

Original article

## Security and defense challenges – civil preparedness in NATO

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### INFORMATIONS

#### Article history:

Submitted: 13 March 2019

Accepted: 16 January 2020

Published: 15 June 2020

### ABSTRACT

The current security and defense challenges, a new type of cold war, requires strengthening civil preparedness in areas that are critical for collective defense, enabling the conduct of operations and military mobility. The article analyses the Alliance's approach to security and defense threats, including to counter hybrid threats. NATO's decisions to reinforce the Allies Eastern Flank are presented. Allied forces should be able to move into and across Europe at high speed to reinforce a threatened Ally. Therefore, attention is paid to civil preparedness and civil sector resilience to provide support to military operations. It considers recent summit decisions and measures to improve military mobility. A wide range of civilian capabilities and active cooperation between public and private partners are critical. In conclusion, the research demonstrates that civil support is a critical enabler for the Alliance's collective defense.

### KEYWORDS

NATO, resilience, readiness, civil preparedness, mobility



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## Introduction

The Alliance is facing the most significant security challenges since the end of the Cold War. Russia's intervention in Crimea, eastern Ukraine and the Black Sea, cooperation with Iran, the supply of weapons to the Taliban and Syria, cyber-attacks, and many incidents involving Soviet planes and warships in the Baltic Sea region have involved the Allies in a new type of Cold War. In response, NATO is developing new policies, structures, and capabilities to address these new challenges and threats. It continues to strengthen shared defense capabilities as well as preparedness, resilience, and readiness of the civil sector to provide support to military operations to improve military mobility.

During the Cold War, transport assets and infrastructure, and many other sectors of the economy were in government hands. In a situation of crisis or war, there were mechanisms in place to allow the control and use of these assets by NATO allies. These mechanisms included the NATO Civil War Times Agencies [1].

Today, we have similar, if not higher, requirements for civil preparedness. However, the security environment becomes even more demanding because of globalization. Most infrastructure, assets, and services are privately owned. Outsourcing of non-combatant military tasks has become the norm, and as a result, the dependence of the armed forces on the availability of civilian resources has increased. With the recent events in Ukraine and elsewhere, we must continue researching a new type of conflicts and wars to be effective and efficient in fighting them. That could include analyzing NATO civil preparedness, reinventing and adopting relevant solutions, and considering the military rebuilding necessary logistics capabilities like transport to become more self-sufficient in a crisis.

The article consists of four sections. The current security environment is presented in the first section. The second section studies hybrid threats. The next section focuses on civil preparedness and resilience, including NATO civil structures and capabilities, enabling military operations as well as serving population needs during the time of crisis and war. Section four summarizes decisions regarding the reinforcement of Eastern flank countries with a focus on military mobility.

Closing remarks underline the role of civil preparedness in responding to current threats. It demonstrates that civil preparedness has always been a critical enabler for Alliance collective defense.

In the research process, qualitative research methods were used, including in the form of analyses and synthesis based on public records, policy documents, and NATO archives online, NATO's media statements as well as work experiences.

## 1. Security environment

The four NATO Summits in Wales, Warsaw, Brussels, and London defined a security environment and decided on the most significant strengthening of shared defense capabilities, including mobility [2].

The Summit in 2014 was held when Russia 'annexed' Crimea and continue to destabilize eastern Ukraine. The Summit took steps to counter these security threats and strengthen the Alliance's defense capabilities, including the Alliance Readiness Action Plan<sup>1</sup> [3].

The Warsaw NATO summit was held in the situation of uncertainty and instability on the outskirts of NATO and beyond it, both from the east and south, with threats of using troops or terrorist, cybernetic, or hybrid attacks. Challenges and threats to security and defense included Russia's actions, the situation in the Middle East and North Africa; terrorism; and

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<sup>1</sup> The Wales Summit Declaration, [online]. NATO. 2014. Available at: [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official\\_texts\\_112964.htm](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm), para. 5: "In order to ensure that our Alliance is ready to respond swiftly and firmly to the new security challenges, today we have approved the NATO Readiness Action Plan. It provides a coherent and comprehensive package of necessary measures to respond to the changes in the security environment on NATO's borders and further afield that are of concern to Allies. It responds to the challenges posed by Russia and their strategic implications. It also responds to the risks and threats emanating from our southern neighbor, the Middle East, and North Africa. The Plan strengthens NATO's collective defense. It also strengthens our crisis management capability. The Plan will contribute to ensuring that NATO remains a strong, ready, robust, and responsive Alliance capable of meeting current and future challenges from wherever they may arise."

instability in the Middle East and North Africa, contributing to the crisis associated with refugees and migrants [4].

