



# REPORT

THE POLISH INSTITUTE OF INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

## U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE: CONSEQUENCES FOR NATO STRATEGIC ADAPTATION, DETERRENCE AND ALLIED SOLIDARITY

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## Executive Summary

In the wake of the Ukraine conflict and Russian hostility towards NATO, the United States has proven to be the most resolute and capable Ally of the Central and Eastern European (CEE) states. The U.S. has been striving to provide leadership for the Alliance and invigorate other members to act, while implementing deterrence and reassurance measures on faster and on bigger scale than other countries. U.S. activities in CEE have included persistent rotational presence of small land forces, air and naval deployments to the region, intense training and exercises, unprecedented pre-positioning of heavy armour in the region, and improvements to local infrastructure. The U.S. has acted both bilaterally and multilaterally, as well as within the framework of NATO's joint Readiness Action Plan (RAP).

U.S. actions have been received very warmly among CEE countries, which are concerned about Russia's behaviour and especially interested in the support and presence of the leading and most powerful member of the Alliance. Nevertheless, for Poland and the Baltic States, the permanent basing of Allied combat forces is a priority. It is necessary to send a strong political signal to Moscow, and prove that there are no second-class security guarantees for new NATO members. The intention is also to deny Russia hopes of achieving a quick victory and presenting the U.S. and the Alliance with a *fait accompli*. At the very least, small permanent forces would ensure that even a successful attack against CEE states would automatically result in a costly conflict with the U.S. and NATO. At the other end of the scale, bigger deployments would slow down an enemy offensive and buy time for reinforcements to arrive.

From the U.S. perspective, however, the permanent basing of troops is impeded by numerous factors. The Obama administration is taking a tougher stance on Russia than most NATO countries, but it is wary of escalating tensions too much. Budgetary constraints and the growing demand for U.S. forces in other regions, predominantly in the Asia and Pacific areas, limit their availability. The unwillingness of most European countries to invest in defence, and their overreliance on the United States, makes it difficult to justify greater involvement in Europe to Congress, even if CEE states do play their part. Moreover, Washington seeks Allied solidarity and involvement in addressing all the threats facing NATO, in which threat perceptions continue to diverge. Finally, the U.S. does not want to damage NATO's cohesion, especially given some Western European opposition to permanent deployments in CEE, seen by these parties as too provocative to Russia and incompatible with the 1997 NATO-Russia Founding Act.

While many of these concerns are understandable, some aspects of the U.S. approach are paradoxical. U.S. support for CEE states, which strive to pay their share for defence, is conditional upon the actions of NATO members that do not fear Russia and do not want to increase their defence budgets. The U.S. points to the lack of NATO consensus on a permanent presence, but does not do much to shape a new agreement. This gives the impression that the U.S. is happy to use European divides as an excuse not to act, and to avoid difficult and costly decisions. Meanwhile, the vulnerability of CEE states already affects NATO's cohesion and poses a risk that Russia will undermine the credibility of both the Alliance and the United States.

In the light of the forthcoming 2016 Warsaw summit, the CEE states should strive stronger for U.S. leadership in shaping a new consensus within NATO. They should also reach out to other European states and work out mutual support for their requests. While CEE countries should continue to call for the deployment of larger combat forces regardless of the 1997 Act, they could also consider solutions that are less satisfying but more viable under

current political and financial limitations. Such solutions could include a limited permanent presence or rotational basing of combat troops in line with the Act. Finally, there is a need to enhance other U.S. and NATO measures, regardless of the outcome of endeavours to secure a permanent presence. Increased pre-positioning, greater investment in national and NATO infrastructure in the region, and continued exercises are necessary to ensure reinforcement capabilities in case of conflict, and could eventually lead to some kind of “permanent presence by default.”

## Introduction

During his June visit to Europe, U.S. Secretary of Defence Ashton Carter announced the ground-breaking decision to pre-position around 250 armoured vehicles (M1 Abrams tanks, Bradley fighting vehicles and M109 howitzers) and their associated equipment in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>1</sup> For the first time in NATO's history, such equipment will be stored on territories of "new" members: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria, although some of it will be housed in Germany, which already hosts a battalion's worth of tanks and Bradleys. Altogether, the so called European Activity Set (EAS) will be sufficient to equip one U.S.-based armoured brigade combat team, or ABCT (around 5,000 troops), for contingency, and will be used in exercises by U.S. units on rotation in the region.<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. move signals Washington's commitment to the long-term strengthening of Allied security in CEE, and such a message is even more visible given Carter's remarks on a "strong and balanced" U.S. approach to Russia. On one hand, Carter declared that the U.S. will continue to cooperate with Russia in areas such as an Iran deal, and remains ready for closer engagement with Russia if Moscow retracts from its adversarial policy. On the other hand, Carter expressed scepticism about whether such reconfiguration could occur during Putin's rule, and stressed that the U.S. and NATO have to strengthen their deterrence capabilities in the face of Russian aggression.<sup>3</sup> In that field, Washington pledged further assistance for the Allies in making NATO forces "more agile, mobile and responsive" and thus also able to counter threats from other directions, particularly on the southern flank of the Alliance.<sup>4</sup> This assistance includes a "small footprint, high impact rotational presence" of U.S. units in CEE, joint training and exercises, stronger cooperation on cyberdefence, increased responsiveness of U.S. forces, and provision of high-end support capabilities for NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), ready to deploy within two to seven days in the event of an emergency.<sup>5</sup>

The possibility of placing of heavy gear in CEE was voiced by the U.S. in 2014, and the pre-positioning of equipment in general was agreed by NATO at the 2014 Wales summit. The U.S. has, however, chosen the time of its final announcement carefully. Washington clearly intends to reassure CEE Allies, which have recently renewed their calls for deterrence measures that are more far-reaching than those already put in place by the U.S. and NATO. Apparently, though, the Obama administration intended not to substitute Allied actions but rather to complement them, and came forward with pre-positioning only after Europe had made progress in some areas of the Readiness Action Plan, such as the VJTF. By introducing such measure a few days before a meeting of NATO defence ministers, the U.S. displayed its leadership and ability to make a meaningful contribution to the Alliance, simultaneously encouraging other members to ramp up their efforts.

This belated prepositioning could also have arisen from U.S. concerns about its potential reception by some Western European allies, to which such a far-reaching move as placing tanks close to the Russian border could appear too provocative. Eventually, the reaction of most NATO

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<sup>1</sup> The author would like to thank U.S. experts and officials, whom he interviewed during a study trip to Washington D.C., in June 2015, and whose invaluable insights helped to improve the content of this paper.

