieve stated objectives. This was left out of the Treaty which, on the one hand, has allowed the Alliance to adapt to changes in the security landscape and the Alliance's mission.[3] On the other hand, the evolution of strategy, in terms of specific objectives and activities in order to counter different challenges, has had to be agreed upon over time and often in the midst of, or even after, a crisis. This means that first-round planning — in the form of advance or crisis-response planning and/or actual measures taken — informs future strategy as well as future plans and practice. Accordingly, plans and patterns of behaviour deemed successful in action are later often converted into a comprehensive strategy.

From 1949 onwards, this dialectic and difficult-to-overview process is essentially the story of NATO's strategy development. The strategic concepts and underlying documents have all been translations of the allies' evolving political ambitions for the Alliance and NATO's updated military requirements, against the backdrop of the North Atlantic Treaty's enduring aims and a changing security landscape.

The interplay between top-down plans and bottom-up patterns is visible in how, a few years after its inception, NATO had already recognised its significant dependence on United States (US) nuclear weapons. It therefore introduced the concept of massive retaliation in 1954, about three years before the third strategic concept (Military Commitee 14/2, MC) formally established it, in May 1957. Likewise, the Alliance was already committed to a "forward strategy" in 1952, which aimed to position NATO's defences as near to the Iron Curtain as possible – albeit at that time on the Rhine – and to halt or delay a Soviet attack at the earliest opportunity. However, an agreement on moving towards a full forward-defence posture on the Inner German Border and an extended and more flexible deterrence posture was only concluded a decade later, in 1963 (and implemented a decade later). This was also heavily tied to political developments at the time, primarily the 1961 Berlin crisis. In turn, this prepared the ground for the approval, in 1968, of the fourth strategic concept (MC 14/3), which included the notion of flexible response.[4] The same dynamics were present after the Cold War, when NATO's role in crisis management was set out in its 1999 Strategic Concept, building on several years' experience from peace-enforcement operations that the Alliance had already conducted.

Diego Ruiz Palmer describes one of NATO's main efforts in its first five years of existence as being the transformation of the former occupation forces in Germany "from a disparate assortment of weak and operationally disconnected contingents into an increasingly coherent whole."[5] This description similarly captures the reorientation towards deterrence and defence after 2014. Before the establishment of a comprehensive strategy, NATO had already first addressed individual parts of the ends, ways, and means construct, such as a limited forward presence, with some forces at higher readiness and some advanced but incomplete planning on the forces' use. Chapter 3 elaborates on this. The adoption of the 2019 NATO military strategy and subsequent documents was an effort, greatly aided by the 2022 adoption of a new strategic concept, to put together the pieces created since 2014 into a coherent politico-military whole and specify what the individual parts of the strategy aimed at; this is a topic that Chapter 4 elaborates on.

2.3 Connecting the ends, ways, and means

Alliance adaptation during the Cold War was a dynamic process. NATO regularly adjusted the ends, ways, and means to each other, and from this process, the concept of forward defence evolved with the gradual evolution of NATO capabilities. As previously noted, NATO was striving towards some form of forward strategy from the early 1950s to the end of the Cold War. As allies made more forces available to NATO, the Alliance gradually moved the forward-defence line eastward from the Rhine to the border between West Germany and East Germany and Czechoslovakia.[6] Ambitious ends often preceded the available means.

The Alliance's new defence strategy took time to implement, however, and effective frontline defence was not exercised regularly until the early 1970s. While major contributions from allies, West Germany in particular, made possible the gradual eastward movement, other countries reduced their force contributions during the period, which made many question the viability of the strategy. Equally, the 1967 initiative to secure reinforcements for the northern and southern flanks was not properly resourced until 1983, then in the form of a Rapid Reinforcement Plan.[7] This illustrates the precarious process of developing the necessary resources to implement the agreed-upon strategy. Indeed, studies of civilian enterprises have found that only a minor part of strategies are actually realised in the sense of being effectively implemented in the organisations.[8] It may be similar in NATO.

Nor did NATO always agree on the characteristics of the threat, the strategy and operational concepts needed, and the corresponding necessary capabilities. For example, the 1952 Lisbon Ministerial's force goals, consisting of up to 90 divisions, including 30 ready divisions in Central Europe to defend Germany, were never fully met. Instead, NATO planners exerted themselves to develop sensible concepts to accompany the limited available forces and capabilities.[9] Put differently, the ends and ways were often adjusted to fit the means, not the other way around.

The frictions and discrepancies between ends, ways, and means should thus not be underestimated, notwithstanding NATO's overall success in the Cold War. Since 1949, the Alliance has strived to ensure that

no potential adversary could mistakenly believe, due to a real or perceived lack of NATO unity and resolve, that it could successfully and seriously challenge the Alliance or its individual allies.[10] Equally, reassuring allies is perhaps even more important and more difficult than deterring adversaries, lending further weight to the importance of maintaining unity. Indeed, as in previous eras, the Alliance's political unity, solidarity, and coherence are considered so important that the 2019 military strategy reportedly holds them as NATO's centre of gravity.[11]

The need to uphold unity has several times led the Alliance to endorse political aims that have been difficult to uphold or achieve militarily. This has resulted in frequent, if not enduring, politico-military incoherence. During the 1950s, Soviet conventional superiority caused the US, United Kingdom (UK), and NATO's military structures to harbour serious doubts regarding the wisdom of forward defence. However, the political consequences of anything other than forward defence, which could be seen as leaving continental members to fend for themselves in case of hostilities, were deemed detrimental to political cohesion and thus avoided. A greater reliance on the first and early use of sub-strategic nuclear weapons became the imagined panacea, allowing primarily European members to refrain from costly improvements to their conventional capabilities. This illustrates how "the perceived need by NATO to nurture political cohesion within the Alliance resulted in the adoption of strategic concepts that were unsuitable for the military environment within which it was operating."[12]

A similar pattern is clear in the negative reception of later, more flexible concepts that sought to handle the Soviet conventional overmatch without the same degree of reliance on first and early use of nuclear weapons. Such concepts tried to circumvent the problem by instead emphasising mobile operations and manoeuvre. The most prominent example is the US Army's 1982 Air Land Battle, which later turned out to be very successful but was still criticised for not adhering to the tenets of forward defence and the imperative of not yielding allied territory. Furthermore, primarily European critics also emphasised that the offensive cross-border ground operations they perceived as part of the doctrine came with negative political effects on NATO's image as a defensive alliance, and could lead to unwanted escalation.[13] In sum, military strategy is inherently political, and the Alliance's history on the subject is an excellent example.[14]

2.4 Conclusion — Looking back and looking ahead

Looking back, the Cold War's many challenges and unmet ambitions are often forgotten, making today's problems seem worse than they may actually be. Partly, the many frictions of fulfilling ambitious goals are probably inherent in any Alliance: they can be handled but never solved. Without being complacent, one might still remember that unmet force goals and unfilled ambitions have previously proved sufficient for deterrence. They might continue to do so, even though no guarantees exist.

It may be that the Alliance's deterrent effect is the sum of, on the one hand, the degree of unity between allies and, on the other hand, their military planning and capabilities. If NATO's unity is its centre of gravity, the very process of aligning the diverse group of allies around militarily meaningful goals is in itself an important part of its strategy. Put differently, NATO's peacetime strategy can be more about the process than the product. To this, one might counter that effective deterrence requires more than unity and solidarity in words and summitry, by resourcing plans and delivering capabilities. Too much incoherence between top-level goals and consensus on the one hand and the credibility of the allies' defence plans and capabilities on the other can undermine NATO's deterrence. Judging by the admittedly limited one-case historical evidence of the Cold War, however, it seems that NATO tends to prioritise unity over credible capabilities.

Alliance strategy-making has consequently always been a dialectical synthesis of what is politically possible and militarily desirable. Goals and aims have often been aspirational, and aligning ends, ways, and means has always taken time and involved difficult politico-military trade-offs. Three patterns from Cold War strategy-making are noteworthy examples of these dialectics.

First, the Alliance fluctuated between prioritising its conventional and nuclear deterrents. While most Allies agreed that a robust conventional deterrent and defence capability is militarily desirable, political hesitations regarding the costs of fully realising a conventional deterrent raised the importance of the nuclear dimension. The hesitancy was most prevalent in Europe, but not only concerned the financial costs. European allies worried that a robust European conventional deterrent would allow the US to ease its commitment to the defence of Europe, thus reducing the link between an

attack on Europe and US nuclear retaliation, thereby undermining nuclear deterrence.

Second, the same dynamics were prevalent in frequent divisions regarding whether the Alliance should prioritise its deterrence or its defence. Historically, European allies, being closer to the front line and with more near-term memories of wars being fought at home, preferred to emphasise deterrence capabilities, while the US put a greater premium on a robust and credible defence. The European emphasis on deterrence was meant to convey a threat of rapid escalation in case of hostilities, whereas the US saw the more phased escalatory options of defence-oriented capabilities as more credible.[15]

Third, the Alliance balanced the political goal of not yielding allied territory against military effectiveness and the risk of nuclear war. In this, the political aim of upholding unity – expressed in the forward defence of the inner-German border – took precedence over what many meant were more effective ways of using limited military means.[16]

As during the Cold War, NATO's evolving strategy may, in the end, involve adjusting the ends to fit the ways and means, not only the other way around. Forthcoming chapters look deeper at the patterns, plans, and capabilities of the Alliance's ongoing adaptation. ■

Endnotes

1 Krister Pallin has made valuable contributions to this chapter.

2 Henry Mintzberg, a world-renowned researcher in the field of business strategy, wrote his first seminal article on the five Ps of strategy in 1987. For a later development, see, e.g., Henry Minzberg, "Five Ps for Strategy," in The Strategy Process, ed. Henry Mintzberg (London: Prentice Hall, 1999), 13–20. Mintzberg sees plans and patterns as part of a greater whole, which also includes strategy as perspective, position, and ploy.

3 At the time of writing, the treaty's conciseness and lack of guidance partly stemmed from the allies, particularly the US, prioritising freedom of action above credible deterrence. The treaty created more of a paper alliance than the military alliance of today, which came into being with the addition of an actual organisation (the O in NATO), after the outbreak of the Korean War in 1950 made credible deterrence more important than freedom of action. In line with this, NATO has been and still is guided not by rigid rules but in Harlan Cleveland's words, constantly evolving transatlantic bargaining guided by pragmatism, precedents, and a habit of seeking consensus. This puts NATO's inner life in stark contrast to that of, for example, the EU's, with its rules, regulations, and directives, and it would probably not have worked without the strong hand of the US as first among equals. See, also, Stanley Sloan, Defense of the West: Transatlantic Security from Truman to Trump (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2020), 9–10.

4 Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, A Strategic Odyssey: Constancy of Purpose and Strategy-Making in NATO, 1949–2019, NDC Research Paper 3 (Rome, NATO Defense College, 2019), 7 and 28-29.

5 Ruiz Palmer, A Strategic Odyssey, 16.

6 It started at the Rhine Ijssel line; moved east to the Lech and Weser rivers, in 1957 as West Germany joined NATO, and ended at the Federal Republic's eastern border in 1963.

7 Ruiz Palmer, A Strategic Odyssey, 10.

8 Mintzberg, Henry, The Rise and Fall of Strategic Planning (London: Prentice Hall, 1994), 24–25.

9 Richard L. Kugler, Laying the Foundations: The Evolution of NATO in the 1950s, RAND Corporation, 1990, 56-57, *https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA257664.pdf* and Ruiz Palmer, A Strategic Odyssey, 25–26.

10 Ruiz Palmer, A Strategic Odyssey, 11.

11 Hugh Sandeman and Jonny Hall, "NATO's 2022 Strategic Concept: Matching Ambition with Reality," LSE Ideas (October 1, 2022), 7, *https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep45245*.

12 Simon Moody, "Enhancing Political Cohesion in NATO during the 1950s or: How it Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the (Tactical) Bomb," Journal of Strategic Studies, vol. 40, no. 6 (June 8, 2015), *https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/01402390.2015.1035434*.

13 John A. Van Alstyne, Should the U.S. Army's AirLand Battle Doctrine be Acceptable to NATO?, Naval War College, 1986, 8-9, *https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/tr/pdf/ADA170411.pdf*.

14 John Stone, Military Strategy: The Politics and Technique of War (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).

15 Sten Rynning, "NATO: Ambiguity about Escalation in a Multinational Alliance," in Nuclear Weapons and Escalation: Managing Deterrence in the 21st Century, ed. Stephan Frühling and Andrew O'Neil (Acton: Australian University Press, 2021), 68.

16 However, it should be noted that there is a multitude of views on the military logic of NATO's Cold War posture. See, for example, Phillip A Karber, "In Defense of Forward Defense," Armed Forces Journal International, vol. 121, no. 10 (1984), 28, 50. Karber makes the point that the political need to maintain a forward defence strategy should not obfuscate the sound military logic that underlies the strategy "in terms of operational depth, defensibility of terrain, force density, and timing of mobilization." However, he also notes that forward defence can not constitute a deterrent-in-being if it lacks deployed and prepared forces, which is the basis of some of the main critiques of the concept.

3. NATO's return to deterrence and defence 2014–2024

Eva Hagström Frisell and Karl Agell

This chapter provides an overview of NATO's return to deterrence and defence as its primary tasks in the period 2014–2024. The analysis adopts a bottom-up approach to outline NATO decisions, measures, and activities undertaken to strengthen its force posture since 2014 and the new ambitions it has adopted for deterrence and defence since 2022. This approach gives insights into how patterns of strategy form within the Alliance and shows that NATO gradually developed its ways and means before agreeing on the political ends of the new strategy.

The next section describes NATO's gradual adaptation post-2014, which has focused on reassurance of exposed allies and deterrence against Russia through a tripwire forward presence and a capability for rapid reinforcement. This is followed by analysis of the Alliance's early response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, including the military support provided to Ukraine, which provides insights into how NATO's strategy was applied and further developed in a crisis. Third, the chapter addresses the steps taken post-2022 to enhance NATO's deterrence and defence posture, NATO enlargement to Finland and Sweden, and NATO's partnerships in the eastern neighbourhood. The concluding section summarises the patterns of NATO's emerging strategy, the post-2022 ambitions and some challenges to their implementation.

3.1 Patterns of a new strategy post-2014

For much of the 1990s and 2000s, NATO's primary tasks were crisis-management operations outside of NATO territory, for instance, in the Balkans and Afghanistan, and security cooperation with partners and prospective NATO members. Russia was seen as a partner, and consequently allies significantly reduced costly capabilities for high-end warfare. However, at the request of new Alliance members in Central and Eastern Europe, which joined in 1999 and 2004, respectively, NATO took limited steps to prepare for the task of deterrence and defence in the Euro-Atlantic region. In 2010, NATO adopted contingency defence plans for the Baltic States and Poland, and in 2013, conducted an exercise of an Article 5 scenario. Even though these steps were politically important for the new allies, the plans did not match the available resources and were labelled non-executable.[1] In other words, they were *pro forma* plans.

Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea and aggression in Eastern Ukraine in early 2014 were a wake-up call for NATO planners and many of its members. Beginning in 2014, NATO and individual allies, particularly those on the eastern flank, began a military transformation from out-of-area crisis-management operations to deterrence and defence of NATO territory.

Post-2014 reassurance measures

NATO's initial reaction to Russia's 2014 aggression focused on reassuring eastern-flank allies through relatively restrained measures. NATO enhanced its situational awareness and reinforced its air policing and maritime patrol activities. The United States (US) launched Operation Atlantic Resolve and, together with other allies, deployed company-sized contingents to the Baltic States and Poland. The number of allied exercises gradually increased.[2] At the 2014 Wales summit, NATO adopted the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which included measures to enhance its rapid-response capabilities and adapt its command structure. NATO tripled the size of the NATO Response Force (NRF) to 40,000 soldiers, including by establishing the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), consisting of a brigade-sized formation supported by maritime, air, and special forces elements. From 2015, major European NATO allies alternated annually in providing the VJTF's core forces and its ground HQ.[3] In effect, the NRF and VJTF were mobile tripwire forces that were hardly meant for serious combat. Despite this, it proved a demanding

task for many allies, and large-scale exercises revealed gaps in national capabilities.[4]

Under the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SACEUR) command, the NRF's operational-level command alternated between Joint Forces Command Brunssum and Naples (JFC Brunssum and JFC Naples). At the lower tactical level, the eastern-flank command structure was developed with a more explicit regional focus. For example, the Multinational Corps North-East (MNC-NE) HQ in Szczecin upgraded its readiness and was tasked with supporting regional activities. In addition, NATO established small Force Integration Units (NFIUs) on the eastern flank to support defence planning, coordinate training and exercises, and facilitate NRF deployments.[5]

NATO also developed five Graduated Response Plans (GRPs) for the NRF's deployment in various geographical directions to provide deterrence in a crisis. The GRP's first part covered the deployment of the VJTF, which was supposed to be ready in 7 days, with lead elements deploying within 2–3 days. The second part covered the Initial Follow-on-Forces Group, consisting of the brigades that formed the VJTF in the previous year and those that would do so the coming year. These units were supposed to be ready within 30–45 days. The third part involved generating the NRF's Follow-on-Forces Group and other Follow-on-Forces from force registers. However, obstruction from Turkey delayed approval of the Eagle Defender plan, which covered the Baltic States and Poland, until 2020.[6] Furthermore, with the exception of the VJTF's deployment and some forces in the country in question, the GRPs required more work and were judged non-executable at short notice in 2020.[7]

Post-2016 deterrence measures

Eastern European allies, however, found the first post-2014 measures insufficient, and NATO's force posture did not counter the conventional-force imbalance in Russia's favour on the eastern flank. Defence experts stressed that Russia's ability to act swiftly with conventional forces in its neighbourhood and NATO's inability to counteract resulted in a force balance that was to NATO's disadvantage and non-deterring, a predicament that exposed allies argue is still unaddressed.[8] Beginning at the 2016 Warsaw summit, the allies therefore started to strengthen their presence on the eastern flank and improve their capabilities for reinforcement.

In 2017, NATO established the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), initially consisting of four multinational battalion-sized battlegroups, in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. Larger NATO allies, such as the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Germany, and the US, served as framework nations for the deployments, while other allies contributed smaller-sized units. In effect, the battlegroups were primarily to act as tripwires, and to ensure wide Alliance engagement in case of an armed attack, aiming to deter Russia. Unilaterally, the US increased its force presence on the eastern flank by continually rotating forces up to brigade size, including sustainment forces, to the region.

Two division-level headquarters were established to coordinate training and preparation activities of the four battlegroups. The Multinational Division North-East headquarters in Elblag, Poland, became operational in 2018, overseeing the battlegroup activities in Poland and Lithuania. The Multinational Division North headquarters, in Adazi, Latvia, co-located in Karup, Denmark, was added in 2020, coordinating the battlegroups in Latvia and Estonia. In the Alliance's southeastern part, NATO established a smaller so-called tailored Forward Presence (tFP) in 2017 under the Multinational Division South East headquarters in Bucharest.[9]

Several allies soon realised, however, that to ensure a deterrent effect, the eFP battlegroups needed backing from viable reinforcement capabilities. At the 2018 Brussels summit, NATO adopted measures to increase the Alliance's responsiveness, readiness, and reinforcement capability.[10] First, to ensure early crisis response, NATO decided to strengthen its intelligence-sharing, strategic awareness, advance planning, and decision-making.

Second, the Alliance took steps to improve the readiness levels among European forces. US Secretary of Defence James Mattis launched the so-called Four Thirties initiative. He aimed for NATO's European allies and Canada to be able to deploy, in addition to the NRF, 30 mechanised battalions, 30 fighter squadrons, and 30 major naval combatants with enabling forces within 30 days. NATO adopted this idea, launched the NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI), and began to identify national forces to meet the requirements. However, at the time, it was not evident how these forces would be organised and conduct exercises. Furthermore, allies likely double-hatted existing high-readiness units to fulfil the requirements of the NRI.[11]

Third, NATO outlined measures to facilitate moving reinforcements to the eastern flank in an enablement plan. To facilitate cross-border movement, the EU and NATO agreed to cooperate on military mobility, an area with several obstacles due to the profusion of national and EU regulations in the post-Cold War era.[12]

The focus on reinforcement of the eastern flank prompted reforms of NATO's command structure.

NATO decided to establish a Joint Force Command in Norfolk, Virginia (JFC Norfolk) and tasked it to facilitate the flow of reinforcements and supplies across the North Atlantic. The US also re-established its 2nd fleet with the same area of responsibility. To facilitate intra-European movement, NATO set up a Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) in Ulm, Germany. Furthermore, in 2020, the US decided to reactivate its V Corps HQ to enable corps-level command in the region, with a forward element in Poznan, Poland.

In sum, the measures that NATO adopted in the summits in Wales, Warsaw, and Brussels were signs of an emerging strategy that can be characterised as deterrence by reinforcement, based on a limited forward presence and an enhanced capability for reinforcement. However, the limited scale of the forward presence implied that NATO continued to rely on a strategy of deterrence by punishment, ultimately backed up by its nuclear deterrent.[13]

At the same time, the measures adopted lacked strategic direction, resulting in, for example, overlapping mandates between different entities in NATO's command and force structures.[14] The allies' political differences over how to handle upcoming crises further hindered the elaboration of new strategic ends. Leading up to the NATO meeting in London in 2019, French President Emmanuel Macron even branded the allies' non-functioning political and strategic coordination as the "brain death of NATO."[15]

Steps toward a new strategy

The allies' political disagreements handed the initiative to NATO's political and military structures to shape the Alliance's new strategy. NATO's military bureaucracy drafted and adopted a new military strategy in May 2019.[16] Taking their point of departure in the military strategy, NATO's two strategic-level commands developed two key documents to implement it.

