

America Threatens Russia: U.S. Consolidates New Military Outposts In Eastern Europe

Bases, troops and missiles along the entire length of Eastern Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean

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With NATO as intermediary, facilitator and Trojan horse, the Pentagon has established itself - with bases, troops and missiles - along the entire length of Eastern Europe from the Baltic Sea to the Mediterranean.

Two weeks after the United States started its third rotation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Baltic air patrol on September 1, with the deployment of F-15C Eagle fighter jets operating out of the Siauliai International Airport in Lithuania, neighboring Estonia finished a three-year project to upgrade its Amari Air Base in order to accommodate more NATO warplanes.

The opening ceremony for the enlarged base, which with expanded runways is able to host "16 NATO fighters, 20 transport planes [and] up to 2,000 people per day" [1], was held on September 15.

The Estonian base, like its Lithuanian counterpart, is a Soviet-era one modernized and extended for use by NATO, which financed 35 percent of the expansion.

Defense Minister Jaak Aaviksoo said of the augmented air base that "You could say that it wasn't just the Estonian Air Force that got a base, but our allies now also have a home, or if you prefer, a nest in Estonia where they can land and rest." [2] The head of the Estonian Air Force, Brigadier General Valeri Saar, said that NATO aircraft involved in the air policing mission in place for over six years could be stationed at the Amari Air Base in the future.

President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, an American expatriate and former Radio Free Europe employee, made even stronger claims by stating the completion of the base will facilitate the deployment of fellow NATO members' troops and military equipment to his nation for prospective direct intervention: "It is obvious that a small country like Estonia would need the help of its allies in the event of a serious military crisis. Likewise, it is obvious that no matter how willing someone is to provide this help, they cannot do so without the proper infrastructure. Let's be honest: until today our ability to accept the airborne help of our allies has been extremely limited." [3]

A "serious military crisis" only makes sense in relation to Russia. The air policing operation that was launched in March 2004 when Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia were absorbed into the Alliance - the first former Soviet republics to enter the bloc - with the subsequent rotation of U.S., British, German, French, Turkish, Spanish, Danish, Norwegian, Dutch, Belgian,

Portuguese, Polish, Romanian and Czech warplanes has never identified against whom and what NATO was allegedly protecting the three Baltic states' airspace.

As the stock villains – Iran and North Korea – cannot be invoked as threats to the region, Estonia's and Lithuania's joint neighbor Russia is the inescapable candidate.

Ilves also “underscored the fact that from 2012, when the complex as a whole is due for completion, NATO will have one of the most modern air force bases in the region at its disposal” [4] for the above-mentioned purpose.

By obtaining the use of the Siauliai and Amari air bases, NATO has secured facilities for air operations in five former Soviet states in total. The invasion of Afghanistan earlier brought the Alliance into air bases in Kyrgyzstan (Manas), Tajikistan (Dushanbe) and Uzbekistan (Termez). Comparable sites between the Baltic Sea and Central Asia – Georgia and Azerbaijan in the South Caucasus – are NATO's for the asking and are already being used for supplying the war in Afghanistan.

Airfields are not the only locations where increased NATO and U.S. military presence is being felt in the Baltic Sea region.

On September 13 thirteen NATO member states and partners began this year's annual Northern Coasts naval exercise in the Baltic Sea. Over 4,000 military personnel, more than 60 ships, and planes and helicopters from the U.S., Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Finland and Sweden are involved in the largest exercise ever staged in Finnish waters, near the Bay of Bothnia where last year's Loyal Arrow 2 NATO war games included “the biggest air force drill ever in the Finnish-Swedish Bothnia Bay.” [5]

A week after Northern Coasts 2010 began, U.S. Special Operations Command Europe launched the Jackal Stone 10 multinational special forces exercise at the 21st Tactical Airbase in Swidwin, Poland, from which it will move to two other locations in Lithuania. 1,300 special forces from the U.S., Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Croatia, Romania and Ukraine are participating, the first time that special operations units of the seven countries have engaged in joint maneuvers.

