



NATO's Readiness Action Plan for Assurance and Deterrence – Progress & Challenges on the Road from Wales to Warsaw

Dr. Klaus Olshausen

January 2016

Summary

When NATO heads of state and government will meet in early July 2016 at their Warsaw summit the crisis and conflict in and around the Ukraine that had hit NATO and its member countries in spring 2014 by surprise will still not be resolved.

While NATO didn't face up to Russia's aggression against Ukraine it was quick to realise that reassurance measures especially for the Eastern Allies were an immediate and longer term necessity. The early measures from May 2014 were consolidated at the Wales summit in September 2014 with the decision of the Rapid Reaction Plan. The implementation process is ongoing. The most visible part is the creation of an "interim spearhead force". It was formed and tested throughout 2015 and by July 2016 at the summit it should reach its full operational capability. Many more activities regarding a reinforced NRF, improvements of the NATO force as well as the command structure and developments for a broad range of capabilities for collective defence are under way. Some of the challenges are obvious: overcoming impediments in force generation processes, creating a credible follow-on force for an 'MJO plus' and "cultural changes in decision making". And all progress depends on the commitment of all 28 nations to stick to, accomplish and sustain the real increase in their defence spending. Watching the actual budgets there is reason for doubt. To further develop the political strength of the Alliance the Warsaw summit needs to re-establish the transatlantic bond in and beyond the security and military arena including economics with global outreach. Only then, it will convey the common willingness and political preparedness to act in collective defence and crisis response engagements when and where required.

About ISPSW

The Institute for Strategic, Political, Security and Economic Consultancy (ISPSW) is a private institute for research and consultancy. The ISPSW is objective and task oriented, and impartial to party politics.

In an ever more complex international environment of globalized economic processes and worldwide political, ecological, social and cultural change, that bring major opportunities but also risks, decision makers in enterprises and politics depend more than ever before on the advice of highly qualified experts.

ISPSW offers a range of services, including strategic analyses, security consultancy, executive coaching and intercultural competency. ISPSW publications examine a wide range of topics relating to politics, economy, international relations, and security/defence. ISPSW network experts have operated in executive positions, in some cases for decades, and command wide-ranging experience in their respective areas of specialization



Analysis

I. The “Wake up Call”

Russia's open aggression against Ukraine since late February 2014 and the new kind of ‘Blitzkrieg’ with the annexation of Crimea – executed against all existing treaties signed by Russia – hit NATO and its member countries obviously by surprise.

NATO didn't face up to Russia's attack in Ukraine but immediately realised the urgent need to reassure the Eastern Allies and citizens, especially in the Baltics, of the firm collective defence commitment under Article 5 of the Washington treaty. Immediate measures beyond declaratory statements and communiqués included reinforcing the permanent air policing over the Baltics and rotational Allied troop presence of land, air and naval forces in Baltic Sea to the Black Sea regions.

Early on, the idea of a capable and sizeable “spearhead” force of 5,000-6,000 soldiers for immediate deployment was born and – decided. The events in the East of Europe overturned the previous planning for the NATO summit in Wales in September 2014. Without going into detail of all preparatory and partly controversial debates and work, the Alliance decided that kind, scale and ‘spirit’ of measures to enhance assurance and deterrence would be kept in line with the NATO-Russia Founding Act of 1997, which also reflected Germany's position.

II. Decisions on the Readiness Action Plan at the Wales Summit in September 2014

While the nations on New Year's Eve 2014 were struggling to identify summit-worthy initiatives and projects other than the decision to end NATO' largest combat operation in Afghanistan and to enhance both NATO's exercise regime and partnerships, the discussions and decisions in Wales got their key topic a few weeks later by the obvious need to adequately respond to Russia's aggression against the sovereign Ukraine and, on the other hand, in the South the growing instability mainly through the dramatically worsening conflict in Syria and Iraq, esp. by the brutal actions of the self declared Islamic State.

The main result of the Summit discussions was the consensual decision of a far reaching Readiness Action Plan (RAP). It comprised a package of short and longer term measures, mainly in two areas. **First** the assurance measures that had been in place since May 2014: An immediate increased military presence and activity for assurance and deterrence in the Eastern part of the Alliance. While the increased air-policing patrols over the Baltic States had a particular visibility, there were many maritime patrols in the Baltic and the Black Sea and different training and exercise activities of ground troops. All actions were executed by forces of Allied countries on a rotational basis.