Firstly, NATO's Allied Command Operations (ACO), with the Supreme Headquarters Allied Power Europe (SHAPE) in the lead, drafted a Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA Concept), which NATO's defence ministers approved in 2020. The DDA concept is the basis for NATO's operations planning, focusing on the use of the allies' existing forces. Secondly, in early 2021, NATO's Allied Command Transformation (ACT) produced NATO's Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC), which is to guide the development of the allies' forces in the coming 20 years.[17]

During the same period, NATO's Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg led a reflection process, including consultations between experts and allies. The aim was to strengthen NATO's political dimension; in February 2021, Stoltenberg presented his food-for-thought paper on NATO's strategic environment toward the 2030s.[18] Once Joe Biden succeeded Donald Trump as US President, the allies agreed to task the Secretary-General with preparing a new strategic concept.

Russia's military buildup, political demands, and subsequent full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, however, became a turning point for NATO. Whereas Russia's aggression and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 began a gradual adaptation towards a strategy of deterrence by reinforcement, based on a limited forward presence and an enhanced capability for reinforcement, the 2022 full-scale invasion prompted the development of a more coherent strategy and robust force posture.

3.2 Early response to Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine

NATO's response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine illustrates the formation of the Alliance's strategy during a real-time crisis. It reveals how the Alliance's political goals came about, in what ways the Alliance chose to act, and the available resources to back up its actions. This section does not aim to be exhaustive but rather provides an overview of important NATO decisions and deployments made at short notice in response to an upcoming crisis. This provides a snapshot of NATO's operational capability. Of course, every crisis or war has its own unique ramifications. Nevertheless, it is in such situations that the Alliance strategy is tested and, if needed, further developed.

Strategic communication and increased readiness

Before Russia's February 2022 invasion, individual allies and the Alliance as a whole engaged in a number of activities to support Ukraine and deter Russia. Following the Russian military buildup and exercises near the Ukrainian border in April 2021, several allies enhanced their ongoing military support to Ukraine. Having trained Ukrainian service members since 2015, in 2021 the US, UK, Poland, and the Baltic States participated in several military exercises in Ukraine and

the Black Sea and pledged additional military support.[19]

Before the invasion, allies also engaged in strategic communication and dialogue with Russia. However, collectively, the allies sent mixed messages. The US attempted to demonstrate Alliance unity, threatened Russia with sanctions, and, at the same time, warned Russia bilaterally. The US and the UK leveraged their intelligence apparatus to track and undermine Russian efforts. However, the intelligence communities in Germany and France did not believe an invasion was likely.[20]

Germany allowed work to continue on the Nord Stream 2 gas pipeline, and France continued its high-level political dialogue with Russia. Furthermore, they continued to promote the Normandy Format, which was established to negotiate a settlement after Russia's 2014 aggression against Ukraine and consists of Russia, Ukraine, Germany, and France, as the main alternative for handling the looming crisis.[21]

At the June 2021 Brussels summit, NATO called on Russia to reverse its military buildup and destabilising activities around Ukraine and voiced strong support for Ukrainian sovereignty. At this time, Ukraine was eager to become a NATO member and to sign a membership action plan (MAP). The allies, split between those favouring a timetable for membership and those that did not, failed to agree and continued to call for further Ukrainian defence reforms.[22]

In late November 2021, NATO foreign ministers met in Riga, and Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg vowed severe political and economic consequences should Russia invade.[23] NATO kept the diplomatic door open, however, and invited Russia to meet in the NATO-Russia Council.[24]

On December 17, Russia demanded that NATO and the US sign agreements that would revise the European security order. Moscow not only called for the withdrawal of Western military forces from Eastern Europe and Central Asia and wanted assurances that Ukraine would not join NATO but also demanded guarantees against further Alliance enlargement.[25] At a virtual summit in January 2022, NATO rejected these demands and reiterated that any Russian military aggression would face harsh consequences.[26]

In response to Russia's military preparations and political demands, NATO allies increased forward deployments and conducted several exercises on the eastern flank.[27] The US raised the readiness of its troops in Europe and prepared to deploy 8,500 additional troops from the United States.[28]

Since the US had warned in January 2022 that Putin had already ordered his forces to invade Ukraine, several allies decided to deploy more forces to the eastern flank.[29] The UK enhanced its presence in Estonia and Poland, while Germany deployed reinforcements to Lithuania.[30] The US deployed around 6,000 US troops, including approximately 3,000 from the 82nd Airborne Division, to Germany, Poland, and Romania. The US also moved an airborne infantry battalion from Italy and fighter aircraft and attack helicopters from Germany to the Baltics. Additional attack helicopters were moved from Greece to Poland.[31]

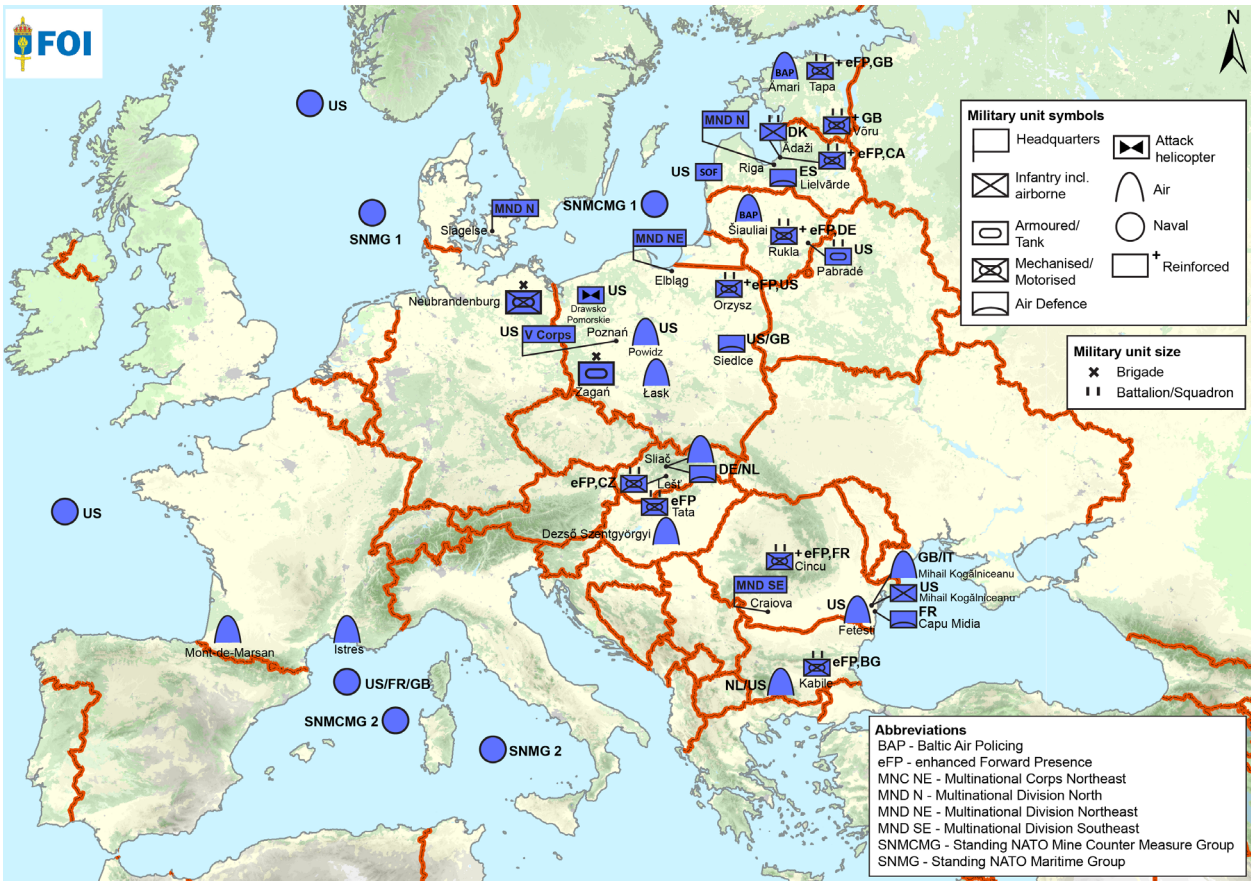
Although the support provided to Ukraine exposed divisions among the allies, they nevertheless accelerated the delivery of military assistance.[32] As late as January 2022, Germany refused to supply weapons and prevented other allies from sending German-made kit to Ukraine.[33]

Activation of operations plans and increased forward presence

On February 24, 2022, the day that hostilities began, the three Baltic States and Poland invoked the North Atlantic Treaty's article 4, and the North Atlantic Council (NAC) promptly held consultations.[34] The next day, NATO enabled faster decision-making, partly by giving SACEUR more authority; activating its operations plans, and beginning forward-deployment of significant forces to the eastern flank.[35] The measures undertaken included both NRF deployments in line with the post-2014 GRPs and so-called vigilance activities outlined in the newly adopted DDA Concept.

A few days later, on February 27, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz announced that Germany was at a historical turning point (*Zeitenwende*), and pledged significant rearmament and military support to Ukraine.[36] Similar turnarounds happened throughout Europe.[37] At an extra summit in March 2022, NATO decided to set up four additional eFP battlegroups in Slovakia, Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, adding to the existing four.[38]

Since February 2022, SACEUR has been mandated to calibrate NATO's ground deployments, air defences, and standing maritime groups along the eastern flank.[39] After three months, in June 2022, NATO stated that SACEUR had 40,000 allied troops under his command, a figure that remained unchanged at least up until June 2023. Almost 30,000 of these were deployed in Central and Eastern Europe and included host-nation forces on the eastern flank.[40] By June 2022, the number of troops deployed as part of the eFP had almost doubled to approximately 9,600, compared to 5,000 in February 2022.[41] These reinforcements provide



Map 3.1 NATO and allied military deployments and activities as of June 2022
Source: Pär Wikström, FOI.

a snapshot of what NATO allies were able to deploy to the eastern flank in three months' time. Map 3.1 illustrates NATO and allied military deployments and activities as of June 2022.

On the ground, allies sent reinforcements to the eight countries on the eastern flank. The UK almost doubled its presence in Estonia, adding an infantry battalion, which returned to the UK during the autumn.[42] Canada reinforced its presence, and Denmark deployed an additional infantry battalion to Latvia.[43] The US reinforced its battalion in Lithuania, and Germany forward-deployed a command-post element, with a brigade on standby in Germany.[44] The US accelerated the process of establishing the forward army corps HQ in Poland.[45] The Czech Republic, Germany, the Netherlands, and Slovenia contributed to the newly established eFP battlegroup in Slovakia, which was announced as combat-ready in September 2022.[46] In Hungary, national forces made up the lion's share of the eFP battlegroup, with contributions from Croatia and the US.[47] France deployed parts of its high-readiness forces designated to the NRF, and the US sent elements of the 101st Airborne Division to Romania.[48] Bulgaria initially provided the bulk of forces to the eFP battlegroup in the country, with Italy sending more forces and taking over the command in October 2022.[49]

In the air domain, allied air forces had already raised their readiness before Russia's invasion of Ukraine. By March 2022, 100 allied aircraft were on high alert in Europe.[50] Early in the war, NATO faced increased Russian air activity, including fighter sorties and constant AWACS activity, which later abated. By April 2022, NATO advertised that it had circa 30 aircraft of various types continuously in the air.[51] Several allies reinforced air policing and air-defence activities along the eastern flank with additional deployments to the Baltic States, Hungary, Slovakia, Romania, and Bulgaria.[52]

Furthermore, NATO used its unmanned aircraft and strengthened the Alliance's ground-based air defences. Before the war, NATO's fleet of five Global Hawk drones (RPAS) had flown missions inside Ukraine.[53] After hostilities began, they were deployed more cautiously, flying over the Black Sea and along NATO's border with Ukraine.[54] Several allies deployed medium- and long-range ground-based air defences to Latvia, Poland, Slovakia, and Romania.[55]

At sea, NATO increased its naval presence in Europe, with the Standing NATO Maritime Group (SNMG) 1 patrolling the Baltic Sea and SNMG 2 patrolling the Mediterranean Sea. The Alliance also conducted several large-scale naval exercises. Prominently, US, French, and UK aircraft carriers deployed to the Mediterranean, and, in May 2022, NATO tested the integration of maritime capabilities across the Alliance in exercise Neptune Shield. For the first time since the Cold War, a US Carrier Strike Group (CSG) practised the transfer of authority to NATO command.[56]

Military support to Ukraine

Since Russia's 2022 invasion, the West has significantly assisted Ukraine by providing military, financial, and humanitarian support. The assistance has been essential for Ukraine's ability to fight and for the functioning of the Ukrainian state. At the same time, the military support given to Ukraine has affected the available capabilities of NATO allies. Appendix 2 contains graphs that illustrate key aspects of the US and European support to Ukraine 2022–2024, based on the Kiel Institute for the World Economy's project, the Ukraine Support Tracker.

NATO as an organisation has provided relatively little direct assistance to Ukraine, partly because NATO itself does not preside over any significant military assets to contribute or funds to provide, partly because the allies have wanted to avoid a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO. However, the Alliance has expressed staunch political support by denouncing Russia's invasion and supporting Ukraine's independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity.

Since 2016, NATO has supported Ukraine in strengthening its military capability and reforming its armed forces in accordance with NATO standards through the so-called Comprehensive Assistance Package (CAP).[57] This assistance has included measures to address corruption and strengthen civilian control over the military. In its original form, the CAP included a modest set of support measures. NATO offered expertise, funding, and guidance in a number of important enabling functions. Equipment provided to Ukraine was limited to defensive and supportive systems. Within the CAP framework, several trust funds were also set up, to which allies could make voluntary contributions.[58] Following the start of the war, at the Madrid summit in June 2022, allies agreed to strengthen the CAP to cover such items as boots, rations, and communications equipment.[59]

The bulk of assistance to Ukraine comes directly from the allies, acting bilaterally or coordinating their efforts in various ways. The most important coordinating body has been the Ukraine Defense Contact Group (UDCG), also known as the Ramstein Group, led by the US Secretary of Defence. The group consists of all NATO members, the EU, and over a dozen global partners.[60] Over time, as national stocks of weapon systems and ammunition have become increasingly strained, the allies have started to coordinate assistance measures in so-called capability coalitions.[61] For example, in March 2024, the Czech Republic launched an initiative to collectively purchase up to 800,000 pieces of artillery ammunition for Ukraine from the global market.[62] In addition, the EU has channelled significant amounts of financial assistance from its member states, including military support, through the European Peace Facility (EPF).

In April 2024, NATO Secretary General Stoltenberg proposed that NATO should play a larger role in coordinating the military assistance given to Ukraine and establish a Ukraine assistance fund for the next 5 years. The aim was to secure coordination, predictability, and long-term financing of the Alliance's assistance to Ukraine, particularly in view of the uncertainty over future US support after the US elections in November 2024.[63] At the July 2024 Washington summit, allies agreed to establish a new mission called the NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine (NSATU), which will consist of a command element at the US HQ in Wiesbaden and logistics nodes on the eastern flank to coordinate the military assistance and training of Ukrainian armed forces.[64] While failing to commit to a multiyear fund, allies pledged to provide military assistance to Ukraine amounting to a minimum of EUR 40 billion in 2025.[65]

There are a few noteworthy trends in the West's military support to Ukraine. The first trend is how the types of weapons and weapon systems delivered to Ukraine have progressed over time. During the first months of the war, allies hesitated to send Ukraine heavier weaponry due to fears of escalation. Generally, this meant that primarily shorter-range weapons and lighter arms, or Soviet-era systems already in Ukraine's inventory, such as tanks and infantry fighting vehicles (IFVs), were provided. From spring 2022, deliveries of various unmanned systems, loitering munitions, and air-defence systems became more prominent. By summer 2022, some highly qualified Western materiel, such as the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System (HIMARS), started appearing in assistance packages.

In winter 2022 and early spring 2023, allies began providing Western main battle tanks (MBTs), alongside IFVs and APCs.[66] By summer 2023, Ukraine received

the first deliveries of long-range precision-strike weapons. The UK and France provided the Storm Shadow/SCALP air-launched cruise missile (ALCM), which had an operational range of about 250 kilometres, in the Ukrainian theatre.[67] In October 2023, the US followed suit and delivered a small quantity of Army Tactical Missile Systems (ATACMS). The first tranche included missiles with a range of 165 kilometres; the second tranche, delivered in March 2024, comprised missiles capable of striking from 300 kilometres.[68] By October 2023, preparations began to supply F-16 fighter aircraft, including the training of Ukrainian pilots. The first aircraft were transferred to Ukraine in the summer of 2024.[69] The trend has been that allies have provided more long-range systems to Ukraine over time.

The second trend, much related to the first, relates to how the West has increasingly downplayed the risks of escalation, as the incremental changes to Western assistance have not been met by Russian counteractions. Overall, the allies have tried to balance between two conflicting priorities: supporting Ukraine for as long as it takes while avoiding a direct confrontation between Russia and NATO.

However, the process of overcoming the fear of escalation has been cumbersome and led to intra-Alliance criticism. These disagreements, sometimes publicly expressed, have harmed Western cohesion. Some analysts contend that media fixation around these disagreements has made efforts to assist Ukraine seem more tenuous and vulnerable than they perhaps are.[70] In May 2024, the US and Germany, the allies most prone to stressing the risk of escalation, declared their support for Ukrainian attacks on military targets across the border, on Russian territory, to stop Russian advances in the Kharkiv area.[71] A future step, proposed by Emmanuel Macron in spring 2024, is to allow allied maintenance and training personnel to operate in Ukraine to free Ukrainian personnel and enable them to join frontline operations.[72]

The third trend is the way the size and content of Western support have increasingly affected the allies' national capabilities. This explains the increasingly difficult national discussions to maintain a balance between governments' national security priorities to support Ukraine and national armed forces' unwillingness to shed themselves of important capabilities. Discussions about the assistance to Ukraine also reflect differing perspectives on the best strategy to handle the threat posed by Russia. Views are split between those who propagate for providing increased support to Ukraine to degrade and defeat Russia in the short term and those who prefer a buildup of national capabilities to handle Russia's reconstituted military capability in the long term.

In addition to weapons and ammunition, the West has provided significant intelligence support and military training to Ukrainian forces, with the US playing a key role in delivering this intelligence support. Reportedly, Ukrainian long-range fires and precision strikes have relied upon data provided by the US.[73]

Western nations are also training Ukrainian forces, primarily in the UK, Germany, and Poland. The UK-led Operation Interflex aimed to have trained 40,000 Ukrainian soldiers by mid-2024. Meanwhile, the EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine (EUMAM Ukraine) expected to have trained 60,000 soldiers by the summer of 2024.[74] However, in some cases, Ukrainians have raised concerns about the relevance of the training provided, given that their tactical and operational challenges differ from Western training conditions.[75]

In sum, the Alliance and individual allies' response to Russia's war against Ukraine illustrate how NATO's strategy is formed in a crisis. Even though an armed attack on allied territory would put the Alliance under more direct strain, political differences and disagreements in handling Russia's war on Ukraine may be illustrative of intra-Alliance bargaining that is unavoidable in any crisis. The allies are likely to differ in their views on how ambitious the Alliance should be when it comes to reassuring exposed allies and deterring an external adversary from escalation. Furthermore, except for a small number of joint assets, NATO depends on the reinforcement capabilities of individual allies. Deployments can be undertaken both bilaterally and through NATO frameworks and operations.

3.3 Plans for a new strategy post-2022

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine prompted NATO to adapt its defence posture further. This section provides an overview of the political decisions forming the Alliance's new strategy, as well as NATO enlargement and partnerships, while Chapters 4 and 5 will assess the content of the new strategy and its implications toward 2030.

A more robust defence posture

Since 2014, the Alliance has been gradually developing reassurance and deterrence measures, built on a tripwire forward presence combined with a rapid reinforcement capability. Post-2022, NATO sought a more robust

defence posture, including more forward-deployed forces.[76]

At the June 2022 Madrid summit, allies adopted the 2022 Strategic Concept, which singles out Russia as the most significant and direct threat to allies' security.[77] The Strategic Concept stresses that the Alliance will strengthen its posture and ensure a substantial and persistent presence on land, at sea, and in the air. It will "deter and defend forward with robust in-place, multi-domain, combat-ready forces, enhanced command and control arrangements, prepositioned ammunition and equipment, and improved capacity and infrastructure to rapidly reinforce any Ally, including at short or no notice."[78]

The transition toward a more robust defence posture is possible due to a more consolidated assessment of the threat from Russia post-February 2022. However, leading up to the Madrid summit, allies' views on NATO's future posture and their ability to deliver on new commitments still differed. Some eastern flank allies argued for a strategy of forward defence reminiscent of the Cold War and for a permanent, large-scale presence on the eastern flank.[79] The strategic concept's compromise focuses on *defending forward* rather than forward defence and on *persistent presence* instead of permanent presence. It is not evident what this compromise language means for NATO's future force posture. However, in essence, NATO wants to deploy more forces forward, suggesting that it is aiming for deterrence by denial.[80]

The Madrid summit defined a new baseline for NATO's posture. The summit communiqué states that the Alliance will now "defend every inch of Allied territory at all times." NATO committed to increasing its presence on the eastern flank, from the existing eight battlegroups to brigade-size units "where and when required." This formulation allows for flexibility and reflects the fact that allies have varying abilities to meet these requirements. In addition, the forward presence will be underpinned by further reinforcements; prepositioned equipment; enhanced command and control, including improved and effective division-level command structures along the eastern flank; and collective-defence exercises.[81]

NATO also adopted a new force model, NFM, to develop the force structure for deterrence and defence, including better readiness and a greater number of troops potentially available to SACEUR. To many allies' surprise, the Secretary-General declared that NATO aimed to replace the existing NATO Response Force, consisting of 40,000 troops, with 300,000 soldiers at 30 days readiness.[82]

One year later, at the 2023 NATO summit in Vilnius, allies decided to strengthen the Alliance's force posture further. The allies agreed on new operations plans, which set the operational requirements for NATO's force structure and guided its force development. Allies committed to fully resourcing the plans with national forces and strengthening command and control, which included raising JFC Norfolk's operational capability to that of JFC Brunssum and Naples. The allies also committed to exercises to practice implementation of the new operations plans, including by demonstrating their ability to scale-up the eastern-flank forward presence. To strengthen NATO's Integrated Air and Missile Defence (IAMD), the allies agreed to regularly train and establish a rotational presence of air-defence systems across NATO's territory. Furthermore, as part of the new force model, the allies agreed to establish a new Allied Reaction Force.[83]

At the 2024 Washington summit, NATO took stock of the decisions taken at the Madrid and Vilnius summits to strengthen its force posture. The Alliance reported progress in integrating the forward land forces (FLF) on the eastern flank, including the previous enhanced Forward Presence (eFP), national command structures, and the new allies, Finland and Sweden, into the operations plans. Allies announced that NATO would establish a presence in Finland. Furthermore, NATO updated its IAMD policy and announced the completion of the Aegis Ashore site in Redzikowo, enhancing NATO's ballistic-missile defence.[84]

In sum, decisions taken since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 have led to further adaptation of NATO's force posture. NATO is moving from a limited forward presence and deterrence by reinforcement, post-2014, towards more forward-deployed forces, post-2022. The ambition to defend every inch of NATO territory by strengthening the forward presence on the eastern flank and the capability for reinforcement suggest that NATO is aiming for a strategy of deterrence by denial, which constitutes a major undertaking that will affect NATO up to 2030.