<sup>2</sup> A. Mehta, "Pentagon Placing Gear in Eastern Europe," *Defense News*, 24 June 2015, [www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com); M. Tan, "Army to Send Even More Troops, Tanks to Europe," *Army Times*, 5 January 2015, [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com).

<sup>3</sup> Media Availability with Secretary Carter En Route to Berlin, Germany, U.S. Department of Defence, 21 June 2015, [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).

<sup>4</sup> Press Availability with Secretary Carter at NATO Headquarters, Brussels, Belgium, U.S. Department of Defence, 25 June 2015, [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).

<sup>5</sup> A. Carter, Remarks at Atlantik Brücke: "U.S., Germany, & NATO Are Moving Forward Together," U.S. Department of Defence, 22 June 2015, [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).

members was muted, but media reports suggested that some concerns were still present.<sup>6</sup> Public opposition was avoided, possibly because it would have caused rifts between Washington and CEE Allies, especially in the light of continuing Russian belligerence towards NATO.

Carter's announcement has been welcomed by the NATO Secretary General, and received a very vocal and positive reception from the CEE states most concerned about Russian policy. Nevertheless, even though pre-positioning and other U.S. and Allied moves are praised in the region, it is the permanent presence of combat troops that remains a priority for Poland and the Baltic states. Such deployments are deemed necessary not only in order to achieve fully effective deterrence, but also to mark a major shift in relations with Russia and ensure longer-term adaptation of the Alliance to the new security situation in the region. In the context of 2016 Warsaw summit, these countries in particular seek further leadership, support and presence of the United States.

### **U.S. Military Activities in Europe during the Ukraine Crisis: A Step Ahead of NATO**

#### **Initial Deployments in CEE**

From the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, the U.S. has been acting faster than the rest of NATO, and the scale of its military moves has been bigger than in the case of any other single Ally.

In its initial move, the U.S. sent twelve UK-based F-15 fighters and a KC-135 air-tanker to augment the NATO Baltic Air Policing (BAP) mission. This happened on 6 March 2014, a few days before NATO decided to launch its first reassurance measure, by deploying AWACS planes over the region. At the same time, the U.S. started additional naval deployments on the Black Sea. Moreover, on 14-15 March, 12 F-16s from Italy began a temporary deployment to Poland to strengthen the U.S. Air Force Aviation Detachment there.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, the other individual Allies started taking similar steps at the end of March, while NATO collectively agreed on an enhanced presence in CEE on 16 April.<sup>8</sup>

The U.S. was also the first country to deploy land units in CEE, and is still the only NATO member that maintains a persistent rotational presence there in its own capacity. Deployments of small contingents (around 150 troops) in Poland and each of the Baltic States began at the end of April, when four companies of 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade, based in Italy, arrived to train and exercise with local units.<sup>9</sup>

The deployment marked the beginning of Operation Atlantic Resolve, which encompasses the majority of air, sea, and land deployments and activities intended to reassure NATO Allies and deter Russia.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> One exception was the prime minister of Luxembourg, who said that the U.S. move is not characteristic of "an exit strategy." "Cold War Resurgent: US Nukes Could Soon Return to Europe," Spiegel Online, 19 June 2015, [www.spiegel.de](http://www.spiegel.de).

<sup>7</sup> "Fact Sheet: European Reassurance Initiative and Other U.S. Efforts in Support of NATO Allies and Partners," The White House, 3 June 2014, [www.whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov).

<sup>8</sup> "Rasmussen: NATO to Deploy More Forces in Eastern Europe," *Defense News*, 16 April 2014, [www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com).

<sup>9</sup> J. Harper, J. Vandiver, "Vicenza-based Paratroops Deploying to Poland, Baltics," *Stars and Stripes*, 22 April 2014, [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

<sup>10</sup> For fact sheets on U.S. deployments, exercises and other activities under Operation Atlantic Resolve, visit: "Operation Atlantic Resolve," United States European Command, [www.eucom.mil/operation-atlantic-resolve](http://www.eucom.mil/operation-atlantic-resolve).

## European Reassurance Initiative

The U.S. further increased its military involvement in CEE after Obama introduced the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI) on 3 June 2014.<sup>11</sup> The requested \$985 million<sup>12</sup> for ERI funding through the 2015 fiscal year (FY) was authorised by Congress in December 2014, and the Pentagon seeks nearly another \$800 million for the next FY.<sup>13</sup>

The ERI has allowed the U.S. to sustain its persistent rotational presence in Poland and the Baltic States, to bring additional rotations from the United States to the region, and to step up land, air, and sea exercises and training in CEE. As a part of these actions, the U.S. army expanded its rotational deployments to Bulgaria and Romania in March 2015, although these are periodical, not continuous.<sup>14</sup> Air deployments in CEE have included, among others, Theatre Security Packages of 12 U.S. air force A-10 ground attack aircraft and 10 Air National Guard F-15 fighters, while a few B-2 and B-52 strategic bombers temporarily operated from the UK on several occasions.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the ERI funds allowed the previously scheduled withdrawal of F-15 fighters to be postponed, and these will now remain at their Lakenheath base in the UK at least until the end of 2016.

Exercises have covered a wide range of scenarios, including special operation forces activities, close air support missions, armoured units manoeuvres, anti-submarine warfare, and missile defence drills, with one Patriot missile battery moved to Poland in March 2015. The U.S. also practised the rapid deployment of a battalion-sized element of ABCT from the U.S. to the region, and movement of a cavalry regiment with more than 60 Stryker armoured vehicles across the CEE, which received wide media coverage.

Other ERI goals were to explore the pre-positioning of equipment in CEE, and improvements to the local reinforcement infrastructure. Regarding the former, the U.S. military first mentioned such a possibility in late 2014, and began examining CEE sites in January 2015.<sup>16</sup> Equipment already stored in Germany and more brought in to Europe by units rotating from the U.S. during the last several months already make up two-thirds of the equipment needed for an ABCT. The remaining battalion should be on site by the end of 2015, while the placement of all storage sites is most likely to be completed by the summer of 2016.<sup>17</sup> Planned infrastructure improvements

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<sup>11</sup> Fact Sheet: "European Reassurance Initiative..." *op. cit.* See also: W. Lorenz, M.A. Piotrowski, "Obama's Call to Congress May Spur Better Defence of Poland and the Region," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 80 (675), 6 June 2014, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>12</sup> From that sum, \$175 million has been set aside for a transfer fund to support Ukraine and the Baltic States, with another \$13.7 million for partner capacity-building with the NATO Allies and non-NATO partners such as Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova.