At the opening ceremony for the exercises Polish Defense Minister Bogdan Klich addressed the participants, stating, “Special operations in the world today are becoming increasingly important in the conduct of combat operations. And exercises like this check the ability of allied and international cooperation, which is essential for the success of the Allies.” [6]

The centerpiece of the exercise is the deployment of USS Mount Whitney, the flagship of the U.S. Sixth Fleet, which was sent to the Georgian port of Poti on the Black Sea in a show of strength by Washington shortly after the 2008 Georgian-Russian war. The president of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė, inspected helicopters used in the exercises, was given a tour of the USS Mount Whitney and said “Lithuania's active policy has helped to [assure] that such defense guarantees will be provided to us.” [7]

The war in Afghanistan is not the only application for the skills so acquired, although all 12 new NATO members in Eastern Europe – Albania, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia – supplied troops for NATO's Kosovo Force (KFOR), for the war in Iraq and for NATO's International

Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan.

NATO Partnership for Peace allies and candidates Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Finland, Georgia, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Sweden, Switzerland and Ukraine have provided forces for one or more of the above missions, in several cases for all three.

The West's post-Cold War military colonies are levied not only for bases on their territory but for troops and military hardware to be used in wars abroad.

When this May the Pentagon moved a Patriot missile battery and over 100 troops into Morag, Poland – 35 miles from the border with Russia's Kaliningrad district – it was not for NATO's first ground war in Afghanistan or against an imaginary missile threat from Iran. A Polish newspaper account of the ongoing Jackal Stone 10 special forces exercise – "US army to show its strength in Poland" – pulled no punches: "NATO is in the process of developing contingency plans to defend Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania against Russian attacks – the first time since the end of the Cold War that NATO has specifically identified Russia as a potential threat." [8]

Poland's fellow Visegrad Four member Slovakia hosted the NATO Military Committee, which consists of 450 military officers from all 28 member states, on September 17-19. The conference was attended by NATO's two top military commanders, Admiral James Stavridis (Supreme Allied Commander Europe) and General Stéphane Abrial (Supreme Allied Commander Transformation). General David Petraeus, commander of 150,000 U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan, participated via video conference. The gathering focused on military operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo and on the new Strategic Concept to be adopted at the bloc's summit in Lisbon in November.

Slovakia joined NATO five years after its Visegrad partners the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland because its citizens consistently voted in federal elections in a manner displeasing to Washington and Brussels, evidently preferring the notion that a government ought to represent the interests of the nation rather than those of the U.S. and should uphold the rights of its own people over those of the American president and NATO secretary general. NATO demands political subservience as well as warfighting and weapons interoperability.

After a compliant government was installed and Slovak troops had been dispatched to Iraq, the nation was brought into NATO in 2004. Its forces, like those of 16 other new NATO member states and partners, were transferred to Afghanistan beginning in December of 2008, much as NATO is now redeploying troops from Kosovo to the same war theater. It is hard to believe that many (if any) Slovaks are convinced that sending their sons and daughters to Kosovo, Iraq and Afghanistan in any fashion contributes to their nation's defense and security.

Slovak troops that have been sent to the three war zones have had the opportunity to renew acquaintances with their former fellow countrymen from the Czech Republic. The European Union has formed a 2,500-troop Czech-Slovak battlegroup.

Czech Prime Minister Petr Necas met with NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen in Brussels on September 17 and confirmed that "Presence in NATO's Afghan mission is a long-term priority of the new Czech government."

Defense Minister Alexandr Vondra recently disclosed that he had submitted a proposal to the Czech government for streamlining the procedure for deploying and maintaining troops abroad to circumvent oversight in the parliament where opposition parties can scrutinize the deployments. Vondra wants to shift troops from NATO's mission in Kosovo to its war in Afghanistan where there are now 530 Czechs deployed, and Necas "would like the current system of approving missions for one year only to be extended to two years...." [9] On September 23 Vondra announced that 200 more Czech troops are headed to the Afghan war front and that the nation's special forces are to resume combat operations there.

Popular and parliamentary objections will not be allowed to interfere with NATO obligations.

A government report of earlier this month detailed that Czech overseas military missions cost almost three billion crowns last year, up by half a billion from the preceding year. The 2009 expenditure for Afghanistan was forecast to be 1.73 billion crowns but rose to 2.32 billion crowns.