NATO enlargement and regional partnerships

Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine prompted Finland and Sweden to conduct a fundamental review of their respective security policies. Both countries, along with many others, were alarmed by Russia's demands in December 2021. The two countries interpreted these demands as violating the European security order's principles and the sovereign right of countries to decide their security

policy. Russia's subsequent invasion of Ukraine demonstrated to both populations and political parties the limits of military non-alignment, revealing how exposed their countries were to Russian aggression. At the virtual summit on 25 February 2022, NATO had already decided to give Sweden and Finland increased access to meetings and intelligence.[85]

In the weeks following the invasion, domestic political discussions and consultations with NATO and major allies intensified. The Finnish and Swedish governments initiated assessments of the deteriorating security situation, which were published in April and May 2022, respectively.[86] Even though Finland's strategic reassessment was conducted more quickly than Sweden's, the countries attempted to align their respective processes. With broad parliamentary support, both countries' governments applied for NATO membership in May 2022. Most allies supported them, but Turkey voiced concerns regarding the countries' efforts to counter terrorism. Turkey's President Erdogan was also suspected of linking the acceptance of NATO enlargement to the Turkish presidential elections and a future US sale of F-16 fighter aircraft.[87] Following negotiations, Turkey, Finland, and Sweden signed a trilateral memorandum in the run-up to the Madrid summit in June 2022, paving the way for the decision on July 5, 2022, to invite Finland and Sweden to become NATO members.

In most NATO countries, the ratification process was remarkably swift, but Hungary and Turkey lingered. Finland eventually became NATO's 31st member on April 4, 2023. Following further negotiations leading up to the Vilnius summit in July 2023 and a new trilateral statement, this time between Turkey, Sweden, and the NATO Secretary-General, President Erdogan agreed to forward the Swedish accession protocol to the Turkish parliament. At the time, Erdogan publicly linked the parliamentary approval to a possible US sale of F-16 fighter aircraft. After ratification by the Turkish and Hungarian parliaments, Sweden became NATO's 32nd member on March 7, 2024.[88]

Finland and Sweden's membership alters NATO's geostrategic position in the northeast. Finland and Sweden are both Baltic Sea states with an interest in securing maritime traffic and the Baltic States' territorial integrity. The two countries are also Arctic states with an important role in defending the land domain in the High North and indirectly protecting the sea lines of communication in the North Atlantic. However, in other respects, the countries will likely perform separate roles within NATO due to their different geostrategic positions.

As a frontline state, Finland will fill an important role in upholding a capability for deterrence and defence against Russia and in receiving allied reinforcements. At the same time, being more peripherally located from Western Europe, Finland needs to ensure its security of supply.[89] Sweden will be more of a rear area in NATO, facilitating reception and staging of allied forces and transportation of reinforcements and supplies further east. Sweden will also play a key role in regional deterrence and defence efforts by providing reinforcements to neighbouring allies and contributing to NATO's maritime efforts in the North Atlantic and the Baltic and North Seas, as well as to NATO's integrated air and missile defence. Now that all Nordic countries are NATO allies, common operations planning within the Alliance framework will be a natural next step. Operational cooperation is already ongoing bilaterally between Sweden and Finland and trilaterally with Norway, constituting important building blocks for future efforts.[90]

According to the 2022 Strategic Concept, NATO will strengthen its ties with partners that share the Alliance's values and interest in upholding the rules-based international order. In the Euro-Atlantic region, the focus has turned more toward supporting partners in the Black Sea region and the Western Balkans, which NATO considers strategically important.[91] NATO reiterates these countries' right to decide their future foreign-policy course, free from outside interference. The Alliance's relation with Ukraine is close, and NATO continues to support the Euro-Atlantic aspirations of Ukraine, Georgia, and Bosnia Herzegovina. In addition, NATO has increased its support to constitutionally neutral Moldova to strengthen its security and defence capabilities and national resilience.

At the 2023 Vilnius summit, the allies openly disagreed on whether to give Ukraine a timeline for membership. Instead, the Alliance's compromise was to upgrade the NATO-Ukraine Commission to a Council of more equal standing and publicly state that Ukraine's interoperability and political integration with NATO had surpassed the need for a MAP.[92] The G7 countries and several co-signatories decided to formalise their long-term security commitments to Ukraine in the form of bilateral agreements that, although important politically, do not go as far as Ukraine and several other countries had hoped.[93]

In the lead-up to the 2024 Washington summit, Ukraine's NATO membership was again the focus of much debate. While many allies wanted a clear commitment to Ukraine's future membership, several members continued to oppose a timetable. In the end, the allies agreed to continue to support Ukraine on

its "irreversible path to full Euro-Atlantic integration, including NATO membership"[94]

The allies are likely to continue to disagree on Ukraine's future membership in the Alliance, at least while the war continues and possibly even after the cessation of hostilities, largely depending on the outcome of the war. Some allies are cautious to avoid the risk of direct confrontation between NATO and Russia, while others stress the need for further Ukrainian governance reforms. Experts have also pointed to difficulties in planning for the collective defence of Ukraine.[95]

3.4 Conclusion — Patterns and plans of a new strategy

This chapter shows that NATO is undergoing a major transformation from out-of-area crisis management operations to deterrence and defence of NATO territory as its primary task. In the period 2014–2024, NATO gradually adapted its posture from a limited forward presence coupled with a rapid reinforcement capability to a more robust posture. The post-2022 strategy entails plans for both a strengthened forward presence and a capability for larger-scale reinforcements, including an ability to conduct better-sustained operations.

At the same time, the pattern of NATO's adaptation since 2014 illustrates the intra-alliance bargaining and compromises involved in strategy-making in the Alliance. The allies are likely to continue to have different views on how ambitious the Alliance should be when it comes to forward deployments on the eastern flank, providing military support to Ukraine, and future NATO enlargement. Furthermore, as NATO depends on the national capabilities of all allies to resource its plans, there are several challenges to implementing NATO's far-reaching ambitions to "defend every inch of allied territory" in the coming years.

First, NATO intends to reinforce the eight eFP battlegroups on the eastern flank at short notice with forces up to brigade size when and where required. The ambition to defend forward will require that framework nations identify and produce high-readiness forces, establish forward command elements, pre-position stocks and ammunition, and regularly conduct force deployment exercises. The rapid-reaction brigades, furthermore, need to be able to integrate with host nations' forces at the divisional level. In the coming years, the development of these high-readiness brigades will be a major undertaking for NATO.

Second, NATO wants to increase the pool of forces able to reinforce the forward presence. The NATO Force Model aims to have 300,000 soldiers ready within 30 days and a further 500,000 soldiers within six months. Russia's war against Ukraine has demonstrated the need for heavy land-warfare capabilities and revealed NATO's shortages of manpower, equipment, and supplies, especially for ground operations. Thus, NATO allies need to improve the availability of existing units, expand force structures, and match manoeuvre units with combat support, such as ISR, EW, artillery, air defence, and UAVs. Furthermore, there is a need for more logistics support, ammunition stocks, and large-scale exercises. While NATO allies have begun to fill important capability gaps, including the acquisition of long-range precision fires and air defences, expanding the ground forces will take time. Recruitment and personnel retention continue to be problematic in many countries.[96]

Third, the support delivered to Ukraine has depleted Western stocks of certain types of ammunition and weapon systems. Russia's war has demonstrated the need to be able to regenerate during a conflict. However, Western production facilities seem unable to rapidly scale-up to the required level. Additionally, European allies depend on the US defence industry, particularly regarding air defences, strategic transport, and ISR.

The Alliance's ability to achieve its task of deterrence and defence up to 2030 will largely depend on how NATO and its members can resource its ambitious plans and, in other words, connect the ends, ways, and means of its emerging strategy. ■

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4. NATO's evolving strategic ends and plans

Albin Aronsson

Since 2022, the Alliance has accelerated its adaptation efforts to strengthen its ability to fulfil the task of deterrence and defence. This includes producing and approving several important documents and plans that will guide the Alliance toward 2030.

This chapter takes a top-down approach to the Alliance's strategy. It starts by dissecting the Alliance's expressions of strategy and deciphering its three core tasks, focusing on how NATO understands its task of deterrence and defence. This is followed by a description and analysis of the Alliance's operations planning, i.e., its concrete planning for the use of military forces, including nuclear planning. The aim is explanation and contextualisation rather than detailed assessments of the plans' viability. The final section addresses how NATO's strategy documents and plans align to achieve the task of deterrence and defence up to 2030.

4.1 Balancing political possibility and military needs

NATO has several strategy documents. The highest-ranking document is the Strategic Concept, produced in eight editions since the first classified version in 1949. The concept's role is to provide political guidance to the Alliance's civilian and military bureaucracy and, since it became public in the 1990s, demonstrate cohesion among the Alliance's members, as well as contribute to deterrence towards present and future adversaries. Based on recent editions, its life expectancy is around a decade. The Alliance has various strategy documents that are subordinate to the Strategic Concept. This section describes and analyses the Alliance's strategic concept, the subordinate NATO Military Strategy, and the 2020 Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area (DDA Concept). The following text discusses these documents in their hierarchical order rather than in the order the Alliance approved them.

A clearer hierarchy of documents

Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea and intervention in Eastern Ukraine marked an important course shift for NATO. However, the absence of a sufficiently unifying threat perception and fears of internal friction, partly due to the Trump administration's criticism of the Alliance and its members, made significant reforms difficult, with the allies unable to agree on updating the 2010 strategic concept.

Russia's 2022 attack on Ukraine, however, prompted the Alliance to undertake revisions to the Strategic Concept, which had been under development since 2021, formally adopting it in the summer of that year. The concept clearly defines Russia as NATO's main adversary, a significant shift from the old concept's description of Russia as a partner.[1]

The approval and publication of the 2022 Strategic Concept achieve a significant degree of coherence at the politico-military level. However, for several years, there was a problem: the subordinate documents, the NATO Military Strategy (NMS) and the DDA Concept, had been agreed upon before the Strategic Concept. From an ideal top-down approach, it would have been more logical for the Strategic Concept to precede the NMS and the DDA Concept, providing political and strategic direction. However, this may also be seen as consistent with Chapter 2's description of how Alliance strategy formulation has historically transpired. It has seldom followed an ideal, or rational, top-down process. In this case, the NMS and DDA can be seen as patterns that proved successful and to which the 2022 Strategic Concept lent political approval.

NATO's 2019 Military Strategy — A theatre-wide approach

In 2019, the United States (US), United Kingdom (UK), and the Alliance's international staff managed to prompt the Alliance to agree to a new classified NATO Military Strategy (NMS), the first of its kind since the Cold War. Still in place, the strategy describes an international security environment beset by strategic competition, pervasive instability, and strategic shocks. Importantly, it identifies two main threats to the Alliance: Russia and international terrorism.

The NMS focuses on the strategic-operational level and the conceptual organisation of the Alliance's units to reinforce deterrence against Russia. The NMS's main contribution seems to be that it takes a more comprehensive approach to NATO's tasks. It includes a so-called 360-degree perspective, specifies the threats, and describes what is required by the Alliance to address those threats, presently and into the future. This may have facilitated the Alliance's planning and execution of military operations, which previously had to be developed without sufficient high-level guidance.

The NMS was anchored in the Alliance's overarching strategy of deterrence by punishment, but as previously alluded to, it introduced a theatre-wide approach and the possibility of posing strategic dilemmas for the adversary, including the possibility of "horizontal escalation." NATO would no longer compartmentalise its attention and forces between separate areas, moving instead — in theory, at least — seamlessly across the Alliance's territory.[2]

Despite its authoritative name, the NMS's role is toned down within the Alliance for somewhat unclear reasons. The NMS was endorsed by NATO's military structures but not by the political structures, and some members merely "noted" it.[3] However, our interview respondents suggested that the NMS is sufficiently consistent with subordinate documents to ensure that their implementation is not disturbed.[4]

The DDA Concept — The missing link?

Perhaps partly due to the NMS's subdued role, in 2020 the Alliance agreed to a major military document called the Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area. The DDA Concept is supposed to implement the military strategy by further identifying which military effects would be desirable in peace, crisis, and war in the Alliance's different geographic regions. Moreover, the DDA Concept highlights that almost all military activities can in some way contribute to the Alliance's aims, both in peace and in crisis, in order to deter an adversary from initiating hostilities.[5]

The DDA Concept guides a number of operations plans referred to as the "family of plans," a notion analysed in Section 4.2, below. The DDA Concept is the basis for SACEUR's Strategic Directive (SSD), which concerns NATO's peacetime planning, operations, and activities; and SACEUR's Area of Responsibility-Wide Strategic Plan (SASP), which involves NATO's crisis and wartime planning. According to one of its authors, the DDA Concept provides the missing link of actual strategy: the link between the political objectives and the military instruments.[6]

NATO's Warfighting Capstone Concept (NWCC) accompanies the DDA Concept and straddles NATO strategy, operations planning, and defence planning.[7] The NWCC describes the future operating environment of NATO's armed forces and argues how those forces should adapt toward the year 2040. It is mainly designed to assist the member states' defence-planning process in the long term, but interview respondents suggested that it is also meant to inspire the implementation of the DDA Concept and the family of plans.

The NWCC argues that in the future NATO's forces should have cognitive superiority, layered resilience, influence and power projection, cross-domain command, and integrated multi-domain defence. These latter terms are likely references to the concept and doctrine of Multi-Domain Operations (MDO) and Digital Transformation that SACEUR is reportedly working on. Given its phrasing and content, the NWCC's relevance to the Alliance has been questioned in general, and particularly in terms of its impact on the short-term implementation of NATO planning.[8] It is possible to imagine that in the future the Alliance may tone down the NWCC.

Nevertheless, NATO now appears to have achieved a higher degree of coherence in its higher-level strategy documents; their current hierarchy is illustrated in Figure 4.1.

The threat — Russia and terrorism, and the PRC?

NATO's new strategy documents identify Russia as the most significant threat to the Alliance, but this is unlikely to be a panacea for the Alliance's ability to focus its efforts. During the Cold War, the Soviet Union served as a magnetic pole that managed to reduce the Alliance's many internal and bitter arguments.[9] The fact that the characterisation of Russia is now clear reflects

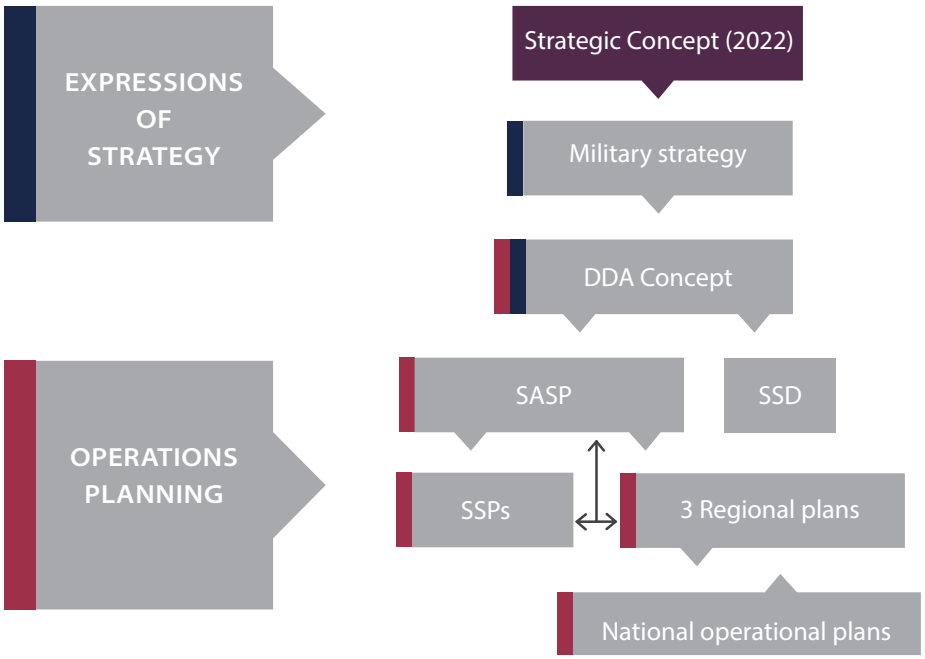


Figure 4.1 NATO's hierarchy of strategy documents

Remarks: SASP: SACEUR's Area of Responsibility-wide Strategic Plan. SSD: SACEUR's Strategic Directive. SSP: Subordinate Strategic Plan.

Source: Author and designed by Karin Blext.

how far the Alliance has come since 2014. Indeed, a simplistic first impression might suggest that it is possible that Russia will fill the function that the Soviet Union served during the Cold War.

This is unlikely for several reasons, however. The Alliance still suffers from being a large, significantly more heterogeneous group of countries than was the case during the Cold War. The allies still hold diverging views on Russia.[10] Some of this stems from the fact that Russia is considerably weaker than the Soviet Union was. Russia is arguably not capable of conquering Europe in the way the Soviet Union once was perceived to be. The Soviet Union was also much closer geographically to many large European NATO members, and Communism constituted a political threat to allies regardless of geography. In the current situation, some eastern flank members may continue to lobby for a substantial strengthening of the Alliance's military posture against Russia, while other countries may significantly hinder such efforts.[11]

The 2022 Strategic Concept establishes international terrorism as the most direct asymmetric threat to the Alliance. In addition, the strategic documents highlight pervasive instability, illegal migration, and fragile states in northern Africa and the Middle East. This is because many of the member countries around the Mediterranean are more concerned about threats from terrorism and migration than they are about Russia. Indeed, Europe's unstable security environment shows little sign of improving in the near term, which means that the missions the Alliance and its members perform in these regions are likely to continue and risk fragmenting the Alliance's resources in several directions.[12]

For the first time in a strategic concept, the People's Republic of China (PRC) was mentioned in the 2022 Strategic Concept. This was a clear nod to the US, which has worked to get the Alliance to officially recognise the PRC challenge. However, the allies are divided on the subject.[13] France and Germany, together with several smaller members, wanted to avoid depicting the PRC as a threat to the Alliance, instead choosing to describe China as an assertive actor employing a wide range of "malicious" tools.[14] The Alliance took another significant step at the 2024 Washington summit, at which China was labelled a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war in Ukraine.[15]

The extent to which China will affect NATO policy in the coming years is unclear. NATO is deliberating on how to view and respond to China, but it may take years for the Alliance to reach consensus on its approach. If its view of China continues to remain unconsolidated in years to come, the issue may distract the members and negatively affect the Alliance's ability to constructively resolve other issues.[16]

NATO's evolving core tasks

NATO has three core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security. Upon their 2010 codification, the Alliance was supposed to value the three tasks equally.[17] In reality, NATO had already been pursuing these tasks since the early 1990s, but the intensity of effort applied to them has varied over time.

"Deterrence and defence" has historically referred to what the Alliance was established to achieve: deterring and defending against a large-scale attack from a peer adversary in the Euro-Atlantic Area. "Crisis management" refers to NATO's engagement with conflicts outside the Euro-Atlantic Area. "Cooperative security" involves NATO's activities in security policy dialogue, including, for example, mentoring, training, and preparing relevant military forces located in countries adjacent to the Alliance's territory and globally. The central idea of these latter two core tasks has been to contribute to "project stability."[18] Beginning in 2014, the deterrence and defence task gradually received greater attention, much due to the start of the Russian aggression in Ukraine.

The strategy documents produced in the last few years have expectedly raised the importance of deterrence and defence, but the Alliance still values crisis management and cooperative security. Many allies are frustrated with what was actually accomplished in Afghanistan and by the *circa* 20 years of out-of-area operations, and this would suggest that those allies would wish to limit their engagement in crisis management and cooperative security.[19] This may be true for some allies, but the Alliance will also take a more central role in the coordination and execution of support for Ukraine and other vulnerable countries on Russia's borders, activities that fall under the task of cooperative security.