The Summit in July 2018 assessed a security and defense environment as unpredictable and fluid [5]. Challenges and threats are growing from various strategic directions, and we are facing conventional and hybrid wars, terrorism, mass migration, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. These are the activities of Russia, the annexation of Crimea, the ongoing destabilization of eastern Ukraine; provocative actions of troops near NATO borders, such as the deployment of modern missiles in Kaliningrad, violation of the airspace of NATO countries, or the building of military potential in Crimea; large-scale exercises, including the nuclear dimension; hybrid activities, disinformation campaign, and cyber-attacks. Russia is more assertive and willing to use military force to intimidate its neighbors.

The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, advanced missile technology, maneuvering missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, energy weaponry, and other new technologies continue to be security threats. Space is also a very dynamic and fast-changing area.

At the meeting in Brussels, NATO leaders announced the continuation of the 360-degree principle – the approach to threats from all directions – and the fulfillment of the three main tasks – collective defense, crisis management, and collective security. The Alliance: confirmed the decisions agreed at the Wales and Warsaw summits, and the further adaptation of NATO to more demanding security and defense conditions, strengthening deterrence and defense, including through continued presence in the eastern part of the Alliance and intensification of the fight against terrorism. These decisions include:

- a) launching a NATO Readiness Initiative – “Allies will offer additional 30 major naval combatants, 30 heavy or medium maneuver battalions, and 30 kinetic air squadrons, with enabling forces, at 30 days’ readiness or less” as in the 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration, para 14,
- b) maritime/Atlantic command in Norfolk, Virginia and logistical support in Ulm, Germany; responsible for the efficient transit of troops across the Atlantic and within Europe,
- c) cybersecurity operations center at SHAPE, Mons, Belgium,
- d) anti-terrorism and stabilization initiatives; full operability of the counter-terrorism center in Naples,
- e) increasing the mobility of high-readiness forces deployed into critical locations.

In London, NATO reiterated its consideration of challenges growing from various strategic directions, conventional and hybrid threats, terrorism, mass migration, and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. These include Russia’s aggressive actions, terrorism, state and non-state actors challenging international order, instability triggering migration, and particularly cyber and hybrid threats [6, para. 3].

The Alliance leaders stressed that NATO strives for peace, security, and stability in the Euro-Atlantic area and is determined to protect and defend the Alliance indivisible security, freedom, and our shared values. “Any attack against one Ally will be regarded as an attack against us all, as set out in Article 5 of the Washington Treaty” [5].

NATO and the European Union focus their cooperation on areas such as countering hybrid threats, building resilience, increasing military mobility, improving infrastructure, cybersecurity and defense, and strategic communication [7].

## 2. Hybrid threats

The conflict in eastern Ukraine drew attention to the challenges closer to the territory of the Alliance, especially the threat of a hybrid war.

The Warsaw University defines hybrid threats as “conducting without an official declaration of war, combining elements of conventional war, cyber warfare, terrorism, irregular actions (e.g., diversion) and other destructive actions (e.g., economic pressure), with the simultaneous use of propaganda actions” [8].

The hybrid war in Ukraine is not a completely new and unknown type of conflict, but it is different from previous hybrid conflicts in many respects. It has been challenging to determine who is the opponent. Both non-military actions and military instruments were used. Non-military instruments include Russian investment, trade, and capital, which were used to influence critical decisions, political parties, as well as economic and political elites.

Propaganda, including disinformation to shape an attacked country and international opinion, has played a vital role. It is worth noting that mainly because of the long-lasting and intensive disinformation campaign, the Russian Federation took over the Crimean Peninsula practically without a fight.

Cyber-attacks on selected targets have been used extensively. The UK-based defense contractor BAE Systems reported that in 2014, Ukraine computers were targeted by aggressive ‘Snake’ virus [9]. There have been four malware groups, believed to be linked to the Ukrainian conflict, identified [10].

As part of this hybrid war, military actions commenced after destabilization and disinformation campaigns, having produced riots, brutal interventions, and chaos. In February 2014, the Crimean city of Sevastopol was attacked. The occupation of the peninsula begun, contrary to the guarantees agreed earlier in Budapest. The Crimea was handed over to Russia without the so-called “one shot”. Later, however, Russia attacked the Donetsk and Luhansk regions.

