Efficacy, not Efficiency:
Adjusting NATO's Military Integration

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Introduction

NATO stands at a strategic crossroads. The Wales Summit of September 2014, supposed to mark the end of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), the Alliance's biggest and most costly operation, stood in the shadow of the Ukrainian crisis. Consequently, it resulted in a re-orientation of NATO towards collective defence and the indivisibility of security of all its members – all with a clear focus towards a resurgent Russia. While the roots of this development go deeper than the annexation of Crimea, Russia's *coup de main* of March 2014 without doubt effected an acceleration and crystallization of options. At the core of NATO's choices now stands the tacit acknowledgement that, for the foreseeable future, the era of "Global NATO"[2] is over, with ISAF liable to be the high-water- mark of Allied operations, both in geographical and military scope.

Consequently, for the first time in years, real debates surround the issue of NATO capabilities beyond stabilization operations. While the last decade saw numerous efforts to enhance NATO's capabilities with regard to stabilization operations over strategic distances – and with ISAF having lifted the Alliance to a new level of interoperability – it is now about the military capabilities underlying NATO's core task. Bluntly speaking, NATO now has to prepare more for wars of necessity, and less for the wars of choice of global stabilization operations.

This paper has three core theses. **First**, with NATO's strategic return to a renewed focus on collective defence, most of the models for

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[2] I. Daalder and J. Goldgeier, "Global NATO", *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85/5, Sept./Oct. 2006, pp. 105-113.

multinational cooperation within NATO lose their focus: low-intensity operations over long distances. **Second**, most currently championed models of multinationality, at the core of the NATO Response Force (NRF), increasingly fail to acknowledge the basic principles of warfighting, the mechanism of force generation and integration, as well as the political realities of defence politics. **Third**, NATO multinationality will have to resemble the pattern of the 1990s rather than that of the 2000s, and it will not be cost-effective and militarily efficient at the same time.

What is needed could be described as a "1990s plus" model – a paradigm that acknowledges the ad-hoc nature of deployments, discards the fiction of rotating forces or integration down to brigade levels, and realises that it will have to come down to common training and interoperability under an integrated operational command structure, not pooling and sharing. An effective defence will cost money.

While the political principles of military multinationality are common for all services, the military principles guiding concrete implementation differ significantly. Allied navies and, especially, air forces, with a high degree of technological specialization, limited crew numbers manning important weapon systems, and the tested principle of common training on the basis of a common SOP and a shared language, already feature a level of multinationality that will be impossible to match for ground forces in the field, outside of long-standing integrated headquarters. Therefore, this analysis will focus primarily on Allied ground forces, except when explicitly mentioned.

Efficacy, not efficiency – Multinationality during the Cold War

The "Single Issue Multinationality"

An alternative to current models of military multinationality would have to build on successful precedents of Allied integration in the face of a conventional defence. Therefore, it is vital to understand how NATO conceived of multinational operations before 1990 – and, thereby, why current plans are based on a flawed understanding of NATO's strengths and weaknesses.

Over the better part of its existence, multinationality and military integration within NATO tried to combine both the military necessity of cooperation on the one hand, and the principle of national sovereignty on the other hand. The result is instructive and can be described as "**single issue multinationality**:"Allied armed forces agreed to integrate and cooperate to a degree never seen before. They did so, however, against one single foe, in one single major scenario, and in one clearly defined geographical region: to defend Western Europe and its neighbourhood against an attack by the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact.

At the same time, however, with the notable exception of the German Bundeswehr, no Allied army was tied down in any other regard. Allied armies fought hot wars throughout the Cold War, on every major continent, without being in any way constrained or controlled by the Allied command structure. As a consequence, national armed forces retained the autonomy to conduct operations based on national discretion. Once under the operational command of NATO structures, however, the orders of Allied commanders were generally binding.