The **second** area encompasses the adaption measures, which “include the components required to ensure that the Alliance can fully address the security challenges it might face”. The Alliance decided to take essential steps to improve the NATO force structure (para. 8, Wales Declaration), the NATO command structure (para 9), the NATO training, exercise and infrastructure programme in the east (para 10) as well as defence spending (para 14).

A particular prominence was given to the quick reaction “Spearhead Force” with the administrative name “Very High Readiness Joint Task Force” (VJTF). It has become a core element of the enhanced NATO Response Force (NRF) that will also be expanded to become more responsive and more capable. Besides the military structures it was decided to enhance and shorten the decision making process of NATO including a more



detailed advance planning esp. for collective defence, both based on enhanced intelligence, indications and warnings and situational awareness.

III. The Implementation of the “Wales Decisions”

The meeting of NATO defence ministers in early October 2015 – half way to the Warsaw Summit – can be used as an opportunity to take stock of progress achieved in implementing the RAP, but also identifying challenges and risks that have to be addressed.

Right after the Wales Summit, the “Interim Spearhead Force” (IVJTF) was to be launched as a test bed using the land component for the NRF 2015 as a core element commanded by the 1. GE/NL Corps Headquarters in Münster, Germany, and supported by the three framework nations Germany, Netherlands and Norway. To consolidate the IVJTF as a relevant force, the overarching military concepts were tested in tabletop exercises in January and February 2015, followed by alert and deployment exercises in April, May and June 2015. With the exercise “Noble Jump” in June 2015, this test-bed IVJTF proved to be operational. A number of challenges remain, such as timely deployment over larger distances and the full and timely availability of qualified personnel, weapon systems and equipment.

During their meetings in February, June and October 2015 the NATO Defence Ministers took many decisions to further implement the Readiness Action Plan and increase the readiness and preparedness of NATO forces. Seven European Allies have signed up as framework nations of the VJTF land component for the next years until 2022. Germany will take on the responsibility for the full-fledged VJTF in 2019.

The further increase of the strength (up to 40,000) and capabilities of the NRF beyond the land component with air, maritime and special operations components was agreed. The build up of the Headquarters Multi-national Corps Northeast in Szczecin to a High Readiness Headquarters capable of command and control of the VJTF (Land) and the NRF in an Article 5 scenario as well as the newly established NATO Force Integration Units (NFIU) is under way. It is expected to achieve operational capability in this role by the time of the NATO summit in Warsaw. The first six of these NFIUs, small permanent NATO staffs set up in the eastern Allies from the Baltic States to Bulgaria, have already opened and are planned to be completed at the end of 2015. And two more will be established in Hungary and Slovakia as decided at the October meeting. They are designed to support planning, exercises and coordination with their host nations as well as facilitate potential reinforcements for deterrence and defence.

In addition, a new standing “Joint Logistics Support Command Headquarters” as part of the NATO Command Structure, attached to the SHAPE Headquarters in Mons, has been decided. This capability is indispensable to improve NATO's ability to speed up the coordinated move of multinational forces across the whole territory of the Alliance in Europe with all necessary equipment, supplies and transportation.

In the context of the changes in the military posture, Allies also agreed to considerably enhance the information and early warning system, to completely review the NATO Crisis Response System and to give SACEUR the authority to alert, prepare and stage the VJTF. Of note, they also agreed to a new concept of detailed advance planning, the Graduated Response Plans for deterrence, rapid reinforcement and collective defence as well as to significantly speed up their political and military decision-making in a crisis, while keeping political control. Finally, the Alliance is working on a strategy on its role to counter Hybrid Warfare, be it conducted by Russia in the East or terrorist groups in the South like ISIL/DAESH, which behaves like a state-actor. Close coordination and cooperation will be a key building block of such a strategy.



IV. Challenges to Be Tackled

While NATO and the nations rightly emphasise the accomplishments already reached and the progress of the implementation of the RAP in general, there are still many steps to follow and difficulties to be overcome.