It was recently reported in an article called "Czech military strategy looks toward U.S." that former Czech defense minister and current NATO Assistant Secretary General Jiri Sedivy (the first Czech to be appointed to such a major NATO post) is heading up a team of 15 security and international relations experts drafting a white paper on the transformation of the country's armed forces.

"The new strategic concept of NATO will be one of the important works in creating" the white paper, a Defense Ministry spokesman recently stated, in fact asserting that "NATO initiatives will take precedence." He added that "The ambition is that three quarters of the armed forces of the Czech Republic are consistent with NATO standards." [10]

This past weekend a "two-day NATO Days military air show" was held in Moravia and attended by 205,000 observers. "One of the major attractions was a U.S. Air Force B-52H Stratofortress strategic bomber. The aircraft, which was deployed in the Vietnam war, in the Persian Gulf war, in the bombing of Yugoslavia and in the recent operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, is on the territory of Central Europe for the first time ever." [11]

U.S. Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Affairs Ellen Tauscher has recently reconfirmed American interests in basing an interceptor missile radar facility in the Czech Republic to complement missile deployments in Romania and Poland. NATO plans radar sites near Nepolisy in Bohemia and in Slavkov (Austerlitz) in Moravia.

On July 27, 2009 officials from NATO and 12 participating nations - NATO members the U.S., Bulgaria, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania and Slovenia and Partnership for Peace allies Finland and Sweden - were present for the activation of the "first-of-its-kind multinational strategic airlift unit" [12] at the Papa Air Base in Hungary, which in the interim has been used extensively for the war in Afghanistan.

To Hungary's west, it was reported this week that the head of the Slovenian Armed Forces Union, Gvido Novak, sent a letter to President Danilo Turk informing the latter that the Slovenian government was "illegally sending troops" to participate in NATO operations in Afghanistan, that "the commander-in-chief...was unconstitutionally and illegally sending Slovenian soldiers to Afghanistan."

Novak's accusation came a week before the latest deployment of troops to Afghanistan and

was based on the fact “that without a state of war being declared, the decision cannot be made without parliament, while the government is yet to send its proposal to MPs.” His letter additionally warned that “the new Slovenian military mission to Afghanistan will not be peacekeeping and defensive any longer, and that it will be a war mission....” [13] Slovenes are also learning that the popular will and parliamentary procedures are overridden by demands imposed under NATO membership conditions.

After NATO’s 78-day air war against Yugoslavia in 1999, 50,000 troops marched into Kosovo under NATO command and the U.S. build the colossal Camp Bondsteel and its sister site Camp Monteith there, the first foreign military bases on Yugoslav soil since World War II.

Earlier this week Bulgarian Defense Minister Anyu Angelov announced that the draft of his nation’s National Security Strategy is “in total harmony with the draft Strategic Concept of NATO” and, contradicting a recent claim by President Georgi Parvanov, said “We should not make wrong conclusions from the contents of the draft National Security Strategy – such as concluding that the Bulgarian armed forces can protect the country in a large-scale military conflict on their own, and without NATO’s collective security system.”

Angelov also stated: “I personally think that Bulgaria must stick to the US missile shield....Our commitment to active participation in the missile defense of the US and NATO in Europe must be part of the Strategy.” [14]

After a seven-day visit to Washington beginning in late June during which he met with Pentagon chief Robert Gates, NATO Allied Command Transformation officials in Virginia and missile shield coordinator Ellen Tauscher, the defense chief “confirmed Bulgaria’s firm position that it will participate in the US missile defense in Europe, and that the shield must be a crucial project for the entire NATO.”