In this analysis, it is important to remember the often forgotten fact that, as a general rule, during the Cold War NATO did not rely on the peacetime integration of units it was to lead. While the headquarters themselves were multinational and integrated, the army corps they led were, as a general

rule, nationally homogenous.[3] In addition, between 1960 and 2002, the Allied Mobile Force (AMF) was constituted as a multinational, brigade-sized mobile unit to reinforce NATO's threatened flanks on the territory of otherwise relatively weak Allies.[4] Notably, its function was to a large degree symbolic, namely to "*to demonstrate the solidarity of the Alliance*"[5] – on actual operations, it effectively mattered as little as its multinational successors (see below).[6] Within NATO, the AMF was the exception; as a rule, below multinational corps, national units remained homogenous. The reasons were both political and military in nature.

Politically, tying down troops in integrated units at a relatively low level drastically reduces a state's ability to act independently: integration reduces strategic flexibility. The fate of integrated units below the corps level is instructive: the Franco-German Brigade, for example, was never the spearhead of multinationality it was intended to be. Its creation had political motivations, yet the political consensus for its deployment is rarely found. More "interventionist" countries regularly abstain from these models lest they get their most effective troops tied down; less interventionist countries favour those models, since they add an element of mutual control to otherwise important symbolism.

Militarily, integration on a low tactical level magnifies – below the level of the corps – the challenges which are anyway inherent in multinational cooperation. Standardization of weapons, ammunition and logistics in general becomes paramount and nearly impossible to guarantee in combat. Language becomes critical; and operational control, under the friction of combat, with limited language competence becomes not only deficient, but life-threatening. Here it is worth reconsidering the debate surrounding the failed "European Defence Community" (EDC) of the early 1950s, where notably France pushed for the integration of multinational combat units at the lowest possible level.[7] When faced with the possibility of multinational combat divisions, Ulrich de Maizière, a war veteran who later became the first Chief of Defence of the new Bundeswehr, categorically stated: "*Such a mixed unit has no place on the battlefield.*"[8] While progress in language competence, advanced communication technology and sixty years of harmonized education and training will have improved the basis for multinational cooperation within NATO, perhaps allowing for combat-effective multinational divisions, there surely is a distinct limit to how low multinational integration can be pushed without entailing negative ramifications for combat effectiveness.

Thus, while "single issue multinationality" was the rule of a well-functioning NATO integration process for forty years, it was, as we shall see, the exception to this rule – the AMF, a unit with primarily symbolic functions – that became the role model for the development of multinationality from the 1990s until this day, including the decisions taken in Wales in 2014.

[3] And even those were overwhelmingly national only. See A. King, *The Transformation of Europe's Armed Forces. From the Rhine to Afghanistan*, Cambridge, 2011, pp. 40-41.

[4] See J. Gerber, *Die Bundeswehr im Nordatlantischen Bündnis*, Regensburg, 1985, pp. 46, 67-68.

[5] NATO Handbook, updated 29 October 2002, https://web.archive.org/web/20070717000304/http://www.nato.int/docu/handbook/2001/hb1207020305.htm (accessed 06 March 2015)

[6] The only "sharp" action was the deployment of the AMF's air component to Turkey in 1991 to deter a possible spill-over of the Gulf War into the country. See B. Lemke, "Strategische Mobilität im Kalten Krieg 1956 bis 1990: Die Allied Mobile Force, die UK Mobile Force und die Rapid Defence Joint Task Force im Vergleich", in H. Möllers and R. J. Schlaffer (eds.), *Sonderfall Bundeswehr? Streitkräfte in nationalen Perspektiven und im internationalen Vergleich*, Oldenburg, 2014, pp. 229-258, p. 239.

[7] S. M. Karanowski, *The German Army and NATO Strategy*, Washington, 1982, p. 21-22.

[8] M. Rink, "'Strukturen brausen um die Wette'. Zur Organisation des deutschen Heeres", in Helmut R. Hammerich et al (eds), *Das Heer 1950 bis 1970. Konzeption, Organisation, Aufstellung*, Oldenburg, 2006, pp. 353-484, p. 381.

Principles of Multinationality

What, then, was the backbone of NATO's common conventional defence and multinationality under the constraints of national sovereignty? While necessarily oversimplifying, three factors stand out: a common strategic outlook, standardization, and training.

