

Original article

## Military Security in Central and Eastern Europe – from overarching principles to current NATO perspectives

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### INFORMATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

This year, NATO is celebrating its 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary and the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty. The Alliance was founded in the early days of the Cold War, but found itself in a new geopolitical situation after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar world. The organization has been transforming ever since and over time this transformation has included both expansion and adaptation to new circumstances. With the return of Russian neo-imperial ambitions in the recent years, NATO has been given new impetus. Emerging threats and challenges, which are mainly of a military nature, have been addressed by NATO through further recent adaptation processes which were based on the return to the core role of the Alliance, namely collective defense and deterrence. This, in turn, has created a boost of NATO activity on the ground, which means that improvement with regard to interoperability and integration is now in high demand.

### KEYWORDS

security, NATO, military threat, enhanced Forward Presence, interoperability



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## Introduction

Insecurity and instability increasingly influence, and threaten to further influence, NATO's eastern boundaries and the area beyond them. The Alliance faces a range of security challenges and threats that originate from state and non-state actors, posing conventional and unconventional threats. The willingness of regional actors to use military action along with the threat or even the use of force in order to attain political goals is a clear and present source of regional instability. NATO has adapted to these developments by enhancing regional deterrence, improving its defence posture, and by seeking a unified effort among all its security partners.

National security refers to a nation organized into a country. It can be defined as the ability of a country to ensure: its existence as an institution; the existence of the nation

as a community (cultural community); the physical survival of its people; its territorial integrity and political independence (sovereignty); its order and internal stability; the wellness and good living standards for its citizens as well as the conditions for multifaceted development. Thus, a threat to national security may arise from a series of events, facts, states etc. (internal and external), dependent or independent of people. This may lead to the malfunctioning of the above-mentioned abilities of a country, which again may result in the loss of sovereignty and territorial integrity, in full or in part, which will be most detrimental to the country, since both aspects are conditions *sine qua non* for the safety of its citizens and for its national development.

Nowadays, only the state is considered to be the sole source of the 'right' to use violence.<sup>1</sup> According to Max Weber, *the concept of state* could not exist without the social institutions which knew the application of violence against the conditions described as *anarchy* [From: 1, p. 77-128]. In foreign relations violence is often treated as the last resort to maintain power and regime status quo<sup>2</sup> [See: 2, p. 46] against specific challenges such as a foreign enemy. Armed force is thus a unique instrument of the independent state, maintained and authorized for warfare. There is a notion in the body of science that the military plays a crucial role in the maintenance of state power and its sovereignty once it is established.

### **Re-emerging military threats**

For a number of years, we have observed armed conflicts of different intensity, also in the immediate vicinity of EU borders, combining the features of conventional and interstate warfare, as well as armed intervention and actions below the threshold of war. These conflicts and interventions have significantly influenced the social perception of national security, and they have become a strong incentive for the revision of views on the stability of peace in international relations. The public has become aware that an armed conflict between states or a group of states is probable and that the risk of using force is becoming real again. Thus, the total domination of threats, so far defined as non-military in nature, has come to an end.

Despite the changes in the security environment, reminiscent of a return to previous experience, no further return to old practices, simple but incompatible with the mechanisms of development and evolution, is to be expected. Undoubtedly, the spectrum for sensing threats is constantly expanding, highlighting those not yet defined or not yet experienced, especially in relation to the "old" threats perceived as returning ones. It is also becoming more and more difficult to divide and determine the interrelationship and strength of the "impact" of such threats as:

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<sup>1</sup> In this publication, the definition of violence refers to the intentional application of physical force against a group or community to injure, damage, or destroy, resulting in or having a high likelihood of death, psychological harm or deprivation, submission.

<sup>2</sup> In general terms, Hannah Arendt challenges the traditional conception of power and violence where violence is considered as an ultimate manifestation of power. For Arendt, both terms represent different phenomena and, as such, violence falls outside the concept of the political, whereas power is strictly linked to the political sphere.