The Alliance as competitor and the risk of overextension

The Alliance's strategic-level doctrinal publications provide further context and explanation of the task of deterrence and defence at a level not found in the politically charged Strategic Concept. The December 2022 Allied Joint Doctrine Publication (AJP-01), NATO's highest doctrine, describes deterrence and defence as NATO's "primary responsibility" and as "preventing adversaries' hard power strategies."[20] This is a significant change from the last 25 years but is unsurprising given the 2022 Russian invasion of Ukraine. However, what is intriguing is the higher level of coherence between NATO's official communication and these doctrinal publications. Several points are noteworthy.

The first point of note is the doctrine's elaboration of what it calls the "continuum of competition," described as the continuous state between cooperation, rivalry, confrontation, and armed conflict.[21] This notion of competition between the Alliance and its adversaries seems to align well with the DDA Concept and its design, as well as the subordinate SSD and SASP. Previous doctrinal publications have mentioned this

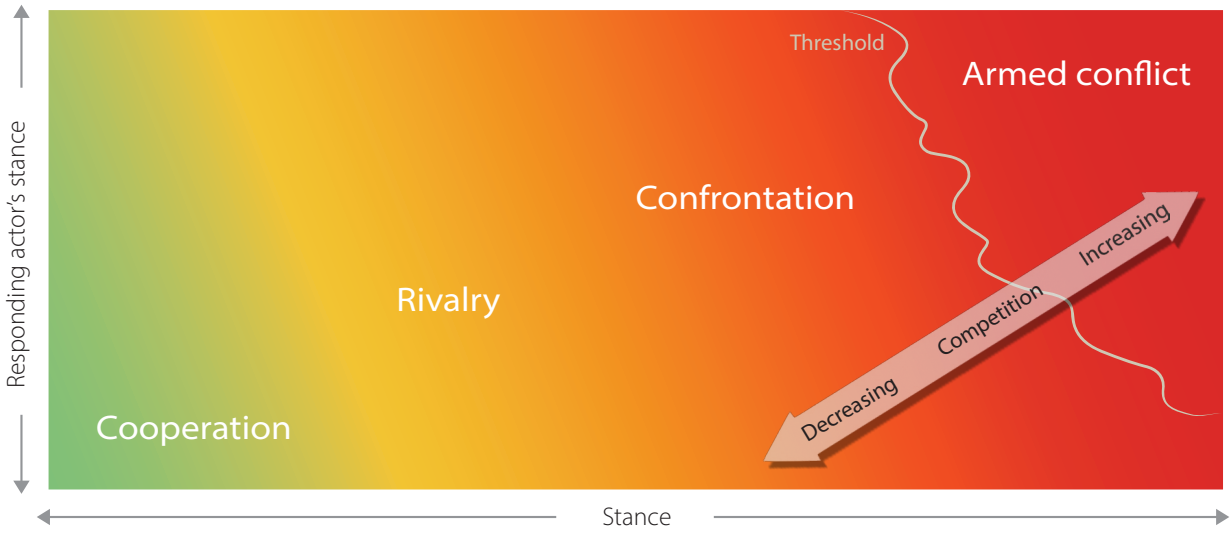


Figure 4.2 The continuum of competition
Source: NATO Standardization office, Allied JointPublication (AJP-01), (Brussels: NATO Standardization office, 2022), 11. Tailored by Karin Blext.

continuum in various forms, but the thinking behind it appears to have affected the DDA Concept at a previously unseen level.[22]

The DDA Concept stresses that the Alliance's strategies and plans should enable its forces to be ready and able to act in the various stages, from green to dark red, shown in Figure 4.2. Furthermore, NATO's doctrine explains and codifies deterrence as operating continuously up to the outbreak of conflict. The doctrine elaborates and views the terms cooperation, rivalry, and confrontation as encompassing three main types of deterrence: general deterrence, tailored deterrence, and immediate deterrence (the orange area immediately prior to the outbreak of war); and then defence, as shown in Figure 4.3. It is worth noting that it is unclear how these categories relate to deterrence by punishment and denial, as mentioned in Chapter 1.

General deterrence is continuous deterrence, day by day, year by year, between actors. "Tailored deterrence" refers to a situation when a potential rival becomes an actual rival with clear offensive intentions and has perhaps shown some inclination to use violence to reach its goals, which in turn requires the design, or tailoring, of a specific set of deterrence capabilities. Tailored, and later immediate deterrence, become particularly relevant when an adversary is perceived to be on the verge of committing to aggression.[23]

Why is this important? If the DDA Concept and the family of plans were actually to conform to the Alliance's doctrine, then the Alliance should have plans for how to operate, deploy, and engage its forces at various levels through the continuum of conflict, perhaps to rival an adversary, to confront it, and to defend against it. Moreover, it would have a clear allocation of tasks and distribution of military units to fulfil these various stages of deterrence and, ultimately, of defence, across the continuum of competition. What these specific tasks are and where they would be fulfilled would, out of necessity, be confidential. Hints can be derived from, e.g., the location of exercises and vigilance activities, but would only be part of the puzzle. Recently released public information about the Alliance's new Military Alert System, which aims to replace the old Crisis Response System, seems to validate NATO's evolving perspective on deterrence and defence.[24] The new military alert system appears to have specified alerts that correspond to specific tasks for the Alliance's forces across the competition continuum.[25] In sum, the conceptual understanding of this "continuum of competition" facilitates an understanding of how the DDA Concept and subordinate plans are structured and meant to work and how the Alliance's forces are to act across the continuum.

In this regard, NATO's strategies and doctrines have a few potentially problematic features. First, how are the delimitations between the various stages of cooperation, rivalry, confrontation, and armed conflict constructed, motivated, and decided? This might be particularly acute in a (potentially) escalating situation:

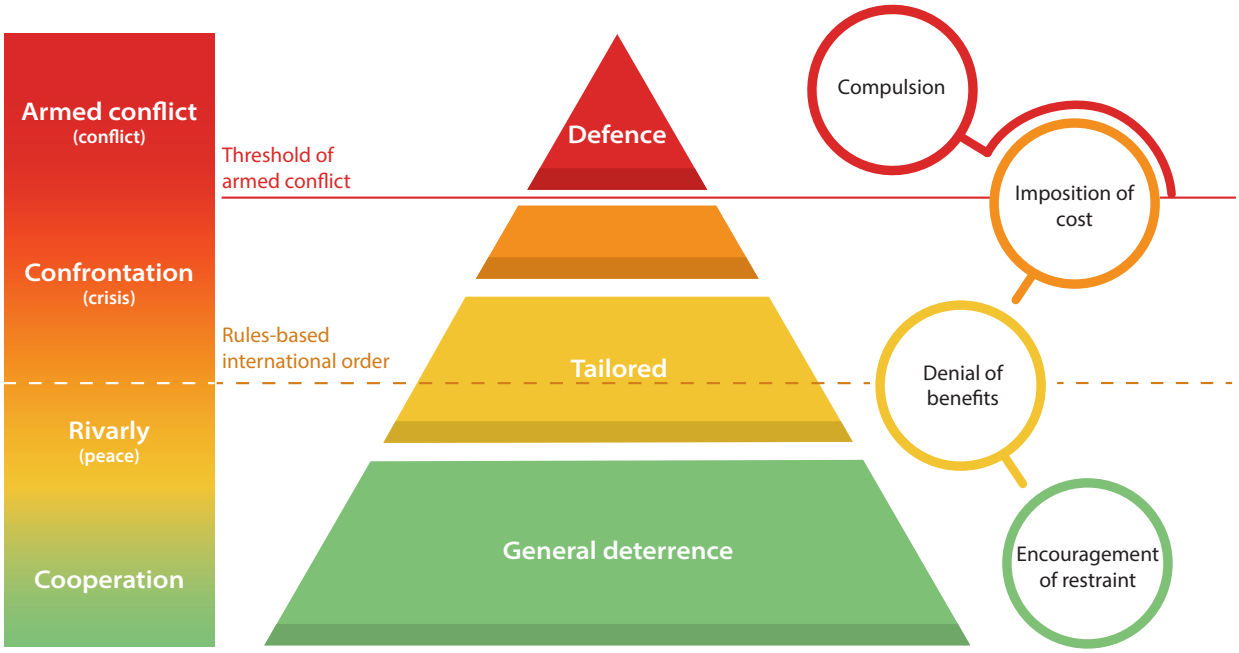


Figure 4.3 Deterrence and defence in the continuum of competition

Source: NATO Standardization office, Allied JointPublication (AJP-01), (Brussels: NATO Standardization office, 2022), 50. Tailored by Karin Blext.

Who decides when, and based on what, to conceptually move into tailored deterrence and then immediate deterrence and perhaps back to general deterrence? This pertains directly to SACEUR's mandate. As previously noted, the activation of the Alliance's operations plans in February 2022 transferred the command of 40,000 NATO troops to SACEUR. Presumably, in the new plans and the NATO Force Model, which Chapter 5 details, there ought to be clear demarcations of when more troops or materiel would, or at least should, be subordinated to SACEUR.

Perhaps the most problematic feature of the NMS and DDA Concept's emphasis on the continuum of competition is the risk that the Alliance's forces overextend themselves. It is expensive in terms of time, financial resources, and readiness to use military forces to respond to various types of perceived aggression and along the competition continuum. It risks focussing the armed forces' effort on the wrong type of task, potentially leaving it insufficiently prepared for when and in case 'the big war' starts.

The forces that are more appropriate to respond to Russian sub-threshold activities, for example, sabotage and espionage, are likely the coast guard, the police, and other types of security forces. Currently, the burden-sharing between the Alliance's military forces and various other security forces may be insufficiently clear.

In this regard, Russia imposes upon NATO a difficult strategic dilemma. If NATO would not respond to Russia's various forms of sub-threshold aggression, then that could become costly in terms of deterrence-signalling. At worst, Russia and other actors could view it as an invitation to further aggression. However, it is unclear whether NATO has chosen the most appropriate response. The Alliance may have to delineate more clearly between military and security forces' tasks, so as not to risk exhausting the Alliance's forces in the coming years.[26]

4.2 Operations plans — Work in progress

NATO's operations planning refers to the planning for the use of the Alliance's armed forces across the continuum of competition, from peace to crisis to armed conflict, to respond to threats against the Alliance.[27]

NATO has two categories of operations planning: advance planning and crisis-response planning. Advance planning is about threats and contingencies that can be identified beforehand, e.g., Russia could theoretically attempt to attack the Baltic States. Crisis-response planning prepares for emerging and unexpected crises and events.[28] Advance planning is the focus of this section.

Unfortunately, for research purposes but also for security reasons, little is known publicly about the specific content of NATO's operations plans. Therefore, it is necessary to consider what the plans generally need to contain to be effective. All types of operations planning involve some amount of qualified guesswork. Plans can never hope to be fully accurate regarding the scenario(s) for which they are developed, the type of attack or threat that is levelled against NATO, and the type of forces and operations that would be needed and available to counter those threats and attacks.[29]

The plans must nevertheless suggest the possible and, importantly, the most dangerous scenarios. The plans need to specify and provide tentative responses to the following questions: Who is the threatening actor? What type of threat (e.g., air attacks) might that actor level against NATO? What might that actor hope to achieve, and in what timeframe at specific locations or across a theatre? Most importantly, the plans need to specify the actions and forces that NATO can use to counter the threatening actor's activities.[30]

Logically, then, if we surmise that NATO's plans hope to be effective, they likely contain rather detailed, most-likely scenarios covering all of the above factors and probably several more. Concretely, the plans likely allocate the combined military assets at SACEUR's disposal to the regional plans according to need and suitability. Ideally, military assets should generally not be double-counted, i.e., allocated to different plans that may have to be activated simultaneously, as was previously the case. Some capabilities that can be moved quickly or are in short supply will, however, out of necessity, have more than one task.

The new family of plans

Until the summer of 2023, the Alliance had four categories of advance plans: standing defence plans (SDP), graduated response plans (GRP), contingency plans, and generic contingency plans, of varying degrees of development and executability.[31] One of the major deliveries of the 2023 Vilnius summit was the approval of the strategic level and, as developed, the operational level of the Alliance's new operations plans.[32]

There are now two large strategic advance-operations plans: SACEUR's Strategic Directive (SSD), which refers to peacetime activities, and SACEUR's Area of Responsibility-wide Strategic Plan (SASP),

which deals with the planning for times of crisis and war. One of the 2022 Strategic Concept's key phrases is "The Euro-Atlantic area is not at peace."[33] This conveys that parts of the SASP may be active and would indicate that the Alliance views the current situation with Russia as being at a heightened degree of competition intensity (see previous section on the continuum of competition).

Three regional plans (RP) and seven domain plans, called Subordinate Strategic Plans (SSP), are subordinate to the SASP. The three regional plans are, as their names indicate, geographically organised.[34] The SSPs are plans for the Alliance's five warfighting domains: air, sea, land, space, and cyber, as well as a special reinforcement and special-operations plan.[35] Nuclear plans may be kept separately or be part of the air-domain plan.[36]

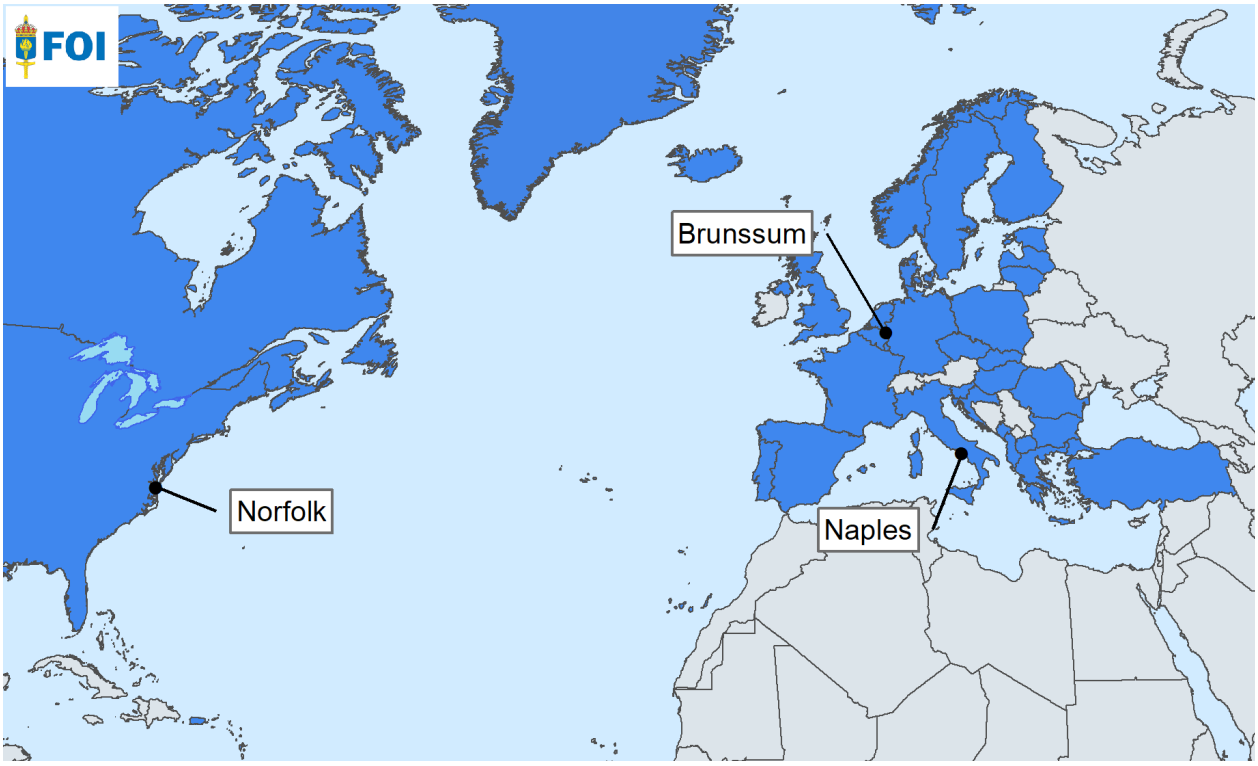
The regional plans — Northwest, Central, South

The first regional plan covers the Northwest part of the Alliance, the North Atlantic, including the Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom gap (GIUK), parts of the Arctic, and northern Europe. The US-based Joint Force Command Norfolk is the assigned command HQ. The main contributors in military resources to this plan are likely to be the US, UK, the Nordic countries, and to some degree France, given that country's naval and air capabilities. Important to note, however, is that all NATO countries could conceivably contribute to all three regional plans.

The Northwest plan's development is dependent on several issues. Two examples are the JFC Norfolk's staffing and resourcing and the question of where the dividing line between the Northwest plan and the Central plan will ultimately be drawn. These issues are further analysed in Chapter 5.

The second regional plan covers the central and eastern parts of the Alliance, including at least the Baltic countries, Poland, and other countries located north of the Alps.[37] The Netherlands-based JFC Brunssum is the assigned command. The main contributors in military resources are likely to be the US, Germany, France, and the countries that the plan covers geographically, including Poland.

JFC Brunssum, as of autumn 2023, is the largest of the JFCs and has the most resources, which is logical for several reasons. The Baltic States are the most exposed and vulnerable NATO members, given their



Map 4.2 Europe and the North Atlantic, with Joint Force Commands (JFC)
Source: Pär Wikström, FOI.

small size and lack of strategic depth, while the remaining eastern NATO members are of course located either adjacent to Russia or bordering Ukraine and or Belarus.

The third regional plan covers the Alliance's southern territory, likely including the countries surrounding the Mediterranean and Black Seas. Italy-based JFC Naples is the assigned command.[38] If a Russian threat were to manifest itself on the central front (the most likely scenario), actions in the southern plan would likely serve as complements to the other plans and enable NATO to pose strategic dilemmas for Russia or even cut it off entirely from the Mediterranean, without the southern area being the main theatre of operations.

One of the Alliance's weaknesses after the Cold War was the loss of regional focus. The Alliance gradually discarded the regional sections of the old General Defence Plan(s) and instead developed the graduated response plans (GRPs). For several reasons, the GRPs were not synchronised. One drawback was that military assets were double-counted, i.e., they figured in several plans simultaneously. The NATO Response Force (NRF) could be used in all GRPs and in other defence plans, but as there was only one NRF, this would have been a problem if conflict had erupted in several places simultaneously. With the approval of the new regional plans, NATO has taken a major step forward. The ability to execute these plans with the available resources, however, remains an issue and is further analysed in Chapter 5.[39]

The SSPs — From space to the ocean floor

The domain/functional plans (Subordinate Strategic Plans, SSPs) are the thematic equivalent of the regional plans. There are currently separate plans for air, sea, land, special operations, space, and cyber and one special reinforcement plan.[40] The SSPs should be roughly similar in structure, if not in content, to the regional plans (RPs). The Alliance may develop more SSPs in the coming years, and a significant unknown is the degree to which the domain plans are synchronised with the RPs. Evidence suggests that the development of the SSPs transpired before the RPs and that SHAPE is in a process of adjudicating between domain and regional advisors and commanders.[41]

The SSPs are the responsibility of the Alliance's domain-specific commands, that is, Allied Air Command (AIRCOM) in Ramstein, Germany; Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) in Northwood, UK; Allied Land Command (LANDCOM) in Izmir, Turkey; and Special Operations Forces Command (SOFCOM) located at SHAPE and NATO Space Centre under AIRCOM. The SSP Cyber would probably be run from SHAPE via several allied entities.[42]

The SSP Reinforcement likely focusses on the follow-on forces called for in the regional plans. The responsible command would ultimately be SHAPE, but more specific tasks would probably be delegated according to the type and location of the reinforcements. For instance, if the reinforcing troops travel across the Atlantic, JFC Norfolk, together with AIRCOM and MARCOM, would likely be responsible, and so forth. Alternatively, if the forces cross the European mainland, the Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC) would likely have responsibility.

The RPs and SSPs were approved politically by NAC and the Military Committee in the summer of 2023, at some level of completeness, but they probably require much more work.[43] In order to make them executable, they have to result in detailed lower-level planning for assigned forces, as well as for other capabilities and supporting functions, in adaptation to available assets. Given these two large factors — the recent political approval and additional work required, even with having achieved a level of parallel planning — it is reasonable to assume that the Alliance has some distance to travel before the plans are executable and successfully married to the required forces.

Moreover, even if the required forces are available to SACEUR on paper, they may not be sufficiently trained and exercised to be able to deploy and execute the approved plans. In sum, there is probably a considerable gap between the plans' ambitions and the present ability to execute them. Thus, one of the Alliance's main focusses in the coming years will likely be to close this gap.

Nuclear Plans[44]

Nuclear weapons are the anchor of NATO's deterrence, but the Alliance lacks its own nuclear capability. The United States, the UK, and France supply this capability to the Alliance.[45] The US shares non-strategic nuclear weapons with several NATO members, and the latter provide dual-capable aircraft (DCA) for weapons delivery. The Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) is the Alliance's senior body on nuclear matters and SHAPE the planning body for nuclear missions.

Nuclear planning involves several complex steps: establishing the objectives that the actor wants to accomplish by using nuclear weapons; developing and selecting targets, including the requirements those targets place on a possible strike package; choosing the suitable type of weapon and delivery system; marrying target

development and the needed weapons; and lastly, decision-conferencing. Force execution and battle damage assessment follow, and then the process starts again, if needed.[46] The planning process requires an extensive apparatus.

During the Cold War, NATO had well-established mechanisms for these steps. The NPG's role was to decide the "when" regarding the use of nuclear weapons; SHAPE's role was to deliver the "where," that is, the location for conducting the joint nuclear planning, and military forces were responsible for the execution of the orders.

Following the end of the Cold War, however, the Alliance stopped peacetime standing nuclear planning, and the influence and expertise of the bodies responsible declined.[47] The 2023 Vilnius summit's communiqué was therefore significant as it committed the Alliance to "continuing to modernise NATO's nuclear capability and updating planning to increase flexibility and adaptability of the Alliance's nuclear forces. . ."[48]

If the Vilnius communiqué's statement on nuclear deterrence is juxtaposed with the other developments outlined in this report, there is reason to believe that the Alliance has now instructed SACEUR and SHAPE to resume common nuclear planning and for the NPG to be informed and asked to decide on particularly sensitive questions.