First, a common **politico-strategic framework** was a prerequisite. Without a broad consensus on the political parameters guiding combined military planning, a multinational command structure planning for a war that would immediately make national borders obsolete would have been impossible. Throughout the Cold War, this consensus was in constant danger of being shattered by shifting national interests and threat assessments.[9] However, the broad outlines of NATO's *raison d'être*, how a conventional defence of NATO territory would have to be conducted at a given time, and what units and deployments would be necessary for this, were agreed collectively and unambiguously. In addition, the integrated multinational command structure was to ensure that this agreed strategy was implemented down to the operational and tactical levels.

Second, **standardizing** products and processes was key.[10] Allied planners after 1949 were acutely aware of the importance of effective logistics and pushed for remedies, with considerable yet incomplete success. The best case would have been, and remains, common and nationally identical weapon systems, from rifles to combat aircraft and frigates, with identical spare parts and software. This vision stands largely unfulfilled, as numerous common weapon development programmes testify. Too few such programmes were successful in developing and delivering major weapon systems on time, and without national modifications which more or less

obfuscated any advantage obtained from having a common frame, creating path dependencies of updates and specializations that led, once more, to diverging national paths. However, in one of the least recognized success stories in the history of NATO, the second best option of a consequential standardization of everything military – Standard Operating Procedures (SOP), schemes of orders as well as weapon calibres and doctrine – was and is, up to this day, the *conditio sine qua non* of military integration, enabling a large degree of technical interoperability without impacting negatively on weapon development and, hence, on national politico-economic interests. Standardization thus acknowledged political realities and made the best out of them – a lesson for today. Without consequential standardization there is no effective military multinationality.

Third, **common training** was absolutely critical to create and preserve interoperability. NATO never fought; over forty years, it trained. For decades, regular manoeuvres tested the integrated command structure, its doctrines, as well as its subordinate national units. These manoeuvres had to be large enough to be multinational; and they had to allow the (mostly national) units of the national armies to train as integral units – to train as they would have fought. That is important: while multinational manoeuvres continued after 1990, and were regularly advertised as role models of military integration, they were conducted more often than not at levels far below the division, brigade or even battalion; in addition, they were not regular exercises featuring the same units and commands, but mostly based on one-off cooperation. Both aspects drastically limited any impact on military multinationality. While the ISAF mission lifted Allied interoperability to levels unseen before, it will be crucial to preserve these capabilities

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[9] See S. R. Sloan, *Permanent Alliance? NATO and the Transatlantic Bargain from Truman to Obama*, New York/London, 2010, pp. 43-73.

[10] On the issue of standardization, see, inter alia, G. Ashcroft, "Military Logistic Systems in NATO: The Goal of Integration", *IISS Adelphi Papers* No. 68, June, 1970, pp. 5-7.

in peacetime. NATO has recognized this, by launching the "Connected Forces Initiative" (CFI) in 2012 (see below). However, effective multinationality does not rely on a better understanding of how Allied militaries operate – and that is the most that can be achieved with today's manoeuvres. Instead, it needs effective multinational command structures leading mostly nationally homogeneous combat units and training them in manoeuvres that are multinational at an appropriate level – at the division level and beyond.

Taken together, those three elements of multinationality – a common political framework, standardization and common training – formed the backbone of successful (though never tested) NATO military integration, resting on lessons learned from a world war and on sound political-military principles. However, with the advent of out-of-area operations and the simultaneous demand for a peace dividend after 1990, military integration developed away from this solid base in favour of far more sophisticated and visionary, yet at the same time far more vulnerable and precarious models of integration. The debate over the ideal level and principles of multinational integration is as old as NATO itself, and was most pronounced in the negotiations over its early and failed contemporary, the European Defence Community (EDC). In the negotiations over the EDC, during the 1950s, the trend to push military integration to the lowest possible level (brigade and division) stemmed from the impetus to control the prospective Ally Germany by trying to avoid combat-effective German formations capable of independent operations.[11] At least since the conception of the NRF after the Prague Summit, and continuing with today's planning in NATO, a similar impetus stems from budgetary pressures, coupled with a political will to present at least a nucleus of a "European Army." In both cases, considerations of military effectiveness, as will be shown, were and are too often disregarded.