1. Military threats constituting a relatively specific group of threats posed by armed forces.
2. Non-military threats covering a very wide and inaccurate range of threats or even presenting an unlimited set of threats.
3. Internal and external, i.e. global, regional, local threats. It is a very difficult and subjective criterion due to unclear and imprecise boundaries between what is internal and what is external in a mutually dependent globalized world.
4. State and non-state threats, including the convergence of threat sources. On the one hand, we have non-state organizations (in the light of international law) that effectively use organized military means in their classic version. On the other hand, there are national states which deliberately and in a coordinated manner use the means and methods which have hitherto been an attribute of non-state organizations [See: 3, p. x-xv] (criminal activities, state-sponsored smuggling, attacks on computer networks, etc.).

Having in mind the specific geographical location, historical records, national interests, place in the international system and very own cultures of Central and Eastern European countries, the list of challenges and threats to their national security may include:

1. Sudden change in the geopolitical orientation of one or a group of neighbouring countries.
2. Strategic isolation or loss (break up) of existing military alliances or political or economic treaties and arrangements within the EU.
3. Organizational and decision-making ineptitude resulting in the inability to equalize (eliminate) the potential military imbalance, both in qualitative and technological terms (quantitative is beyond our range), with regard to the Russian Federation.
4. Abandonment or negligence of the development of organizational, decision-making and technical capabilities necessary to face the challenges stemming from the global “networking” of societies and its consequences for the nation states.
5. Lack of acceptance for the existence of phenomena resulting from civilization-al paradigm changes (global and national) as factors making it impossible to adapt the country and nation to the evolving environment and conditions.
6. Tolerance for actions undermining the authority, efficiency and constitutional role of state institutions (internal and/or external).
7. Direction of national aspirations and ambitions (*soft power*) without ensuring conditions, consolidation or building up necessary potential of the country (socio-economic, political, economic, financial, social, cultural etc.).
8. Inadequate qualifications (competences, political experience, strategic “maturity”) of the elected or appointed national leaders responsible for creating, communicating and implementing the vision of the future of the country and nation.

Nevertheless, in spite of the nature and complexity of the challenges and risks, we are experiencing more and more frequent symptoms of “re-militarization” of international security, manifested by enhancing military security by certain states in relation to the various types of threats discussed above. This trend is a response to changes in the international environment in combination with many years of negligence with regard to modernization and maintenance of the armed forces in some NATO states.

Military security cannot be separated from military threats and it tends to occupy the very center of national security concerns. A military threat intimidates all the components of the state. As such, it can result in the disruption or destruction of state institutions, and it can undermine or negate the very idea of the state. Military actions thus strike at the very essence of the state’s basic protective functions and threaten to damage social and individual interests [See: 3, p. 107]. This is not least the case in the Baltic Sea Region where, though to a varying degree, all countries have refocused their national security scopes increasingly toward military security and simultaneously increased their defence spending. The value of NATO membership has gone up in the region and the organization is now (again) the focal point and drive for security-related efforts and a primary provider of security.

### **NATO activities**

The activity of NATO in the Baltic Sea region has been gradually increasing since 2014, i.e. since the Russian annexation of Crimea and destabilization of Ukraine. The initiatives taken by the Alliance at that time represent a response to Moscow’s actions. Since then, three NATO summits have taken place (in Newport, Warsaw and Brussels), and Russia has not abandoned its provocative conduct (in Europe and beyond), and therefore, the Alliance’s vigilance has intensified. The President of the Russian Federation declares openly his intention to increase the number and capacity of the Russian armed forces. However, it is due to more than just statements that Russia’s actions require close monitoring. All of this applies to the whole range of practices, from recurring disinformation incidents against NATO troops in the East, through violations of the Baltic airspace, to exercises taking place in the Russian Federation in close proximity of NATO’s eastern boundaries. The spectrum of threats is much wider than we could have imagined only a few years ago. Among other aspects, we are also talking about the so-called hybrid actions and threats posed by cyber-attacks.