Unlike conventional war, the center of gravity in Ukraine was on non-military activities, the use of propaganda and disinformation, cyber-attacks, provoking unrests on political grounds, destabilizing economy, applying financial pressure, spreading corruption and crime, conflicting ethnic groups; illegal border crossing and disinformation about its purpose, and critical infrastructure’s sabotage like attacks on electricity networks and power plants; and others.

## 3. Civil preparedness

In 1949 and later, the term “civil emergency planning” was used to denote the plans and “preparations that must be made by governments in time of peace to ensure that the Home fronts will stand the strain of war” [11, p. 8, para. 65].

At that time, the NATO Structure consisted of a few committees and planning groups, including the North Atlantic Ocean Regional Planning Group. It is important to note that NATO has always considered the reinforcement of Europe by forces from America. Commercial shipping and other transport modes have been of critical importance for such deployments. Therefore, from its inception, NATO focused on civil transport preparedness.

In May 1950, the North Atlantic Council set up the Planning Board for Ocean Shipping in London, charged with the responsibility of preparing plans for the mobilization and control of merchant shipping in time of war. In June 1952, Planning Board for European Inland Surface Transport and the Petroleum Planning Committee were established by the Council. Both Boards were reporting directly to the Council, cooperated with SACEUR and member governments. In the years 1952-1955, the Civil Aviation Planning Committee and other civil committees were set up [1].

In the 1950s, NATO understood the need for preparedness for war in civil defense and a crucial role of transport. During the Cold War, most critical civil assets, services, and infrastructures were in government hands. In the case of crisis or war, there were mechanisms on the spot to allow NATO allies to control and use these assets. These mechanisms included the NATO Civilian War Times Agencies. By the late 1980', the Alliance maintained plans for eight NATO civil wartime agencies, which could be stood up in times of crisis or war to coordinate and direct efforts ranging from industrial resource allocation and oil supplies to food production, civil transportation, and the management of refugee flows [1]. These Civil War Time Agencies were put in a dormant status and finally disbanded in early 2000.

In 2000, the North Atlantic Council decided on NATO Civil Emergency Planning's five roles, which are:

- 1) civil support for Alliance military operations under Article 5,
- 2) support for non-Article 5 crisis response operations,
- 3) support for national authorities in civil emergencies,
- 4) support for national authorities in the protection of the population against the effects of weapons of mass destruction and
- 5) cooperation with partner nations [12].

These five roles continue to be valid today. However, along with the decisions taken at the recent NATO summits, NATO's focus shifted toward enhanced civil preparedness.

In 2019, the Civil Emergency Planning structures responsible for civil preparedness included: Civil Emergency Planning Committee; and four Planning Groups covering eight functional areas. These are the Transport Group with Ocean Shipping, the Inland Surface Transport, and Civil Aviation, the Joint Health, the Agriculture and Food Group, the Industrial Resources & Communications Services Group, and the Civil Protection Group. The members of the Planning Groups are representatives of the relevant national ministries often reinforced by military representatives and civil experts.

The Planning Groups have established and maintained their pools of international experts from different industries, academia, and in some cases, administration. They advise NATO and countries on civil preparedness-related issues. CEP experts play the advisory and operational roles at any stage of crisis management. They give advice on the civilian aspects of crises and the effective use of civilian capabilities, support civil-military planning, and develop programs and concepts. The NATO experts contribute to the development of resilience requirements, the evaluation criteria, guidelines, and assessments [13].

An additional essential element is the Euro-Atlantic Disaster Response Coordination Centre, which is NATO's principal response mechanism in case of natural or human-made disasters, and CBRN incidents. It is active all year round, operational on a 24/7 basis, and involves

NATO's Allies and all partner countries. The Centre functions as a clearing-house system for coordinating both requests from and offers of assistance for a stricken country [14].

In response to the new threats, the Alliance develops its concepts, capabilities, and adopts structures. It has increased its military presence in the eastern flank. Importantly, along with military enforcement, NATO has been strengthening civil preparedness with a focus on building resilience in those areas that are critical for NATO's collective defense.

Resilience is not a new task for the Alliance. Article 3 of the North Atlantic Treaty says that "In order more effectively to achieve the objectives of this Treaty, the Parties, separately and jointly, using continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, will maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack." Resilience was always understood to go beyond military capabilities.

NATO defines at its website that "Each NATO member country needs to be resilient to resist and recover from a major shock such as a natural disaster, failure of critical infrastructure or an armed attack. Resilience is a society's ability to resist and recover easily and quickly from such shocks and combines both civil preparedness and military capacity. Robust resilience and civil preparedness in Allied countries are essential to NATO's collective security and defense" [15].