The Age of Integration: Multinationality after 1990

The two decades of increasingly extensive Allied operations after 1990 saw the simultaneous evolution of common and integrated multinational forces to support these operations.[12] While trying to adapt to new challenges, NATO (and the EU, for that matter), in their effort to better prepare for *out-of-area* operations, deviated from the tried path and focussed on new ways of multinationality – standing multinational forces of high readiness with rotating contributions from the member states. The results were units that, intentionally or not, were operationally irrelevant, for the following reasons.

First, every mission will disrupt the peace-time structure of the national armies as well as, by necessity, the composition of standing multinational units. At the root of this is a simple fact that complicates the life of military planners. Most national armies do not deploy whole units above the level of battalions. Be it because of national troop ceilings, of capabilities dictated by the type of mission, or of the constitution of the multinational force package, modularity and flexibility in the form of national or multinational task forces were a necessary concession to this reality. While there are exceptions, the need to create force packages, or even joint task forces designed individually for this single mission, prevents most armies from "training as you fight." The result is a basic pattern of military planning where ministries define "levels of ambition" and plan for scenarios that, almost by definition, will be spoiled by reality.

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[11] See C. M. Kelleher, "Fundamentals of German Security: The Creation of the Bundeswehr – Continuity and Change," in S. F. Szabo (ed), *The Bundeswehr and Western Security*, New York, 1990, pp. 13-30, p. 19.

[12] See King, *Transformation*, pp. 40-45.

As the former Vice Chief of Staff of the US Army, General John M. Keane, pointedly noted: "Wars break armies."[13]

Therefore, **second**, pre-planning will most of the time lose to "ad-hocism." During the 1990s, the Balkan operations were organized ad-hoc. Since there was no standing multinational force to be deployed, NATO concentrated on what it could do best: adapting its strategic and operational command structure.[14] It quickly established high-readiness headquarters like the Allied Rapid Reaction Corps (ARRC) in 1992 to provide an institutional framework for potential future operations. This was continued through various states, with comparable steps taken in the EU.[15] Military headquarters are relatively easily adapted, since integrated command and control structures look back at decades of history, imply relatively low costs, and send a welcome political signal of multinational readiness.

A commander, however, needs troops. And the history of standing multinational forces to overcome the "ad-hocism" of force generation has not been a success story. After the shock of Kosovo, when NATO narrowly avoided the bloody task of invading Kosovo against Serbian resistance, and the impetus of September 11, 2001, the first decade of the 21st century became the decade of standing Allied ground forces. At its Prague Summit in 2002, NATO decided to establish the NATO Response Force (NRF), as a joint and multinational spearhead force of up to 24,000 soldiers grouped around a brigade-sized ground element.[16] From the beginning, the NRF had a dual purpose: first, to promote interoperability and common standards through common training and the certification process of the units contributing to the NRF on a rotational basis; and, only second, to stand ready for operations. The EU, meanwhile, moved from the excessively overambitious Helsinki Headline Goal (HHG) of 1999 – which foresaw a corps-sized force of 60.000 soldiers – to the more modest EU Battle Groups (EUBG) after 2003.[17] NRF and EUBG were based on the same principle: the modular, multinational composition of rotating contributors.

Neither the NRF nor the EUBG have ever been deployed into combat. The reasons are not identical, but similar: the necessary unanimity within NATO and the EU was not reached on short notice; the major contingencies the NRF was designed for did not become reality – where its military success, as is argued above, might anyway have been doubtful – and the EU came to realize that the rotating combination of nations contributing to any single EUBG would always be slightly imperfect, although here opportunities for their activation were abundant. As the NRF has never been deployed in scenarios it was intended for, its second function proved to be decisive. The verifiable commitment of member states to contribute well-trained and well-equipped forces to the NRF package ensured that participating armies were fielding partially state-of-the-art forces. Seen as an Allied instrument to improve interoperability and readiness, the NRF can be considered a success; as an intervention force, it did not matter.[18] *Thus, while NATO operated effectively and admirably, it did so not because of standing and integrated multinational forces, but because of its practiced and impressive command and control arrangements coupled with good, yet ad-hoc generated troops.*

[13] B. Woodward, *The War Within: A Secret White House History 2006-2008*, New York, 2008, p. 202.

[14] See M. Webber, J. Sperling and M. Smith, *NATO's Post War Trajectory. Decline or Regeneration?*, Hampshire/New York, 2012, pp. 76-77.