Nevertheless, performing the above-mentioned general steps in nuclear planning appears to be an overwhelming task for the comparatively small NATO staff. It is likely that the US and its national command authority (NCA), including Strategic Command (USSTRATCOM), perform the majority of the planning work. They may inform the NPG and SHAPE of parts of that planning.

The Alliance has reportedly strengthened some areas of its nuclear posture and exercises, but whether this means that the nuclear plans are integrated, or at least well-synchronised, with the other operations plans is not publicly available.[49] Nevertheless, efficient integration of nuclear plans into the other plans would likely require extensive information-sharing. Indeed, there are indications that the development and updates of the functional and regional plans were separate from any existing nuclear plans, at least early on.[50] Whether this separation remains is unknown.

The publicly available information on the subject suggests that the Alliance's nuclear planning has a long way to go. This may partly be due to a lingering unwillingness in some capitals and in the Alliance's international staff to become too involved with nuclear matters, despite the rude awakening in recent years to the weapons' relevance.

Coordinating national, bilateral, minilateral, and Alliance planning

One of NATO's key challenges and ambitions is ensuring that the Alliance's plans are coordinated and integrated with the allies' national operations plans, which are primarily intended for their own territories or national strategic goals.

As NATO and the allies adapted to the post-Cold War world, many members gradually thought less about national defence plans. In recent years, NATO member states have improved their national defence plans, but many are only now discovering just how much is required to be able to assemble a credible territorial defence. Variation among allies is considerable.[51] Moreover, the relative lack of synchronisation between allied and national plans was long characterised as a problem for NATO. Members were reluctant to share their national plans and integrate them with those of the Alliance.

In recent years, however, NATO has recommended that members share their national planning to allow the Alliance to build the regional and domain/functional plans on top of member states' plans.[52] In some cases, the synchronisation may be well-advanced, for example, Norway's and the Baltic States', while some allies lag.[53]

Minilateral and bilateral agreements between individual countries are another issue. If these agreements predate NATO's recent plans, they have to be adapted to align reasonably with the former. Otherwise, in a contingency, the plans risk being in conflict with each other. Additionally, some allies may not fully trust the Alliance and may retain their own national plans as a last resort or backup in case the Alliance proves dysfunctional in a crisis. For such scenarios, the US very likely has parallel contingency planning.

In 2024, it is unlikely that the Alliance's various plans and the allies' minilateral, bilateral, and national plans align. Several Alliance members are probably in the process of identifying where and when national requirements conflict with SACEUR's. This could at least be the case for Finland and Sweden.[54] If the Alliance's existing internal political momentum persists, it may overcome this. Nevertheless, aligning all plans, whether multilateral, minilateral, or national, is likely to take considerable time, if it is ultimately resolvable.

4.3 Conclusion — Foundation in place

This chapter suggests that NATO's strategy documents and operations plans support the Alliance's ability to achieve its task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe in several significant ways, but that judiciousness and tenacity will be required in the implementation of the documents and plans.

First, the strategic documents now form a more coherent politico-military approach to the task of deterrence and defence. This represents a significant improvement to the previously fragmented approach. The momentum gained by Russia's large-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 has broken down barriers, revitalised the Alliance's inner life, and allowed it to improve its political, strategic, and conceptual efforts substantially.

The second important way that NATO's strategy documents and plans support the Alliance in achieving its tasks is due to the analytical lens, the continuum of competition, through which it views its relationship with Russia and other threatening actors, and especially how this continuum has affected the Alliance's plans. Within this continuum, it appears that the Alliance's intention is to calibrate the use of its military resources to prepare, compete, rival, confront, and defend against an adversary's attempts to influence the Alliance negatively. The operations planning appears to conform to the new, wider understanding of competition. Questions remain, however, for example, regarding the extent that the plans' practical consequences have trickled down to the allies and their armed forces, especially for peacetime operations.[55] There is a danger that the Alliance has insufficiently grasped the effect that competing in this continuum might have on its members' inevitably limited resources. NATO commanders instructed to compete with Russia will need to be judicial and economical in the use of their resources. Otherwise, the Alliance risks a trap. Namely, Russia could, at comparatively low cost, spur the Alliance to overuse its resources on too many "fronts" at the same time and, in effect, degrade the Alliance's preparation and readiness for high-intensity war.

Third, the Alliance appears to have taken significant forward strides with the development of its operations plans for the credible defence of its members. However, the available evidence and NATO's history suggest that the most challenging part, ensuring the credibility of the plans' execution, remains. The low starting point of many members' armed forces, the detailed planning required, particularly for coordinating and integrating allied and national plans, and the likely need to align regional, domain/functional, and nuclear plans indicate that the Alliance will not reach all its ambitions until 2030.

This chapter's final assessment is nevertheless that NATO in recent years has taken several crucial steps by formulating, agreeing on, and promulgating strategy documents and plans. The foundation of the Alliance's strategy may be in place. The next chapter shows how far NATO has reached in resourcing the newly formulated ends and ways. ■

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5. Allied forces and capabilities

Albin Aronsson, Robert Dalsjö, and Eva Hagström Frisell

In addition to its strategy and plans, NATO must possess the required means to be able to achieve the established ends and ways that the previous chapter covered. This chapter thus concentrates on the allied forces and the command and control arrangements available to NATO.

This chapter first describes, explains, and analyses the processes through which the Alliance identifies the forces it intends to use for operations and how it develops those forces for future needs. The next section, 5.1, thus covers the NATO Force Model and the NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP).

Section 5.2 discusses how the Alliance's command structure has been adapted in recent years and considers how NATO's operational and tactical headquarters align with the new regional and functional/domain plans.

Section 5.3 builds on WMC 1 and analyses how the capabilities of 12 key countries for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe align with NATO requirements. The final section, 5.4, summarises the chapter's results

5.1 Force planning — Improved organisation

While operations planning deals with how military assets are to be used to achieve operational objectives, force planning refers to which and what type of forces and other assets are needed to conduct those operations. It logically follows that operations planning ideally should drive the planning of which forces and capabilities that the Alliance and member states develop over time.[1]

However, the Alliance has long been plagued by a gap between operations planning and force planning. NATO's collective experience of recent decades is also that the two processes have had worse interaction than previously in the Alliance's history. This is hardly surprising since planning in recent decades has mostly been about meeting made up generic scenarios rather than a real threat. The result has been a significant gap between the few existing plans and the required forces and capabilities to execute those plans.

At the 2022 Madrid summit, the allies approved a new model, the NATO Force Model (NFM), to replace the old NATO Force Structure. With the new force model, NATO planners argue that the Alliance's force planning better reflects the ways in which the Alliance means to deter and defend against Russia. However, as this report notes, changes to large civilian and military structures take time to implement. In addition, several parts of old models often transfer to the new model. To analyse what has changed and what those changes mean, one must first know what has been.

The old NATO Force Structure

The previous NATO Force Structure (NFS) came into being in 2001. In theory, as the system never fully worked, the NFS consisted of a type of roster of national and multinational forces that member states offered to the Alliance. The envisioned result was that SACEUR could request and assign assets for various operations and contingencies, if decided upon by the NAC.

The NFS consisted of several force packages, including so-called Graduated Response Forces (GRF) HQs and supporting forces. NATO envisioned the joint GRFs to be able to command joint operations at various scales. The forces in the NFS roster had two broad levels of readiness: High Readiness Forces (HRF) and Lower Readiness Forces (FLR), which together formed the Graduated Readiness Forces (GRF).[2]

The NATO Response Force (NRF) was an essential part of the NFS. The NRF was intended as a force pool held at higher readiness that would be able to respond quickly to arising situations.[3] As Chapter 3 details, NATO deployed parts of the NRF and VJTF in February of 2022. However, the Alliance post-2022 assessed that a different force model would better serve the NRF and VJTF's purposes.[4] Consequently, at the 2022 Madrid summit, NATO decided to replace the old model with the new NATO Force Model in 2023.

The NATO Force Model improves SACEUR's overview

The NFM consists of several components: new readiness categories for larger pools of military forces; a new spearhead force to replace the NRF; and a more elaborate system to report the members' armed forces status to SACEUR and SHAPE. NATO intended to complete the NFM's implementation by the end of 2023, but this appeared overly ambitious in terms of ready forces, which the NATO Military Committee's Chair recently confirmed when he said that fully sourcing the NFM was challenging and a long-term process.[5]

The new readiness categories mean that allies will provide forces to SACUER at three different levels of readiness.[6] Tier 1 forces refers to troops that SACEUR can use within 10 days, once the necessary national decisions have been made, particularly regarding Transfer of Authority (ToA). The Alliance envisions this category as encompassing 100,000 troops. Due to the high-readiness requirements, the majority of the tier's forces likely include those already deployed or in theatre, including the enhanced Forward Presence and eastern flank countries' nationally deployed forces.[7] The Tier 1 category also includes the new spearhead force and some critical enablers.

The Tier 2 category is meant to encompass an additional 200,000 troops with a readiness level to deploy within 10–30 days. This likely includes a targeted strength increase to division-level of the Forward Land Forces (FLF) in the event of an impending crisis. The Tiers 1 and 2 forces are to be transferred to SACEUR's command for execution of the regional and functional/domain plans, if need be.[8]

The Tier 3 forces encompass an additional 500,000 troops within 30–180 days. The totality of personnel thus encompasses 800,000 troops, probably meaning all deployable forces in the Alliance.[9]

The NATO Response Force is being replaced by a new entity called the Allied Reaction Force (ARF). The ARF will differ from the NRF in several ways. The force will be more multidomain than the NRF, which apparently means that the force will include more cyber, space, special forces, and other niche and enabling capabilities.[10] The maritime force will include forces from the Standing Maritime Groups. NATO's ambition also seems to be for the ARF to be larger, have higher readiness, and be designed for all contingencies, not just Article 5 scenarios.

The ARF is likely meant to be kept separate to be used as a type of high-readiness force in reserve and thus not directly included in the new regional plans. The responsibility for leading and supplying forces to the ARF will rotate among allies, as with the VJTF, and the force will be standing by from July to June (12 months) before the next ARF force takes responsibility for it. NATO's international civilian and military staff may subject the ARF to inspections and snap exercises to ensure the force's readiness.[11] Inspiration for the ARF may have come from the Cold War era Allied Command Europe (ACE) Mobile Force, in existence between 1960 and 2002.[12]

Another component of the NFM process concerns how the member states report the state of their armed forces to SACEUR, enabling the commander to identify which forces can be used for planning operations. The new system has more tailored and elaborate reporting categories than the previous system. The new types of categories characterise forces not only according to their deployability and readiness but also in their ability to move between different operational theatres. A country on the northern flank may thus be considered to have forces that are ready and capable but not able or suitable to deploy to the Alliance's other theatres/RPs.[13]

Furthermore, member states have implemented a new and more frequent way to report their forces' readiness to SACEUR and the Alliance. This format is called the NATO Force Sourcing Conferences (FSR), which are held three times a year.[14] The purpose is to provide SACEUR with a regular update on how allies' armed forces are progressing on readiness and capability reforms. Given the state of several member states' armed forces, this process of reporting readiness and capability in front of other allies is likely a revelation to many. One observer characterised the process as "educational" for allies.[15]

Despite some friction, with the ongoing implementation of the NFM, the Alliance appears to have set in motion a fundamental part of its adaptation to the threat from Russia. The newly adopted NATO Force model provides SACEUR with a much better overview and detailed understanding of the member states' military forces, including their quality, availability, and readiness. The Allied Reaction Force (ARF) should add to SACEUR's ability to act in crisis or war with a more appropriately tailored force. In sum, the NFM should provide SACEUR a better understanding of the Alliance's freedom of manoeuvre, enable him to improve plans, and act more quickly if needed. However, the Alliance is still publicly circumspect regarding details of the NFM's components. This may be due to several factors, probably operational security, but also that the Alliance may not be sufficiently confident that the forces actually exist or are ready to fulfil the NFM's goals.

More urgency and less deflection in NDPP

The objective of NATO's defence planning process (NDPP) is to align the member states' military capabilities with the operations that the Alliance intends or plans to conduct and to prepare the Alliance for the future.[16] As also noted above, until recently there has been a considerable discrepancy between the ideal degree of interaction between, on the one hand, operations planning and, on the other, the reality of allied forces and capabilities.

NATO and its officials now argue that operations planning is driving defence planning to a much higher degree than before.[17] This section briefly describes and analyses the essential components of the NDPP, addresses the most important progress the Alliance has made in the area, and evaluates some of the likely challenges ahead.

The NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP) consists of five steps undertaken over four years: the formulation and promulgation of the Political Guidance (PG); the determination of capability requirements; the apportionment of capability targets; the facilitation of implementation; and the review of results.[18]

The setting of the Political Guidance is arguably the most important step. In the PG, the Alliance sets its Level of Ambition (LoA) for the current NDPP cycle, meaning short-term (1–5 years) and medium-term (6–19 years).[19] The LoA is what the Alliance wishes that its armed forces are ready for and capable of responding to. It is essentially a consequence of the Alliance's strategy documents and allied consultations.

NATO's characterisation of Russia in its strategy documents suggests that the Alliance has markedly increased its level of ambition in the PG 2023. It is probable that the members have formulated its LoA so that its armed forces should be able to deter and defend against a nuclear armed, near-peer adversary, read Russia, and conduct major out-of-area operations. The LoA is arguably the most important part of the PG23, and given that the Alliance appears to have agreed on a higher LoA, much in the subordinate process may fall into place if allies meet their targets. Three issues nevertheless stand out as potentially problematic in the remaining NDPP cycle.

"Reasonable challenge" is an essential part of the Alliance's design of the requirements apportioned to member states.[20] It means members should be challenged to a reasonable degree in their attempt to fulfil a capability requirement provided to them by NATO. It is understood that, before 2022, many members often skirted this requirement, despite having to withstand their allies' criticisms. There is an impression that, from 2023 onwards, the urgency of the security situation has prompted members to take NDPP requirements more seriously, which, if true, would be a valuable development for NATO.[21] On the one hand, given the Alliance's higher levels of ambition, the number and quality of capability targets should reasonably increase dramatically. On the other hand, given the varying threat assessments among nations, some allies might in the future begin to feel they have had enough.[22]

"Fair-burden sharing" is another critical NDPP component. It means that the process should fairly distribute capability targets among allies.[23] Perhaps the most prominent part is that no Alliance member should provide more than 50 percent of the capabilities in one single area, e.g., long-range artillery, as that would be considered an excessively expensive burden.[24] In reality, the United States (US) provides considerably more than 50 percent of the capabilities to the Alliance in several areas, for instance in ISR. Given the higher expenses for the increasing capability targets, the allies may at some point fail to agree on what "fair" means, and this could result in disparate and diverging investments.

The focus on "minimum capability requirements" for countries to be able to perform their role in the Alliance's operations plans is the third problematic component. It is a well-known aspect of war that things rarely go as planned and that gear and personnel seldom perform as imagined, and the war in Ukraine has overwhelmingly demonstrated this and how much materiel is needed in high-intensity war.[25] In addition, defence acquisition and national will often falter during long processes. NATO officials claim that some redundancies in requirements are accounted for, but it remains unclear to what extent this affects the NDPP. Given resource constraints and the general Western societal belief in "lean production" and similar concepts, there is a considerable risk that the focus on minimum capability requirements has detrimentally affected and will continue to affect NATO's defence planning.

During the remainder of this NDPP cycle, the Alliance's current momentum and the urgency experienced by many allies suggest that countries will strive more sincerely than earlier to fulfil the requirements apportioned by NATO. But frictions, for example, budget constraints, are already evident in the NDPP process. If the threat perception of Russia decreases, or if allies strictly follow the Secretary General's recommendation to prioritise supporting Ukraine over building up their own forces, the allies' ability and willingness to fulfil the NDPP goals may decrease.[26]

In sum, several difficult questions face the Alliance's NDPP in the coming years. If the past is any guide, the

allies may revert to old habits sooner rather than later, pursuing capabilities they think they need themselves despite their allies' opposition, or not investing at all.

5.2 Command and control arrangements in need of reform

Even if appropriate forces exist, they must be effectively led to be able to complete allocated tasks. With the recognition that deterrence and defence has become the primary core task, the Alliance is accordingly in the midst of adapting its Command and Control (C2) arrangement.

During the Cold War, NATO had divided the Euro-Atlantic area and its forces in the region into a hierarchal command structure with preassigned geographic areas of responsibility, designed to handle an attack from the Soviet Union. After the Soviet demise, this structure was considered unnecessary and too expensive, so it was reduced and changed. As Russia was to be a strategic partner, and as most of the Alliance's new crisis management tasks lay outside allied territory, the new streamlined C2 structure had a component division of responsibilities — ground, air, and naval units — rather than one based on geography.

Ground units were for an operation, at least on paper, to be assigned to a headquarters in Turkey, the air units assigned to an American-led HQ in Ramstein, Germany, and the naval units to HQ Northwood, in Britain. Under SACEUR and SHAPE, there were two operational-level commands that could lead joint operations: JFC Naples and JFC Brunssum. These JFCs had a geographic focus but not pre-assigned geographic areas of responsibility. Instead, they took turns leading exercises or operations regardless of area. In a similar manner, the task of commanding ground units in exercises or operations was handed to one of the national or multinational corps HQs, while air and naval units were to be led by AIRCOM and MARCOM, respectively.

These arrangements might have been sufficient when there were no urgent dangers to the Euro-Atlantic area, but once allies had accepted that deterrence and defence against Russia had re-emerged as the main task, a more robust and traditional setup was needed. Thus, two new major commands were created in 2018, JFC Norfolk and Joint Support and Enabling Command (JSEC), which were declared fully operational in 2021, and further changes were in the pipeline.

NATO's accelerated adaptation to its task of deterrence and defence, the urgency added by the ongoing war in Ukraine, NATO's new force model with its three tiers of forces, and the sheer growth of forces assigned to NATO necessitate a revamping of C2, including a formal return to geographic areas of responsibility.

The process of finalising the new command arrangements was still ongoing in the summer of 2024, but the contours are becoming clearer.[27] There is much national prestige attached to the command and subordination arrangements, and they are to some degree "bicycle-shed issues," which many think they understand and opine on, which complicates resolving the issue.[28]

A prominent example of a sticking point has been to decide where the dividing line between JFC Norfolk and JFC Brunssum in the Nordic-Baltic region should be drawn. Some argue that Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Iceland should all belong to JFC Norfolk, while others have argued in favour of assigning the two new members to JFC Brunssum, which is already responsible for Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland.[29] A third proposed solution would be to divide the Nordic region, with the northern and western areas belonging to the Atlantic (Norfolk) and the southern and eastern areas belonging to the continent (Brunssum).[30] This proposition would mean that the delineation between the JFCs would run through the middle of some countries.

At the NATO defence ministers' meeting in June 2024, the allies may have settled the issue, with Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and Finland to be assigned to Norfolk when that command is fully operational. In addition, a forward "multi-corps land component command" is to be established in Finland.[31] It remains to be seen whether this command will be part of the NATO Command Structure or NATO's Force Structure/Force Model, as well as exactly how the dividing lines between the JFCs in the Baltic Sea will be drawn, along with the details regarding a forward air component command in Norway and a logistics command in Sweden.

It now seems clear there will be a formal return to geographic areas of responsibility for the JFCs, but that air and naval units will remain under Ramstein and Northwood. AIRCOM and MARCOM will remain at the same command level as the JFCs, subordinated to SACEUR and SHAPE.

If so, that would be a problematic hybrid solution, as it entails a high risk of friction developing between component and geographic commands and as there would be no joint commands below the JFCs. SHAPE might then frequently have to intervene to solve command problems, and the component commands might become badly stretched in a major conflict.

Insiders argue that Ramstein and Northwood might have to act at three different command levels at the same time: at the strategic level as air and naval advisers to SACEUR, at the operational level as component

commanders for JFCs, and as tactical commanders for their own forces. AIRCOM and MARCOM might have to assist all three JFCs simultaneously and over a huge area, which would probably stretch their capacity.[32] Moreover, as there would be no joint commands below the JFCs, even small Multi Domain Operations (MDO) would have to be managed by the JFCs, which could stretch their capacity.

A simpler and more robust solution would probably be to have three sets of component commands subordinated to the JFCs and/or to have subordinate joint commands for specific areas such as the Baltic and Black Sea regions.

The reforms of the command structure are one more adaptation effort in NATO's process of improving its deterrence and defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area, but it currently seems that the Alliance's efforts fall short. As long as air and naval forces remain under their component commands and not under regional commands, this risks complicating joint operations and overstretching the involved commands. Further changes in this area are expected, but they will be complicated by resistance to change and turf fights. Perhaps NATO will only change to a more effective and logical command arrangement after the current structure has manifestly shown its drawbacks in, for example, exercises or a crisis.

5.3 Forces and capabilities unevenly match requirements

For NATO's strategy and operations plans to be reasonably credible and executable, the allies need to provide the required armed forces. This section explores how the national capabilities of 12 countries of particular importance for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe compare to NATO's stated force requirements.[33]

NATO requirements

The 12 countries' capabilities are analysed by using three different metrics. The reason for using different metrics is that there is a dearth of public information on what the components of the most recent force requirements are, especially the NATO Force Model (NFM).