- The necessary force generation process for the NRF and VJTF still shows some gaps and obstacles. For example, the land forces suffer under the reality that many European units are lacking equipment, in particular in the areas of combat support and combat service support. Another issue relates to the high costs for enlarged field training exercises, in particular the deployment over large distances, which are mostly born by the contributing nations.
- It was clear that the NRF could not remain a stand alone force in case of conflict or war. The new political guidance for NATO Defense Planning clearly states the requirement for NATO to be capable of conducting a “Major Joint Operation plus” (MJO +), including for high-intensity armed conflicts. On the land side, this comprises three complete land corps with at least two structurally fully equipped divisions and a variety of considerable air, maritime and special force elements. As part of this effort, and even more urgent, NATO needs to be able to rapidly and effectively reinforce the VJTF and the NRF, if required. To this end, Allies agreed to re-establish a number of mechanised and armoured divisions in Europe at various readiness levels, but fully manned, equipped with combat support and combat service support forces and fully trained and exercised, including in particular for high-intensity operations. Those military formations should be established over the next years but require determined and continuous measures to be taken by Allies to combine abundant financial, personnel and industrial resources. With the refugee crisis erupting tremendously, economic stress in many nations and numerous competing objectives within different nations, one might be skeptical whether NATO will show the perseverance necessary to establish a credible deterrence and defence for all 28 members against any threats, be they conventional, hybrid, cyber or all together.
- Achieving the necessary very rapid readiness of the VJTF and the enhanced NRF, but even more challenging, the very rapid deployment of these forces to the periphery of the Alliance requires not only a new approach to equipping, training and exercising the forces but also a huge logistic support effort. More importantly, the new security challenges require a sort of cultural change in decisions making and a change of mindset at all levels, including in particular in Allied governments and parliaments. If this is to be achieved for forces and HQs including the 48 hrs plus responses with a “Spear-head Force”, then the decision-making process has to meet this standard, too. Despite the best of long term and actual intelligence, crisis or conflict might arise with little or no warning. Therefore, besides common intelligence efforts and the best of reconnaissance, the NAC and national authorities will have to be prepared to identify, recognise, analyse and assess the crisis situation immediately and to decide to take appropriate action maybe in as little time as one day! In case of an Article 5 threat or attack the common will of all members might be a given, but the prerequisites for quick consensual decision will have to be in place. Looking at today's processes this seems to be a herculean task.
- The decision making in time-critical situations in less than 48 hours requires an increase of SACEUR's responsibility beyond his authority to alert, stage and prepare forces ready to go. Allies have agreed to a new granular concept of advance planning. But it remains to be seen whether and to what degree they will be ready to commit forces and other capabilities to these plans, be it in the East, South or North of the Alliance.



- All of the above will depend on the commitment of all 28 nations to stick to, and accomplish, the real increase in their defence spending (para 14 of the Wales Declaration). Even the VJTF, NRF, including an increase of exercises, fast deployment of heavy equipment and the complete outfit of those units will require a substantial increase of the defence budgets. Any build-up of the mentioned Follow-on Forces and more civil-military capabilities to counter hybrid warfare as well as effective action in the cyber domain cannot be tackled with the medium-term financial planning as of today. Despite the crisis and war in Ukraine since early 2014 and the continuous aggressive actions by Russia, the overall defence budgets of European nations in 2015 have still not increased, with the laudable exception of a number of nations, such as the Baltic States and Poland.

V. Expectation of the Summit in Warsaw July 2016

The summit in Warsaw will face many topics and issues.