In the context of these new challenges, NATO has adopted a two-track policy towards Russia in the region. The two tracks are aspects that complement each other. On the one hand, it is an attitude of deterrence necessitated by Moscow’s measures. Action requires reaction. On the other hand is a willingness to engage in a dialogue with Moscow. To begin with the latter aspect, in April 2018 General Curtis Scaparotti, NATO’s Supreme Allied Commander Europe, and General Valery Gierasimow, Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation, met for talks in Baku, Azerbaijan, under the auspices of the NATO-Russia Council.

In the military dimension (the focal point of this article), with respect to Russia, NATO is focusing both on effective deterrence and the possibility of a rapid deployment of forces. Already in Newport – in 2014 – an emphasis was placed on the need to build up military capacity such as high responsiveness, interoperability and mobility. In this context, the culture of readiness was debated at the last NATO summit in Brussels. Following the negotiations, NATO now also intends to implement the so-called Readiness Initiative. This means that all the attributes to which the Alliance is now so strongly committed are to be strengthened within the national armed forces. Changes in the NATO Command Structure should also be in tune with the rapid response capabilities and Strategic Alliance commanders must have interoperable forces capable of rapid deployment at their disposal.

The changes in question are being implemented via many platforms, not only the military ones – also in the spheres of language and communication. In these spheres, the Alliance has clearly turned its attention to the East. The official NATO website now provides tabs in Russian and Ukrainian as the role and power of information is already clearly understood, especially in the field of the so-called “new media”. At the strategic level, the Alliance’s narrative has also clearly evolved in recent years. Although NATO still remains and will remain non-confrontational in its actions (also the linguistic ones), the more or less anonymous “threat” – a term quite typically used a couple of years ago – now has a more explicit name. Russia’s actions are now referred to as destabilizing and undermining international conventions. And we – NATO – have the right and duty to react to them.

The Alliance has also reacted via the military platforms. One such (regional) reaction, or rather consequential development, is the way Multinational Corps Northeast, headquartered in Szczecin, has evolved. In 2017, as a direct result of the NATO summit in Newport in 2014, HQ MNC NE passed the certification and became a High-Readiness Force Corps HQ with regional responsibility, in order to take on the task of strengthening military security and enhancing military integration in the Baltic Sea Region. Cooperation and exchange with the units now subordinated to the Corps is continuously improving, and the recent assignment of two Multinational Divisions to the Corps will enhance the force structure and the war fighting capabilities of the Corps, while at the same time contributing to further facilitation of the unity of command and unity of military effort in the region. Today, Multinational Corps Northeast is the hinge between the National Home Defence Forces (e.g. in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) and the Joint Level Headquarters in the NATO Command Structure. Furthermore, the military-political aims of the countries of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, but also of Slovakia and Hungary are incorporated into the understanding and considerations of the Corps. The role and the mission of Multinational Corps Northeast are both aligned with real-life planning efforts, which span from current activities and baseline operations to crisis and conflict, in order to contribute to NATO’s credible deterrence posture and ultimately to the defence of NATO territory.

In addition to the Multinational Divisions, the Corps has assumed Command & Control over NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence Battle Groups in the region and the NATO

Force Integration Units in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Hungary. Additionally, the Corps has become the Land Integrator for NATO in the region, thus acting as the Regional Land Component. The tasks for the Corps also encompass building NATO awareness and understanding of the northeastern flank of the alliance in close cooperation with all of the mentioned subordinated units and, through them, with Host Nations' authorities. Together, this awareness and understanding enable the Alliance to act as an information provider, thus adding substantial value to the NATO Command Structure (NCS), NATO Response Forces (NRF), our neighboring and equivalent Corps Headquarters and the Host Nations.

