



### ISSUE BRIEF

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# NATO's Framework Nations: Capabilities for an Unpredictable World

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As the Ukraine crisis demonstrates, in an unpredictable world, military capabilities can be a critical factor. The longstanding goals of the United States and its NATO allies have been to create a Europe whole and free, and globally to support such goals through collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security. Ukraine raises the issue of how best to accomplish those ends. As part of the Ukraine response, there have been and will continue to be diplomatic, economic, and energy efforts. However, one key element will be to create more effective integrated capabilities that will support NATO's military tasks, and thus the values and goals that NATO represents.

At the upcoming summit in September 2014, the NATO nations are very likely to approve a concept of "framework nations" around which to build integrated capabilities. As yet, however, there has been relatively little discussion about how best to organize the framework nations approach so as to support NATO objectives. Accordingly, this paper proposes building the framework nations concept around the three core NATO objectives whose achievement will guide the requisite capabilities. Specifically, the paper recommends that the framework nations concept be organized as follows:

**1. Collective Defense**, with Germany and Poland in the lead. Key elements would include development of host nation support, prepositioning, and stationing of forces; with acquisition focused on air defense; intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) for contested environments including survivable persistent capabilities; combat aircraft, including fighter and air-ground capability; and precision strike capacity.

**2. Expeditionary Capacity for Crisis Management**, with France and the United Kingdom in the lead. Key elements would include mobility, logistics, and ISR

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capabilities; with acquisition focused on airlift, aerial refueling, munitions stocks, and persistent surveillance.

**3. Partnership for Cooperative Security**, with the United States in the lead. Key elements would include interoperable partner military capabilities; working with partners on global commons and transnational security problems; undertaking education, training, and mentoring for partner military/security sector development; and establishing strategic cooperation with partners on matters of international security concern.

Each NATO nation would be free to join such frameworks as it chooses, though there are natural areas based on geography, history, and capacity that

would generally lead the members in particular directions. Utilizing these objectives as key goals would support NATO's collective defense, crisis management, and cooperative security missions as set forth in NATO's Strategic Concept.

## Building the Frameworks

### 1. Collective Defense

Collective defense is the bedrock of the Alliance. It is important to all nations, but it is only straightforward to say that, well prior to the Ukraine crisis, many of the newer members placed higher emphasis on collective defense. The Ukraine crisis, however, has underscored the importance of collective defense for all members, and the critical question now is how best to enhance capacities for this mission. NATO has previously undertaken some reasonable though modest efforts, such as the Steadfast Jazz exercise, but there is a great deal more that could be done.

Collective defense, of course, implies a multination effort—and specifically requires nations to move forces to the assistance of those suffering an attack. Doing so effectively necessitates the requisite planning, exercises, and logistics that would allow an alliance of twenty-eight to focus its efforts on a particular arena. Among many other requirements, this would include understanding and organizing host-nation support, establishing prepositioned capabilities, and acquiring deterrent capacities such as cost-effective air defense. Other critical capabilities for collective defense include intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance for contested environments including survivable persistent capabilities; combat aircraft, including fighter and air-ground capability; and precision strike capacity. Germany and Poland are well-positioned to lead as framework nations in such an effort.

Poland has had decided concerns about collective defense, which the Ukraine crisis has underscored, and has the greatest military capacity among nations with such concerns; in addition, it is geographically close to such others, including the Baltic countries. Germany has strongly denounced Russia's actions in Crimea. Its military technical and organizational capabilities are excellent. A German leadership role on collective defense could have highly beneficial political and military consequences for the Alliance.

An effective effort would start with reviewing host-nation support. The Baltic countries have only very limited military capacity. Deterrence would be significantly enhanced if it were clear that the Alliance's forces could move forward promptly if necessary, and host nation support is critical to such

prompt movement. The initial effort on host nation support, however, should focus not only on the Baltics, but also on Poland as Poland's larger geographic area will support the requirements of a more significant build-up.

Prepositioning would be a second step critical to collective defense. Russia's actions in Crimea effectively destroyed any agreements limiting the posting of NATO forces and materiel. Prepositioning, however, does not normally involve moving materiel far forward, as any such equipment would be subject to being lost to an initial aggression. Air and ground prepositioned equipment likely would therefore be placed in Poland for the most part.