<sup>13</sup> S. Beardsley, "U.S. Spending \$1 Billion to Reassure European Allies," *Stars and Stripes*, 17 April 2015, [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

<sup>14</sup> O. Vaughn, "Army Europe Expands Operation Atlantic Resolve Training to Romania, Bulgaria," U.S. Army, 24 March 2015, [www.army.mil](http://www.army.mil). However, Romania has already hosted continuous rotations of roughly 300 to 500 U.S. Marines and sailors as part of the Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF). In June 2015, the U.S. announced an enlargement of the BSRF by establishing a new Combined Arms Company in Bulgaria. Forces of around 150 Marines will conduct at least three six month-long rotations. G. Harkins, "Marine Corps Sends Tanks, Weapons to Eastern Europe," *Marine Corps Times*, 17 August 2015, [www.marinecorpstimes.com](http://www.marinecorpstimes.com).

<sup>15</sup> See, e.g., : D. Cenciotti, "Two B-2 Spirit Stealth Bombers Have Just Arrived in UK for a Quite Unusual Overseas Deployment," *The Aviationist*, 8 June 2014, [theaviationist.com](http://theaviationist.com); O. Pawlyk, "B-2, B-52 Bombers Deploy to Europe for Military Exercises," *Military Times*, 7 June 2015, [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com).

<sup>16</sup> J. Schogol, "U.S. Army Europe Looks to Add 100 More Armored Vehicles," *Army Times*, 24 November 2014, [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com); J. Vandiver, M. Darnell, "Army Looking to Store Tanks, Equipment in Eastern Europe," *Stars and Stripes*, 25 January 2015, [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

<sup>17</sup> M. Tan, "Army Wants to Double Tanks, Boost Soldiers in Europe," *Army Times*, 5 January 2015, [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com); A. Mehta, "Pentagon Placing..." *op. cit.*; J. Harper, "3<sup>rd</sup> Infantry Division arrives to support Operation Atlantic Resolve," United States European Command, 10 March 2015, [www.eucom.mil](http://www.eucom.mil). Additionally, the U.S. air force envisages pre-positioning of air equipment and upgrades to weapons storage facilities.

are yet to be implemented, and focus on local military airfields, training ranges, and an air transit centre and port in Romania.<sup>18</sup>

### U.S. Actions as a Part of NATO's Readiness Action Plan

The ERI is complementary to the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), which is a NATO-wide effort. The RAP was also announced on 3 June 2014, and approved in its final form at the Wales summit in September 2014.<sup>19</sup> The ERI and RAP share the goals of reassuring CEE states and deterring Russia, as well as measures such as an increased presence in the region, enhanced readiness of Allied forces, pre-positioning, and infrastructure improvements. In many areas, the ERI complements joint NATO activities through U.S. involvement in bilateral and multilateral undertakings outside the NATO framework, including rotational deployments, training, exercises, pre-positioning, and infrastructure upgrades. In other fields, the U.S. engages directly in actions at NATO level, such as BAP, operations of NATO naval forces in the Baltic and Black seas, and NATO-led exercises.

As a part of the RAP, the U.S. contributes officers to the NATO Force Integration Units (NFIUs), which, since January 2015, are being established in Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and Romania.<sup>20</sup> These cells will facilitate planning, exercises and potential combat deployment of NATO forces. Additionally, the U.S. has been increasing its staff in NATO's Multinational Corps Northeast headquarters in Szczecin, Poland, which will coordinate the NFIUs in Poland and the Baltic States and will become responsible for joint military operations on NATO's eastern flank by 2018. In July 2015, U.S. Brigadier General Frank Tate took up the post of Deputy Chief of Staff for Operations.<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, the U.S. pledged to support NATO's VJTF, the core of which consists of land units to be provided by European allies on a rotational basis every year. An interim VJTF has been active since January 2015, and is set to become operational by 2016. The U.S. will provide capabilities in terms of airlift, intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, special operations forces, sustainment, refuelling, precision joint fire, combat helicopters and planes, and naval assets.<sup>22</sup> The U.S. also contributes troops to the NATO Response Force (NRF), capable of deployment within 30 days, which would be expanded from its current strength of 13,000 troops to up to 40,000.<sup>23</sup>

### The Positive Impact of U.S. Actions on NATO and Its Reception in the CEE

The importance of U.S. reassurance measures is well illustrated by remarks by Polish defence minister Tomasz Siemoniak, who said "We care about the backing of the strongest partner in the world, which does not fear Iskander missiles, as it spends more on defence than all other

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<sup>18</sup> "European Reassurance Initiative, Department of Defense Budget Fiscal Year (FY) 2016," Office of the Under Secretary of Defense (Comptroller), February 2015; "EUCOM Provides Update on the European Reassurance Initiative," United States European Command, 20 April 2015, [www.eucom.mil](http://www.eucom.mil). These airfields include: Graf Ignatievo (Bulgaria), Amari (Estonia), Lielvarde (Latvia), Siauliai (Lithuania), Łask (Poland), and Campia Turzia (Romania).

<sup>19</sup> See: W. Lorenz, "NATO Narrows Military Gap on Its Eastern Flank," *PISM Strategic File*, no. 20 (55), September 2014, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>20</sup> J. Garamone, "NATO Sets Sizes for Spearhead, Response Forces," U.S. Department of Defence, 5 February 2015, [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov).

<sup>21</sup> "Brigadier General Frank Tate in Poland," United States Embassy in Poland, 8 July 2015, [www.poland.embassy.gov](http://www.poland.embassy.gov).

<sup>22</sup> Press Availability with Secretary Carter at NATO..., *op. cit.*

<sup>23</sup> In 2015, the U.S.-based 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, is a U.S. contribution to the NRF.

countries in the world.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, the U.S. is valued as highly as an Ally due to its resolve and military potential. In the perception of CEE states, the more Washington signals its commitment to European security, the higher the risk for Russia that its aggression against NATO would result in a global conflict with world’s sole military superpower. In this context, the CEE states are especially reassured by the physical U.S. presence, particularly by deployments of “boots on the ground,” seen rarely and meagrely in the years before the annexation of Crimea. Also, using ERI funds to defer some force cuts has been a positive change from the drastic reductions of U.S. forces in Europe. These moves suggest renewed U.S. interest in European affairs, which is further underlined by the unprecedented decision on pre-positioning.