[15] See J. Howorth, *Security and Defence Policy in the European Union*, Hampshire/New York, 2007, pp. 103-109.

[16] See J. Abts, *NATO's Very High Readiness Joint Task Force*, NATO Defense College Research Paper No. 109, February, 2015, pp. 2-4.

[17] See A. Barcikowska, *EU Battlegroups – ready to go?*, EUISS Issue Brief 40/2013, pp. 1-2.

[18] See M. Webber J. Sperling and M. Smith, *NATO's Post Cold War Trajectory*, p. 77.

From Chicago to Wales: SD, CFI and VJTF

From Smart Defence to the CFI

At the Chicago Summit of 2012, NATO agreed on the basic principles guiding its defence planning towards its goal of "NATO Forces 2020." The Chicago Summit took place against the background of the financial crisis still depressing defence budgets, and of the already agreed end of ISAF by 2014. The twin impetus implied in this – simply speaking, the need to save money, and the reluctance to enter into another sizable operation far from Alliance territory – dictated the path NATO chose to reach its goal. The Alliance's plans can be differentiated into primarily economic and military projects.

Economically, and in terms of defence planning, Smart Defence was supposed to lead the way. According to NATO, Smart Defence was to include "harmonising requirements, pooling and sharing capabilities, setting priorities and coordinating efforts."[19] In a nutshell, Smart Defence is thus intended to increase efficiency in defence planning; it is therefore an eminently economic programme, and only secondarily a military one. Understood in this way, the strengths of the concept become clear: economic incentives push the states towards greater cooperation in procurement, training, maintenance, and administration. Functioning Smart Defence projects, or those of the EU's twin, "Pooling and Sharing," therefore fall into those broad categories.

What Smart Defence never did, however, was aim at military efficacy. As an economic programme, it did not, and could not, take into account military imperatives. Therefore, any expectation that Smart Defence could offer "more for less" is baseless; all it could reasonably be expected to do was offer "slightly less for less."

The focus on efficiency notwithstanding, Smart Defence was an adequate basis for Allied defence planning until the "strategic turn" of the Wales Summit in 2014. That year marks a turning point indeed in NATO's history. The reaffirmation of collective defence after the Russian aggression on Crimea and in eastern Ukraine coincided with the end of ISAF in Afghanistan, which symbolically marks a tentative end to the Alliance's global ambitions.[20]

Most successful models of "Pooling & Sharing" focus on strategic enablers that individual European countries lack, or that are economically expensive to operate. Here, strategic air lift capabilities, airborne reconnaissance as well as early warning platforms are prime examples, as proven by the AWACS aircraft successfully operated on an Alliance level since years. However, with the return of territorial defence in Allied planning, some of those capabilities will lose relative importance – and will, in any way, more often than not stay in national hands, as dictated by political imperatives and military logic.

Thus, "sharing," maybe the politically most hyped aspect of Smart Defence, is approaching a dead end. This is especially true of the discussion about "niche capabilities" and the respective specialization of certain countries.[21] "Sharing" is existentially geared towards out-of-area, low-intensity conflicts, and necessitates a threat environment where states feel secure in giving up capabilities that would be vital in any serious defence scenario. A number of states that already shed certain capabilities and main weapon systems – like the Netherland's mustering-out of its Main Battle Tanks (MBT) – or that discussed specializing on one capability at the expense of most

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[19] NATO: *Smart Defence*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_84268.htm (accessed March 5, 2015)

[20] See C. Nünlist and M. Zapfe, "NATO after Wales: Dealing with Russia", *CSS Analyses on Security Policy* 161/October, 2014.

[21] See E. Hallams and B. Schreer, "Towards a 'post-American' alliance? NATO burden-sharing after Libya" *International Affairs* Vol.88, No.2, 2012, pp. 313–327, p. 325.

others – like the Czech Republic's focus NRBC units[22] – are unlikely to follow through with it, or might already regret having done so, in the face of re-emerging, traditional scenarios of conventional defence. The sharing of elemental combat capabilities would be challenging in any scenario – yet it would be highly risky to build the further defence planning of the Alliance on that tenuous a ground. Thus it is primarily with an eye to its military implications that a key element of Smart Defence loses its conceptual basis.