The NATO's enhanced Forward Presence concept, referred to as the 'eFP', comprises battalion-sized battle groups provided by four Framework Nations (Great Britain, Canada, Germany and the United States), four Host Nations (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland) and, finally, Multinational Division Northeast with Poland as the Framework Nation. After the official announcement of enhanced Forward Presence at the Warsaw Summit in 2016, it took only a few months to see the first eFP Battle Groups being deployed to the host nations. This significant commitment by Allies is a tangible reminder that an attack on one is an attack on all. The Battle groups and, consequently, the deployment of multinational NATO forces on NATO territory is a new standard for NATO, but it comes along with new implications and challenges.

The command authority over the eFP Battle Groups, which are integrated into assigned National Home Defence Forces Brigades (in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland respectively), has been transferred to NATO. All four Battle Groups have achieved Full Operational Capability (an assessment made by the respective Battle Group Commanders), which means that they are declared ready to defend against a short-notice limited conventional incursion. However, the way of getting them ready and the measures according to which they have been declared ready differ from one Battle Group to another. This is due to the fact that eFP has not been declared as an official NATO operation or mission. Therefore, some framework or troop contributing nations consider eFP as a mission, while for others training and exercises seem to be the priority, which has an impact on how the Battle Groups operate – for instance with regard to intelligence. Multiple constraints and complications thus sometimes prevent this critical capability from being fully effective. Due to the multinational composition of each battle group, even rotation schedules within one battle group differ. Furthermore, each rotation means a change of equipment. An heavy-armored battalion can turn into a mechanized or even an infantry unit. In overall, the eFP is clearly a valuable force multiplier and a real step in the right direction, but as one may sense from the above, there is still room for improvement.

The next element in the Corps portfolio are the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU). The NFIUs are liaison elements organically located between the host nations and the rest of the NATO community. In addition to their primary role in facilitating Reception, Staging and Onward Movement for deployed forces, their presence allows for the collection, processing and provision of data in all functional areas and for the delivery of real-time information and intelligence, which enables the alliance to make critical deci-

sions in a timely manner. Hence the importance of the NFIUs cannot be overstated. They allow NATO to respond appropriately and in a more rapid manner than ever before. As the Corps and the NFIUs are working together on a daily basis, the build-up of trust is being facilitated which, despite the procedural and technical dimensions, also should not be underestimated. The NFIUs constitute a major step in the right direction, towards enhancing the ability to act together coherently, effectively and efficiently.

### **Old problems with new faces**

Despite the positive step changes in military readiness and the military resources and capabilities allocated to achieve this readiness, the tasks given to the Corps and to its subordinate elements cannot be accomplished without an appropriate level of interoperability. In addressing the aspect of interoperability, the term can be defined as the ability of the Allies to act together coherently, effectively and efficiently to achieve tactical, operational and strategic objectives. Specifically, interoperability enables forces, units and/or systems to operate together and allows them to share common doctrine and procedures, each other's infrastructure and bases, as well as to communicate. Interoperability reduces duplication, enables the pooling of resources, and produces synergies among the 29 Allies and, whenever possible, with partner countries. The dimensions of interoperability are doctrinal, procedural, technical (including hardware, equipment, armaments and systems) as well as human (including terminology and training), complemented by information as a critical transversal element. It can be found on all military levels, from the strategic down to the tactical level. Furthermore, there is an impact between interoperability and all kinds of domains. To this end, interoperability and the challenges and implications related to it should not be taken into account only when considering the potential future operations – rather, it must be a constant focus area of Corps North East in order to ensure military effectiveness. The eFP initiative described above, which attaches deployed eFP Battle Groups to the Corps, is therefore an area that must have a constant 'interoperability-focus' from the side of the Corps.

