



# BULLETIN

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## Obama's Call to Congress May Spur Better Defence of Poland and the Region

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*President Barack Obama's initiative to increase U.S. defence spending on Europe, announced in Warsaw on his recent visit, is a great opportunity to augment the territorial defence mechanisms in Central and Eastern Europe. However, to secure an enduring U.S. military presence in the region, it should be implemented in the framework of a broader strategy of ensuring the stability of NATO and its partners, including their capabilities to manage asymmetrical threats from externally inspired separatism.*

During the latest visit by U.S. President Barack Obama in Warsaw, he announced a request to the U.S. Congress for an additional \$1 billion to intensify the rotational presence of American troops in Europe and for more frequent exercises with the Allies, especially in Central and Eastern Europe. The proposal prepared by the Obama administration, the European Reassurance Initiative (ERI), would augment the capabilities and readiness of U.S. forces on the eastern flank of NATO, thanks to improvement in infrastructure and pre-positioned military equipment. Funds for these goals would be included in the Pentagon's budget (Overseas Contingency Operations) for 2015, which is dedicated for military missions, including Afghanistan.

**Transformation of the U.S. Presence in Europe.** The United States, after the disintegration of the U.S.S.R, has not perceived Russia as an existential threat and has transformed its military presence in Europe. The growing military power of China, withdrawal of U.S. troops from Iraq, the end of the combat mission in Afghanistan, the financial crisis and military budget cuts only accelerated this trend. According to the Defense Strategic Guidance from 2012, the U.S. Army, which was static and focused on long-term stabilisation, will in the coming years be replaced by lighter rapid-reaction forces. The implementation of this strategy resulted in limiting the presence of U.S. troops in Europe (now 67,000) and, in 2012–2013, withdrawing the last two heavy Brigade Combat Teams (BCT). More reductions of U.S. troops in Europe (fewer companies, battalions and command headquarters) are foreseen in 2014–2016. There are also plans for another review of infrastructure in Europe (European Infrastructure Consolidation), which may result in further closures or changes in the location of U.S. bases there.

With the aim to balance the withdrawals from Europe, Washington decided to contribute the 1<sup>st</sup> BCT from the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division at Fort Hood (Texas) into a high-readiness NATO Response Force (NRF). Starting in 2014, the battalion level components of this BCT (around 800 troops) would rotate twice a year for 60-day periods for exercises in Europe. BCT personnel will rely on heavy armour and equipment (including Bradleys and Abrams tanks), which are prepositioned as a European Activity Set located in bases in Grafenwöhr and Hohenfels (Germany). The U.S. is also increasing its presence in Romania (Black Sea Rotational Force), which should increase its capabilities for reaction in the area of the Black Sea, Balkans and Caucasus.

According to official documents, the U.S. in the future in Europe will focus on more effective air forces, special forces, missile defence and cybersecurity. Announced in 2014, the Quadrennial Defense Review stresses that priorities in Europe are growing the capabilities to interoperate with the Allies and the rapid redeployment of combat troops for coalition operations. At the same time, Washington, as guarantor of European security, is showing publicly its dissatisfaction with the deep cuts in European defence budgets and is appealing to its Allies to take a more responsible approach to the security of the continent and its neighbourhood. Among the European members of NATO, only

Estonia, Greece and the United Kingdom are in line with the recommended 2% GDP for defence, and Poland and France are just below this level of military spending.

**Allied Reaction to the Ukrainian Crisis.** The crisis in Ukraine and the annexation of Crimea by Russia forced the U.S. and NATO to surge their presence in Central and Eastern Europe. Washington sent ships into the Black Sea, increased the number of American F-15s participating in the NATO Baltic Air Policing mission from four to 10, as well as increased the number of F-16s in the Poland Aviation Detachment dedicated to train with the Polish Air Forces from six to 12. Since April 2014, Washington has also deployed elements of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne Brigade for exercises in Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia, and a company of Marines to Romania. Since then, the U.S. has also sent a few ships for exercises with the navies of Romania and Bulgaria. At the same time, Washington is also supporting NATO's partners in Russia's neighbourhood by sending such things as food and medical equipment to the armed forces of Ukraine and conducting another exercise with U.S. Marines in Georgia.

In response to the Russian moves against Ukraine, NATO decided to update defence plans, suspend cooperation with Russia, and offered political support to Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova. The Allies also approved reconnaissance flights with AWACS planes over Poland and Romania to monitor the situation in Ukraine. NATO deployed ships from the Standing Countermeasures Group-I to the Baltic Sea. Additionally, both NATO and the U.S. have sent troops for exercises in the region: "Saber Guardian" in March and April in Bulgaria, and "Steadfast Javelin" in May in Estonia. The latter involved 6,000 troops from NATO countries.

Since April, the NATO secretariat and Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) have been preparing new steps that should increase the readiness of the Allies to react to threats. A Readiness Action Plan (RAP) will focus on exercises and training, increasing the readiness of the NRF, prepositioning equipment, filling gaps in joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance, missile defence, air command-and-control and airlift capabilities. The final version of the plan is supposed to be agreed during the NATO summit in Wales on 4-5 September. NATO leaders are also expected to approve an increase in personnel of the Multinational Corps North-East HQ in Szczecin, which currently employs 242 people, and to increase the readiness of the unit, which is able to deploy almost 100,000 troops.

**How the Initiative Can Strengthen Central and Eastern Europe.** The annexation of Crimea by Russia invigorated attempts by Poland, Romania and the Baltic states to establish a permanent military presence of U.S. or NATO forces on their territories. Poland presented the U.S. administration with its concept of a permanent American force in the region based on the development of the aviation detachment, special forces, missile defence and a training centre for Eastern Europe.

Proposals for permanent NATO or U.S. bases in the new Member States has sparked controversy among some of the other Member States, and the recent moves by the Allies are visibly temporary. Nevertheless, Poland, Romania and the Baltic States can take advantage of the U.S. president's initiative to augment the mechanisms of territorial defence in the region, and to convince the U.S. to place military units there on a permanent basis. To do so, all five states, which have already declared their intent to increase defence spending to 2% of GDP, should coordinate their diplomatic and lobbying efforts in persuading the U.S. Congress to approve the ERI funds for fiscal year 2015, and to make the initiative a long-term project.

Securing funding for 2015 would enable quick reinforcement of territorial defence mechanisms. The top priority should be an extension of infrastructure, which would enable the quick deployment of significant U.S. forces to Central and Eastern Europe. It should be complemented with prepositioning heavy weapons and equipment, such as the Bradleys and Abrams tanks in Poland, Romania and the Baltic States to be used in territorial defence scenarios.

Making ERI a long-term initiative would open the way for regular deployments to the region of battalion-size units (about 800 troops), instead of companies (about 200 troops), which offers more options for wider training. Sensible planning of exercises and training could lead to U.S. troops being present in the region for the larger part of the year.

An increase in the U.S. military presence in the region might also be connected to a broader strategy of augmenting the stability of NATO's partners as well as some Member States via the development of their capabilities to react to asymmetric threats, especially from externally inspired separatist movements. Such a regional programme, which would be in tune with the American doctrine of Security Force Assistance, could capitalise on the experiences of Poland, Romania, the Baltic states and the U.S. with assisting and training the Afghan National Security Forces. If NATO's Central and Eastern European countries lead in this effort with additional funding, it would be an important argument for ensuring a permanent U.S. military presence in the region.