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Research Report

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SWP Comments, No. 16/2015

Provided in Cooperation with:

Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), German Institute for International and Security Affairs, Berlin

Suggested Citation: Major, Claudia (2015) : NATO's strategic adaptation: Germany is the backbone for the alliance's military reorganisation, SWP Comments, No. 16/2015, Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP), Berlin

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/256339>

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NATO's Strategic Adaptation

Germany Is the Backbone for the Alliance's Military Reorganisation

Claudia Major

In reaction to the Ukraine crisis, NATO allies decided at the September 2014 Summit in Wales on the most fundamental military adaptation of the Alliance since the end of the Cold War. The objective is a large scale reinforcement and reorganisation of defence capabilities. Collective defence has thereby been reinstated as the core task of NATO, requiring considerable political, military and financial input from all Allies. The focus of attention is, however, on Germany. First, Germany played a considerable part in shaping the Wales decisions. Second, the partners expect Germany to bear a substantial military and financial burden because of its economic strength. Third, Berlin placed itself under pressure to promote defence cooperation when it launched the framework nation concept in 2013.

The Wales Summit has rung in fundamental change. Although NATO had given itself three equal tasks in its 2010 Strategic Concept: collective defence, crisis management, cooperative security, in reality, crisis management has dominated over recent years. In particular, the operation in Afghanistan informed strategic thinking and decisions as to how NATO states equip and train their soldiers. With the Ukraine crisis, collective defence has once again become the *primus inter pares* of NATO tasks. The Alliance solidified this at the Wales Summit with a work programme. The Readiness Action Plan (RAP), agreed in Wales, is the most important steering instrument with which NATO plans to orient its military set-up once more towards collective defence. At their first meeting at the beginning of

February 2015, NATO defence ministers agreed initial proposals for its implementation. The Wales decisions should be implemented as far as possible by the 2016 NATO Summit in Poland.

Fundamental change

The RAP constitutes the starting point for a military reorganisation of the Alliance, requiring far-reaching changes in planning and logistics as well as in equipment and exercises. It embraces two areas: short term reassurance measures and long-term adaptation measures.

First, the assurance measures agreed in spring 2014, shortly after the outbreak of the Ukraine crisis, have been carried forward. In so doing the Alliance is signalling

to its eastern members, alarmed by Russian actions, that they can rely on NATO's promise of assistance. These measures are to protect those Allies who are particularly exposed and deter adversaries. They include air policing in the Baltic, more AWACS flights over Poland and Romania, intensified maritime surveillance, additional exercises and more personnel for NATO Headquarters (HQ).

Second, the Alliance wants to improve its readiness and responsiveness. This means creating the planning, logistical and equipment conditions for larger units to be moved more rapidly to their theatre of operations and enabling them to be more rapidly operational once there, whether on NATO's southern or eastern flank. Whilst crisis management in Afghanistan involved smaller, brigade – sized units (approx. 3,000 men), the rapid relocation and command of complex, larger units the size of a division or corps are now required. Up to 40,000 (long term 100,000) soldiers must be able both to reach the area of operations and be able to cooperate.

This adaptation is taking place hand in hand with a regional focus and the strengthening of regional hubs. The creation of small regional integration units (NATO Force Integration Units, NFIU) is part of this. Each will have approximately 40 men as a visible and permanent presence, initially in the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and Bulgaria. They are to facilitate the rapid relocation of armed forces into the region and assist in the planning and coordination of training and exercises. In addition, regional NATO HQs are to take on more responsibility, namely the multinational Division Headquarters South-East being set up in Romania and the multinational Corps Headquarters North-East (MNC NE), which Germany, Poland and Denmark are jointly running in Stettin. The MNC NE will increase its readiness, take on more tasks and will become a hub for regional cooperation. In the long term it is to command a collective defence operation up to the size of a corps in the Alliance's eastern area.

A further element in this adaptation is the reform of the rapid reaction force – the NATO Response Force (NRF). An *enhanced* NRF should be deployable more rapidly in future. Furthermore, a small, particularly rapid, reaction force of around 5,000 men (land components) is to be created within the NRF to deploy at very short notice – the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force (VJTF), which, despite its defensive nature, is often also called spearhead force. Some elements of the VJTF are to be deployed in theatre within two to three days. An initial exercise is planned for April to test alarm mechanisms and readiness times; a further one is to follow in June. The various RAP measures are clearly interlinked, as the MNC NE is to be able to command VJTF deployments from 2016 and NRF deployments from 2018 in the Baltic and in Poland.

Not a hegemon, but the backbone

Germany has not only considerably shaped this strategic adaption in terms of concepts, it is now also laying the foundations for its successful implementation in materiel terms. Berlin is providing NATO with considerable underpinning, comprising up to eight brigades. Within the framework of the RAP, Germany has undertaken to make substantial contributions. With regard to assurance measures it has, for instance, increased its naval participation in the Baltic and is sending significantly more soldiers on exercise. As for the adaptation measures, Berlin is taking part in all NFIUs and doubling its personnel at MNC NE from 60 to 120 soldiers. Germany is also the first state to take on the command of the new VJTF in 2015. This means Germany will be testing the concepts agreed in February 2015 and developing them further, thereby shaping the force and presenting a tried and tested concept for approval in 2016 at the Poland Summit.