Militarily, the Connected Forces Initiative (CFI), was supposed to preserve and improve the level of interoperability reached during a decade of war in Afghanistan. It is especially with the CFI's focus on an updated, modified and intensified training cycle, including high-visibility exercises and adapted scenarios, that the CFI retains its importance for today's challenges while the relevance of Smart Defence, officially "the heart of (NATO's) new approach,"[23] is decreasing. At the same time, the CFI entails efforts to harmonize the Alliance's technological planning and communication infrastructure, again to promote interoperability beyond ISAF.[24] The CFI builds on two of the three pillars of military multinationality – common training and standardization –hence its importance for the Alliance. It was adopted by the "Readiness Action Plan" (RAP) decided in Wales, and remains a crucial element of further NATO planning. This step is a sign of growing awareness that the procurement-focussed "Smart Defence" element, with its economy-driven impetus, is rightfully taking a backseat in NATO planning. That cannot be said, however, for the continued reliance of annual rotations in integrated multinational units, which has been lent a new life after Wales – with important implications.

The logic of the VJTF

At the Wales Summit, NATO agreed on new plans based on a reformed and adapted NRF. The VJTF, conceived as a brigade-equivalent force of around 5,000 troops, is to be deployable within two to five days, serving as the advance echelon of the "Enhanced NRF" in order to deploy Allied troops to eastern European hot spots as quickly as possible.[25] To this end, NATO will position vehicles, weapons, and equipment for the VJTF in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria, Poland, and Romania and adapt its command structures for pairing with these items on location – all of this with an eye to the "hybrid" threats emanating from Russia. The term is not helpful, suggesting as it does a fundamentally new threat picture.

For this analysis, "hybrid warfare" is best defined through its underlying logic: the conscious negation of a clear distinction between a state of war and a state of peace. Actions that have traditionally been permitted in warfare, but not in peace, are thus to become legitimate instruments of foreign policy. The result is the creation of a structural grey area in inter-state relations, and a challenge to the core foundations of peace in Europe. Such a negation of peace or war, combined with the emphasis on a permanent state of confrontation, constitutes the West's main problem with Russia's approach policy.

In the face of this "hybrid" threat, the VJTF stands in the tradition of the AMF and can, as its predecessor, best be described as a "mobile tripwire," constituting a deployable guarantee of Alliance solidarity that should make it more difficult for Moscow to

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[22] See C. Ek, *NATO's Prague Capabilities Commitment*, CRS Report for Congress, January, 2007, p. 3.

[23] Summit Declaration on Defence Capabilities: *Toward NATO Forces 2020*, 20 May. 2012, Press Release (2012) 064.

[24] See NATO: *Connected Forces Initiative*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_98527.htm (accessed May 13, 2015)

[25] See NATO: *NATO Response Force*, http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_49755.htm (accessed May 18, 2015)

attack an individual Ally without striking all of the (major) Allies at the same time. This purpose is, to a considerable degree, already served by its mere existence coupled with an assured rapid deployment capability. Not that its combat value is completely insignificant; unlike the already present NATO forces engaged in exercises on a rotational basis, the VJTF could offer sufficiently robust resistance against any foe to ensure the invocation of Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty. But combat effectiveness is not the essence of the concept. Therefore, while criticism of the quality of equipment used by some of the first units assigned to it is justified, especially against the background of familiar problems with equipment in the troop-contributing nations, these shortcomings have little bearing on the VJTF's effectiveness in its primary mission. For the "mobile tripwire," multinational integration is necessary, and rotation is not harmful beyond dramatically increasing the logistical difficulties. The same is not true, however, with regard to the "Enhanced NRF" that is designated as providing NATO's follow-on forces in case of a further escalation.

The NRF, which is the template for "second wave" planning at the moment, has, as discussed above, not yet faced the test of live deployments, let alone real combat. Moreover, in this case, unlike with the VJTF, the combat-effectiveness of the follow-on units would be more important than their national composition or response time. The issue would no longer be political symbolism, but actual warfighting capability; and again, counting on a multinational corps including, potentially, multinational divisions or even brigades, is a risky bet.

