

# **GLOBAL WARFARE: U.S. Marines Deployed Worldwide, From the Black Sea To Africa And Beyond**

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Last December U.S. Marine Forces Europe conducted a two-day conference in Stuttgart, Germany (where U.S. Africa Command headquarters is based) to plan this year's Black Sea Rotational Force (BSRF) deployment. Military officials from European NATO nations were also involved in the planning process.

Black Sea Rotational Force 12 will be the longest and largest deployment of the force, a Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF) first activated in 2010. In that year the rotation was for three months; last year five months; this year six months.

In its first year of existence the BSRF engaged in bilateral and multinational training exercises with counterparts from thirteen nations in the Balkans, the Black Sea region and the Caucasus, the BSRF's area of operations.

Last year it conducted and participated in exercises in Romania, Georgia and Ukraine with fourteen NATO allies and partners: Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia, Bulgaria, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

During its increasingly lengthier deployments, the BSRF is based at the Mihail Kogalniceanu Airfield in Romania, where the complementary, U.S. Army Europe's, Task Force East has also been deployed in addition to the latter also operating at the Babadag Training Area in the same country and the Novo Selo Training Area in neighboring Bulgaria.

This year's BSRF deployment includes 71 (by one count 91) training events with 19 other nations. The five new nations (assuming the fourteen mentioned above will still be involved) have not been divulged, except that Marine Forces Europe reported earlier this year that BSRF-12 will participate in the Noble Shirley 12 exercise "in the Levant." Noble Shirley is a regular live-fire exercise held in the Negev Desert with the Israeli Defense Forces and U.S. Marines.

The BSRF also participated in this year's Baltic Operations (BALTOPS) war games with Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Denmark, France, Georgia, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia and Sweden - rather far from its defined geographical confines - including in an amphibious assault exercise in Lithuania.

It inaugurated this year's deployment with the two-week Agile Spirit 12 exercise at the Vaziani Training Area in Georgia in part to train native troops for the war in Afghanistan.

Seventeen of the nineteen nations being trained by the BSRF this year have troops serving under NATO command in that war zone.

This year's rotation involves 360 Marines, which represents a doubling of Marine Forces Europe personnel since last year. According to the Pentagon news agency American Forces Press Service, in May Brigadier General Charles Chiarotti, Marine Forces Europe's deputy commander, stated that he hopes "the rotational force grows to a 600- to 700-member unit with limited crisis response capabilities, fixed- and rotary-wing."

The U.S. announced in 2009 that it would spend \$110 million to upgrade two bases in Romania and Bulgaria (of eight it acquired after the two nations joined NATO in 2004), which could accommodate a larger Marine presence, perhaps year-round.

The BSRF is currently running an exercise at the Novo Selo Training Range in Bulgaria with 1,000 troops from the U.S., the host country, Macedonia, Serbia and Ukraine. The Bulgarian commander is a graduate of a military academy in Washington. This year the BSRF will conduct training exercises at six Bulgarian bases and airfields.

Earlier this month Marines with the BSRF conducted a training exercise in Timisoara, Romania with local troops.

According to the U.S. Marine Corps website: "Some of the Romanian soldiers already know what it's like to serve alongside Marines in combat from previous tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan. They welcome the training as added knowledge they can use for the future as some of them may be going to Afghanistan within the year."

An American corporal present at the drills said, "This training is important to them because they see American Marines as the most elite fighting force in the world."

The BSRF will also participate this month in the annual U.S.-led NATO and Partnership for Peace exercise in Ukraine, Sea Breeze. The two-week exercise will include fourteen nations including NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative partners Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, which provided warplanes for NATO's six-month air war against Libya last year.

The BSRF is, as mentioned above, a Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force (SPMAGTF), which have previously been used in Afghanistan, Liberia, Panama, the Persian Gulf and the Philippines.

The BSRF in turn has now become the prototype for a similar unit assigned to U.S. Africa Command, Special Purpose Marine Air Ground Task Force 12.2 (12.2 since this April), formed last October and based at the Naval Air Station Sigonella in Sicily, which has been deployed to Uganda, Burundi and Djibouti to train troops for deployment to Somalia and to Liberia to instruct its military in "riot control and peace keeping techniques." In May of 2010 NATO airlifted 2,500 Ugandan troops into and out of Mogadishu for the war there and the European Union is training Somali government troops in Uganda for the same purpose.

The U.S. Marine Corps website reported that the SPMAGTF African deployment — which "could become more commonplace as troop levels in Afghanistan drop in line with an approaching 2014 combat mission end date" — is to be followed by an SPMAGTF mission in the Asia-Pacific region with troops stationed in Darwin, Australia.

The Marine Corps is the Pentagon's preeminent expeditionary combat branch and one which

increasingly is being used to integrate the militaries of former socialist Europe, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region into the U.S.'s worldwide military network.

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