A third step would focus on the stationing of forces. Forces stationed forward underscore a willingness to use force if required, and therefore enhance deterrence. It will be important to organize forward forces in a militarily effective manner. One useful approach would be further development of multinational formations, both ground and air. In undertaking the development of multinational formations for use in forward deployment, it also will be valuable to include not only forces from Germany, Poland, and the Baltics, but also forces from the United States, United Kingdom, and France. Lessons learned from Afghanistan about how to integrate multiple forces may be useful, and a good deal of creativity should be applied in determining precisely how to organize. Ultimately, of course, all multinational formations would have to fit under the Supreme Allied Commander Europe's (SACEUR) military planning.

Finally, the acquisition of relevant capabilities should be undertaken. As noted, these would include air defense; ISR for contested environments including survivable persistent capabilities; combat aircraft, including fighter and air-ground capability; and precision strike capacity. A multiyear acquisition approach should also be undertaken. Acquisition should fit the multinational formation approaches that are utilized.

### 2. Expeditionary Capacity for Crisis Management

Expeditionary missions have become an operational fact for the Alliance. From Bosnia and Kosovo in the Balkans to Afghanistan and Libya in the greater Middle East to antipiracy off the coast of Africa, NATO militaries have undertaken difficult and substantial expeditionary efforts. No one can predict with any confidence when NATO might next be called upon to undertake an expeditionary mission. Despite the focus on Ukraine, the rest of the world has not gone away. The requirement for expeditionary forces arises as a

result of crises, and crises have no set pattern. Whether NATO's military capacity would be called upon will always depend on multiple geopolitical considerations that will come together in the event, and are highly unpredictable.

But while the precise crises that might lead to the use of military force cannot be determined in advance, the NATO experiences over the past two decades have significantly informed the requirements of expeditionary capability. In addition, both France and the United Kingdom have been configuring their forces so as to maintain their capacity for expeditionary missions. Moreover, these countries have undertaken to work closely together on their military capabilities. Under these circumstances, it would be very sensible for France and the United Kingdom to lead as framework nations for the continued development of NATO's expeditionary capabilities. Based on their own combined efforts to date but also utilizing existing NATO planning and SACEUR guidance, the two nations could develop with others the needed capacities for effective crisis management.

The United States has been heavily engaged in NATO expeditionary efforts, and would be expected to do so in the future. Canada, by virtue of its being a North American nation, is also necessarily engaged in expeditionary actions for most of its military operations and should participate in this framework approach. But putting two European nations with significant capacity and will in charge of the framework effort for NATO would allow Europeans to establish the capabilities necessary to effective operations drawing on a wider group of European nations.

The requirements for expeditionary capabilities, of course, overlap those of collective defense. Generally, however, projection of forces will add stresses to mobility, logistics, and ISR capacities. Mobility requirements include airlift, aerial refueling, and sealift—and airlift and aerial refueling are in dangerously short supply in NATO other than in the US force structure. Logistics has multiple aspects, but one deficiency that the Libya operation underscored and which needs to be remedied is adequate munitions stocks—in that case, air-to-surface missiles—for the allies. ISR will depend on both airborne and space platforms. Unmanned aerial vehicles are an increasingly important element for providing persistent surveillance but it is important to note that advanced piloted aircraft also are not available in sufficient numbers; space capabilities also are key and will include military systems but also the use of commercial space systems.

An important expeditionary capability will be special operations forces. NATO has made significant efforts in this regard, including the establishment of a command structure. Continued efforts would especially focus on enablers for special operations forces, including sensors, intelligence capabilities, and delivery systems.

One final point: in multiple expeditionary efforts by NATO (or NATO nations), the military actions have been successful but the overall result has been less than satisfactory because of the difficulty in achieving sufficient results in the civilian sector, particularly with respect to the multiple elements of governance. This is a fundamental problem with respect to the use of force in crisis management situations. To put it another way, while the so-called “comprehensive approach” that NATO has adopted for integrating military and civilian efforts is sensible in theory, it has mostly been a failure in practice. If NATO intends to continue to engage in crisis management through military means, it should immediately undertake a significant analysis as to how to make the aftermath of any combat result in a much more effective on-the-ground situation. Such an analytic effort could be led by the United Kingdom and France as the proposed framework nation leaders for crisis management, but the United States should also be significantly involved. One approach would be to establish a small, tripartite working group of experienced practitioners with a mandate to provide recommendations.