Moreover, U.S. activities have at least to some extent helped to pave the way for more vigorous NATO involvement. Other Allies could have been more reluctant to, for example, start rotations of ground troops in CEE, fearing retaliation from Russia. With U.S. units already in place, such concerns have lost much of their validity. Besides, overall U.S. engagement has a tangible impact on the operational effectiveness of NATO’s defences. Training and exercises with U.S. troops increase the interoperability and combat value of CEE forces. Pre-positioning of equipment shortens the time necessary to deploy U.S. reinforcements in the region, as it would only require the transport of personnel, without the need to bring in hardware. It will also lower the cost of rotational deployments, and allow them to be sustained and intensified. Peacetime deployments and reinforcement in contingency would be further facilitated by improvements to local infrastructure. Apart from that, two U.S. BCTs based in Europe are already at a relatively high level of readiness, especially the 173<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, which is designated as the U.S. Army Europe’s Contingency Response Force, with the first company capable of reaction within 18 hours.<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, many of the support capabilities provided by the U.S. are very important, if not unique, for NATO, given the gaps in European potential. Key areas include airlift, ISR, precision munitions, and air refuelling. Even the ability to pre-position a brigade-sized stock of equipment seems uncommon, as most European Allies do not have sufficient equipment in storage to make similar moves, at least on their own.

## The U.S. and the Case for Permanent NATO Bases in CEE

Despite their positive impact, U.S. and NATO moves do not fully alleviate the concerns of CEE countries, which feel particularly threatened by Russia. These countries include Poland, the Baltic States and Romania. All of them openly stress the need for longer-term adaptation of the Alliance, reaching beyond current measures under the RAP and ERI.<sup>26</sup> They were also calling specifically for a NATO permanent presence before the Wales summit, and Poland and the Baltic States have recently renewed such requests.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> “Siemoniak w USA: zaczynamy negocjacje ws. zestawów Patriot” [Siemoniak in the U.S.: We Are Starting Negotiations on Patriot Systems], PAP, 19 May 2015, [www.pap.pl](http://www.pap.pl).

<sup>25</sup> M. Tan, “Rapid Response Force Stands up in Europe,” *Army Times*, 12 October 2013, [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com). Additionally, depending on its availability, the U.S. could further reinforce Europe with the Global Response Force, rotationally consisting of one airborne brigade based in the United States, with the first battalion deployable on 18 hours’ notice. M. Tan, “82<sup>nd</sup> ABN Trains to Maintain Global Response Force,” *Army Times*, 13 June 2013, [www.armytimes.com](http://www.armytimes.com).

<sup>26</sup> See, e.g.: “Siemoniak: NATO Needs to Increase Its Capabilities within the Scope of Conventional Deterrence,” *Defence24*, 22 May 2015, [www.defence24.com](http://www.defence24.com); Joint Press Conference with Secretary Carter, Lithuanian Minister of Defense Oleskas, Latvian State Secretary of Defense Sarts and Estonian Minister of Defense Mikser in Tallinn, Estonia, U.S. Department of Defence, 23 June 2015, [www.defense.gov](http://www.defense.gov); “Iohannis: NATO Force Integration Unit in Bucharest Will Be Made Operational in September,” *AGERPRES*, 2 February 2015, [www.agerpres.ro](http://www.agerpres.ro).

<sup>27</sup> A. Kacprzyk, “Deterring Russia after Ukraine: CEE Divided on the Future of NATO Policy,” *PISM Policy Paper*, no. 13 (96), July 2014, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl); “Siemoniak: NATO Needs...,” *op. cit.*; “Baltic Military Chiefs to Call for Permanent NATO Presence,” *Reuters*, 14 May 2015, [www.reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com).

## The NATO–Russia Founding Act Issue

One of the main rationales raised by CEE states relates to the argument that truly permanent basing is necessary to send a strong political deterrent signal to Moscow, by proving that there are no second-class security guarantees for the region and that NATO is not a “two-tiered” alliance.<sup>28</sup> Although U.S. and NATO officials stress that persistent rotations of units will be continued for “as long as necessary,” there are also fears that these deployments will turn out to be only temporary.<sup>29</sup>

Moreover, there has been long-standing dissatisfaction in the region with the provisions of the 1997 NATO–Russia Founding Act, in which the Alliance declared that it would not permanently station additional “substantial combat forces,” indirectly precluding such a move with regard to the territories of new NATO members. Following the annexation of Crimea, many CEE officials argued that NATO should no longer abide by these provisions, as they regarded the “current and foreseeable security environment,” which has changed radically since Russia violated the Act. Others also pointed out that some permanent basing could take place in line with the 1997 pledge, as long as it did not reach or exceed the notional “substantial” size of forces. There is no agreed definition between NATO and Russia of the term “substantial,” although in the past Moscow described “substantial forces” as units not bigger than a brigade.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, there is no clear agreement on that matter in the Alliance itself. Eventually, at the Wales summit, the Allies decided to abide by the Act.

## The Importance of Permanent Basing for Deterrence and Defence

Apart from purely political reasons, calls for a permanent combat presence are also influenced by military considerations. They relate to the fact that the U.S. and NATO deterrence postures in the region rest almost entirely on the mechanism of reinforcement in the event of conflict, with very limited forward presence in peacetime. Meanwhile, Russia has repeatedly demonstrated its ability to mobilise and deploy large numbers of troops within days or even hours, which in effect causes fears that Moscow could quickly overwhelm local defences and occupy parts of Allied territory before the arrival of NATO reinforcements. Such fears are especially well-founded in the Baltic States, which are not only dwarfed by Russia militarily, but are also home to large Russian-speaking minorities, which could be used to stage a crisis and give Russia justification for an intervention aimed at protecting its citizens. In addition, these states could easily be cut off from the rest of NATO by Russian forces from Kaliningrad Oblast, which could further impede the deployment of Allied troops with the use of various anti-access and area-denial weapons (such as long-range air defences and anti-ship missiles). Thus, Russia could present the U.S. and NATO with a *fait accompli*, gambling that neither would be willing to engage in a long and costly campaign to retake Allied soil.