He also disclosed “that the United States has confirmed its plans for deploying its troops in Bulgaria and Romania in the so-called Joint Task Force East....Under an inter-governmental agreement, the US will be able to use together with the Bulgarian Army four military bases on Bulgarian soil, with a total of 2,500 soldiers, to go up to 5,000 during one-month rotation periods.” [15]

Last month Angelov revealed why he does not believe that Bulgarian troops can defend their nation without NATO support – because their purpose is not to defend their country but to assist NATO in wars abroad – when he “announced that Bulgaria was going to change the functions of the Bulgarian troops in Afghanistan, and that instead of guard units it was going to send a 700-strong combat regiment by the end of 2012.” [16]

At the beginning of this month Angelov flew to Poland to meet with Defense Minister Bogdan Klich for discussions concentrating on “the US missile shield in Europe.” [17]

On September 19 the Bulgarian defense minister “expressed strong support for his colleague, Economy Minister Traikov, who invited US companies to consider investments in Bulgarian military plants.” Traikov was in the U.S. at the time where he “invited Boeing to study opportunities for the privatization of the ailing Bulgarian military industrial giant VMZ Sopot.” Angelov applauded the offer as an effort to “breathe life into the Bulgarian defense industry.” [18]

A new member state doesn’t only turn the nation’s military bases over to the Pentagon and

NATO and offer them combat troops for wars thousands of miles away, it is also compelled to cede national defense industry assets to the U.S. and its main NATO allies as well.

Immediately afterward it was reported that a NATO team led by Frank Boland, director of NATO's Defense Policy and Planning Department, was arriving in Bulgaria "to review the level of implementation of the agreements between Sofia and Brussels," in particular to examine, adjust and approve the nation's aforementioned new National Security Strategy. [19]

In neighboring Romania, last week it was announced that Frank Rose, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Defense Policy and Verification Operations, was in the capital for a "third round of negotiations centered on Romania's participation in the US missile defence system," [20] following the Supreme Defense Council approving U.S. Standard Missile-3 deployments in the country on February 4 of this year and official negotiations on the agreement led by Ellen Tauscher in Bucharest on June 17. On September 16 Russian Defense Minister Anatoly Serdyukov, fresh from a meeting with his American counterpart Robert Gates in Washington, said of U.S. interceptor missile plans in Eastern Europe: "They tell us their missile shield is not aimed against us, but we tell them our calculations show it is aimed against us." [21]

The year after Romania's NATO accession, then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice secured an agreement with the nation for the acquisition of four military sites: The Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base and training bases and firing ranges in Babadag, Cincu and Smardan. The air base had been used in 2003 for the invasion of Iraq, a year before Romania joined NATO, and has been employed since for the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

In 2006 a similar pact was signed with Bulgaria for the use of the Bezmer Air Base, Graf Ignatievo Air Base and Novo Selo army training range. The seven military sites were the first the U.S. gained access to in former Warsaw Pact countries. They have been used not only for air operations but for the training of a Stryker regiment, special forces and other combat units for "downrange" conflicts like those in Iraq and Afghanistan. The Pentagon's Joint Task Force-East, "the largest U.S. military contingent operating in Eastern Europe," [22] spends much of its time training at Romania's Mihail Kogalniceanu Air Base and Babadag Training Area.

It was announced last year that the U.S. will spend \$110 million to upgrade a base apiece in Bulgaria and Romania as 2,000 American troops were completing military exercises with the armed forces of both countries that ran from June to the end of October.

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Notes

- 1) Estonian Public Broadcasting, September 15, 2010
- 2) Ibid
- 3) Office of the President, Public Relations Department, September 15, 2010
- 4) Ibid
- 5) Barents Observer, June 8, 2009
- 6) U.S. Army, September 22, 2010

- 7) Press Service of the President, September 21, 2010
- 8) Warsaw Business Journal, September 21, 2010
- 9) Czech News Agency, September 17, 2010
- 10) Prague Post, September 8, 2010
- 11) Czech News Agency, September 20, 2010
- 12) U.S. Air Forces in Europe Public Affairs, July 27, 2010
- 13) B92, September 20, 2010
- 14) Sofia News Agency, September 19, 2010
- 15) Sofia News Agency, July 3, 2010
- 16) Sofia News Agency, August 18, 2010
- 17) Sofia News Agency, September 5, 2010
- 18) Sofia News Agency, September 20, 2010
- 19) Standart News, September 21, 2010
- 20) Nine O'Clock News, September 17, 2010
- 21) Itar-Tass, September 17, 2010
- 22) Stars and Stripes, October 17, 2009

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