The deterrent function of the eFP Battle Groups is a heavy burden and one can easily agree that the Battle Groups, which constitute purely tactical elements, have a role as joint enablers in the potential future operations as well. What is even more obvious is that these tactical units carry out strategic activities and have a huge impact on the strategic level, which increases the responsibility of all regional stakeholders. This is evident especially when it comes to the combat functions. These functions represent functional categories of capabilities used to generate specific effects during land operations. As such, the functions are a conceptual tool used to provide a list of component activities at the land tactical level, which contributes to operational success. With command and control being the hub of decision-making and objective achieving, only together they can form a coherent whole – the basis of a balanced forces' combined capabilities; in addition, they also embrace: intelligence, maneuverer, firing, force protection and logistics [See: 5]. Having in mind this narrative, it is worth to mention that command is the authority vested in an individual of the armed forces for the direction,

coordination and control of military forces [See: 6]. It is the combat function that integrates all other functions into a single concept to create the desired effects that support selected objectives. That is why authorization, clear C2 relation and the provision of means such as suitable and capable CIS are of the utmost importance. Firing, on the other hand, is defined as the use of weapon systems to create a specific lethal or non-lethal effect on a target. In order to create this effect, it is necessary to ensure capable weapon systems, backed up by a proper and common training as well as doctrine. As for sustainment, it is the combat function that provides for personnel, logistics and other support required to maintain and prolong operations until successful mission accomplishment. It integrates all aspects of service support to help generate and sustain military capacity. Within this, the provision of trained troops, transportation of all classes of supply and a common understanding of the day of supply notion (DOS) is necessary. Altogether, the combat functions – and the ability to carry them out and master them – must therefore also be a constant focus area for the Corps when training, preparing and evaluating itself and its subordinates in order to contribute to regional military security.

Only capabilities relative to those of the adversary can prove the superiority of any militaries in times of an armed clash [7, p. 16]. This of course refers to the relation between NATO and its potential military opponent on the Eastern flank. In the past examples, and despite perhaps not having had the perfect military organization, successful militaries had been superior to their enemies due to having much better doctrinal preparation, thus giving themselves the military advantage on the battlefield [7, p. 16]. The question we should ask ourselves in this regard is how we should respond to the current military threats and challenges? Do we – NATO – for example possess the same cohesion in organization, military technology and doctrine as our potential adversaries? In giving the rather obvious answer to the question, there clearly is an urgent need to dust off the “forgotten” craft of war. After 30 years of focus on out of area operations and the parallel expansion of the number of NATO member countries, our organization seems to have forgotten many previously accepted best practices. An example is the Military Load Classification pertaining to infrastructure such as roads and bridges. Without proper Military Load Classifications of the fragile and to some extent limited road infrastructure in Multinational Corps Northeast Area of Operations, a rapid deployment and subsequent employment of large mechanized formations remains more an illusion than a realistic scenario. Another essential part of the transfer of operational sectors will be the hand-over and take-over of barriers from the military formation in control to the incoming formation. NATO has well-described procedures for tactical hand-over and take-over of obstacles (i.e. STANAGS). However, Barrier Operations on a larger scale have not been on the agenda since the end of the cold war and a generation of junior officers and Non-Commissioned Officers have never practised this discipline as part of their tactical training. It is thus also an urgent requirement to relearn how to conduct barrier operations, including the hand-over and take-over of obstacles between units of different nationality. Without this re-learning effort, such operations may very likely be complicated by the lack of a common language, and differences between army formations in terms of organization, doctrine,



training, barrier munitions, equipment and capabilities, or even differences between the incoming and outgoing Commanders' concept of operation.

## Conclusions

These days, the security situation on the eastern flank of NATO has exposed the alliance to old dangers and challenges, extended with new dimensions and new characteristics. After years of engagements in *small wars*, the inherited habits and experiences drawn from such engagements have shown their limits. Therefore, we need to come back to military basics to a certain degree. As a result, military threats – and consequently military security – have once again come to the forefront of national and alliance security thinking. International politics, which have always been, and, as confirmed by the events since Crimea, still are anarchical in nature, make both threats and the (military) security aimed at guarding against such threats vitally important. Contrary to the old predictions [4, p. 119], the relevance of military threats has not been declining compared to threats in other security sectors, and we must acknowledge this and respond accordingly.