The whole situation might be even more complicated by the lengthy decision-making process within the 28-nation Alliance. NATO has rightfully granted SACEUR the authority to mobilise the VJTF before a political consensus is reached, thereby shortening the potential time

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<sup>28</sup> See e.g.: K.M. Hovland, “Estonian President Calls for Permanent NATO Base in Country,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 2 September 2014, [www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com); H. Foy, “NATO Treats Poland Like a Buffer State, Says New President,” *Financial Times*, 13 August 2015, [www.ft.com](http://www.ft.com).

<sup>29</sup> These concerns could grow in light of the latest NATO decision to reduce the Baltic Air Policing Mission, from the 16 fighters that have been taking part in the mission as a part of enhanced reassurance measures, to eight. Nevertheless, the reduced number is still higher than during the pre-Crimea period, when four jets participated in BAP. G. Jennings, “NATO to Scale Back Enhanced Baltic Air Policing Mission,” *IHS Jane’s Defence Weekly*, 4 August 2015, [www.janes.com](http://www.janes.com).

<sup>30</sup> J. Durkalec, “The Russian Approach towards Revival of Conventional Arms Control Regime in Europe,” *PISM Bulletin*, no. 134 (210), 22 November 2010, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

of the unit's deployment after approval.<sup>31</sup> Still, there is a risk of prolonged deliberations between the Allies. A swift initial reaction could be much more likely if the U.S. were to act unilaterally,<sup>32</sup> but even such a move would be unlikely to make up for the Russian time advantage. Moreover, two U.S. BCTs would be not enough to counter a large scale invasion without a broader NATO contribution, especially in the event of an operation aimed at pushing the aggressor out of already occupied territory.

Permanent basing of forward-deployed U.S. or other Allies' troops is perceived as a remedy to these problems in several ways. First, such deployments would serve as a "trip-wire." An attack on U.S. or NATO forces could drastically shorten the decision-making process and draw the Western Allies into the conflict from the very beginning. Such prospects would minimise Russian hopes for a quick victory and increase the chance of further involvement by the U.S. and NATO, even if forward-deployed U.S. and NATO forces were over-run at the outset of hostilities. Apparently, concerned CEE states do not see NFIUs and pre-positioned equipment as sufficient, standalone trip-wires. The same seemingly applies to the U.S. missile defence sites that are to be deployed in Romania and Poland by 2015 and 2018 respectively, even though both states value such presence very highly.<sup>33</sup> A perfect trip-wire would be positioned directly in the areas threatened with aggression, and would consist of forces prepared to engage the enemy, similar to the NATO Berlin Brigade during the Cold War.<sup>34</sup> Therefore, the ongoing persistent presence of rotational forces does not meet these requirements either, as such units move across each country for training and exercises.

Finally, permanent bases would ideally host a greater number of troops than the current rotational U.S. company, occasionally augmented by similar NATO units or forces taking part in exercises. While Poland did not set a specific number, the Baltic States requested NATO to permanently station a battalion, composed of troops rotated from NATO countries, on each of their territories.<sup>35</sup> Altogether, these units would comprise a brigade-sized force (between around 3,000 and 5,000 troops). While increased unit size could serve as a stronger sign of commitment, CEE states also seem to desire forces that would have a tangible impact on local defences, in order to at least slow down any enemy offensive and buy time for reinforcements to arrive. In the words of Latvian state secretary of defence Janis Sarts, "the posture has to be militarily significant enough to change that calculus, to basically neutralise that perceived advantage of space and time."<sup>36</sup>

## Political Conditions for U.S. Military Engagement in Europe

While CEE states would welcome permanently stationed troops from other NATO countries as well, they aim predominantly for a U.S. presence,<sup>37</sup> in large part for the same reasons that

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<sup>31</sup> J. Vandiver, "Breedlove Granted New Command Powers for New Threats," *Stars and Stripes*, 24 June 2015, [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

<sup>32</sup> The U.S. officially hinted at the possibility of bilateral military support without joint NATO approval of an Article-5 based reaction. "U.S. Can Act Alone if Needed: NATO Envoy," *LSM.LV*, 8 May 2015, [www.lsm.lv](http://www.lsm.lv).

<sup>33</sup> See: J. Adamowski, "Poland, Romania Lead E. Europe Missile Defense Efforts," *Defense News*, 9 August 2015, [www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com).

<sup>34</sup> An analogy often used by Baltic officials. See e.g., D. Haynes, "Baltic States Ask for NATO Brigade to Deter Putin Invasion," *The Australian*, 14 May 2015, [www.theaustralian.com.au](http://www.theaustralian.com.au).

<sup>35</sup> Estonian prime minister Taavi Rõivas has advocated for a U.S. battalion. "Rõivas Tells U.S. Senators Estonia is Prepared to host US battalion," *ERR News*, 27 May 2015, [news.err.ee](http://news.err.ee).

<sup>36</sup> Joint Press Conference with Secretary Carter, Lithuanian Minister of Defense Oleskas..., *op. cit.*

<sup>37</sup> N. Lesniewski, "To Counter Putin, Poland and Lithuania Officials Want U.S. Bases, Durbin Says," *Roll Call*, 29 May 2015, <http://rollcall.com>; "Deputy Prime Minister Tomasz Siemoniak visits Washington, DC," Embassy of the Republic of Poland in Washington, DC, 20 May 2015, [www.washington.msz.gov.pl](http://www.washington.msz.gov.pl); "Rõivas Tells U.S. Senators...", *op. cit.*; T. Atlas, D. Lerman, "NATO's Eastern Members Seek Bases to Deter Russian Threat," *Bloomberg*, 2 May 2014, [www.bloomberg.com](http://www.bloomberg.com).

underlie interest in any U.S. engagement in the region. U.S. troops would constitute a strong deterrent as a trip-wire force, linking an attack on CEE states with one on a major nuclear power and the world's biggest conventional military player. U.S. forces also have presumably greater combat experience than do most, or even all, European countries. Moreover, as the political leader of the Alliance, the U.S. is assessed to be much more willing than other members to undertake such a move, possibly prompting other states to follow Washington's lead. Finally, given its military capacity, it is assessed that the U.S. would be most capable of deploying greater numbers of troops in CEE.

Meanwhile, such calls should take into account a number of political factors, which shape the U.S. approach to deterrence and reassurance in Europe and CEE. One of them is naturally Russia's behaviour and its reception in Washington, which at first glance looks favourable for CEE states and their requests. Top military leaders count Russia either as the biggest or one of the biggest threats to U.S. security,<sup>38</sup> the majority in Congress supports a tougher line on Russia, and the Obama administration is becoming increasingly assertive towards Moscow. Still, examined closer, the picture is much more nuanced.