First, the pool of all allied forces available to SACEUR is organised in the NATO Force Model, which Section 5.1 details. This section focusses on the forces belonging to Tiers 1 and 2, with a readiness of 30 days or less, which should encompass 300,000 troops. These categories are the allies' high readiness forces, very likely assigned to one of the three regional plans.[34] Especially lacking in the public information on the NFM is the number of naval vessels and fighter aircraft included. NATO's present deployments, primarily the 40,000 troops, 100 aircraft, and 27 ships that are alleged to be under SACEUR's command since February 2022, are likely included in the NFM and assigned to regional plans. The new Allied Reaction Force (ARF) is also included in the NFM but will likely be held separate from the regional plans as a "high-readiness force in reserve," deployable in the Euro-Atlantic area, and for out-of-area contingencies.[35]

A novelty with the NFM is that allies assign forces and capabilities to specific plans.[36] This is particularly relevant for ground forces, which can perform tasks either on their national territory, deploy for shorter distances within a region or within the whole Euro-Atlantic area, whereas naval and air forces are more mobile. The assignment to plans also makes it more difficult to double-count forces, which previously was a significant problem in NATO.[37]

In Northern Europe, the forces of the frontline states, Finland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, will probably remain in-country to perform deterrence and defence tasks nationally. The other countries in the region, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, are likely going to be given both national and regional reinforcement tasks. Germany, France, the UK, and the US should be able to reinforce allied presence across the Euro-Atlantic area.

Second, due to the limited available information about the NFM, it is worth comparing the national capabilities with the requirements of the previous NATO Readiness Initiative (NRI). NATO officials have also argued that the NRI's readiness process contributes to the NFM.[38] Launched in 2018, the NRI required Canada and European allies to muster 30 mechanised battalions, 30 fighter squadrons, and 30 large surface combatants within 30 days by 2020.[39]

Third, according to NATO's defence-planning process (NDPP), no ally should provide more than 50 percent of a single capability. This metric is chiefly meant to illustrate the status of US and European burden-sharing.[40] It is widely acknowledged that the US provides more than half of several key strategic enablers to the Alliance, but it is unclear whether the requirement is also applied to the number of manoeuvre forces.[41] It is nevertheless worth assessing how European countries fare in the share of the Alliance's manoeuvre forces.

Western operational capability in 30 days

In the first report in this series, WMC I, we assessed the manoeuvre forces and some joint assets that 12 countries of particular importance for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe would be able to mobilise if given three months' warning. The assessment assumed a scenario in which these forces were to prepare for a potential high-intensity war against a near-peer adversary. To fulfil wartime tasks in such a scenario, we assessed that forces would have to be nearly complete in terms of material and personnel, including having munitions and other necessities, trained for their assigned task, and having appropriate support and command functions. We found this to be a significant hurdle for many armed forces.[42]

In our WMC I assessment, we provided a spectrum, from a conservative to an optimistic estimate, regarding what the countries would be able to mobilise. As our 90-day assessment differs from the NFM's 3-tiered readiness, we approximate our conservative assessments to the NFM's Tier 1 and 2, i.e., forces that would be available within 30 days. The sections below compare our assessment of national capabilities with the Alliance requirements.

Ground forces unevenly match NATO requirements

Table 5.1 presents our assessment of the number of mechanised and infantry battalions and attack helicopter squadrons that the 12 countries could amass. The US forces include those stationed temporarily under Operation Atlantic Resolve, thus including those forces sent to reinforce Europe in 2022. In addition, we have added likely US cross-Atlantic reinforcements, which we also assessed in WMC 1. The table's numbers are rough estimates due to the inherent difficulties in making these assessments, on which WMC I elaborates.[43]

The NFM requires that SACEUR should have 300,000 troops at his disposal within 30 days. Our assessment suggests that combining the 12 allies' ground manoeuvre forces with the necessary combat support (e.g., artillery or engineering) or combat service support (e.g., logistics) gives a total, albeit very approximate, number of 135,000 troops in deployable brigades and divisions.[44]

If we add the land component of the ARF of at least 6,000 troops, the total number of troops amounts to approximately 140,000 soldiers.[45] If our calculations are not completely erroneous, it would mean that the 12 countries in our study could produce around half of the ground forces required for the NFM's Tier 1 and 2. However, for the total force number, deployable air and naval forces should be added.

Turning to the NFM's deployability component, we assume that the Alliance's operations plans require the allies to be ready to reinforce the frontline member states within 30 days and form divisions in place. How do the allies perform?

In Estonia, a division-sized formation would mean that the host country, Estonia, would have to deliver at least one brigade (three manoeuvre battalions, plus

Table 5.1 Assessment of ground forces available in Northern Europe within 90 days

	Mechanised battalions[(a)]	Infantry batallions8[(b)]	Attack helicopter squadrons
United States	9	6	≥8[(c)]
US reinforcements	≥3	≥7 plus 6–12[(d)]	4–9
United Kingdom	3–6	3–6	1–2
Germany	5–7	2–3	1–2
France	2–4	1–3	2–3
Poland	12–24[(e)]	-	0–1
Lithuania	≤2	1–3	-
Latvia	1–2	0–1	-
Estonia	-	3–6	-
Finland	≥6	≥4	-
Sweden	3–5	2–3	-
Norway	1–3	0–1	-
Denmark	1–2	0–1	-
Total[(f)]	**48–73**	**35–56**	**16–25**

Remarks: **(a)** Armoured and mechanised forces is one category. **(b)** Includes manoeuvre forces, generally well-staffed and well-equipped and trained. Does not include local, regional or home or national guard forces. **(c)** This is two Combat Aviation Brigades, each containing 20–24 attack helicopters. **(d)** The first number refers to US Army. The second number is an estimate of what the Marine Expeditionary Force would provide. **(e)** The Polish armed forces call all their divisions and brigades armoured or mechanised. Presumably, the force also includes infantry, but our WMC 1 assessment does not allow us to make this distinction in the table. **(f)** These figures are a rough estimate due to the inherent uncertainties in making these assessments. They should not be considered as a final or definitive answer to how many forces the West could muster in the allotted time-frame.

Source: Albin Aronsson et al., Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023: Part I—National Capabilities, ed. Björn Ottosson and Krister Pallin, FOI Reports, FOI-R--5527--SE (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency—FOI, 2024).

combat support and combat service support). The UK, as a framework nation, would have to deliver at least one brigade and provide command and control, and the French and Danish forces would have to provide one combined brigade. This appears achievable from our analysis. Three manoeuvre brigades would constitute at least a small division but would need the addition of divisional enablers. Thus, NATO appears to be able to rapidly form a division in Estonia, thus fulfilling its readiness requirement. However, some of these troops would still have to be moved to Estonia, an important aspect that our analysis has not covered.

In Latvia, the Alliance's ambition should be the same. Latvia would have to provide the equivalent of one brigade, the framework nation Canada one mechanised brigade, and the remaining allies the equivalent of one mechanised brigade. It is unclear if allies would be able to deliver forces at the required scale, not least regarding the necessary combat support and combat service support elements. Thus, the reinforcement requirements for Latvia appear to be difficult to meet.

In Lithuania, the host country would have to provide one mechanised brigade; the framework nation, Germany, at least one brigade; and the remaining five countries, together, would contribute a total of one brigade. Our analysis suggests that the countries involved would struggle, but given a strenuous effort, they might be able to deliver the required forces.

In Poland, the defence requirements are likely higher, due to the country's size. Our assessment suggests that Poland could likely mobilise four national brigades in 30 days. As the US has 15,000 extra forces stationed in Poland since 2022, we assess that the US and other allies could provide the equivalent of at least one division.[46] If the US forces were to decrease in the future, the ability to reinforce the presence might change, but from high levels.

In Finland, NATO has not revealed which countries will be tasked to contribute to a forward presence or to reinforcements. As Finland, with a good margin, would be able to mobilise at least two mechanised brigades and one infantry brigade within 30 days, the division requirement is probably already filled. Together, the US, Norway, and Sweden would likely be able to provide rapid reinforcements consisting of at least one brigade. However, it is worth remembering that Sweden is also required to reinforce Latvia, that Norway only has one mechanised battalion available within 30 days, and that the US has other commitments across the Euro-Atlantic area. Whether and how NATO planners have resolved this is naturally excluded from public view.

The 2018 NRI required the Alliance to have 30 mechanised battalions ready within 30 days in 2020. Our assessment suggests that the 12 assessed allies, relevant for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe, could assemble approximately 27 battalions after subtracting the US, Swedish, and Finnish contributions (as they were not counted in the 2018 NRI). Assuming other allies would be able to provide a few battalions, this means that NATO may fulfil the 2018 readiness requirement, but around 4 years after its due date and in a worsened security situation.

On burden sharing, our assessment suggests that the US provides approximately 45 percent (37 out of 83) of the mechanised and infantry battalions. The Alliance thus appears to fulfil its formal NDPP-related burden-sharing requirement in the land domain, at least for Tier 1 and 2 land forces.

Lack of naval surface combatants in Northern Europe

Table 5.2 presents our assessment of the number of carrier groups, large surface combatants (destroyers and frigates), attack submarines (conventional and nuclear-powered), and ballistic-missile submarines. The allies also have many smaller and, to a varying extent, advanced warships, such as corvettes, which are suitable for operations in the Baltic Sea, but we have excluded them for reasons of parsimony.

In this section, we can only rely on the NRI and burden-sharing requirement, given that the NFM specifies neither naval nor air forces. The readiness initiative attempted to ensure that the allies have 30 large surface combatants ready within 30 days. We interpret this to refer only to destroyers and frigates. Using our conservative assessment, table 5.2 suggests that the European allies in Northern Europe could muster around 15 major surface combatants. The remaining NATO allies must thus be able to provide half of the required vessels to reach the sum of 30 vessels, a significant amount but not unreasonable given the capabilities of such allies as Turkey, Spain, and Italy.

On burden-sharing, the US provides approximately nine vessels, or close to 40 percent, of the total number. The Alliance thus passes the burden-sharing requirement in the Tier 1 and 2 categories.

Table 5.2 Assessment of naval forces available in Northern Europe within 90 days

	Carrier groups	Large Surface Combatants[a]	Attack submarines (SSN, SSK)
United States	1[b]	5	NED[c]
US reinforcements	≥1	4–10	3–10
United Kingdom	1	4–8	2–3
Germany	-	4–5	2–3
France	1	4–7	≥2
Poland	-	0–1	0
Lithuania	-	-	-
Latvia	-	-	-
Estonia	-	-	-
Finland	-	-	-
Sweden	-	-	≥2
Norway	-	2–3	2–3
Denmark	-	1–3	-
Total	**≥4**	**24–42**	**>13–23**

Remarks: (a) Destroyers and frigates, not corvettes or patrol boats. **(b)**The carrier deployed as part of (temporary) US reinforcements to Europe since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Destroyers and frigates, not corvettes or patrol boats. **(c)** Not Enough Data.

Source: Albin Aronsson et al., Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023: Part I—National Capabilities, ed. Björn Ottosson and Krister Pallin, FOI Reports, FOI-R--5527--SE (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency—FOI, 2024).

Table 5.3 Assessment of air forces available in Northern Europe within 90 days

	Combat aircraft squadrons[a]	Strategic bomber squadrons	Strategic transport squadrons	ISTAR & MPA squadrons
United States	8+4	1	3	2
US reinforcements	6–8 plus 4 plus 1[b]	≥2–3	NED	1
United Kingdom	4–5 plus 1	-	2–3	2–3
Germany	3–5	-	2–3	1
France	2–3 plus 1–2	-	2	1
Poland	2–4	-	-	-
Lithuania	-	-	-	
Latvia	-	-	-	
Estonia	-	-	-	
Finland	2–3	-	-	-
Sweden	≤4	-	-	1[c]
Norway	≤1	-	-	1
Denmark	0,5–1	-	-	0–1
NATO				1
Total	**43,5–54**	**3–4**	**≥9–11**	**10–12**

Remarks: (a) The numbers after + are squadrons estimated to be on-board the countries' aircraft carriers. **(b)** This is an estimate of USMC fighter squadrons on-board an amphibious assault ship (LHD). **(c)** Sweden decided in July 2024 to donate 2 of its AEW&C aircraft to Ukraine.

Source: Albin Aronsson et al., Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023: Part I—National Capabilities, ed. Björn Ottosson and Krister Pallin, FOI Reports, FOI-R--5527--SE (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency—FOI, 2024).

Northern Europe holds only part of total air force capability

Table 5.3 presents our assessment of the number of squadrons of combat aircraft, strategic bombers, large strategic transports, ISTAR, and maritime patrol aircraft (MPA) that the 12 countries could amass.

Based on the information in table 5.3, it is clear that the Alliance should be able to 'field' a considerable aerial fighting force, but the air forces' ability to achieve the NRI's air component of 30 squadrons in 30 days is perhaps the hardest measure to evaluate. This is due to there being so many countries that possess fighter squadrons that are not included in WMC I. Our conservative assessment suggests that the countries relevant for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe could produce some 15 fighter squadrons, when excluding the US, Sweden, and Finland (as they were not part of the NRI), but we refrain from speculating on the accuracy and significance of that number.

On burden-sharing, the US provides 23 of the total 43,5 squadrons (in table 5.3), some 50 percent of the total. Thus, in terms of the number of fighter squadrons, the Alliance appears not to fulfil the NDPP burden-sharing requirement.

Challenging to fulfil the NFM towards 2030

Based on our assessment in WMC I of the countries' future operational capability, we conclude that Poland and the Baltic and Nordic states have the most ambitious plans, both in general and in the enhancement of their ground forces' 30-day readiness. Poland plans to have four operational divisions by 2030, which in practice would mean 3–6 additional mechanised battalions, plus enablers, compared to our assessment of the current operational capability. The Baltic States focus on developing division-level command, but demographics will likely hinder an expansion of the existing organisation. Finland can already muster a sizeable wartime

organisation, but the other Nordic countries are each aiming to field 1–3 additional mechanised battalions, organised in brigades, by 2030.

The major European powers envisage few additional ground manoeuvre units. Much of the UK, France, and Germany's reforms aim to make the currently existing manoeuvre units ready for warfare and more deployable. For these countries to be able to field more forces than in 2023 and 2024, ammunition, equipment, personnel, and training issues have to be addressed. The permanent stationing of one German brigade in Lithuania will likely increase its availability for defence tasks. If the UK's reforms go well, the country might be able to contribute an extra mechanised brigade by 2030.

The US Army is reducing its size, especially due to its recruitment challenges, and Washington might in the coming years decide to reduce its armed forces' presence in Europe. This could be due to several reasons, for example, a new presidential administration's general wish to reduce the number of permanently stationed forces abroad or the US's increased focus on the Indo-Pacific region (although such a decision would likely affect air and naval forces more than army units).

Most countries in our study aim to modernise army materiel, for example, tanks (MBT), infantry fighting vehicles (IFV), armoured personnel carriers (APC), air defences, and artillery. If the acquisitions processes deliver, the materiel will qualitatively improve existing forces' capabilities.

However, recruitment and retention are, and appear to continue to be, problems in growing organisations. In addition, several countries aim to expand the number of conscripts enlisted for service as well as the reserve force, and this may affect presently available personnel, as some personnel must be allocated to training new recruits. Insufficient funding for ongoing reforms and competing priorities may fail to substantially improve the current situation.

Regarding naval forces, there are no expectations of significant expansion of the number of combat vessels until 2030. Similar to the situation in other services, the allies' main focus is making the current force structures more deployable, but they will likely be constrained due to the limited number of maintenance facilities and crew shortages. The UK and Germany plan to introduce new frigates and submarines toward 2030, but this will likely improve availability only after 2030. In addition, the US's focus on the Indo-Pacific might see more vessels allocated to the 7th fleet, which at least temporarily would mean fewer vessels in Europe and the North Atlantic. Such an allocation could delay US naval reinforcements from arriving in Europe.[47] France, Germany, and the UK might also allocate more vessels to the Indo-Pacific to participate in exercises and patrols, also contributing to a reduction of the number of vessels and their availability in Europe.[48]

The smaller navies of the Nordic countries are investing in mid-life upgrades and the replacement of existing warships, which will primarily improve air defence and anti-submarine warfare capabilities. The Baltic States and Poland's naval capabilities are limited, but acquisition of land-attack (surface-to-surface) and anti-ship missiles will improve coastal defence and improve the chances of constraining Russia's Baltic Fleet to its ports.

With the exception of Poland, we assess that the studied countries are unlikely to increase the number of available air squadrons by 2030. However, the introduction of F-35 fighter aircraft in the US, UK, Germany, Poland, Norway, Denmark, and Finland will qualitatively improve capabilities, for example concerning Suppression/Destruction of Enemy Air Defence (SEAD/DEAD) tasks. In Poland, the introduction of F-35s will likely lead to one additional available fighter squadron by 2030, whereas the reduced number of aircraft might decrease the Danish Air Force's operational capability.

Sweden will begin the conversion to the fourth-generation-plus fighter aircraft JAS 39E in 2025. To maintain the number of operational aircraft, some older JAS 39 C/Ds will remain in service. Sweden and several other countries are also improving base protection, acquiring more and better weapons for their aircraft as well as long- and medium-range air defences, and developing their UAV capability.

5.4 Conclusion — Strengthened processes, varying force fulfilment

This chapter assesses the means that NATO has at its disposal to achieve its desired ends. The chapter shows that the Alliance's processes to identify and generate the forces needed to execute its strategy have improved in recent years, but that many obstacles exist that risk derailing NATO's current momentum.

The transition from the NATO Force Structure to the NATO Force Model is a major undertaking for the members. Our analysis suggests that the new model improves SHAPE's overview and understanding of the available forces. The NFM's main components — the forces' tiered readiness, assignment to plans, and the more frequent and predictable force-sourcing conferences — should inject more order into the Alliance's force planning, especially as allies become more comfortable with the new model.

For the identification of these forces, the most important aspect is that the operations planning now drives the force planning to a greater extent than was previously the case. The transition to a more threat-based planning is positive for NATO's ability to fulfil its mission, and the gap between the threats and the capabilities required to counter those threats seems to be decreasing, at least conceptually.

The NDPP, which primarily manages the Alliance forces' adaptation and development to improve their ability to execute Alliance tasks, seems to have been revitalised. The primary cause is the threat that the majority of allies and international staff perceive and the resulting importance of attempting to fulfil the agreed force requirements.

However, if the NDPP is to serve its purpose over the long run and prepare the Alliance for high-intensity combat, our analysis suggests that some of the principles that now steer the process, particularly "minimum capability requirements," have to be at least scrutinised, if not reformed.

Nevertheless, the most significant challenge to the NDPP's functioning is that the momentum generated among the allies by the war in Ukraine is waning. The allies increasingly experience the significant trade-off between supporting Ukraine with equipment and personnel resources for training (see more in Chapter 3) and the need to improve Alliance defence capabilities. This problem is exacerbated by the fact that many allies started with near-empty magazines and that the established European defence industries are slow in ramping up production. This conundrum is expected to negatively impact the NDPP's results in the coming years.

NATO's C2 arrangements are in the process of reform, but we assess that the Alliance currently has a problematic hybrid solution that fails to serve the Alliance's armed forces optimally. In a crisis or war, the seemingly overlapping mandates between the regional and functional commands risk creating many situations infused with friction. Such situations could seriously delay the Alliance's response to major aggression and make it slower than the opponent's decision-and-command loop.

Our evaluation of the 12 allies covered in WMC 1, in relation to the Alliance's requirements, shows that the 12 countries perform unevenly across the domains and that their results much depend on the metric chosen.

Regarding the NFM, the countries considered may muster less than half of the Alliance NMF's Tier 1 and 2 personnel requirement of 300,000, amounting to around 135,000 ground forces. As to deployability, the countries appear to fulfil the requirements regarding the number of host-nation ground forces and reinforcements available to the eastern flank. However, for these types of rapid deployments, sufficient material would have to be pre-positioned in the front countries. It would be highly challenging, if not impossible, to fly in sufficient mechanised materiel, etc., in less than 30 days.[49] The Alliance forces may thus meet the "notice-to-move" requirement, but whether those forces could be deployed to the specified locations in time is unclear.[50]

With regard to the NRI, the allies covered in WMC I, excluding the US, Sweden, and Finland (as they were not part of the initiative), barely attain 30 mechanised battalions, but with the addition of uncounted allies, the members would supersede the NRI ground-force requirement. In contrast, the same allies can only field about half of the required number of naval surface combatants and aircraft squadrons.

On burden-sharing for manoeuvre forces in Europe, the European allies perform relatively well when it comes to operational capability in 30 days, with the US maximally contributing 50 percent of capabilities in fighter squadrons but less in naval surface combatants and in ground forces. However, as our study has not considered all relevant capabilities, especially enablers, these numbers should be cautiously interpreted. Indications are that the US currently supplies a disproportional share of advanced capabilities, such as long-range strike, SEAD, ISR, and ground forces logistics.

The countries relevant for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe are not envisaging any major growth in the quantity of available manoeuvre forces, with a partial exception of Poland. However, modernisation efforts and the acquisition of new capabilities might improve the quality of existing forces. Without significant growth in the number of forces, but with improvements to the quality and deployability of existing forces, these countries might be better able to fulfil the Alliance's Force goals towards 2030. However, our study suggests this will prove highly challenging, at the very least, and will likely require significant budget growth, smarter spending, or both. Our analysis suggests that toward 2030 the Alliance will be heavily dependent on technology improvements in equipment to compensate for the relative lack of mass, including in equipment and personnel.