### **3. Cooperative Security and the United States**

The United States has long provided the bedrock capabilities for NATO, and it will continue to do so including nuclear extended deterrence and the most advanced conventional forces for both collective defense and crisis management. Accordingly, within the context of military planning by SACEUR, the United States will generally have the lead role for most NATO missions. The benefit of the framework nations approach for collective defense and crisis management is to maximize the value of resources of other NATO members whose efforts would then be melded with those of the United States. However, as part of the framework nations approach, it makes sense for the United States to lead in the cooperative security arena where it has significant comparative advantage.

The strategic concept mission of cooperative security is significantly directed to NATO's partners, many of whom are actual allies of the United States or, alternatively, close partners with the United States in areas like the Gulf, Asia, and the High North. The United States is engaged worldwide, and the United States defense strategy issued in January 2012 (as well as the

2014 Quadrennial Defense Review) proposes to rely heavily on partners in multiple regional arenas.

In today's globalized world, continued development and usage of partnerships offers NATO strategic opportunities to enhance the capacity to accomplish the Alliance's missions. NATO has long had partnerships as an element in its strategy and operations. Especially with NATO members' defense budgets and capabilities decreasing significantly, the imperative for NATO to strengthen and better leverage its partnerships is greater than it has ever been.<sup>1</sup> This is particularly true for significant security concerns outside the North Atlantic area. In such event, partners would have invaluable benefit to NATO both from a standpoint of greater understanding of the relevant context as well as from the benefit to legitimacy of operations that their involvement with NATO would engender. Additionally, when the types of security challenges that NATO faces involve the global commons or transnational issues such as cyber, maritime piracy, energy security, nonproliferation, and counterterrorism, future engagement will be enhanced by partners that can bring knowledge and capabilities toward creating effective solutions.

The United States is well-positioned to lead a partnership strategy that complements NATO's approach for Alliance member states, including interoperable partner military capabilities, working with partners in the global commons and with respect to transnational security problems, undertaking education, training, and mentoring for partner military/security sector development, and establishing strategic cooperation with partners on matters of international security concern.<sup>2</sup> Especially with the United States in the lead, this will create a positive answer to many of the significant political questions surrounding enhanced partnerships, including most importantly whether NATO has the collective will to work more closely with partners, and, from a partnership perspective, whether it is important to work closely with NATO (the latter being more of an issue for Middle East/Gulf and Asian partners than for Europeans, particularly Sweden and Finland).

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1 NATO's partners have included multiple countries with significant resources, among them Australia, Finland, Japan, Qatar, South Korea, Sweden, and the United Arab Emirates. These and other partners maintain effective militaries and have the resources to utilize them in appropriate circumstances.

2 In implementing this strategy, NATO and its partners should utilize the concepts of strategic differentiation and flexible structures to ensure that partnerships as part of the NATO operating approach contribute to international security.

Key elements of the approach would include:

1. encouraging the most effective operational partners to join the NATO Response Force (NRF);
2. creating an enhanced exercise schedule for partners and a clearinghouse to coordinate national-led multinational exercises;
3. including the most effective partners in an operational chain of command for regional contingencies;
4. developing, with partners, cybersecurity standards for partner operational networks;
5. developing operational counterterror capacities with partners built around special operations forces;
6. working with partners to maintain counterinsurgency and comprehensive approach capacities;
7. developing a maritime force that works with partners in the Gulf, the littorals around Africa, and the Arctic;
8. expanding long-term educational efforts regarding the proper role of a military in a democracy; and
9. creating Strategic Partnership Groups with key Gulf/Middle East partners and with Pacific partners. Partners who have joined a Strategic Partnership Group and the NRF should have a right of consultation with NATO.<sup>3</sup>

## Conclusion

The framework nations concept can be a valuable method for the Alliance to use its available resources for defense. However, in order to avoid fragmented approaches and a sense that "anything which is more is better," it is important to focus the framework concept on upgrading the capability of NATO to perform its critical missions. Utilizing the objectives of collective defense, expeditionary capacity for crisis management, and cooperative security through partnership—and putting in the lead, respectively Germany and Poland; France and the United Kingdom; and the United States—will make it most likely that the framework nations concept will actually achieve the important capability enhancements that will allow the Alliance to effectively achieve its deterrent and military force objectives.

3 This section and the recommendations are taken from and more fully developed in a previous paper by the author, "NATO Global Partnerships: Strategic Opportunities and Imperatives in a Globalized World," [http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/files/publication\\_pdfs/403/NATOPartnerships2013.pdf](http://www.atlanticcouncil.org/images/files/publication_pdfs/403/NATOPartnerships2013.pdf).



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