Congress is, to a significant extent, preoccupied with U.S. internal politics, and for many of its members there are more important and pressing foreign policy issues than Russia, in particular an Iran deal and the Islamic State problem. Support for bolstering NATO is often declared in quite general terms, while more specific discussions on Russia and NATO are usually limited to members of select bodies, especially the Armed Services Committees of both chambers. The administration, for its part, has been striving to deter Russia's aggressiveness more visibly and resolutely than most of NATO, but has also appeared wary of taking steps that would escalate tensions too much and risk Russia's disengagement from important areas of cooperation, such as the Iran negotiations. Such rationale clearly underpinned the refusal to provide lethal weapons to Ukraine, and could also have influenced the drawn out process of pre-positioning. As illustrated by Carter's visit to Europe, escalation fears partially lost their importance in the light of continued Russian belligerence and fading hopes of bringing Moscow "back on track" regarding broader cooperation, but a degree of care is likely to continue underpinning Obama's policy.<sup>39</sup>

The shape of the U.S. approach to NATO is affected not only by the need to balance a set of goals regarding Russia, but also regarding European allies. The U.S. moved to reassure CEE states and deter Moscow in order to sustain the credibility of NATO and bilateral relations, probably also bearing in mind that Allies in other regions also were likely to draw conclusions from U.S. actions in Europe. At the same time, Washington does not want to act alone in the long term, but rather to spur and complement the enhancement of European defences, which also explains the symbolic scale of some U.S. actions.<sup>40</sup> To be sure, the U.S. has proved that it is ready to act alone if necessary, but the scale of longer-lasting involvement is widely dependent on the actions of European nations.

First, U.S. officials have repeatedly stressed the need to increase European defence budgets and meet the goal of 2% GDP, re-embraced by NATO at the Wales summit.<sup>41</sup> The fact that the U.S. is responsible for more than 70% of combined NATO expenditure makes it more difficult for the Obama administration to justify greater U.S. involvement in Europe in the light of the widespread

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<sup>38</sup> M. Weisgerber, "Russia, Not ISIS, Greatest Threat to U.S., General Says," *Defense One*, 14 July 2015, [www.defenseone.com](http://www.defenseone.com); S. J. Freedberg Jr., "Gen. Milley to SASC: World Getting Worse, Army Getting Smaller," *Breaking Defense*, 21 July 2015, [www.breakingdefense.com](http://www.breakingdefense.com).

<sup>39</sup> For example, in July, the U.S. army's chief of staff Ray Odierno warned with regard to CEE that "putting lots of soldiers in Europe escalates, it doesn't deter, and you have to walk that fine line." A. Mehta, "Army Chief: Russia Major Threat, Iran Bears Watching," *Defense News*, 17 July 2015, [www.defensenews.com](http://www.defensenews.com).

<sup>40</sup> S. Wilson, "Obama Urges Europeans to Bolster NATO to Help Deter an Expansionist Russia," *The Washington Post*, 26 March 2014, [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

<sup>41</sup> A. Carter, Remarks at Atlantik Brücke: "U.S., Germany...", *op. cit.*

conviction of European “free-riding” on American taxpayers’ money.<sup>42</sup> These concerns are not alleviated by changes in European budgets in 2015, where signals are mixed.<sup>43</sup> On the bright side, despite previous suggestions, the UK announced that it will maintain defence spending at a level of no less than 2% of GDP, and Poland became the fourth European NATO country to meet that goal. Overall, at least 18 European NATO members will increase their defence budgets in real terms, but these moves are in many cases very limited. Moreover, most of the countries that increased or plan to increase their budgets, for example, Germany, have not outlined a clear plan to reach 2% of GDP in the coming years. In sum, European defence spending is projected to drop from an average 1.5% of GDP per country, to 1.4%.<sup>44</sup> In that context, hikes in the budgets of Poland, the Baltic States, and Romania are definitely a welcome step, but not necessarily recognised by the majority of members of Congress, who often tend to look at Europe as a whole.<sup>45</sup>

The U.S. also expects tangible European involvement in deterrence and reassurance measures in CEE. Some such moves have been already praised by United States, especially the creation of the VJTF, but more might be necessary to balance future adaptation moves, especially with regard to a permanent presence. Such an attitude is clearly present in the draft text of the U.S. 2016 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA), passed by the Senate in June. On one hand, it calls for the administration to explore “options for expanding the presence of United States ground forces of the size of a Brigade Combat Team in Eastern Europe.” On the other hand, it stresses that increased U.S. presence in the region “should be matched by an increased force presence of European allies.” Similarly, Washington expects NATO members from other parts of Europe to be politically ready to participate in the Alliance’s activities along its southern flank, and to invest in the capabilities necessary to do so. Carter has recently re-emphasised the need for Alliance solidarity in addressing all threats, including in the field of cybersecurity.

Moreover, the U.S. is clearly trying to avoid moves that would undermine NATO’s cohesion, which is best illustrated by recent remarks by John A. Heffern, deputy assistant state secretary for European and Eurasian affairs. He has ruled out the possibility of establishing a permanent NATO combat presence in Poland after the 2016 Warsaw summit, stating that the U.S. wants to avoid internal disputes within the Alliance, indirectly referring to the opposition from some European NATO countries, including Germany.<sup>46</sup>

## Financial Constraints and Force Structure

The scale of future U.S. military involvement in Europe, and CEE specifically, will also be determined by limitations on the availability of resources. Budgetary restraints are the key factor in this field, including the threat of further sequestration. In fact, cuts implemented so far have already downsized the U.S. footprint in Europe significantly, with 13,000 U.S. troops, including two of four BCTs, being withdrawn from the continent since 2012. A positive signal is that the latest round of closure and realignment of U.S. bases in Europe, announced in January 2015, is

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<sup>42</sup> K. Baron, “Obama, Hagel, Kerry on NATO Defense Blitz,” *Defense One*, 3 June 2014, [www.defenseone.com](http://www.defenseone.com).