One final factor is that the demands that the regional and functional/domain plans place on allies' force contributions are likely to be higher than the initial assignment of forces may indicate, but that this does not appear to be sufficiently accounted for in the NFM, NDPP, and the alliance members' military means. In the land domain, for example, this is because one assigned

brigade will require two additional brigades for an ally to be able to rotate forces in the field; this is due to the need for recuperation and training, as well as attrition, in a high-threat or war scenario. A conclusion of this chapter is therefore that NATO's force planning may overly rely on the assumption of a short war, partly because the personnel and materiel mass for a long war might not exist, or that it goes nuclear quickly. ■

Endnotes

1 In reality, there will always be a high degree of back-and-forth communication between them.

2 NATO, "The NATO Force Structure," May 13, 2015, NATO, February 13, 2015, *https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_69718.htm.*

3 The first spearhead force created within the NRF was the Immediate Response Force, consisting of 13,000 troops. In 2014, the alliance replaced this with the Very High Readiness Task Force (VJTF), consisting of around 6,000 troops.

4 John R. Deni, "The New NATO Force Model: Ready for Launch?" NATO Defense College, April 2024, *https://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=1937*.

5 Bauer and Van Wagenen, "Media Briefing."

6 NATO, "New NATO Force Model," June 29, 2022, *https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220629-infographic-new-nato-force-model.pdf.*

7 Deni, "The New NATO Force Model."

8 Transfer of Authority (TOA).

9 In this sentence, "deployable" refers to forces that can be effectively used. It can include deployments within an actor's national territory or to a different country/region.

10 Deni, "The New NATO Force Model."

11 Deni, "The New NATO Force Model."

12 NATO, "Allied Command Europe Mobile Force Land Headquarters to be dissolved in Autumn 2002," August 12, 2002, *https://www.nato.int/docu/pr/2002/p02–098e.html*.

13 Interviews, NATO, October 2023.

14 Deni, "The New NATO Force Model."

15 Interviews, NATO. October 2023.

16 NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process," March 31, 2022, *https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_49202.htm*.

17 Interviews, NATO, October 2023.

18 NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process."

19 The NDPP addresses the development of capabilities in a short-term (1–5 years), medium-term (6–19 y), and long-term (19+ y).

20 NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process."

21 Interviews, NATO, October 2023.

22 For more analysis of the varying threat perceptions in the Alliance, see Ottosson et al., Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2024, Part II, 27–29.

23 NATO, "NATO Defence Planning Process."

24 Alexander Mattelaer, "Revisiting the Principles of NATO Burden-sharing," US Army War College Quarterly: Parameters, vol. 46, no. 1 (2016): 27, doi:10.55540/0031–1723.2821.

25 See, for instance, Carl von Clausewitz, On War (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), 119–121.

26 NATO, "Press Conference with NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine," press conference, April 29, 2024, *https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_225154.htm*.

27 Yle News, "Nato Committee Chair: Finland Will Join Norfolk Command Group," May 29, 2024, *https://yle.fi/a/74–20091251*.

28 The law of triviality, coined by C. Northcote Parkinson in 1957, argues that people within organisations often give disproportionate attention to trivial issues. Parkinson illustrates this with a fictional committee tasked with approving the plans for a nuclear power plant, but spends most of its time debating simple matters, such as the materials for a staff bicycle shed, while neglecting the far more complex and critical design of the plant itself.

29 There are arguments and counterarguments for assigning the Nordic region to JFC Norfolk. Arguments in favour include, firstly, that operations in Norway would be strongly influenced by what happens on and over the sea; and, secondly, that the Nordic governments and chiefs of defence have already agreed on this. Thirdly, this solution enables deeper operational cooperation between the Nordic allies, and, fourthly, dividing the Nordic area between two different JFCs would be politically unpalatable and might create operational problems.The counterarguments include, firstly, that this would create a dividing line in the Baltic, which could also cause operational problems, not least concerning the role of Gotland, the defence of the Gulf of Finland, and air/naval operations in the Baltic Sea. A second counterargument is that this solution would amount to the formation of a Nordic "club" within NATO, a kind of regionalisation usually frowned upon within the alliance, while at the same time turning their backs on the Baltic states, Poland, and the threat from the east. Thirdly, Norfolk is dominated by US naval officers with little understanding of land warfare or operations in the Baltic region, and Norfolk is six or seven time zones away, which may complicate coordination. Fourthly, the Nordic-Baltic region has two distinct operational focal points, the High North and the southern Baltic, each with unique characteristics, dynamics, and contexts, posing different challenges and opportunities. Finally, while Norfolk is operational, it has a long way to go in increasing its personnel and capabilities before it can manage a larger area of responsibility, as hundreds of positions are yet to be filled.

30 Robin Häggblom, "The Baltic Connection," Corporal Frisk blog, October 1, 2023, *https://corporalfrisk.com/2023/10/01/the-baltic-connection/#:~:tex.t=Brunssum%20is%20the%20default%20option,a%20key%20detail%20for%20Finland*.

31 Finnish Ministry of Defence, "NATO Defence Ministers Support Objectives of Finland's NATO Integration," Defence Ministry (Finland), press release, no date, *https://www.defmin.fi/en/topical/press_releases_and_news/nato_defence_ministers_support_objectives_of_finlands_nato_integration.14405.news#332b68e5*.

32 Berg, "Endret verden, endrer NATO: Del 1.

33 Albin Aronsson et al., Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023: Part I—National Capabilities, ed. Björn Ottosson and Krister Pallin, FOI Reports, FOI-R–5527–SE (Stockholm: Swedish Defence Research Agency—FOI, 2024).

34 Berg, "Endret verden: Del 2."

35 Bauer and Van Wagenen, "Media Briefing."

36 NATO, "New NATO Force Model,"

37 Bjerg Moller, "NATO at 75," 102.

38 Interviews, NATO, October 2023.

39 Bjerg Moller, "NATO at 75," 102.

40 Alexander Mattelaer, "Revisiting the Principles," 27.

41 For example, strategic transport, ISR, air defence, and battle-decisive munitions. Kjellström Elgin, Monaghan, and Berg Moller, Understanding NATO's Concept, 10.

42 Aronsson et al., Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023: Part I.

43 Aronsson et al., Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2023: Part I, 22–23.

44 The size of a battalion varies greatly in the alliance, but it usually contains between 300–1,000 troops. Taking the midpoint, 650 soldiers, multiplied by the number of battalions, 83 (mechanised plus infantry battalions, or 48+35=83, in table 5.1), enables us to arrive at an approximate personnel number for the manoeuvre battalions of 54,000. Then we need to add the number of troops in a brigade or a division who are not part of the manoeuvre battalions but provide necessary combat support (e.g., artillery or engineering) or combat service support (e.g., logistics) capabilities. Using a multiplicator of 2.5 should account for these deployable elements of brigade or division "slices," yielding a total of approximately 135,000 troops in deployable brigades and divisions. We note, however, that countries have given the lowest priority to support functions.

45 UK Ministry of Defence, "UK Takes Lead of NATO Rapid Response Force," news story, December 28, 2023, *https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-takes-lead-of-nato-rapid-response-force*.

46 International Institute for Strategic Studies — IISS, The Military Balance 2024 (London: Routledge, 2024), 127.

47 Jennifer Hlad, "Germany Vows Continued Pacific Presence to 'Protect the International Order,'" Defense One, August 2, 2024, *https://www.defenseone.com/policy/2024/08/germany-vows-continued-pacific-presence-protect-international-order/398548/*; Alessio Patalano, "Italy: The Globally Connected Mediterranean Power?" Royal United Services Institute—RUSI, August 1, 2024.

48 Hlad, "Germany vows"; Patalano, "Italy."

49 For more analysis of NATO's reinforcement capability, see Hagström Frisell et al., Deterrence by Reinforcement.

50 Previous FOI studies have indicated that such transport would take significant time. Hagström Frisell et al., Deterrence by Reinforcement.

6. Towards a realised strategy

Albin Aronsson, Eva Hagström Frisell, Jakob Gustafsson, and Robert Dalsjö

This report examines the evolution of NATO's deterrence and defence strategy since Russia's aggression against Ukraine in 2014, including the Alliance's renewed impetus following the 2022 invasion, and assesses potential developments through 2030. The ambition has been to answer the question:

- How well do the ends, ways, and means of NATO's strategy align to achieve the task of deterrence and defence in Northern Europe?

To recap, the report examines the evolution of NATO's strategy in four steps. To provide a historical perspective on the Alliance's ongoing adaptation, Chapter 2 analyses important features and dilemmas in NATO strategy-making during the Cold War. Subsequently, Chapter 3 applies a bottom-up approach and outlines the patterns and plans of the Alliance strategy for adapting to the post-2014 European security environment. Chapter 4 then adopts a top-down approach and analyses and problematises the contents of the Alliance's current strategy documents and plans. Chapter 5 examines the resources available to the Alliance and the member states to implement the plans.

This concluding chapter constitutes the fifth step in the analysis, connecting the report's parts into an integrated perspective. The next section, 6.1, assesses the gradual alignment of NATO's strategy between 2014 and 2024. Section 6.2 addresses the remaining gap between NATO's political ambitions and the available resources. Section 6.3 considers the most important challenges to achieving an aligned strategy for deterrence and defence towards 2030. In the final section, 6.4, we explore various alternative approaches that NATO could potentially adopt to better align its strategy for deterrence and defence against Russia.

6.1 A more coherent politico-military approach

Between 2014 and 2024, NATO gradually developed a more coherent strategy for deterrence and defence.

Starting in 2014, NATO took a number of steps toward a more credible defence posture, underpinned by limited forward presence and rapid reinforcement. The Alliance's primary aims were to reassure the eastern allies, reduce the time-distance gap in Russia's favour on the eastern flank, and signal to Moscow that attempts at establishing a fait accompli through land-grabs could only fail. NATO therefore placed rotational, multinational, and small tripwire forces in the Baltic States and Poland, backed by (potentially) rapid reinforcements. However, many allies and military planners soon pointed out that the decisions were piecemeal, and the absence of a sufficiently comprehensive and convincing Alliance strategy gradually became evident.

NATO's military structures began formulating a more credible and coherent approach in 2018, resulting in the 2019 NATO Military Strategy, its first since the Cold War, and the 2020 Concept for Deterrence and Defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area. Due to political disagreements between allies at the time, NATO's political and military authorities proceeded to develop the strategy bottom-up, in which the military strategy and concepts preceded the setting of clear political-military goals. However, this revealed an uneasy situation in which the allies did not agree on the Alliance's ultimate goals.

Russia's February 2022 invasion changed the Alliance's political dynamics. The 2022 Strategic Concept had been in development since 2021, but Moscow's renewed war prompted the allies to revise, strengthen, and approve the document at the 2022 Madrid summit. With the new concept, the allies managed to agree on a more coherent politico-military approach to deterrence and defence and send clear political guidance to the Alliance's international staff and member states. This step proved important and resolved the previously convoluted situation.

The Alliance took further steps to develop its military planning at the 2022 Madrid and 2023 Vilnius summits. SACEUR's strategic plans, along with regional

and domain/functional operations plans, were now directing the way in which the Alliance's forces should act to deter and defend against Russian activities across the so-called continuum of competition.

Those plans now drive the development of the forces provided by the allies through the NATO force model (NFM), significantly improving the Alliance military leadership's overview of the allied forces. The plans now also guide the development of the armed forces through the revitalised NATO Defence Planning Process (NDPP). As these steps pressure the allies to better live up to the Alliance's force goals, this is a significant improvement compared to pre-2022. In sum, the decisions taken since 2022 have made the ends and ways of NATO's strategy more aligned, increased the robustness of NATO's military planning, and raised the strategy's credibility.

6.2 A lack of means

NATO's strategic ends and ways, however, signal that the Alliance aims higher. The vow to "defend every inch of Allied territory at all times" is a notable commitment. While the Alliance guards its language and injects subtle caveats regarding the extent of its ambitions, the notion of defending every inch and its promises to deny adversaries any possible opportunity for aggression suggest that NATO's intended strategy, at least concerning political aspirations, is one of deterrence by denial.

Combining the pieces of the DDA Family of Plans and the NATO Force Model, a possible interpretation of what NATO is trying to achieve could be labelled, using a bit of NATO speak, as a dynamic and tailored 'forward defence-in being,' which is responsive to various indications and warnings. Thus, through the new alert system and the higher readiness and responsiveness, the aim of the subordinate strategic plans and regional plans, as well as deterrent activity in peacetime, is to constantly deny Russia local superiority "when and where required," thereby achieving a sort of deterrence by denial.

The first component of the intended strategy is a strengthened forward presence in eight countries on the eastern flank, with the aim of being able to scale-up the existing battlegroups to brigade-size units "when and where required." The second component is a large-scale reinforcement capability, primarily comprised of the NATO Force Model's Tier 1 and 2 forces, which the new operations plans identify. The allies are tasked with making 300,000 soldiers available to SACEUR within 30 days, a stark contrast to the post-2014 capability for reinforcement, which primarily consisted of the NRF and had a target of 40,000 troops in 7–45 days, a task that allies had difficulties living up to. The difference — 260 000 additional soldiers — demonstrates the major allied commitment needed to fulfil NATO's stated ambitions.

As Chapter 5 shows, however, it appears difficult for the Allies to resource the NFM with near-complete, well-supplied, trained, and supported forces, thus making the strategy difficult to execute. Our analysis shows that the examined 12 countries relevant for deterrence and defence of Northern Europe could assemble approximately 135,000 ground forces in 30 days. Add deployable air and naval forces to this, keeping in mind that land forces typically require more personnel than other services. Note that we arrived at this number by generously counting, without thoroughly considering, for instance, the various enablers and protection measures necessary for such a force composition.

Nonetheless, the 135,000+ figure would constitute around half of the required 300,000 forces for the first two tiers of the NFM. This means that remaining allies and especially additional American cross-Atlantic reinforcements would have to contribute substantial forces to reach the target. Further research should scrutinise the credibility of this claim.

Furthermore, a substantially improved strategy of deterrence by denial would likely require larger-scale forces in place (assuming Russian reconstitution) and the ability to rotate forces, which does not seem to be part of current plans.

To worsen the situation, the continuation of Russia's 2022 war against Ukraine has demonstrated the requirements of high-intensity warfare and revealed NATO's relative shortages of manpower, equipment, and supplies. To address this, NATO allies need to improve the existing units' availability, expand force structures in some cases, and better match manoeuvre units with combat support. In addition, allies need to address capability gaps, personnel recruitment and retention problems, enhance logistics, improve ammunition stocks, and conduct more large-scale exercises.

Taking all of this together, our assessment is that, at its core, NATO's current strategy ultimately relies more on deterrence by punishment than denial and will likely continue doing so. Politically, however, the Alliance aims for a strategy of deterrence by denial. While NATO's strategy will always be a mix of both elements, several factors — reassurance of vulnerable allies, Russian conduct in Ukraine, and the horrors of nuclear war — make denial an easier political sell. However, without

the necessary resources and larger forward-deployed forces, we could describe the current approach as deterrence by denial "on the cheap."

NATO is clear-eyed, however, on the challenge of aligning its resources with its ends and ways. NATO's international staff and member state officials seldom miss an opportunity to emphasise the budget increases and sense of urgency needed to continue the Alliance's adaptation. The very process of adopting a threat-based defence planning process and the clear articulation of high ambitions aims to spur development of the necessary means. In the coming years, it will be up to member states to actually deliver on what has politically and rhetorically been agreed upon in order to accomplish a more aligned strategy. Several factors, many of them well-known recurring features and dilemmas from NATO's past, suggest that this might prove difficult.

6.3 Challenges to an aligned strategy toward 2030

The foremost challenges to successful implementation of NATO's strategy are more political than military. Granted, member states' armed forces are currently plagued by shortages of personnel, materiel, and ammunition, which are compounded by the support provided to Ukraine. However, in the longer term, these matters can be resolved if political unity within the Alliance and political will in member states can be upheld. As for unity, a number of issues will challenge the Alliance's ability to develop the necessary means.

First, allies have differing perceptions and priorities concerning the threat from Russia, which is only natural given geography and history. This difference has several components. The first component relates to the ongoing war in Ukraine. Much of the allies' perception of Russia is tied to the war's development and outcome. Even if the Russo-Ukraine war were to come to some standstill, many NATO members would still see Russia as a major threat, mainly because these countries believe that Moscow's ambitions extend further than to Ukraine, necessitating the upholding of the Alliance's political and military momentum. After some standstill in the war, however, some other NATO members might conclude that Moscow's ability to threaten the Alliance has sufficiently diminished, thereby "permitting" these allies to slow their defence investments. Increased political polarisation, populism, and nationalism in several member states could also affect threat perceptions and priorities, potentially leading to less predictable support for defence reforms.[1]

Another component of the threat perception concerns how NATO's ongoing adaptation lacks a clearly formulated desired end-state for NATO-Russia relations. The basic goal is to improve the Alliance's deterrence and defence and contain Russia; but then what? Should Russia be contained for decades, or should some sort of modus vivendi be sought after the war in Ukraine ends? The easiest way to maintain unity on this issue is to avoid addressing it. The 2022 Strategic Concept and post-2022 summit communiqués mention that the Alliance strives for predictability and stability in relation to Russia but remain otherwise silent on the subject. In other words, the political ends of NATO's strategy towards Russia are insufficiently defined due to the need to uphold unity, the varied instincts of member states, and the difficulties in assessing Russia's future trajectory. For various reasons, this issue may soon become urgent.[2] NATO has communicated its ambition to formulate a more strategic approach to Russia ahead of the 2025 Hague summit, but it is unclear whether the "Russia strategy" will deal with the overarching political dynamics.[3]

Secondly, the evolving US role in the Alliance introduces uncertainty into NATO's planning and, in the longer term, makes unity harder to uphold as the traditional Alliance leader's interest may wane. For the first time in NATO's history, the US's primary state competitor is outside the Euro-Atlantic region. Although the US's focus on and resources allocated to China and the Indo-Pacific have evolved slowly, there is increasing evidence that this is changing.[4] Previously, when the US faced other global engagements and a turbulent domestic situation, European allies temporarily increased their defence spending and improved burden-sharing within the Alliance.[5] But Washington always fully returned to Europe and spearheaded the efforts to revitalise the Alliance, largely due to the Soviet Union's shadow.

If China does assume the Soviet Union's Cold War role, there is no guarantee that the US will re-engage in European defence with the same intensity as before. European allies, more significantly than earlier in NATO's history, would need to dramatically increase their own efforts and be prepared to compensate for fewer US forces in the Alliance's operations plans, at least in the air and naval domains, given the increased demand for such forces in the Indo-Pacific theatre. Such a scenario would challenge NATO's unity, and some member states might choose to prioritise their bilateral relationship with the US over NATO, possibly undermining NATO's collective efforts. Some members could even attempt to 'hide' behind states that are closer to the threat from Russia and/or prioritise other issues.

Third, divisions between allies about the appropriate levels of forward defence may challenge NATO's unity of effort. States closer to the front line with Russia are likely to continue to argue for strengthened forward defences and effective deterrence by denial. They are currently strengthening border defences, e.g., by constructing bunkers and anti-tank obstacles. Allies primarily tasked with providing reinforcements, however, want to preserve precious state finances and maintain their flexibility to deploy limited capabilities across the Euro-Atlantic area. They also wish to avoid the risk of forward-deploying large-scale forces, as such forces would be vulnerable to preemptive and surprise attacks. The current precarious balance between what the frontline states and the reinforcing states want might not hold.

In addition to unity and solidarity within NATO, sustained political will and financial backing among member states are necessary to develop the capabilities needed to resource NATO's strategy for deterrence and defence. This necessitates a fundamental change of mindset in many countries and shifting priorities within national budgets.

Currently, many allies confront problems in expanding their armed forces. In this situation, one must consider the point of departure. Almost all states in Europe reduced their armed forces radically in the post-Cold War period and followed American advice to transform the forces they had left for operations out of area. This also resulted in a significant downsizing of European industries that produced heavy armaments. Thus, allies now simultaneously need to rebuild their armed forces to meet the Russian threat while supporting Ukraine and expanding their industrial bases, which has proven difficult for many countries. However, with time and sustained political will, which will not come easily given the challenges outlined above, these problems should be manageable.

6.4 Achieving deterrence nonetheless

NATO's strategy seeks to achieve the task of deterrence and defence against Russia. While NATO has come a long way in recent years, future developments and member states' ability to deliver on increased ambitions are closely tied to the external and internal challenges outlined above. The many unknowns make forecasting difficult, but we see several ways that the Alliance might follow to either alleviate the current problems or accept risk in order to ultimately uphold Alliance unity through 2030, and achieve the core task of deterrence and defence.

Firstly, if NATO lacks the resources (and possibly the interest) for an effective deterrence by denial, the Alliance may aim to fill the gap with capabilities that traditionally are more associated with a strategy of deterrence by punishment. Notably, the Alliance may increase the role of nuclear weapons, as it has done in the past, particularly during the 1950s. The initial steps would likely involve better integrating nuclear plans with regional and domain/functional plans, along with conducting more frequent exercises of the Alliance's nuclear mission. The Alliance is already taking some of these steps. A subsequent step could be to use nuclear signalling more extensively and enhance the credibility of the Alliance's willingness to use nuclear weapons in conflict.[6] Further, lowering the threshold for their use and clearly demonstrating this stance could impress upon adversaries the seriousness of the Alliance's commitment. While such measures might be necessary to compensate for a shortage of conventional forces, the latter steps could face significant opposition from several allies and their publics, once again illustrating trade-offs between political unity and military effectiveness. Moreover, if events continue down this line, pressure would build for augmenting NATO's currently rather modest nuclear posture with more weapons or more means of delivery.

As a middle-way, NATO may also opt to continue developing its conventional punishment capabilities. NATO traditionally stresses direct defence at the place of attack, as in "defending every inch," and horizontal escalation has been a thorny subject. Some European members have previously been reluctant to grant SACEUR a mandate to widen the geographical scope of hostilities because of fear of provoking potentially uncontrollable escalation. These member states have also feared that their publics would disagree with the notion of defending through offensive operations.[7] However, the 2019 military strategy and subsequent strategic plans' theatre-wide approach come with options for horizontal and/or (non-nuclear) deliberate escalation. Equally, frequent NATO allusions to presenting Russia with "strategic dilemmas," suggest that the Alliance intends to deter Russia by more than the increased conventional forces stationed in the east.