Germany had already agreed with NATO in 2013 that it would take its turn serving as the lead nation for the then NRF. This is why the German-Netherlands Corps in

Münster has been in command of the NRF's land forces since January 2015. The Alliance has charged the Corps' headquarters with using this year's exercises to test how a spearhead unit can be formed from the existing intervention troops and be combat ready in any deployment area in a fraction of the 30 days initially set for the NRF. Since such a unit will require considerable operational, logistical and planning input, alongside significant financial expenditure, there will first be an interim solution: 2015 the Interim VJTF, 2016 an operational VJTF and, finally, 2017 the fully operational VJTF. During this interim period, not all requirements will have to be met; for example, forces will not have to be quite as rapidly deployable. The current test phase will, however, lead the way by laying down the foundations of the concept.

Germany, the Netherlands and Norway will provide the majority of the troops in the 2015 set-up phase and will bear the associated costs. The Bundeswehr and the Dutch armed forces contribute by far the largest contingents, Germany approximately 2,700 of the total of some 5,000 soldiers. As well as the HQ, Germany is also providing paratroopers, mechanised infantry and transport aircraft.

At a cursory glance, the German contributions to the RAP appear rather compartmentalised: the VJTF, the Stettin headquarters, contribution to the re-assurance measures, additional personnel for NATO. However, in overview it turns out that Germany is providing the backbone for the successful implementation of the Wales decisions. Without German participation, they would be hardly feasible.

Homework for Berlin

The new tasks pose political, military and financial questions for Berlin.

Politically, Germany has to be in a position to underpin its military contributions. It has to create the preconditions for rapid decision-making on any deployment and Germany's share therein, including, where

applicable, in multinational structures. This means *on the one hand*, that for the Bundestag to take decisions without delay, it has to be informed comprehensively about German contributions, about its potential role in case NATO's article 5 is invoked and about NATO's decision-making procedures. For example, although NATO can certainly launch VJTF alarm exercises, already relocation exercises (that is, when troops move to exercise in a different place), require a political decision by the North Atlantic Council. If involvement of the Bundeswehr in armed operations is to be expected, then the Bundestag has to vote on it. The upcoming results of the Rühle Commission, which is also discussing how to assure both the rights of the Bundestag and Berlin's international obligations such as in NATO, may offer pointers here. A further element is better communication with the public about how radically the Alliance is changing at present, how substantial the German contribution is and why both are necessary. *On the other hand*, the federal government should consider together with the Allies how the Alliance is to deal with unconventional threats, often also called hybrid threats. The Alliance plans to present a concept at the 2016 Summit at the latest. According to NATO, it is not only conventional attack that can lead to the invocation of Collective Defence according to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, but also unconventional attack, for example by troops without insignia. This is precisely what happened in the Ukraine, which is why the eastern Allies in particular want to be prepared for such situations. How should the Alliance react if the boundary between war and no war is fluid, if a case of national defence in the classical sense does not exist, yet a NATO country is being destabilised à la Ukraine. Although the invocation of Collective Defence is not automatic but will always be a political, consensus-driven decision taken by the Allies, being acquainted with the arguments, options and decision-making processes is indispensable.

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ISSN 1861-1761

Translation by Kiersten Sparke

(English version of
SWP-Aktuell 20/2015)

Militarily, German obligations signify a long term, increased requirement for personnel, equipment and exercises as well as the reform of existing plans and processes. At present, only the German armoured brigades are fully capable of conducting operations in line with Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. And even these brigades would have to be supplemented with personnel and equipment. Added to this are increased logistical requirements. If troops, where applicable with heavy equipment, are to be relocated faster, then corresponding transportation capacity has to be available, whether aircraft or flatbed trucks. There would have to be increased exercises to meet the changed requirements. In the short term, military means can be re-tasked. In the long term, a robust solution will be required to the problem of how more tasks can be fulfilled while capabilities stay the same or reduce.

For that challenge, Berlin has already proposed a solution that it must now implement systematically. In 2013 it introduced the framework nations concept, according to which smaller armies plug specific capabilities into a larger framework nation, which forms the organisational backbone for the collaboration. The construction of such multinational units is supposed to increase sustainability and key military capabilities. Yet, it is at least just as important that the Bundeswehr's political and military ability to cooperate are improved if Germany, as a framework nation, wants to act even more in future in multinational structures.

Financially, it is questionable whether the substantial contributions and the changes necessary for these can be borne from current funds. Planning is still to be done. But if there are to be increased exercises, if new equipment is required and used more intensively and if more personnel are despatched, then costs will also rise. Consideration is, however, being given to reforming NATO's financing mechanisms in order to reduce the burden on the larger framework nations. Financial resources are also being

released thanks to the Bundeswehr no longer being engaged in Afghanistan to the extent it was before. In addition, more efficient cooperation and division of tasks, as proposed in the framework nation concept, could restrict additional expenditure. But even then, the defence budget would have to grow over the longer term. For this reason, a solid and long term financing plan has to be produced for military capabilities and activities.

Contributions allow a say

Through its substantial military contributions, Germany is gaining credibility and political latitude. Backed by France and Great Britain, the federal government had rejected alternative reassurance and adaptation proposals, for example for a forward defence with permanent stationing of substantial combat troops in eastern Europe. This brought Berlin the accusation of being too pro-Russian. Amidst all criticism of the Russian behaviour, Germany is also pushing to keep the dialogue with Moscow, such as by summoning the NATO-Russia Council. Its intensive participation in the RAP enables Berlin to put forward such suggestions with more prospect of success and, furthermore, to build the profile of a reliable security policy player. On the basis of its exemplary military contribution, Germany is becoming a recognised political shaper in the Alliance. Yet, this is also due to that fact that traditional leading states are either occupied by other issues (France in Africa), do not have available the necessary means in the foreseeable future (Great Britain) or, despite providing essential support, want to leave the lead on the RAP to the Europeans (the USA).