<sup>43</sup> For spending data see: “NATO Publishes Defence Expenditures Data for 2014 and Estimates for 2015: Financial and Economic Data Relating to NATO Defence,” NATO Public Diplomacy Division, *COMMUNIQUE PR/CP(2015)093-COR1*, 22 June 2015, [www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2015\\_06/20150622\\_PR\\_CP\\_2015\\_093-v2.pdf](http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_06/20150622_PR_CP_2015_093-v2.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Values in constant 2010 prices. In current prices, European spending is to remain at 1.5% of GDP level.

<sup>45</sup> After the ERI was announced, even some strong Congressional NATO supporters were initially sceptical about its desirability. For example, Sen. Lindsey Graham (R., S.C.) said: “Rather than me give a billion dollars, which is not enough money to do anything, why don’t we ask NATO nations to contribute more?” C.E. Lee, J.E. Barnes, N. Bendavid, “Obama Pledges to Bolster Europe’s Security,” *The Wall Street Journal*, 3 June 2014, [www.wsj.com](http://www.wsj.com).

<sup>46</sup> “U.S. Backs away from Poland’s NATO Base Push,” *Radio Poland*, 22 June 2015, [www.thenews.pl](http://www.thenews.pl).

slated to have a minimal impact on the number of American troops, and focuses on the return of 15 military sites to their host nations and the rebasing of some units within Western Europe. For the next few years, the U.S. plans to retain around 67,000 troops<sup>47</sup> on the continent, but some reductions are still on the table.<sup>48</sup>

There are plans to reduce the 12<sup>th</sup> Combat Aviation Brigade, currently based in Germany, in part by rebasing 24 Apache helicopters to Alaska, by 2016.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, as a part of a sequestration-forced plan to downsize the U.S. army from 490,000 to 450,000 soldiers by 2017, some 1,700 troops will be cut from Europe within the next three years. The U.S. army plans to offset these and previous cuts with more rotations from the United States, potentially by aligning all elements of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division from Colorado with U.S. European Command (EUCOM).<sup>50</sup> This would increase the number of U.S.-based BCTs aligned to EUCOM from one to three. The U.S. army also intends to pre-position a second ABCT in Germany, as Army Prepositioned Stocks, intended for use in contingencies.<sup>51</sup> The U.S. air force, for its part, plans to base two squadrons of F-35 joint strike fighters in the UK by 2020.<sup>52</sup> These plans, along with the overall U.S. presence in Europe, would, however, be threatened were Congress and the administration fail to hammer out an agreement on the 2016 budget. This would result in automatic reductions across all military branches, and the army alone would have to cut another 30,000 soldiers, which would definitely affect European based and EUCOM-aligned forces.

The other major factor is the growing demand for a U.S. presence in other parts of the world, especially given the on-going rebalancing, or pivot, to Asia, and crises in the Middle East. The trade-offs between the regions are less in terms of assets, since army land units, withdrawing from the Middle East and with limited involvement in Asia (where air and naval capabilities are most needed) are most in demand in Europe. There is, however, competition for funding. The situation in Europe might in fact present the U.S. army with a strong argument for additional funds, but for the time being its force structure is still strained. Therefore, moving U.S. BCTs from Western Europe to CEE states permanently could have a negative impact on EUCOM flexibility. Forces based near big transportation hubs in Germany and Italy are well positioned to cover a range of contingencies, not only in Europe but also in North Africa and the Middle East. Basing such forces further east would, in turn, impede their ability to react elsewhere.

Meanwhile, rebasing units from the U.S. would meet some political resistance, as closure of bases would result in losses of local jobs. From that point of view, rotational deployments have a strong advantage, as they do not stir such controversy in the United States. Nevertheless, at some point further intensification of rotations might prompt considerations on the financial viability of permanent basing. The relative costs would depend on many factors, especially the size of units, as well as the pace and duration of rotations. It would also depend on specifics of burden-sharing, as it is likely that the U.S. would expect far-reaching financial participation of the host nations and NATO. While CEE countries already support a rotational presence and have declared a readiness to share the burdens of future U.S. and NATO engagement on their territories, they should bear in mind the additional cost associated with any permanent basing. Its infrastructural requirements would be much greater, partially because it would necessitate the build-up of housing projects for

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<sup>47</sup> 10,000 of these troops fall under U.S. African Command (AFRICOM).

<sup>48</sup> See: W. Lorenz, "NATO Spearhead Needs a Shield on the Eastern Flank," *PISM Bulletin*, no. 16 (748), 9 February 2015, [www.pism.pl](http://www.pism.pl).

<sup>49</sup> J. Vandiver, "DOD Announces Army Reorganization, Inactivation Plans," *Stars and Stripes*, 29 April 2015, [www.stripes.com](http://www.stripes.com).

<sup>50</sup> Currently, only the division's headquarters is aligned with EUCOM. Since February 2015, it has been present in Germany, serving as a division-level headquarters for the U.S. army.

<sup>51</sup> M. Tan, "Army Wants to Double ...," *op. cit.*

<sup>52</sup> A. Tilghman, L. Schwetje, "EUCOM Base Closures will not Affect Force Levels," *Military Times*, 9 January 2015, [www.militarytimes.com](http://www.militarytimes.com).

troops and their families. Further costs would depend on whether permanent basing would rely on already existing national infrastructure, as do current deployments, or on new U.S. facilities.

## Conclusions

Calls for a permanent NATO presence will not die down any time soon, given the persistence of Poland and the Baltic States both before and after the Wales summit. In fact, efforts might even be intensified in the run-up to the 2016 Warsaw summit, as evidenced by the agenda of new Polish President Andrzej Duda.<sup>53</sup> Moreover, positions of CEE countries are entirely justified in the light of Russia's adversarial stance and its military capabilities. Basing permanent troops in the region is necessary not only to send a strong message of Allied commitment and solidarity, but also to overcome numerous political and operational complications in NATO's posture. Placing combat troops in border states would ensure that any attack against them would be the same as an attack against NATO. It would deprive Russia of hopes of discrediting NATO through a swift local victory, achieved without triggering broader conflict with the Allies. Basing larger forces in CEE would also allow countries under attack to resist invasion and allow time for reinforcements to arrive.