Consequently, Russia must consider the risk of NATO counterattacking anywhere in the Euro-Atlantic area.[8] US doctrinal developments and upcoming US deployments of longer-range missiles in Germany and newfound European interest in the same capabilities

can be seen as part of this trend, albeit on a longer-term trajectory. It thus complements the in-place deterrence-by-denial forces with a conventional deterrence-by-punishment element.[9] Similarly, one might speculate that the Subordinate Strategic Plans (SSP) include additional ideas on how to present strategic dilemmas to Russia. While there is a deterrence logic to such an approach, an overemphasis on strategic dilemmas might decrease the stability and predictability that NATO strives for in its relations with Russia. In other words, choosing this approach would necessitate a meticulous balancing act between ways and ends.

Secondly, the Alliance may muddle through. NATO's history suggests that implementing ambitious, large-scale plans and merging hard capabilities with realistic goals will take at least 10–15 years. Even generously counting from 2022, by 2030 the Alliance will only have had 8 years, making the current lack of resources unsurprising. Furthermore, as Chapter 4 argues, it remains unclear whether the true implications of the Alliance's plans, across the continuum of competition, have yet trickled down to the allies and their armed forces.

In that vein, the Alliance may choose to accept higher risk in the near term, especially as long as Russia is occupied in Ukraine. Some allies might also argue that Russia's performance in the war so far makes the task of deterring a Russian attack easier, thus "allowing" them to aim to have addressed major capability gaps around 2035. Such an approach and assessment of the Russian threat, however, comes with its own challenges, both with regards to upholding a sense of urgency in Western and Southern Europe and with regard to upholding a sense of reassurance among eastern allies.

Thirdly, NATO may choose to adjust the ends and ways to better fit the means. Historically, the Alliance has been better at formulating and politically supporting strategies than the allies have been at implementing the required steps to make those strategies credible and executable. The consequence has often been taking steps to adjust the ends and ways to fit the means, and not the other way around, or to live with the discrepancy. NATO may choose to do so again by, for example, toning down or reinterpreting the rhetoric on "defending every inch" to a more militarily meaningful and achievable formula. However, this would be difficult for some frontline states to accept.[10]

To conclude, it is worth reminding ourselves of what NATO is and how it works. Far from being a military organisation run according to command lines, in peacetime NATO remains an Alliance of 32 members operating through consensus. This means that political feasibility takes precedence over theoretical perfection and that major changes take time. NATO's enduring challenge has been balancing political unity with military effectiveness. Historically, political unity has been more important than achieving perfect military solutions. However, it is uncertain whether this will be sufficient to deter and defend against a reconstituted Russia. To execute effectively the Alliance's strategy for deterrence and defence through 2030 and beyond, it is imperative to narrow the gap between political ambitions and available capabilities. ■

Endnotes

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6 William Albergue and Arthur Kacprcyk, "More Pillars Needed: Ten Options for Europe to Improve NATO's Nuclear Deterrence," Stimson, October 2, 2024, *https://www.stimson.org/2024/more-pillars-needed-nato-nuclear-deterrence/*.

7 Ringsmose and Rynning, "NATO's Next Strategic Concept."158.

8 Ringsmose and Rynning, "NATO's Next Strategic Concept."158.

9 Alexander Graef and Tim Thies, "Missiles on the Move: Why US Long-range Missiles in Germany Are Just the Tip of the Iceberg," Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, August 12, 2024, *https://thebulletin.org/2024/08/missiles-on-the-move-why-us-long-range-missiles-in-germany-are-just-the-tip-of-the-iceberg/*.

10 Alternative operational concepts are currently under discussion in the expert community; see, for example, Lukas Mengelkamp, Alexander Graef, and Ulrich Kühn, et al., "A Confidence-Building Defense for NATO," War on the Rocks, June 27, 2022, *https://warontherocks.com/2022/06/a-confidence-building-defense-for-nato/*.

Appendix 1.

List of interviews

Defence Capabilities Section, Defence Policy and Planning Division, NATO International Staff, Brussels, October 16, 2023.

Defence Planning Directorate, Defence Policy and Planning Division, NATO International Staff, Brussels, October 17, 2023.

Defence Policy and Plans Division, US Mission to NATO, Brussels, October 16, 2023.

Defence Policy Section, Defence Policy and Planning Division, NATO International Staff, Brussels, October 16, 2023.

Enablement & Resilience Section, Defence Policy and Planning Division, NATO International Staff, Brussels, October 17, 2023.

Joint Delegation of Canada to NATO, Brussels, October 18, 2023.

Permanent Delegation of the Federal Republic of Germany to NATO, Brussels, October 18, 2023.

Permanent Delegation of the Republic of Poland to NATO, Brussels, October 18, 2023.

Permanent Representation of France to NATO, Brussels, October 17, 2023.

Permanent Representation of Sweden to NATO, Brussels, October 18, 2023.

Plans Section, Operations Division, NATO International Staff, Brussels, October 18, 2023

United Kingdom's Joint Delegation to NATO, Brussels, October 18, 2023.

Appendix 2. Western assistance to Ukraine

Karl Agell

All data on Western assistance to Ukraine has been sourced from the database of the Kiel Institute for the World Economy's (IfW Kiel) project, The Ukraine Support Tracker. The database covers the period from 24 January 2022 to 30 June 2024. IfW Kiel tracks financial, humanitarian, and military assistance. In its update from April 2024, IfW Kiel reported that it had changed its methodology. While they previously tracked committed assistance — that is, pledges by a state or the EU — they have now moved to tracking allocated assistance. The latter comprises assistance that has been or is about to be delivered or paid. For this reason, the figures presented here may be lower than previously presented figures.[1] The euro value is set at the monthly average for June 2024.

Figure 7.1 shows that the lion's share of the U.S. assistance is devoted to military assistance, while the EU provides more financial and humanitarian assistance. Also note that much of the assistance allocated by European states is baked into the EU graph. IfW Kiel notes that in total, European countries have allocated approximately EUR 93 billion and the US more than EUR 75 billion. In military assistance, Europe as a whole has allocated approximately EUR 40 billion and the US over EUR 51 billion.

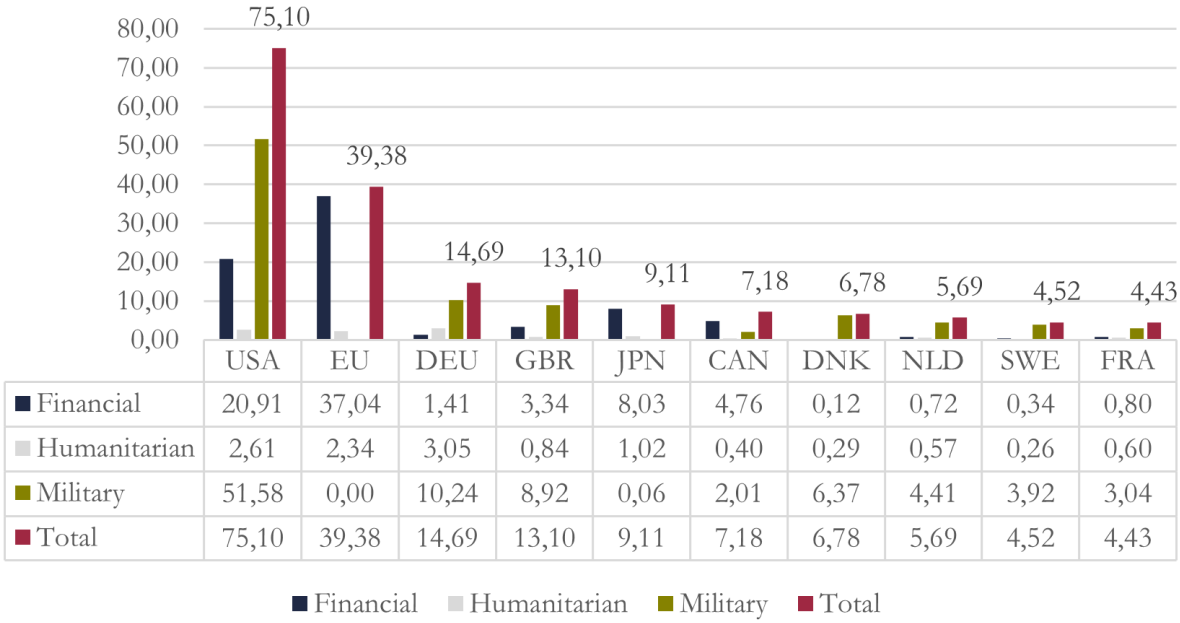
Figure 7.2 examines European contributions in more detail. Assistance that in Figure 1 was placed under the EU column is here distributed among the member states. The figure shows that EU member states, to a greater extent, act collectively. For example, France's allocated assistance almost triples from EUR 4.43 to 11.99 billion if assistance provided through the EU is added. Italy, Spain, and Belgium also stand out as preferring to act through the EU rather than bilaterally. As mentioned, the figures show allocated assistance; much more has been committed in the longer term. The EU, for instance, has programmes for long-term assistance over the course of several years.

Figure 7.3 illustrates the gap between committed and allocated assistance. The EU total includes bilateral support from EU member states as well as support through EU institutions. The figure shows that the US is faster to allocate the assistance it pledges, even if total EU allocations exceed those of the US. The US has allocated approximately 76 percent of committed assistance; the same figure for the EU is approximately 59 percent. This large gap consists mostly of multiyear budgetary and macrofinancial assistance packages.

For instance, in February 2024, the EU approved that EUR 50 billion in financial assistance would be paid out until 2027. IfW Kiel counts this as a commitment that, so far, has not been allocated. Every year, EUR 12.5 billion of this package would be shifted to allocated assistance when it is actually paid out.[2] Another important factor is that when the US Congress approves funding for Ukraine through an appropriations act, the funds can generally only be spent within the fiscal year they were appropriated.[3]

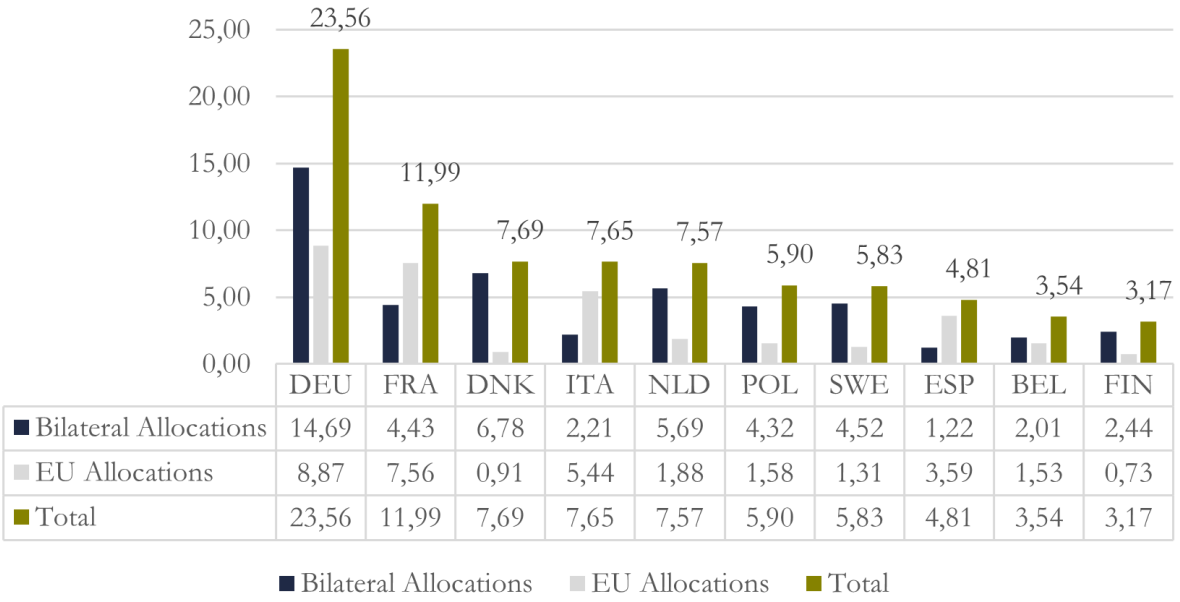
Of note is that US assistance mostly consists of grants, i.e., assistance that is not expected to be repaid. The EU, on the other hand, in large part issues loans with the expectation of repayment at some point. This seems to have to do with complications in EU-wide budget negotiations. Various other issues are bundled up with Ukraine assistance proposals that make it more difficult to pass motions in the European Parliament. Therefore, it appears easier to create a consensus within the bloc by offering loans.[4]

Finally, Figure 7.4 examines assistance in relative terms, as a percentage of GDP, including costs from receiving and sheltering refugees. In this figure, the contributions of Ukraine's neighbours stand out. Poland, the Baltic States, and Eastern European countries in general have made considerable efforts to provide assistance to Ukrainian refugees. Even countries that have been unwilling to provide military assistance, such as Hungary, have done more than most when factoring in refugee costs. ■



	USA	EU	DEU	GBR	JPN	CAN	DNK	NLD	SWE	FRA
Financial	20,91	37,04	1,41	3,34	8,03	4,76	0,12	0,72	0,34	0,80
Humanitarian	2,61	2,34	3,05	0,84	1,02	0,40	0,29	0,57	0,26	0,60
Military	51,58	0,00	10,24	8,92	0,06	2,01	6,37	4,41	3,92	3,04
Total	75,10	39,38	14,69	13,10	9,11	7,18	6,78	5,69	4,52	4,43

Figure 7.1 Ukraine's 10 biggest supporters and categories of assistance (EUR billions)
Source: IfW Kiel, Ukraine support data set August 2024, "Fig 3. Ranking (€)." Data current as of June 2024.



	DEU	FRA	DNK	ITA	NLD	POL	SWE	ESP	BEL	FIN
Bilateral Allocations	14,69	4,43	6,78	2,21	5,69	4,32	4,52	1,22	2,01	2,44
EU Allocations	8,87	7,56	0,91	5,44	1,88	1,58	1,31	3,59	1,53	0,73
Total	23,56	11,99	7,69	7,65	7,57	5,90	5,83	4,81	3,54	3,17

Figure 7.2 Top 10 EU supporters and distribution channels (EUR billion)
Source: IfW Kiel, Ukraine support data set August 2024, "Fig A17. Ranking (€ bn.+ EU)." Data current as of June 2024.

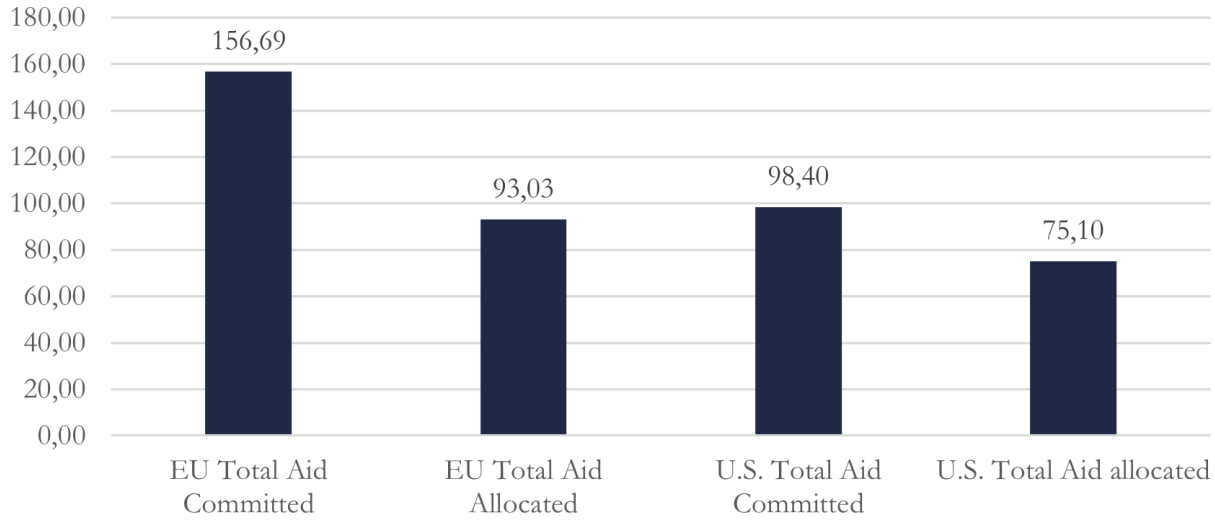
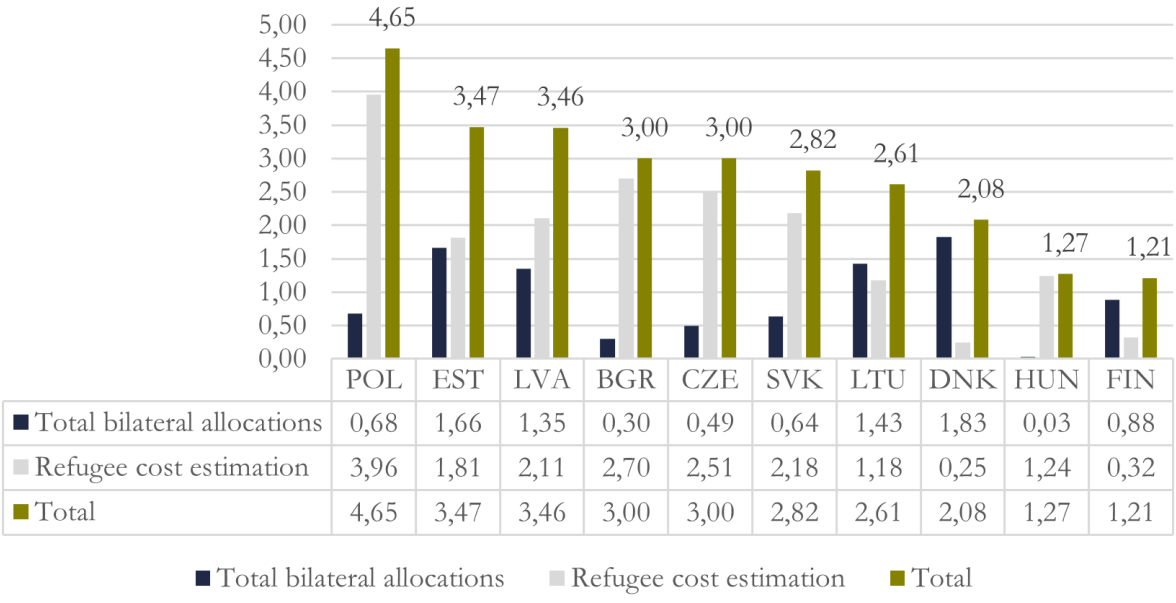


Figure 7.3 EU and US total assistance and committed and allocated assistance (EUR billion)
Source: IfW Kiel, Ukraine support data set August 2024, "Fig A13. EU vs US Comm & Alloc." Data current as of June 2024.



	POL	EST	LVA	BGR	CZE	SVK	LTU	DNK	HUN	FIN
Total bilateral allocations	0,68	1,66	1,35	0,30	0,49	0,64	1,43	1,83	0,03	0,88
Refugee cost estimation	3,96	1,81	2,11	2,70	2,51	2,18	1,18	0,25	1,24	0,32
Total	4,65	3,47	3,46	3,00	3,00	2,82	2,61	2,08	1,27	1,21

Figure 7.4 Assistance including refugee costs (percentage of GDP)
Source: IfW Kiel, Ukraine support data set August 2024, "Fig 7. With Refugee Support, %." Data current as of June 2024.

Endnotes

1 Pietro Bomprezzi, Ivan Kharitinov, and Christoph Trebesch, Ukraine Support Tracker — Methodological Update & New Results on Aid "Allocation" (Kiel: Institute for the World Economy—IfW, April 2024), 2–6.

2 Bomprezzi, Kharitinov, and Trebesch, Ukraine Support Tracker, 9–10.

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4 Henry Foy, "EU's € 86 bn Budget Battle Casts Shadow over Ukraine Funding," Financial Times, August 29, 2023, https://www.ft.com/content/870922b9-fb37–4907-b806–89e034924d3f; Sergiy Sydorenko, "What Are the Conditions for EU's € 18 Billion for Ukraine?" Euractiv, January 17, 2023, https://www.euractiv.com/section/europe-s-east/news/what-are-the-conditions-.

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The Northern European and Transatlantic Security Programme (NOTS) at the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI) analyses security and defence policy developments in Western countries and organisations that influence Swedish security. Every three years since 2017, the programme has published a comprehensive analysis of Western military capability and the military strategic situation in Northern Europe. Building on previous efforts, this third iteration is our most ambitious undertaking to date.

Part three of Western Military Capability in Northern Europe 2024 examines NATO's evolving strategy for deterrence and defence in Northern Europe, covering the current situation and looking ahead to 2030. It focuses on how well NATO's adaptation efforts, strategic ends, operations plans, and force development align to achieve the core task of deterrence and defence.

The report finds that the ends and ways of NATO's strategy have become more aligned since 2014 and that the Alliance now has a more coherent politico-military approach to its core task of deterrence and defence. However, there are several gaps between NATO's political ambitions and the available means. Towards 2030, differing threat perceptions among allies, changes in the transatlantic relationship, and debates about the appropriate levels of forward defence are likely to challenge the implementation of NATO's strategy. Furthermore, allies must demonstrate the political will and financial backing to build the necessary capabilities for successful implementation. Given these challenges, NATO may, as several times before in its history, pursue alternate ways to achieve deterrence and defence towards Russia nonetheless.

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ISSN 1650-1942

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