The final declaration (§ 73) of the NATO Summit in Warsaw stated that "Civil preparedness is a central pillar of Allies' resilience and a critical enabler for Alliance collective defence. While this remains a national responsibility, NATO can support Allies in assessing and, upon request, enhancing their civil preparedness. We will improve civil preparedness by achieving the NATO Baseline Requirements for National Resilience, which focus on continuity of government, continuity of essential services, security of critical civilian infrastructure, and support to military forces with civilian means" [4].

Today's security environment has become more demanding because of globalization. Most infrastructure, assets, and services are privately owned. Outsourcing of non-combatant military tasks has become the norm, and as a result, the dependence of the armed forces on the availability of civilian resources has increased [16].

In times of crisis, both population and civilian resources are exposed to external attack and internal disruption. Hybrid threats, including cyber threats, are also confusing the dividing lines of war and peace. Civilian preparedness means that in times of crisis or disaster, the government can continue its core functions and services to the population, and civilian support for military operations is ensured [17]. It means civil sectors are prepared and ready to support NATO military operations. It requires a full range of military and civilian capabilities and active cooperation between public and private partners. It also requires cooperation with partners and international bodies, particularly with the European Union [1].

NATO has agreed on baseline requirements for resilience in seven strategically fundamental areas such as:

- "1) assured continuity of government and critical government services: for instance, the ability to make decisions, communicate them and enforce them in a crisis,
- 2) resilient energy supplies: back-up plans and power grids, internally and across borders,

- 3) ability to deal effectively with the uncontrolled movement of people, and to de-conflict these movements from NATO's military deployments,
- 4) resilient food and water resources: ensuring these supplies are safe from disruption or sabotage,
- 5) ability to deal with mass casualties: ensuring that civilian health systems can cope and that enough medical supplies are stocked and secure,
- 6) resilient civil communications systems: ensuring that telecommunications and cyber networks function even under crisis conditions, with enough back-up capacity,
- 7) resilient transport systems: ensuring that NATO forces can move across Alliance territory rapidly and that civilian services can rely on transportation networks, even in a crisis" [15].

Together with a set of guidelines on minimum standards for national resilience, assessments, and a tailor-made toolbox, they aim to help countries achieve the required resilience and provide benchmarks against which to assess the state of civilian preparedness [18].

These seven areas apply to the entire crisis spectrum, from an evolving hybrid threat to the most demanding scenarios envisaged by planners. Therefore, national resilience assessments should be conducted periodically to generate an overview of civil preparedness. It would identify areas where further efforts are required to enhance resilience and deal with a wide range of threats.

#### **4. Civil preparedness – enabling military mobility [2]**

The Alliance increases its military presence in the eastern part of its territory. Since the Warsaw Summit, four battalions have been present in Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland on a rotating basis. The U.S. has declared the deployment of an armored brigade and components of the U.S. Army division, including the command that will oversee the activities of the battalions, as mentioned above. The existing U.S. Mission Command Element/U.S. Division H.Q. serves as the hub for ensuring the mobility and rapid flow of U.S. reinforcements from Europe and America to Poland and the Baltic states in time of crisis. There are earlier established Multinational Corps Northeast in Szczecin and then Multinational Division North-East in Elblag. At the south-east flank, the Alliance decided on a military presence built around the Romanian skeleton brigade within the multinational division.

The current legal conditions, the availability of means and transport infrastructure, especially the extended journey times in peacetime, place considerable constraints on the rapid transport of troops. For example, rail transport of troops and armored vehicles from permanent bases in Germany to Poland has taken weeks because of tremendous bureaucratic obstacles to the movement of forces in Europe. Recently, thanks also to NATO civilian and military planners and implementation exercises, NATO has adapted and increased its ability to deploy forces in potential conflict areas along Europe's border with Russia [1].

Regarding the movement of troops and their effective integration into the local defense systems, NATO has set up eight allied force integration units in the eastern flank, in Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, and in Slovakia and Hungary. These units are small, multinational headquarters to facilitate the rapid deployment of a task force with very high preparedness and allied reinforcement forces.

The Allies also announced further steps to improve the readiness and efficiency of air, land, and sea transport to increase mobility by 2024 at the latest. These mean that border crossing times for military movements are to be shortened by the end of 2019. Diplomatic clearances for the land, sea, and air movement are to be provided within five days. Primary and alternative supply routes capable of handling military transport have been identified. As stated in the 2018 Brussels Summit Declaration, para. 17, a network between NATO, national entities, civil and military, including the single National Points of Contact to facilitate and speed up communications and coordination regarding border crossing, should be set up by the end of 2019. Strategic assessments have been developed for the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea, North Atlantic, and the Mediterranean Sea. In the field of aviation, the initial operational capability for rapid air mobility to enable short-term cross-border air traffic in Europe has been declared [5].