Quite logically, in their calls, CEE states look mainly towards the United States, which has played the biggest role in reassuring CEE in the wake of Ukrainian conflict. Both the speed and scale of U.S. actions have been unmatched by other Allies, and Carter's June visit to Europe reinforced the image of the U.S. resolve to provide leadership within NATO. Nevertheless, securing a permanent presence of U.S. forces in CEE is an extremely challenging task, related to a complex set of factors. While Washington clearly recognises the need to deter Russia, and has proven that its determination to act is stronger than in the case of most NATO members, it remains wary of escalating tensions with Russia too much. In effect, the U.S. attitude towards permanent basing would be partially dependent on the future course of Russia's actions, and on whether Moscow continues its highly adversarial policy or tries to de-escalate the tensions. Greater U.S. military engagement in Europe is further impeded by budget constraints, an increased need for the involvement of U.S. forces in other regions, especially Asia and the Pacific, and internal political complications that could occur in the event of U.S.-based units being redeployed to the Old Continent. Neither does the stance of a large number of European NATO members make the case any easier, either because of the wide-spread unwillingness to pay a fair share for defence, or due to differing threat perceptions and a reluctance to address different threats in the spirit of solidarity. Most importantly, Western European opposition to permanent basing in CEE makes it difficult for the U.S. to come forward with such deployments. Even though Washington could theoretically deploy combat troops on a bilateral basis and without NATO's approval, it would contradict the U.S. priority of maintaining Alliance cohesion. Even with such consent, deployment of U.S. troops would still be a tough sell in Congress, if at least a few other Allies do not participate as well.

While these difficulties and concerns are largely understandable, Washington's approach does, however, have its own paradoxes. The biggest of them is the fact that the U.S. makes its support for CEE Allies conditional upon the actions of other members, which do not share the concerns of the former. In other words, Allies that feel most threatened by Russia invest in their own capabilities and are willing to share the costs of a U.S. presence, but might not receive sufficient U.S. assistance because of Allies who do not see Russia as a threat and do not feel the need to pay more for defence. The U.S. also declares that lack of consensus within NATO precludes the permanent basing of U.S. troops in CEE, but it does not seem to be doing much

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<sup>53</sup> "New Polish President Makes NATO Bases in Central Europe a Priority for Warsaw Summit," *NATO Source*, 6 August 2016, [www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/natosource).

to influence other NATO members and shape a new consensus. This gives the impression that Washington is satisfied with being able to lay the blame on other NATO members, using their stance as an excuse to avoid further engagement in CEE and so avoiding higher financial costs and difficult decisions that would hamper the U.S. pivot to Asia or relations with Russia.

If they are to reach their goals, CEE countries will have to convince sceptical Western European Allies, but it is unlikely that they can do this alone. To be successful, diplomatic efforts aimed at reaching consensus on a permanent presence would require strong U.S. leadership. Setting up permanent bases in CEE might be very problematic for Washington, but so is the continuing vulnerability and insecurity of U.S. allies in the region. It already affects NATO's cohesion and makes the Alliance look less united than it should be in the face of the threat from Russia. Failure to provide adequate deterrence in the region could also result in Russian military action, which would undermine the credibility of NATO and the U.S. and change the European security landscape drastically. Moreover, U.S. policy towards CEE states is also watched by other U.S. allies, and to some extent has an impact on the credibility of U.S. global commitments. Political and budgetary decisions might be difficult, but the stakes for Washington in Europe and NATO are high as well.

Poland and the Baltic States should explore additional ways to present their rationales to the U.S. and convince Washington of their requests. This might include intensified lobbying of Congress, and increasing direct public communication with the U.S. administration. CEE countries should also work on creating a broader coalition among European NATO members. One possible direction would be to reach out to the Southern European states, and strike a bargain on greater CEE involvement in NATO's current and potential activity along the southern flank in exchange for backing a permanent presence.

The ideal outcome of CEE diplomatic efforts would include withdrawal from the NATO-Russia Founding Act and the deployment of larger units in the region. These goals are undoubtedly worth pursuing, but CEE countries might also consider options that would be less satisfying for them yet more viable under current political and financial limitations, and still favourable for regional security. Possible area of consensus might include providing some permanent presence without rejecting the NATO-Russia Founding Act. This would require reaching a common NATO understanding on definitions within the Act. It is too late to work out a mutually recognised definition of "substantial combat forces" with Russia, but the Alliance could refer to past Russian views on that matter, and deploy forces up to the strength of a single brigade. If distributed across the region, such deployments would have less actual defence value, but could still enhance deterrence as effective trip-wires. Furthermore, the Alliance could try to clarify the meaning of "permanent stationing." Do persistent rotations of troops at permanent bases also fall in that category? In fact, the Baltic States request is still based on a rotational presence, albeit of larger units and potentially with greater focus on their combat function than on training and exercises. If reconcilable with the Act, such an approach could have other merits too, as it would remove some of the political and financial problems related to the rebasing of troops from the U.S. or European countries. All these options might, however, convey a less clear message to Russia, than would a full and entirely justified rejection of the 1997 document, which constrains NATO policies needlessly in a security environment that is radically different from the one that existed at the time the Act was signed.

Regardless of the final result of CEE endeavours for a permanent combat presence, the U.S. and NATO still need to take other steps in order to strengthen deterrence in the region. Even with the permanent presence of larger units, front-line states would still require additional reinforcement in the event of a major conflict. In that field, ERI-funded upgrades are undoubtedly favourable, but CEE states expect rather greater investments in facilities necessary to expedite the reception of bigger forces, similar to the infrastructure present in Western Europe (for example,

major ports and airfields, and logistic hubs). These should naturally come in substantial part from the CEE states themselves, as well as from NATO. Within the RAP, the Alliance continues its investments in national infrastructure as part of the NATO Security Investment Programme (NSIP), but should consider increasing their scale, as was suggested by Poland.<sup>54</sup> Moving beyond the RAP, it would be a welcome and substantial move to create not just national but NATO logistical facilities. Another measure could include enhanced pre-positioning. On the U.S. side, this could mean expanding planned sets of armour in eastern flank countries. It would enable the deployment of larger units to single areas or countries, while under current plans the equipment would be distributed across a large geographical area, with a company or at most a battalion placed in each state. European members might not have the capability to store heavy vehicles, but surely setting up depots with, for example, munitions and weaponry, is within NATO's range. Apart from their military utility, all these moves, along with continued exercises, persistent rotational deployments, and the establishment of command structures such as NFIUs, could eventually lead to a permanent presence "by default." Nevertheless, such a presence would still fall short of the deployments necessary to ensure fully credible deterrence in the region.

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<sup>54</sup> "Co chcemy osiągnąć na spotkaniu NATO" [What We Want to Achieve at the NATO Summit], *Polska Zbrojna*, 5 August 2015, [www.polska-zbrojna.pl](http://www.polska-zbrojna.pl).



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