



The Political and Military Significance of NATO's *Trident Juncture 2018* Exercises

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Trident Juncture 2018 is intended to strengthen NATO's ability to conduct collective-defence and deterrence in response to potential Russian threats. The field manoeuvres will test about 45,000 Alliance soldiers. During command-post exercises, simulations without troops, it will check NATO's ability to lead a defensive operation involving much larger forces. Although the exercises will take place mainly in Norway, the Alliance will demonstrate the ability to respond to threats in the entire Nordic-Baltic region.

Trident Juncture 2018 is NATO's biggest military exercise based on a collective-defence scenario since 2002. It will involve 45,000 troops, 60 ships and 150 aircraft. The exercises will consist of three main phases: a deployment and redeployment phase, a live field exercise (LIVEX, from 25 October to 7 November), and a command-post exercise (CPX, 14-23 November). The main field phase will take place in Norway with activities also including Iceland, the Norwegian Sea, the North Atlantic, the Danish Straits in the Baltic Sea, and the airspace of NATO partners Sweden and Finland. The conclusions from the exercises can be used to further adapt NATO command and force structures to the potential threat from Russia.

Collective Defence and Deterrence. The ability to defend Norway is essential for NATO's collective defence of the entire Nordic-Baltic region, which is treated by Russia as a single strategic theatre of military operations. Norway, which borders Russia in the Arctic, provides the Alliance with the ability to monitor the activity of Russia's Northern Fleet, its most powerful of five fleets, armed with more than a third of the country's strategic nuclear warheads. In March 2017, Russia simulated attacks on Norwegian radar on the island of Vardøya near the Kola Peninsula, where the Northern Fleet is stationed. Two months later, the Russian air force simulated attacks on targets deeper inside Norwegian territory. During its *Zapad 2017* exercise, Russia placed Iskander ballistic missile launchers near Norwegian borders. Such actions indicate that during a NATO-Russia crisis, the Russian military will try to limit the Alliance's freedom of action in the region and may include attacks on military infrastructure or even an attempt to occupy part of Norwegian territory.

As demonstrated in the NATO *Trident Javelin 2017* command-post exercise, the Alliance could face serious logistical challenges in Norway. The main lines of communication from the south to the north of the country stretch over 2,000 km, with a significant part inside the Arctic Circle. The mobility of troops would depend on one railway line (with hundreds of bridges and dozens of tunnels), one main road, and the ability to defend ports in Bodø, Tromsø, and Narvik. The exercises also showed that NATO must be capable of protecting ports against ballistic missile attacks and cruise missiles and be prepared for high losses, especially if it was necessary to carry out amphibious operations.

Importance for NATO Forces. During the live field phase in Norway, NATO will certify the NATO Response Force (NRF), which will be on duty for one year from January 2019. NRF was strengthened after Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014 and consists of one very high readiness multinational land brigade (the so-called spearhead, or VJTF) and two brigades with a lower reaction period. In 2019, the spearhead will be commanded by Germany,

which will designate 8,000 troops for the exercises. The other two multinational brigades will be commanded by British and Italian forces. During the training, the role of the opponent will be played by Norwegian, Canadian, and Swedish (with the Finnish component) brigades supported by U.S. Marines. The exercise will enhance NATO interoperability and winter-combat skills. Norway will test its ability to receive reinforcements and move large numbers of troops across the country. It will also test its total defence concept based on public and administrative support for the armed forces.

Defence operations also will be carried out by two NATO standing naval groups that will be part of the NRF, including the Polish frigate *ORP Kazimierz Pułaski*. The Alliance will practice, among other things, the ability to protect sea lines of communication and infrastructure (including ports) crucial for sending reinforcements from the U.S. to Europe while a NATO air task force supported by Sweden and Finland will protect the airspace in the region of operations and offer support to naval and land forces.

Test of Command Structure. During the live field exercises, NATO will test the commands capable of conducting both collective-defence missions and crisis-response operations. The chain of command for the mission in Norway will consist of an operational headquarters in Naples (one of the two NATO operational commands) and its subordinate land, naval, and air commands. The land command (LANDCOM), located in Turkey (Izmir), will deploy some personnel to Norway to command the NRF land brigades. In an escalation of a conflict, this LANDCOM would take over the command of additional support forces of up to three corps.

The command of a defensive operation involving three corps supported by NRF forces (altogether over 100,000 soldiers) will be tested during a computer-assisted exercise (CPX) without the participation of actual troops on the training grounds. The exercises will be based on a realistic scenario in which NATO has to face a near-peer adversary with forces of similar size and armament. The Alliance will test, among others, the ability to recover lost territory despite the threat created by modern defensive and offensive systems and hybrid activities employed by the adversary.

Strategic Communication. *Trident Juncture 2018* is a high visibility exercise, which should demonstrate that NATO has the ability and political will to defend its members. In parallel with the *Trident Juncture*, Finland supported by NATO and EU partners will hold the *Northern Coast 2018* naval exercises in the Baltic Sea. At the beginning of November, the United Kingdom will begin the *ARRCADE Fusion 2018* exercises, which aim to rebuild the capabilities of the multinational Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) to participate in land, manoeuvre warfare with armoured and mechanised units. Poland will start the *Anakonda 2018* manoeuvres with several NATO countries also involved. The latter exercise will test the command structure (including the Headquarters of the Multinational Corps North-East in Szczecin and the Headquarters of the Multinational Division North-East in Elbląg) for a collective-defence mission with the participation of multinational units deployed in Poland and the Baltic States.

This high-tempo of exercises serve as a signal to Russia that it will not be able to paralyse NATO by creating a threat on its Northern and Eastern Flanks at the same time. The nature of the manoeuvres in the Baltic also indicates that the Allies are prepared to counter Russian attempts to block their access to Sweden and Finland.

Challenges for Poland. Polish security depends on NATO's ability to run a successful collective-defence mission in the entire Nordic-Baltic region. Therefore, the conclusions from the exercises may help Polish decision-makers agree consensus on the directions of the development of the armed forces, especially the navy and air force.

Building its image as a state supporting security in the entire Nordic-Baltic region can reinforce Poland's case for placing in the country a land operations command that could coordinate a force of several corps. One of the arguments is that having the headquarters in Poland shortens the reaction time to a crisis involving the Eastern Flank because land command elements would have to be deployed from Izmir in western Turkey.