The development of Multinational Corps Northeast into a high readiness component of NATO's Force Structure and simultaneous establishment of the Corps as the land integrator for the region is an example of such acknowledgement and response. It represents a change in thinking and in action, but despite this significant development and all the developments that have come along with it, the attached multinational divisions, the eFP Battle Groups and the NFIUs are not yet in a position where we can declare 'mission accomplished'. Several areas of concern remain and must be dealt with.

One area of constant concern for the Corps is interoperability. It is difficult to speak of a defined acceptable level down to which we should consider interoperability feasible, but we must acknowledge that the lower the level, the more difficult it becomes. No less important is integration, namely the process of incorporating different incoming force elements (for instance the NATO Very high readiness Joint Task Force) into the existing operational battle space structures or ongoing regional operations as they unfold – a completely different and challenging discipline. When currently discussing the enhanced Forward Presence and topics such as interoperability and integration or classical military disciplines such as hand-over/take-over of obstacles or combat tasks, we are on the right way to get there. But there is still some way to go, and we need to constantly learn and re-learn.

There is a lot at stake on NATO's eastern flank and it is our obligation to think of the need to improve every aspect of what we need to possess in terms of military capabilities and master in terms of military disciplines – instead of relying on temporary solutions or improvisation. Once soldiers are on the ground, they find pragmatic ways to handle almost every challenge. However, it depends on us, their superiors, to provide them with an environment that allows them to carry out their tasks in the best way possible.

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The author declared no conflict of interests.


### Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

### Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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### Biographical note

**Slawomir Wojciechowski** – Lt Gen PhD. The Commander of Multinational Corps Northeast since September 2018. During his 35 years in the military, he served in a variety of the Polish Army units and formations. He commanded the Air Defence regiment and later the Infantry brigade. Additionally, during this time, he served on key positions in Iraq and Afghanistan; meanwhile, he prepared and commanded the first Polish European Battlegroup. In his career, he held a high position in the General Staff and was later appointed the Department Director responsible for Strategy and Defence Planning in the Ministry of Defence. Before he had been appointed Corps Commander, he had successfully served on joint level as the Deputy, and later as the Commander of the Operational Command of the Polish Armed Forces. Educated in the Academy of The National Defence in Warsaw, the UK Joint Services and Command

Staff College in Shrivenham and the US Army War College, General Wojciechowski developed his scientific interests in the area of strategic thinking as well as the state security, defence and development strategies. It resulted in the PhD dissertation successfully defended in 2017. He actively participates in the seminars and conferences covering issues pertaining to the problems of geopolitics, military security and NATO or EU military activities.

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### **Bezpieczeństwo militarne w Europie Środkowo-Wschodniej – od nadrzędnych zasad po aktualne perspektywy NATO**

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#### **STRESZCZENIE**

W tym roku NATO świętuje 70. rocznicę podpisania Traktatu Północnoatlantyckiego. Sojusz został zawarty na samym początku zimnej wojny, jednakże zaraz po rozpadzie Związku Radzieckiego i końcu tzw. świata dwubiegunowego znalazł się w nowej sytuacji geopolitycznej. Wraz z renesansem rosyjskich ambicji neoimperialnych, NATO otrzymało nowy impuls do działania. Pojawiające się zagrożenia i wyzwania, głównie o charakterze wojskowym, wpłynęły na dalszą ewolucję Sojuszu i jeszcze większe zaangażowanie w procesy dostosowawcze. Głównym kierunkiem działania jest powrót do koronnej roli Sojuszu, która skupia się na kwestiach obrony zbiorowej oraz odstraszeniu. Rozwój NATO w zakresie interoperacyjności i integracji jest obecnie wysoce pożądany.

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#### **SŁOWA KLUCZOWE**

bezpieczeństwo, NATO, zagrożenie militarne, wzmocnienie wysuniętej obecności (enhanced Forward Presence – eFP), interoperacyjność

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