The Allies established two new headquarters, responsible for the protection of transatlantic communication lines and to support the rapid movement of troops and equipment to, within and from Europe, which requires civilian support and civil-military planning.

## Conclusions

In response to evolving threats, the Alliance develops its capabilities, adopts structures, continues to build readiness and resilience. It increases its military presence in the eastern flank. Importantly, along with military reinforcement, NATO has been improving civil preparedness, and especially building resilience in areas that are critical for NATO's collective defense.

Lessons learned from the Ukraine conflict show that if territorial integrity is under any form of hybrid aggression than to resist this type of aggression, adequate civil preparedness, political and military means must be used at national and Alliance levels.

NATO civil preparedness, including objectives, structures, procedures, and processes, has adopted to evolving threats and challenges. Civil preparedness allowing to resist and recover from any attack, kinetic and/or hybrid, is of a key importance. In a crisis, civil sectors must be prepared and ready to resist any shock, recover quickly, continue essential services to the population, and to support military operations. As discussed, NATO agreed on seven baseline requirements for resilience in strategic sectors, which serve Allies to assess and improve their civil preparedness. That includes civil transport that could be used for strategic reinforcement and tactical movements.

To ensure the ability of the Allied forces to move freely and quickly by land, air or sea, requires improving the necessary legislation and procedures, to strengthen command and control and to increase transport capacity. Therefore, a whole-of-government approach is necessary, including through national plans, in the framework of cooperation between civilian (administration, private sector, and academia) and military actors in times of peace, crisis, and conflict. The military can consider rebuilding or strengthening their critical logistics capabilities, particularly transport assets, to reduce dependency on the private sector.

To be prepared, protected, and ready to respond to a crisis requires cooperation and involvement of all relevant actors, including critical private industry players and from academia. Resilience requires cooperation with partners and international bodies, particularly with the European Union.



Hybrid tactics and means could be practical tools to achieve objectives without escalating a conflict to a regional or global level. Therefore, a proper national security strategy should be developed to allow for effective countering various types of threats from possible directions.

### Disclaimer

This article reflects the author's personal views and does not represent the views of any institution or organization.

### Acknowledgement

No acknowledgement and potential founding was reported by the author.

### Conflict of interests

The author declared no conflict of interests.

### Author contributions

The author contributed to the interpretation of results and writing of the paper. The author read and approved the final manuscript.

### Ethical statement

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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## Wyzwania bezpieczeństwa i obronności – cywilne przygotowania w NATO

### STRESZCZENIE

Obecne wyzwania w zakresie bezpieczeństwa i obronności, nowy rodzaj zimnej wojny, wymagają wzmocnienia gotowości cywilnej w obszarach o krytycznym znaczeniu dla obrony zbiorowej, umożliwiając prowadzenie operacji i mobilność wojskową. W artykule przeanalizowano podejście Sojuszu do zagrożeń dla bezpieczeństwa i obronności, w tym do przeciwdziałania zagrożeniom hybrydowym. Przedstawiono decyzje NATO o wzmocnieniu wschodniej flanki sojuszniczej. Siły sojusznicze powinny mieć możliwość szybkiego przemieszczania się do i przez terytorium Europy w celu wzmocnienia zagrożonego sojusznika. W związku z tym zwraca się uwagę na przygotowania cywilne i odporność sektora cywilnego dla zapewnienia wsparcia operacji wojskowych. Uwzględnia się w nim ostatnie decyzje podjęte na Szczytach NATO oraz środki mające na celu poprawę mobilności wojskowej. Kluczowe znaczenie ma szeroki zakres zdolności cywilnych i aktywna współpraca między partnerami publicznymi i prywatnymi. Podsumowując, badania pokazują, że wsparcie cywilne jest kluczowym elementem umożliwiającym obronę zbiorową Sojuszu.

### SŁOWA KLUCZOWE

NATO, odporność, gotowość, cywilne przygotowania, mobilność

**How to cite this paper**

Jacuch A. *Security and defense challenges – civil preparedness in NATO*. Scientific Journal of the Military University of Land Forces. 2020;52;2(196):270-80.

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5604/01.3001.0014.2532>



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