Most critically, it is more than doubtful whether the planned annual rotation of the VJTF, matched with the complex pre-positioning of equipment,

will be sustainable. The challenge becomes even clearer when one considers potential future theatres of operations in the south of Alliance territory. Because of sound military principles, and in order to minimize the inherent friction of multinational mission command, the AMF was not composed of rotating national contingents, but rested on permanent contributing states and nationally defined areas of operation.[26] Only by designating those areas could the immense logistical challenges of pre-positioned supplies and material possibly be overcome. The notion of rotation, today too often considered as essential in multinational units, was only introduced after 2002 with the creation of the NRF. As described above, however, this was mainly intended to serve the crosscutting modernization of national armed forces. For the NRF itself, rotation was more detrimental than helpful. In addition, the NRF did not depend on pre-positioned equipment.

Taken together, the combination of multinationality, rapid reaction capability, and annual changes in the composition of the VJTF is now creating considerable logistical problems. After all, this means that for the same areas of operation, NATO will have to synchronize an annual rotation of diverse units from various Alliance members, who will inevitably also have varying levels of equipment and configuration – or else decide to drop the façade of rapid reaction and reduce its expectations in terms of the VJTF's deployability and reaction time. In the absence of further, politically difficult steps – potentially entailing measures such as the delineation of national areas of operation in border regions, analogous to the NATO defence plans for West Germany – or a fundamental standardization of equipment and training of NATO militaries, which seems even less likely in the short term, the concept of the VJTF will thus quickly meet with practical limitations.[27]

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[26] See Sean M. Maloney, "Fire Brigade or Tocsin? NATO's ACE Mobile Force, Flexible Response and the Cold War", in *The Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4, December, 2004, pp. 585-613, p. 595.

[27] This section is based on: M. Zapfe, "*NATO's "Spearhead Force""*, *CSS Analyses on Security Policy* 174/May 2015.

To sum up: key elements of Smart Defence, and the basic rationale of current military planning for the VJTF and the "Enhanced NRF," face a gradually weakening political-military rationale; they represent a concept of multinationality not suited to actual operations; and they will definitely run counter to emerging military challenges implied in NATO's "conventional turn" after the Wales Summit. NATO is planning for the challenges of the pre-1990s in part with the concepts of the post-1990s. A more suitable way forward, therefore, may be found in the Alliance's more distant past.

"1990 plus": Elements of an Adjustment

A structure of reformed military cooperation, then, would have to acknowledge that the three principles of the "single-issue multinationality" between 1949 and 1990 are more valid than before. **First**, a common strategic framework has to guide Allied defence planning. That framework only superficially exists. In Wales, NATO managed to find a new lowest common denominator: the mutual assistance guarantee under Article V has been reconfirmed as the bedrock of the Alliance; and, as the Summit Declaration makes clear, that guarantee is mainly directed against Russia. However, it is equally clear that beyond this minimal consensus of reassurance and adaptation, tangible disparities remain between the member states. Many of the decisions taken in Wales follow a fine line of compromise. Therefore, considerable disagreements and contrary preferences may be expected on the part of individual NATO members, especially with regard to future policy towards Russia, and whether other challenges and threats might be equally important for a sizable number of member states. As long as the ambivalence of Wales remains unsolved, Allied defence planning will continue be severely hampered, and the VJTF, together with the "Enhanced NRF," will mirror the compromise adopted in Wales, and constitute a

powerful Allied symbol, yet not the effective fighting formation they are supposed to be. That viable strategic framework might include a final decision for a forward posture of Allied forces in the Baltic, a definition of national areas of responsibility in Eastern border regions, or even an extension of the renewed defence planning with an eye to NATO's southern flank. In any case, the framework would have to take a step forward from the Wales compromise – a step unlikely to be taken before the Warsaw Summit of 2016.

Second, improved standardization will have to be the backbone of this planning – admittedly a long-term project. This would necessitate high-level political decisions with regard to procurement, equipment and logistics. The best guarantee for interoperability still is *common* equipment, not *shared* equipment. If NATO leaders energetically use the impetus for increased cooperation to really push for integrated defence procurement – not just well-known harmonization, but real identical equipment –the potential savings might not be as impressive as those initially promised by "Smart Defence." However, this course might actually enhance military efficacy in the scenarios where it is vital.

