



Strengthening European Crisis Response Capabilities: French and British Initiatives

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The European Intervention Initiative (E2I) proposed by France and UK-built Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) are the largest of the multinational projects aimed at strengthening European crisis response capabilities. Their goal is to shorten the time and increase the effectiveness of a military response in the framework of NATO, EU or coalitions of the willing to threats from different directions. Although JEF and E2I differ from each other, they can strengthen the political cohesion of NATO and the EU as well as transatlantic ties. Therefore, the impact on their development lies in Poland's interests.

The Rationale of JEF and E2I. The Joint Expeditionary Force was launched in 2014 and is tasked with conducting a full spectrum of operations, including participation in high-intensity conflicts. JEF consists of about 10,000 troops, with 80% provided by the United Kingdom and the rest by Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway (Sweden and Finland joined in 2017) and has been ready for action since exercises in April and May. The initiative provides Nordic and Baltic countries with an additional crisis response tool that can be used for NATO, EU or coalition of the willing purposes.

JEF is also of political significance. Through this initiative, the United Kingdom, which has the greatest military potential in Europe alongside France, demonstrates its readiness to support its allies should they be threatened. Additionally, it enables Britain to support European crisis response operations after Brexit, and strengthens the UK-initiated Northern Group, a European defence cooperation format comprising the JEF states plus Iceland, Poland and Germany. It is a platform for political consultations on the NATO and EU agendas, and for closer military cooperation.

The French E2I proposal, which was launched on 25 June with a letter of intent signed by nine countries (France, the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, Spain, Portugal, Denmark and Estonia), seems politically even more ambitious. The concept reflects the French vision of European strategic autonomy. Its long-term goal is to build among European countries a sense of responsibility for the southern neighbourhood, and to provide them with the capability to conduct independent missions outside their own territories. Unlike JEF, the French proposal does not assume the creation of a joint multinational force. The E2I countries have committed to regular political and military consultations to identify potential security crises in the EU's neighbourhood, joint planning for the most likely crisis scenarios, operational cooperation and the development of common doctrines to help strengthen the interoperability of their forces. This should create favourable political and operational conditions for timely crisis response operations. The E2I emphasis is on missions outside Europe. It does not refer directly to collective defence, although states should be prepared to participate in the full spectrum of operations. Neither is it intended to duplicate NATO's military structures or undermine cooperation in the EU, especially within the PESCO mechanism (such reservations were expressed by Germany, as a result of which E2I is to launch its own projects in PESCO).

Importance for Security in Europe. NATO's post-Cold War security depends on multinational rapid reaction forces. They were to be the basic tool enabling crisis response and collective defence missions (which also requires, for example, the rapid transfer of forces of high readiness to the territory of threatened states). In 2002, NATO set up a rapid reaction force (NATO Response Force, NRF), which was supposed to be capable of conducting both types of missions. However, NATO planning and Allied exercises focused almost exclusively on crisis response missions until 2014. Such missions required different doctrines and training from those required for defensive operations. The EU also focused on crisis response and built its own rapid reaction Battle Groups (each consisting of 1,500 to 2,000 personnel) exclusively for the needs of expeditionary operations. Both initiatives offered a high level of training and increased the interoperability of European states' forces. They also enforced some level of equipment modernisation and ensured that Allies kept some forces in a state of high readiness.

However, the escalation of threats from the southern neighbourhood and from Russia since 2014 have shown that European countries have too few well-armed forces in a state of high readiness. Therefore, in the last four years, NATO and the EU have taken initiatives to increase the European ability to engage in the most demanding missions, including combat operations. NATO has tripled the number of NRF forces (from 13,000 to 40,000 personnel) and equipped them with a brigade-size (about 5,000 personnel) very high readiness unit, the "spearhead" (VJTF). At a summit in Brussels from 11 to 12 July, the Allies will confirm the "4x30" plan, which aims to have 30 mechanised battalions, 30 air squadrons and 30 warships ready for action in less than 30 days. The PESCO mechanism has also been launched in the EU, under which 25 countries have committed themselves to the regular formation of Battle Groups and launch of projects that enhance the interoperability of their armed forces.

The French and British initiatives aim above all to provide an additional format of cooperation that will increase the ability to respond to threats. The deteriorating security situation clearly indicates that European states must be prepared to undertake crisis response missions in the south, and deterrence and defence in NATO's flank countries, as well as in Sweden and Finland. In this way, European states will have access to an additional tool in the event of paralysis in the decision-making process of NATO or the EU. They will also be better prepared to act when NATO does not have a mandate or if the EU lacks the necessary tools. E2I will be focused primarily on Africa, where France is heavily involved in operations and promotes regional formats of military cooperation (the "G5 Sahel" group). JEF is to operate both in the south and on Allied and partner countries' territories, including Sweden and Finland. As the nuclear powers are involved in both initiatives, Russia will find it more difficult to apply nuclear blackmail, for example to stop the deployment of troops in an escalating crisis. This applies not only to NATO's eastern flank, but also to the Western Balkans and the Middle East. Flexible capabilities to respond to different threats to NATO and EU countries will also strengthen the political coherence of both organisations and their importance in U.S. strategic calculations, contributing to stronger transatlantic ties.

Conclusions for Poland. Poland should consider closer consultation with the United Kingdom and the North Group to determine the conditions for entry into JEF, and with France on the development of E2I. Multinational forces that can be used on the territories of NATO and EU border states, irrespective of complicated decision-making in both organisations, will significantly increase the possibility of taking action in the Nordic and Baltic regions, complicating Russian calculations.

Flexible formats for operations in the south are also in Poland's interests because they reduce the pressure on the use of NATO resources. Participation in JEF and/or E2I could increase Poland's credibility as an Ally who demonstrates solidarity with countries threatened from the southern strategic direction. Poland would also have greater influence on strengthening the political cohesion of NATO and the EU and would gain an additional tool to engage in missions and deepen political and military cooperation with the major Allies (including the U.S.), for whom mitigation of threats in the south remains a priority. Achieving these benefits requires stronger practical links and greater complementarity of E2I and JEF with NATO plans (for example, the 4x30 initiative) and the EU (E2I projects under PESCO).