

NATO Defense Chiefs Order Deployment of Ground Forces on Russia's Doorstep. Increased U.S. Military Presence in Europe

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Global Research, June 17, 2016

[Strategic Culture Foundation](#) 16 May 2016

Region: [Russia and FSU](#)

Theme: [US NATO War Agenda](#)

On June 14, NATO's defense ministers formally approved the deployment plan of four multinational battalions to Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland. Each country will be reinforced by a battalion. The battalions will be under the orders of NATO commanders, and formally deployed on a rotational basis rather than being based permanently in the host countries, but coverage will be continuous and the presence will be maintained permanently.

Great Britain, Germany and the United States advanced plans on June 14 to spearhead a new NATO force on Russia's border from next year. The three NATO's biggest military powers said they would each command a combat battalion across the eastern flank. The new force is expected to total about 4,000 soldiers, with contributions from other allies. Germany is likely to deploy to Lithuania, the United States to Poland and Britain to Estonia, on a six-to-nine month rotating basis. Canada is expected to command a fourth battalion in Latvia. Other NATO nations will eventually take command responsibilities. France is also sending a company of about 250 troops. The battalions are part of a wider NATO deployment to be approved at the Warsaw summit on July 8-9, which will involve troops on rotation, warehoused equipment and a highly mobile force backed by NATO's 40,000-strong rapid response force.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said at the June 14 meeting that the alliance is considering a Romanian offer to command a multinational brigade which could coordinate alliance training and possibly play a deterrent role. Romania has offered to provide the headquarters for the brigade and is expected to lead the formation.

In addition, the United States will increase its military presence in Eastern Europe by deploying an armored brigade. According to the fiscal year 2017 European Reassurance Initiative [budget proposal](#), the US military spending in Europe will be more than \$3.4 billion – far more than the \$786 million in the current budget. The Army will repair and upgrade its already pre-positioned arms and place them at sites in Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. Those stocks will be sufficient for another armored brigade to fall in on. The rotating brigade will bring its own equipment. The move will add hundreds of the Army's most advanced weapons systems to beef up the US European Command's combat capability. It will also free up an entire brigade's worth of weapons currently being used by US forces training on the continent to enable more American troops to be rushed in on short notice. The rotation period will be limited to nine months. An armored brigade combat team comprises about 4,200 troops and includes approximately 250 tanks, Bradley Fighting

Vehicles and Paladin self-propelled howitzers, plus 1,750 wheeled vehicles. The proposed budget increase includes a \$1.8bn outlay on 45,000 GPS-guided smart bombs and laser-guided rockets to boost the forces precision strike capability.

All these plans are in violation of the Russia-NATO [Founding Act](#) (1997), which states that «*in the current and foreseeable security environment*», it would not seek «*additional permanent stationing of substantial ground combat forces*» in the nations closer to Russia.

The arguments of NATO officials saying the forces will deploy on temporary basis do not hold water. The violation is obvious. Actually, stationing forces abroad under the pretext of holding exercises cannot be done on a non-rotational basis anyway, because each unit has an operational cycle that envisions going through exercises. The announced plans are nothing else but a permanent military presence of substantial forces. With the Founding Act invalid, the Russia-NATO military relationship will be left without a legal basis to go upon. The document has played a very important role in the relationship for 19 years.

It's not about ground forces only. Poland and the Baltic States are attempting to build a regional anti-aircraft missile shield. «*We are in discussions now with the Estonians, the Latvians, and the Poles over how we can create some kind of regional air defense system*», Lithuanian Defense Minister Juozas Olekas [told](#) the *Financial Times* on June 10.

American Patriot missiles are being [considered](#) as the four countries evaluate procurement possibilities.

In addition to a proposed anti-aircraft missile shield, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania are also lobbying NATO for an air mission requiring the deployment of dozens of warplanes, [said](#) Lithuania's defense chief, Lieutenant General Vytautas Zukas.

Meanwhile, Romania [has announced](#) its desire to station a permanent alliance fleet -including ships from Ukraine and Georgia - in the Black Sea to counter Russia.

Moscow has accused NATO of moving more and more military forces close to its borders, and vowed to do what it takes to protect Russia's national security and interests. It will have to deploy additional military aircraft and Iskander missile systems closer to the border. In response to NATO's plans, Moscow [has announced](#) the decision to deploy two new divisions in the west and one in the south to counterbalance NATO's increased military presence near Russian borders.

Many Europeans oppose these NATO's plans. For instance, some 56 percent of Germans [surveyed](#) recently do not consider Russia as a threat to their country, with 49 percent of respondents opposing the idea of permanent deployment of [NATO forces](#) in Poland or the Baltic states.

The US decision to increase military presence in Europe comes along with the rise of Donald Trump, who has [disparaged](#) the NATO alliance as a drain on US resources.

His stance has a lot of supporters in the US.

The negative development of events is seen as a provocation by Moscow to reduce any chances of a dialogue within the framework of Russia-NATO Council. NATO's plans to send four armed battalions to the Baltic States and Poland will greatly reduce European security

and provoke an arms race with unpredictable results. An accident or provocation could lead to a dangerous escalation in hostilities. The stand-off will trigger an arms race.

It's not an accident that the very same day the NATO defense ministers meeting took place, President Vladimir Putin ordered a snap inspection of the Russian armed forces to assess combat and mobilization readiness. The inspection (June 14-22) is carried out at a number of weapons and hardware storage facilities, as well as individual military control agencies. Despite the fact that the 2011 OSCE Vienna Document's provisions did not apply to such inspections, Russia voluntarily notified all the signatories about the move. This is the first reaction to NATO's hostile activities.

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