- It will tackle the collective defence efforts in the East vis-a-vis Russia's offensive attitude and in the southern periphery, in North Africa and the Middle East region, in particular the conflict along the Turkish border. In this context, the VJTF has to be settled with its full operational capabilities. In addition, it requires to effectively exercise the NRF 2016 proving that the three land components of VJTF 2015 (stand-down), VJTF 2016 (stand-by) and VJTF 2017 (stand-up) and its air, maritime and special force elements can ensure credible deterrence as well as collective defence or crisis response operations. All NFIU in the East will be ready to support exercises and potential reinforcements.
- To underline the readiness with interoperable national forces and joint and component HQs, NATO and the nations are preparing a considerable 'Exercise Cluster' with NATO as well as national/multi-national exercises. Thus, it is envisaged that NATO will prepare the NRF 2016 with "Trident Joust" in May 2016 and the deployment of the stand-by VJTF with "Brilliant Jump II" in June 2016. Among the multinational exercises, the field training exercises "ANAKONDA" with up to 30,000 troops in Poland and "SABER STRIKE" with about 6,000 troops in Lithuania and Poland are designed to contribute to reassurance of the Eastern Allies in the weeks before the Warsaw summit and to conveying a credible deterrence message towards Russia.

Beyond those considerations and the emphasis on the core mission of collective defence to protect and defend all 28 Allies, whether in the East or in the South, the Alliance will have to focus in Warsaw on some long-term issues.

- How combine the efforts – especially of all European nations – to re-build a considerable conventional follow-on-force and continue to rely on a nuclear element countering the Russian nuclear rhetoric and modernisation efforts.
- The Alliance has agreed to re-balance the three core tasks. The new emphasis on deterrence and collective defence, thereby maintaining the capability to support crisis management, and enhanced cooperation with many partners, in particular in building their defence and related security capacities, require not only more resources (personnel, budget, equipment, including research & development) but also decisive efforts to prevent and ward off any hybrid as well as cyber attacks. That requires not only intelligence to identify the ingenious combination of military and many non-military means, but also vigorous implementation of the yet to be agreed strategy for countering hybrid



warfare – with close cooperation with the EU – that makes pro-active use of the wide potential of civil, media, economic and military assets. Building resilience against hybrid campaigns by nations and NATO will have an important deterrent effect.

- Last but not least, NATO has to work more comprehensively on all risks, threats and opportunities in and from the cyber domain. It will not be sufficient to concentrate only on protecting its own IT assets. In particular, any deployment of NATO and its member states in crisis response or collective defence missions requires to succeed in achieving information dominance and paralysing other instruments of adversaries through measures in the cyber domain where suitable.

VI. Beyond the Warsaw Summit

Warsaw can solidify the approach and the activities decided in Wales 2014. It has to show that the road embarked on is irreversible. But in addition, it provides also the opportunity and the need to further develop the political strength of the Alliance. It needs to keep or re-establish the transatlantic bond not only in the security and military arena, but also in economics with global outreach. The diverse views and perspectives of European members in the East and the West, in the South and the North must not detract from NATO efforts. Powerful capabilities in all areas of security policy can only be achieved in cooperation of our community of Allies. Thus, while Warsaw can and has to corroborate the determination to effectively face the present threats in the East and the South it needs also to set a clear path, focusing on common interests and developing the commitment to effectively and efficiently prepare political, military, civil instruments as an indispensable basis for the common willingness and political preparedness to act in collective defence and crisis response engagements when and where required.

Remarks: Opinions expressed in this contribution are those of the author. This article was first published in "European Security & Defence, 6/2015, p. 36 - 39.



About the Author of this Issue

After 42 years of active duty as officer of the Bundeswehr Lieutenant General (ret.) Dr. Klaus Olshausen assumed as elected president responsibility for the Clausewitz Society from 2006-2013. In his last assignment he represented Germany and its Chief of Defence in the military committees at NATO HQ and the EU in Brussels. In his many national and international assignments he was responsible for strategic, conceptual and operational as well as long-term planning for armed forces including many military capability issues. During the last years on active duty and as an independent consultant on strategic issues his work was predominantly related to the development of an increasingly comprehensive approach to crisis management including crisis prevention, conflict resolution, stability and reconstruction using non-military and military means. Some of his recent publications covered the civil war in Syria and the Russia-Ukraine crisis and war as well as EU-NATO issues, including the mission and the development in Afghanistan.

Klaus Olshausen studied modern and medieval history and political sciences at the Albert-Ludwigs University in Freiburg finishing with a Ph.D. He attended the 2-year course for general staff officers at the German Armed Forces College in Hamburg and received the Eisenhower Award at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College in Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, of the centennial class 1980-1981.



Dr. Klaus Olshausen