Thus, any step away from current defence planning would entail acknowledging that a pure focus on efficiency will not help, but that a broader understanding is possible and necessary: that of efficiency not solely in terms of money saved, but in terms of measuring increased *efficacy* against the corresponding costs. Instead of just sharing, this new-old standardization could in time lead to Allied armies with a high level of interoperability already through standardized material, training and doctrine, while still allowing member states to retain the sovereign decision to block their deployment – or, if so wanted, to ensure autonomy in unilateral deployments.

All of these elements are, of course, not new. Blocking these efforts have always been both inter-military rivalries and, more importantly, political

protectionism over national defence industries. Any step towards common procurement would most likely entail a further centralization of competence in Brussels, and a political compromise between the member states on how national industries and jobs could be protected while synergies achieved. This process would be highly political, and immensely complicated to moderate. A breakthrough in this field thus looks unlikely, and failed projects are legion. However, there are growing signs that national Ministries of Defence are finally acknowledging the dilemma and signalling a renewed readiness to make tough decisions beyond the narrow national interest.

Third, building on this improved standardization, and common training on a scale unseen in the last quarter century, will have to be the basis for future planning. Allied and multinational manoeuvres will have to be the rule, not the exception. Thus, the CFI is aiming in the right direction and should be the bedrock of multinationality. NATO manoeuvres should practice multinationality where it will matter most: at staff level in multinational headquarters and at the level of brigades upwards. They would thereby build on NATO's strength over forty years, namely combining multinational headquarters with national units. NATO's current manoeuvre series, culminating in the impressive "Trident Juncture 2015," is an important and encouraging step in the right direction that needs to be continued and expanded. What sounds like a regression towards days long past is in reality a move ahead, aiming at creating proficiency in warfighting – something that multinational formations of the last 25 years have not been forced to prove. While discarding the idea of integrated brigades, the next level of Allied ground force integration would be – and already is– that of integrated divisions. This way, today's formations, such as the EUBG and the NRF, would effectively be replaced by less ambitious, yet more effective,

cooperation models.

Examples for this model of cooperation already exist. The attachment of a Dutch air mobile brigade to the *Bundeswehr's* airborne "Rapid Forces Division" could serve as a guiding paradigm. Through constant common training, and partial staff integration on the divisional level, the combat-readiness and interoperability of both the German and Dutch forces will be enhanced without one nation necessarily having to give up capabilities. Moreover, this common training might in due time give an additional impetus towards common equipment, service schools, and SOP.[28]

If only some of those briefly sketched elements of "1990 plus" were consequently implemented, the advantages of the NRF and EUBG in fostering interoperability could be retained, while the pretence of their deployment could be dispensed with. Institutionally, NATO is well prepared for those steps. In addition to the CFI, the concept of the "Framework Nation" introduced by Germany – aiming primarily at closing the Alliance's capability gaps within a coordinated process – could remain valuable even under the new political auspices, if purged of its "sharing" elements that make it superficially economically attractive yet operationally deficient. Down the road, these thoughts could ultimately lead to another option beyond the current politico-military *Zeitgeist*: based on standardized or even common equipment, instead of sharing or specializing in niche capabilities, even small member states could focus on fielding independent combined-arms formations, possibly at the level of brigades, generating savings through common training installations, maintenance and logistics – again, trading the focus on efficiency for multinational efficacy combined with retained national autonomy.

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[28] See M. Zapfe, "The Bundeswehr in 2014: Between Kabul and Crimea", *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 154/May 2014, p. 4.

Conclusion

This analysis describes the elements of an alternative to NATO'S approach today: pooling and sharing, and the modular integration of standing multinational units. The first step towards improving NATO's capabilities is acknowledging that the current course falls short; that it is based on an exception to the rule of successful Allied multinationalism and ignores operational lessons gained over the last 25 years; and that, if multinational cooperation is to be successful, it should focus on facilitating the inevitable improvisation instead of clinging to the illusion of planning security through integrated and modular stand-by forces. A look into NATO's own successful past could guide those steps.